

Mindful of Mindfulness-based therapy

Boyan Atzev

Thesis submitted to Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in conformity with
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Social Science
Department of Sociology & Anthropology

© Boyan Atzev, Ottawa, Canada, 2017

Abstract

This thesis explores the transformation of the Buddhist technique of mindfulness as it is applied in psychotherapy. It is based primarily on the experience of a Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course as taught in Montreal in 2015, as well as some prior experiences of mindfulness meditation at the Palyul Center and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in Ottawa. Written as an auto-ethnography, the thesis provides an intimate first hand immersion experience into mindfulness meditation through a phenomenological approach in anthropology. The sociopolitical aspects of MBSR are also discussed through a related Deleuzo-Guattarian framework. The central argument of the thesis is that while effective in the management of stress MBSR fails to address deeper and more severe forms of suffering, stressing the management of emotions rather than their exploration. This fact coupled with the omission of the Buddhist concept of no-independent self and training in mindfulness results in MBSR being a territorializing force of self-surveillance and a social pacifier. The question emerging from this exploration brings us to revisit the role of ethics in the application mindfulness in therapy.

Introduction	p.v
Chapter 1 Theoretical Approach	p.1
Embodiment	p.2
A Brief Background of Eastern and Western ontologies of the " (no-independent) self"	p.4
A Theoretical Approach through Deleuze and Guattari	p.7
The body as a web and <i>bwo</i>	p.8
The Role of Intra-action, affect and becoming	p.11
Intra-action	p.12
Affect	p.14
Territorialisation and Subjectification	p.15
Territorialisation through biomedicine	p.17
De (re)-territorialisation through capitalism	p.19
Lines of flight	p.21
Part One Moving into mindfulness	p.23
Chapter 2 Prior experiences with Mindfulness	p.23
Acceptance and commitment therapy	p.23
Ottawa Palyul Center	p.28
Mindfulness at The Ottawa Palyul	p.29
Chapter 3 Mindfulness and Psychology	p.32
(Session 1)	p.32
Background History	p.36
Vipassana	p.36
Eastern influence in Western Psychology	p.38

Chapter 10	Sadness	p.91
(Session 6)		
Kornfield's podcast		p.98
Reflection		p.99
MBSR as self-surveillance technique		p.102
		p.105
Chapter 11	Anger	
(Session 7)		
Conclusion		p.112
Bibliography		p.117

In the beginning of the 21st century the term ‘mindfulness’ has become a popular buzzword in contemporary Buddhist philosophy and has entered the lexicon of pop-psychology. The *book Mindful America*, by professor of Religious Studies Jeff Wilson (2014), is the first comprehensive historical overview of the trendy social phenomena of mindfulness. In it we read that:

The Mindfulness Research Guide listed 420 research articles on mindfulness in 2010, and in 2012 the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society listed 820 mindfulness-based health practitioners in its database. Mindfulness has been the subject of articles or reports by ABC News, CBS Sunday Morning, CNN, *Cosmopolitan*, (p. 3) *Elle*, Fox News, *Good Housekeeping*, *Huffington Post*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Marie Claire*, MSNBC, National Public Radio, the *New York Times*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Parents*, *Psychology Today*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Redbook*, *Self*, *Time*, *Prevention*, the *Wall Street Journal*, WebMD, and *Woman’s Day*, among many, many others. (p.1)

Mindfulness, with its therapeutic application, also gained popularity through the media in Canada in the early 1990s. Initially, Canadian doctors and therapists interested in Mindfulness-based therapy trained at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center established in 1995 by the American doctor John Kabat-Zinn. A few years later the Center for Mindfulness Studies, directly based on the model of Zinn’s Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program opened in Toronto. Consequently a number of centers offering Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction training for clients or professionals (therapists) opened in various major Canadian cities. Currently, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (from now on MBSR) is one of the predominant types of mindfulness-based therapies in Canada. My thesis offers an exploration of mindfulness-based therapy based on an MBSR course I attended in a clinic in Montreal in 2015.

Although some therapists, most importantly Kabat-Zinn, try to discuss mindfulness only in a contemporary therapeutic context and disregard its historic roots, mindfulness originates in Buddhism. Due to its complex origin and many interpretations today, it is quite difficult to

clearly define mindfulness. The term was established with the translation of the *Satipatthana Sutta* in (1910) by T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. Folley Rhys Davids, who used “mindfulness” for the meaning of *sati*. *Sati* refers to the spiritual faculty that forms an essential part of Buddhist practice and is one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment and one of the Noble Eight-fold Paths. Thus *sati* denotes both the act of meditation and the faculty which develops through continuous practice. (Wilson 2014).

Buddhism was developed after the teachings of Indian sage Gautama Buddha, who taught in 6 BC. Buddha was influenced by contemporary Indian philosophy, regarded reality as illusion and non-dualistic, and involved the concepts of karma and reincarnation. Buddha’s teachings were a reaction to democratize India’s social caste structure, under which religion and philosophy were the domain of the Brahmins, the high-caste in Indian society. According to popular legends the Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment through the means of meditation. He taught that one can avoid suffering, realize the non-dualistic nature of reality, and break the cycle of reincarnation if one trains their mind through meditation, and tempers their negative emotional states and behaviour. Buddha’s teaching was orally passed and then recorded in the Theravada cannon known as The Pali cannon, the oldest Buddhists written tradition. The first detailed discussion of ‘mindfulness’ is found in the Satipatthana Sutra of the Theravada canon 29 BCE. In the sutra, ‘mindfulness’ is explained as a method of meditation for sustaining one’s attention for the means of liberation. (Wilson 2014)

To appreciate the intricacy of the development of mindfulness and its introduction in North American psychotherapy, it is important to note that scholars of Buddhism identify two types of Buddhism operating in the West: forms of ethnic Buddhism that are practices of immigrant communities, and “Western” (modernist) Buddhism. In the introduction of the compilation

Buddhism in Canada anthropologist Mathews, Bruce (2006), distinguishes the two types of - Buddhism as follows: “Ethnic” and “Western”.

The term 'Ethnic Buddhism' refers to the form of traditional form of Buddhism practiced by Asian immigrant communities. It is characterized by an emphasis on religious ritual and performance of ceremonies important to the community, such as wedding or funerals or raising of temples and preservation of the cultural heritage. “Western Buddhism” denotes a particular pluralistic way of practising Buddhism in the West, which emphasizes philosophy rather than religious practice, borrows from various Buddhist traditions, uses interpretation freely and is polarized by public figures who, may or may not be part of the particular Buddhist lineage. While this thesis offers some comparison between the two forms of Buddhism, especially in relation to the practice of mindfulness, it is mostly focused on “Western Buddhism” due to its direct influence current psychotherapy.

Rather than simply a continuation of Buddhist tradition and adaptation of Buddhist teaching to a Western audience, “Western Buddhism” is a separate phenomenon with some connection to the Buddhist religion, but also quite complex and specific to the modern North-American cultural context. This phenomenon is also referred to by some scholars as “Modernist Buddhism”. In *Buddhism and Science -Guide for the Perplexed (Buddhism and Modernity)* (2009), Donald S. Lopez Jr. Lopez describes the phenomena of “Modernist Buddhist” tradition as one which “has developed into a kind of transnational Buddhist sect”[...] “an international Buddhism that transcends cultural and national boundaries, creating... A cosmopolitan network of intellectuals, writing more often in English.” (p. 264) “Western Buddhism” was developed from the writings of Buddhist teachers and the arrival of missionary teachers; these teachers exposed Buddhism to Western students and altered Buddhist philosophy and practices.

In this sense, the term ‘mindfulness’ entered Western “culture” and persisted in many different forms. Various “Western Buddhist” teachers, such as Jack Kornfield, a prominent psychologist and a key figure in the popularization of mindfulness, have been altering the meaning of mindfulness in their interpretations.

This ongoing process of interpreting and changing the meaning and practice of mindfulness will be discussed in depth in the third chapter of the thesis.

The type of ‘mindfulness’ that Western psychology elaborates upon is a particular form of Theravada Buddhist meditation called *Vipassana*, which was first taught in Theravada Buddhism as a form of meditation practice, but which is thought to have died out in South East Asia by the 12th Century. *Vipassana* meditation had been preserved in the canon of the Theravada branch of Buddhism, known as the Pali canon. Vipassana experienced a worldwide revival in the 20th century in South East Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka.

Amongst the key figures in the spread of Vipassana mindfulness were Thit Nath Han and Goenka. Thit Nath Han is a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk who has been a prominent teacher of Buddhism and mindfulness in Europe and North-America for the 1960. Goenka, a Burmese layman, who was trained in Vipassana, popularized this form of meditation not only in India but also in West by setting up meditation centres around Europe and North-America for the 1980 until early 2000. (Wilson 2014). In order to trace the evolution of the mindfulness movement, it is important to note, that the very influential American “Western” Buddhists Jack Kornfield, Sharon Salzberg, and Joseph Goldstein, were students of Thich Nhat Hanh and Goenka, as well as, the Tibetan teachers Tulku Rimpoche and Trungpa Rimpoche.

Coleman (2002) provides an in depth history of the phenomena of Western Buddhism. Tulku Rinpoche founded Dharma Publishing in Varanasi, India in 1963. This school moved to California in 1971-and its main purpose was to preserve and distribute Tibetan Buddhist teachings and to bring these teachings to the West. Tulku was one of the first to explore the connection between Western psychology and Buddhism in various publications, but particularly in *Reflections of mind: Western psychology meets Tibetan Buddhism*. He also set up the Human Potential Training program, which offered training for American psychologists interested in Buddhism. The other key figure was, Trungpa, who lived in Boulder, Colorado, where he ran the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center in 1973. In 1974 Trungpa decided to create a summer school named the Naropa Institute, also in Boulder, Colorado, United States, which offered meditation as part of its BA in psychology. Kornfield, who studied with the Tibetan teacher Rinpoche Kalu and was invited to teach at Naropa, was the first to explore the application of mindfulness in psychological therapy in the 1960s.

Mindfulness was then further altered by Doctor John Kabat Zinn, a student of Thích Nhất Hạnh and Kornfield, in the early 1990s. Zinn applied mindfulness to modern medicine and developed the Mindfulness Based therapy approach, which eventually became MBSR. (Wilson 2014). MBSR, which this thesis is particularly interested in, thus has roots in a particular kind of “Western “Buddhism that co-evolved with the 20th century Vipassana meditation movement.

My thesis is an academic an exploration the phenomena of ‘mindfulness’ in a social context in North America and more specifically in Canada. The general research question I aim to answer is: how is “mindfulness” being done, and possibly undone, in Canada today? I will address

this question by answering the specific question of how is “mindfulness” done in a semi-clinical 8 week long MBSR in a course offered in Montreal, Canada in 2015. In answering this question, I have a special interest in understanding how the meaning and practice of mindfulness, as conceptualized by Buddhism, is maintained or altered in MBSR.

The thesis is written as an auto-ethnography in which I will contrast personal anecdotes with observation and theoretical thoughts. Writing this thesis as an auto-ethnography allows me to explore the topic as a direct participant. While I will speak from my experiences, my research does involve other people who are thus part of making up my understanding of this course and MBSR more generally. Offering some insight into the Buddhist conception of mindfulness I will also draw from my prior experiences of mindfulness in Buddhist philosophy and religion as it is done the Vajrayana Palyul Center in Ottawa. I will also tap into my experiences being immersed in *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* with a private therapist located in Ottawa, to provide some alternative examples of mindfulness-based therapy. All those experiences will provide a broader perspective of the way “mindfulness” is being done in Canada today.

Told through the prism of an auto-ethnography, this thesis attempts to present the events from the field in light of different experiences and theoretical perspectives. Following Jones Ellis’ suggestion in the Handbook of Auto ethnography (2009), I will layer three kinds of accounts. First, I will proceed from the observations gathered from the fieldwork experience. Next I layer this with a reflective examination of my personal process, which took place as I was engaged in participant observation. The third layer consists in additional historical backgrounds of Mindfulness as a movement and application of the relevant theory of the experiences and observations. I use three different types of fonts throughout the thesis to indicate the various layers: the italic for my very personal and reflective perspective, SimSun for anecdotes and

descriptions derived from the participant observation as part of the MBSR course, and Times New Roman New is indicating the analysis.

The thesis begins with a theoretical chapter on the complexities of studying meditation and reason for selecting a phenomenological approach in anthropology, more specifically embodiment and *epoché*. In it I also explain how Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of *Body Without Organs* (bwo from here on), *becoming* and *lines of flight*, and Karen Barad's concept of *intra-action*, become extremely useful when discussing Eastern philosophical ideas and how they can be applied to the analysis of social phenomena of MBSR. The second chapter situates my positioning on the topic in relation to prior experiences with a therapist practising *Acceptance and Commitment therapy* and then with meditation at the Buddhist Palyul Centre in Ottawa. Chapters 3 through 11 are otherwise organized chronologically. I chose to follow my natural chronological immersion in the world of Mindfulness Meditation through an 8 week MBSR course. I focus on the weekly sessions I attended, adopting a structure of presenting each session as an individual chapter in the body of the thesis. Thus, the body of the thesis is divided into two parts: Part 1 brings us into the topic of the format and history of MBSR. Part II, due to the topics of discussing in the last three sessions of course is much more introspective. As the practice deepens, the first hand phenomenological approach in anthropology becomes all the more relevant to the study of mindfulness. Therefore, most of the methodology applied in the study is found at the beginning of Part II in the eight chapters. Throughout the thesis I argue that mindfulness, anthropology and phenomenology in fact share essentially, a same method of direct experience and a practice of bracketing preconceived notions.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Approach

In this chapter, I explore the many ways in which mindfulness meditation is practised, and reveal the most appropriate approaches to studying it. Meditation is a very personal and a real-time life experience. To talk about it, one must do it and then, only later, reflect upon it. The study of mindfulness meditation as a therapeutic technique requires an exploration of the actual practice of meditation. Although the researcher can rely on interviews for descriptions, one can access the changes in one's perception, bodily sensations and affect only through direct personal experience.

Mindfulness meditation aims at changing one's automatic thoughts and emotional patterns. Those emotional patterns are affected through a technique which is grounded in the body. For example, the mediator can calm down from an agitated state such as anger or centre one's mind jumping from one worry to the next by tuning in to the feelings of the expansion and contraction of the stomach muscles while breathing, or focusing one's awareness on passage of the air in and out of the nasal canal.

As such, the most appropriate starting point for studying mindfulness meditation is the body itself. To do so, some core concepts will be explored here as a way to delineate my theoretical approach. With regards to the body, I explore the paradigm of embodiment, the body as 'web' and the 'body

without organs' in anthropology as grounded in a phenomenological approach in anthropology. It is with this open-ended notion of body that the question of the “Self”, Subjectivity vs Objectivity and the Social will be discussed. As such, the concepts of *(de) territorialisation, becoming, intra-actions*, the role of affect and lines are found to be corresponding ways to grasp broader socio-cultural processes. I will go through these concepts in this chapter and return to them in further detail throughout the rest of the thesis, as helpful theoretical tools to understand 'mindfulness' as experienced during the MBSR course.

Embodiment

Taking the direct experience of the body as the ground level for research is at the core from the phenomenological approach in Anthropology. As Desjarlais and Troop (2011) point out, “from a phenomenological perspective, the living body is considered the existential null point from which our various engagements with the world-whether social, eventful, or physical-are transacted” (2011, p 4) This understanding is known as ‘embodiment’ and is defined as “the process in which people literally incorporate biologically, the social and material world in which we live” (Krieger 2005, 59 (5), 350-355).

The phenomenological approach in anthropology consists of a number of different methods: close and continuous engagement, focus on the senses, attention to the poetic, and the reduction or *epoché*. When focusing on the body, anthropologists engage in an exercise of close and continuous immersion in the practice. They concentrate on the bodily experiences, paying special attention to sensorial, as well as bodily forms of knowledge. Phenomenologists try to access the state that

resides before cognition and objectification, which Merleau-Ponty (1945) calls the ‘pre-objective’. This is achieved by having an open mind to the field experience which they approach suspending all preconceived ideas. This technique of suspension of preconceived ideas is known as the method of phenomenological reduction (*epoché*) in participant observation in anthropology.

Furthermore, phenomenology of the body does not stop at focusing only on the body of the researcher engaged in the practice. Anthropologists studying embodiment also, as Desjarlais and Throop put it, “consider the ways in which political, social, economic, and discursive formations intersect with the operations and felt immediacies of bodies in a number of socio-cultural settings” (2011, p. 90). In this sense, this study of MBSR is not simply an exploration of “personal” meditative states, but of an immersion in the social world of an MBSR course.

The sociologist Michal Pagis has already explored the topic of mindfulness in social settings by applying the phenomenological approach. Pagis (2009, 2010a, 2010b) explores the Vipassana type of mindful meditation by immersing in numerous ten-day Vipassana courses. Through numerous observations and interviews, Pagis provides a detailed personal reflection on the engagement with mindfulness in the form of a daily diary. Pagis’ approach is one that balances personal engagement in the practice with attention to setting and interactions with other mediators from the retreats; this is a process that I find to be quite fruitful. While Pagis’s focus is on Vipassana, in this thesis, I will try to apply a similar approach to the study of MBSR.

In their exploration of phenomenological approach and Buddhism in the paper *Imagining: Embodiment, phenomenology, transformation*, Varela, F. J., & Depraz, N. (2003) argues for the value of first person perspective. In my own exploration of MBSR, I find that the application of a

phenomenological approach in the first person perspective allows me to step into the river of life and to capture the lived the experience of being part of an MBSR course. It permits me to tap into and make sense of the setting and aesthetics of MBSR, as well as, the effect experienced in encounters during the course. From this grounded approach to mindfulness through embodiment, the complex question of the “Self” emerges as a concept one needs to bracket.

A Brief Background of Eastern and Western ontologies of the " (no-independent) self"

This inquiry of mindfulness meditation as a currently emerging social phenomenon in Canada inevitably runs into the problem of the different conceptions of reality and the “Self” in Western and Eastern philosophy. If the study is to truly gain insight into the transformation of mindfulness it would require a theoretical approach which is able to encompass both perspectives, as well as the potential perspectives in-between. I will proceed by first presenting these two perspectives and then offering a theoretical framework for exploring MBSR in its full complexity.

In order to gain perspective and begin to appreciate the process of transformation under which mindfulness has gone through we must first familiarize ourselves with Buddhist ontology. The principle of non-duality or Advaya is central to Buddhism. Advaya refers to the idea that there exists no absolute, transcendent reality beyond our everyday reality. Furthermore, while things exist, they are ultimately "empty" of any existence on their own. In other words, they possess no

independent existence. Following the same logic, since the “self” is also “empty” of independent existence, Buddhism maintains the doctrine of no -“self”. (Bowker, 1997)

In a nutshell, the doctrine of no-“self” is best demonstrated in the example of the legend of Nagarjuna. The legend features the Buddhist monk and philosopher Nagarjuna, who provides the example of a chariot in order to illustrate his point in a philosophical discussion with the Greek king. In his explanation, just as a cart is not the wheel, the spoke, nor the basket, we must not consider any part of the body in isolation, nor even the thoughts or emotions of the person. Rather, the “self” is a state of all those working together-it is an aggregate and thus it possesses no reality of its own. (McCagney1975).

Furthermore, this aggregate is in its turn part of a bigger unified reality. This idea is expressed by the concept of “the chain of depended origination “. Bowker describes “ the chain of depended origination” as “ all physical and mental manifestations which constitute individual appearances are interdependent and condition or affect one another, in a constant process of arising and ceasing”. (1997 p. 740) In this way, while it may appear that man is separate from the world and others, this separation is merely an illusion.

The Buddhist view of “self” is quite different from the Western, particularly the scientific biomedical view of reality, the body and the individual. As the philosopher Charles Taylor (1989) explains in *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*, the Western idea of as separate “self” really took hold during the Enlightenment period with the rise of rationality, science and the development of citizenship. During this period science introduced a materialist view of a

reality governed by absolute physical laws. This paradigm, which originated with Newtonian physics and had become the dominant paradigm of science, has also affected how biomedicine regards the human body.

The view that in the human being the body and the mind are separate is known as the Cartesian split “and has been predominant in Western philosophy during the past three centuries. The dualism of many different and separate from nature, already existing as part of Christian ontology, was further strengthened by science during the Enlightenment period. This view suggested an “objective” reality, separated from “individual” consciousness. Biomedicine maintained that consciousness is to be found exclusively in the process of the brain. The rational aspect of consciousness was stressed as expressed in the famous maxim “I think, therefore I am” by the forerunner of rational philosophy Rene Descartes. The human body and the human being became to be seen as a machine governed by the intellect. This view, coupled with the birth of citizenship in the central European states, developed into the view of the individual as a separated self-governing unit. (Taylor 1989)

This conception of reality and the human body, however, has been challenged for decades within the scientific and academic community, especially by the phenomenological approach in the disciplines of philosophy and anthropology. As Lock and Nguyen note in *the Anthropology of Biomedicine*, Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenological approach is a conscious rejection of the Kantian humanistic tradition in which a transcendental ego claims to know the objective world using abstracted rational perspective.” (2010, p. 58) Lock and Nguyen point out that, although the dichotomy between the “objective” and “subjective” has been not overcome by Merleau-Ponty, the issue has been recently tackled by theorists such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, all moving past a closed notion of “self”. In my thesis, I will focus on

Barad's idea of *intra-action* as it relates to affects, namely human and non-human *becoming* as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy ?* (2014). I will introduce these concepts after I first present Merleau-Ponty and Guattari Deleuzes' s concept of the body as a *web* and as a *body without organs (BwO)*; these concepts offer a way out of the limitation and bias of the Cartesian split and "objectivity" within research . In the next section I present these ideas and explain how they can help us appreciate Buddhist philosophy fully, and so gain insight into what has been lost in the appropriation of mindfulness in the MBSR courses given in a Canadian context.

A Theoretical Approach through Deleuze and Guattari

Deleuze and Guattari's *bwo* existing in immanent reality provides us with a model of the human being which is closer to lived human experience. Their ontology, stressing *becoming*, demands an approach that favours a method of immersion and direct experience. Thus Deleuze and Guattari offer a theoretical framework that is complimentary to the phenomenological approach exploring embodiment and affect.

Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari's analysis address the relationship between religion, social control, capitalism and ethics which become quite relevant in the study of MBSR. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of *subjectification*, *territorialisation*, *re (de)territorialisation* and *lines of flight* help us explain the process acting upon MBSR in their relation to the societal order, as well as, to comment on possible routes for reaction to such forces.

The Body as *web* and *bwo*

Merleau- Ponty offers a phenomenological understanding of the body which comes close to that in Buddhism. According to Merleau- Ponty, bodies are not separate but rather co-exist in a constant interaction with co-creating the world. As Merleau-Ponty points in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the body is an “inter-connective tissue”-- a “mesh” or a “web” that inter-implicates all bodies (1968, p. 136). Further, the flesh is a “possibility, [a] latency”. (1968, p.133). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not a subject to the all-powerful intellect, but is instead a “vague” unity of processes that are in constant interaction with their environment (1962, p.198). As such, human beings are not regarded as isolated from their bodies as in Cartesian thought, but are instead part of a process.

This way of looking at the human body and the “self” is quite contrary to the Western view of the “Self”, which posits man as sovereign and separate from the natural world. A similar view of the body that could further the phenomenological approach in anthropology and offer insight into MBSR can be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s work in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. For Deleuze and Guattari the body or the *bwo* is composed of parts that have the capacity to be affected by other bodies. The *bwo* is defined by its actions and reactions with respect both to its internal milieu and to its environment. This characteristic of the body being an assemblage is known as molecularity. (Parr 2010)

Parallels between Merleau Ponty's conception of the body and Deleuze and Guattari's bwo have already been made by scholars. In her article *Becoming-Grizzly* (2007), Neimanis argues that we can turn to Deleuze and Guattari for a further development of Merleau-Ponty's idea of embodiment.

“Through Deleuze and Guattari, we can come to understand human embodiment as comprised of molecular interactions with the world that are enacted through the perceptual, motor, affective and visceral modalities of living that Merleau- Ponty has described for us. By paying attention to our molecularity we in fact see how our molecular bodies constantly extend and disrupt the discrete bounds of our stratified bodies in all sorts of ways: we enter visceral becomings in mouth-becoming- apple or lung-becoming-smog; we entertain affective becomings in a mood-becoming- Prozac and perceptual becomings in eye-becoming-light; we live out motor becomings such as foot-becoming-gas pedal. Our molecularity is what allows stratified bodily assemblages to enter into new and surprising relationships, and to be transformed and reconfigured by these nuptials” (2007, p.11)

The BwO offers an understanding of the body that goes well beyond the individual but presents it as relationship. As body is not defined by materiality and so it can be a social body, as in the case of a political party .In such a case the social body is defined by its parts, in this case other individuals. This view of the body suggests that its nature is much more active and stresses its relationality.

According to Deleuze and Guattari the *body* is stratified and subjectified, which is to say that it exists within fields of organization, such as the institutions of a family, class and occupation, that come to define it. However, the *body* is also capable of alternative modes of experience, which Deleuze and Guattari call *becoming*. One makes oneself a *body* without organs by actualizing its virtual potential when entering into a conjunction with others, in a process called *becoming*.

According to Deleuze and Guattari this constant becoming is defined in relation to others. The world is an assemblage of relations or *becomings*. Every phenomenon in the universe does not exist isolated on its own but rather all phenomena are dependent on another. Thus, the human being consists of a limited set of unfolding processes, which are a part of a much larger set of processes.

The *body* presents a challenge to the dualistic Cartesian view of mind vs matter, as well as the self vs environment, in the “subjective” vs. “objective”. As Bignall points out the Deleuzo-Guattarian view of the *body* “enables a model of selfhood {which} flees and escapes its own limits by forging increasingly complex and active relationship with other bodies.” (2010, p.12)

Similarly to Buddhist ontology, Deleuze and Guattari stress becoming over being. They propose an immanent reality that is unpredictable, interconnected and always in a state of

becoming. I do not seek to equate the *bwo* and the no-self models, rather, I employ the concept of the *bwo* as way to talk about interconnectedness and explain the embodiment of larger processes involved in MBSR. Although part of a web the human being has a unique experience of reality. It represents a focus point, through which's prism the *web* is perceived. Consciousness aware of itself is ultimate result of spiritual practice, such as meditation .I propose that it is also the goal of the phenomenologist, who not only writes about the pre-objective but transforms oneself to be able to maintain and perceive both the inner “self” and the larger “web”. This could be achieved in the tradition of the classic Greek philosopher for whom philosophy also meant a personal examination thorough logic as well as meditation. This is why we must include personal cognition as well,” self”-reflective thinking, as well as analysis in the study of Mindfulness based therapy.

Marleau-Ponty's and Deleuze's terms of mesh, web, *bwo* and *becomings* provide us with terms to talk about essential Buddhist concepts which differ significantly from the Western philosophical and scientific discourse. In this way Deleuze and Guattari help us appreciate the difference between Western and Eastern philosophy and expose the possible problems arising from transplanting mindfulness practice into Western “culture”.

The Role of Intra-action, affect and becoming

The reason why Deleuze and Guattari and Merleau-Ponty are compatible with Buddhism is precisely because they regard reality as immanent rather than transcendental. In Deleuze and

Guattari's view a person is always in a concrete temporal process (*becoming*) and a subject of affective affect.

Deleuze and Guattari explain becoming as: "human bodies, other material bodies, concept-bodies, etc.-are in fact vectors and intersections of the myriad forces and energies that compose these bodies, and connect them to other bodies".(2007 ,p.5) Neimanis explains Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming by pointing out that:

"Being is for them always becoming; everybody is composed of speeds and slownesses, and is therefore defined by its thresholds of changeability rather than by a static essence, or some discretely bounded, impermeable ideal of interiority". (2007, p5)

This view of the body and the encounter of bodies as becoming allows us to not get stuck in a model of relations that makes assumptions about who people are or how they might behave. Rather, this view permits us to always be open to surprises and unexpected turn of events and to consider objects and subjects as open-ended entities permeable to each other.

Intra-action

When considering the encounter of bodies scholars commonly use the term interaction. In order to stay in line with the radical phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari, I offer to replace the term interaction with a much more succinct term coined by Barad: intra-action .Intra-action regards encounter as a fluid event rather than a interaction of two solid entities and thus overcomes the Cartesian split and making it much more appropriate for the

phenomenological perspective. In *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter* Barad explains intra-action:

“A specific intra action (involving a specific material configuration of the “apparatus of observation”) enacts an agential cut (in contrast to the Cartesian cut—an inherent distinction-between subject and object) effecting a separation between “subject” and “object.” Things or objects do not precede their interaction; rather, 'objects' emerge through particular intra-actions.” (Barad 2003, p. 815)

In this way, intra-action offers a new understanding of what happens during the event of a coming together of, what is perceived as, individuals.

When studying relations, Deleuze and Guattari and Barad instruct us to shift our focus and to embrace an ontological mode of becoming in which we are already caught up, but which we fail to acknowledge, and to invite us to learn from them. Through a process of *becomings* and *intra-action*, people enter each other's zones of proximity and necessarily change each other to some degree. Furthermore, Barad also points out that it is the affect in an intra-action which brings about a turn in the course of events. Thus the understanding of encounter as becoming and intra-action is important to my study as it provides a comprehensive ground for understanding the workings of affect, which prove to be essential in analyzing MBSR.

Affect

An interesting similarity between Buddhism and Affect theory indicating the intra -relation nature of reality, is that affect exist only when something is being affected .Affect is a force which is actualized through an actual potential when the favorable meeting of elements occurs.

Colam explains what affect means according to Deleuze: “affect is the knowable product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation or a ghost. Deleuze uses the term “affection” to refer to the additive processes, forces, powers and expressions of change. (2005, p.11) In this sense, for Deleuze and Guattari the intellect is limited, and they point to the role of affect as a force of change in the existence of the body.

Apart from the role affect plays in my “personal “processing of emotional reaction resulting from engagement with mindfulness, affect has also accentuated important events and dynamics in the MBSR course. Studying affect in inter-actions between me and participants in the course allowed me to detect and recognize the importance of the processes taking place and paint a fuller picture of the unfolding of the MBSR course . The visceral and affective became particularly important when attempting to understand the unstructured dynamics which took place during the MBSR course. As Lutz (1986) explains “Affect theory has the promise to

bridge the conceptual dualisms that have plagued the social sciences, such as those between mind and body, self and other, private and public, personal and political, and agency and structure (p.406-409). In this way paying attention to affect, as it occurs in the *bwo*, helps us bridge the gap between the “personal” and “objective” and analyze the larger social processes involved in the MBSR course. Affect plays a major role in tracing the process of *territorialisation* and *de (re-territorialization)* forming what Deleuze and Guattari call the *hard*, and *soft line* and the *line of flight*.

Territorialisation, Re-territorialisation and Subjectification

Territorialisation through Biomedicine

According to Deleuze and Guattari the *bwo* is subjectified in various institutions such as family or work. These institutions represent a territory which territorializes the body making it behave in a certain way. The various forms of education or normalization imposed upon an individual result in making him or her change points of subjectification, always moving toward a higher, nobler one in closer conformity with the supposed ideal.

Deleuze and Guattari's view of the body in society echoes Foucault's argument that the state colonizes the mind and morality of the patient through the institution of biomedicine. Lock explains how biomedicine has pathologized certain ways of being and has created a standard of what is considered to be healthy, and therefore, desirable. She refers to Foucault's term *governmentality* which denotes “the way in which the exercise of power by the modern state

came increasingly to include the active management of the population to stimulate its vitality, and the adoption of codes and techniques by the individuals to govern their own lives, for instance, by adopting a healthy lifestyle “(Lock and Nguyen 2010, p.24). Foucault coined the term technology of the self to refer to such techniques, which includes spiritual exercises for the improvement of one self. In my thesis I will present MBSR as such a technology of the self, keeping in mind the theory of no-self.

Furthermore, governmentality is made possible through, what Foucault calls, the technology of self-surveillance. Self-surveillance is a technique through which the individual polices himself so that he or she follows the socially accepted norms. In my thesis I argue that as Mindful meditation is quite literally a practice of observing one's responses to environment and managing it. It represents processes of *territorialisation* and self-surveillance, which helps to maintain the social order.

However, as revealed through my own experiences engaging with the course, the MBSR class presented moments that allowed for liberation from this kind of employment of mindfulness, as a mechanical practice dictating “healthier “behaviors. This liberation is what Deleuze and Guattari call the process of *de-territorialisation*.

De-territorialisation

Deleuze and Guattari agree that the body does get caught up in processes of subjectification and stratification, but according to them those states are neither final nor solid. They suggest that the body is capable of what they call *de-territorialisation*. The *two* de-territorializes by for

example, incorporating an imposed diagnosis and then interpreting it and acting in a new way. A body which has been subjectified as a patient, and therefore depended on the care of a physician, can then decide that the diagnosis is not final. It can engage in behavior such as joining a support group, changing to some extent its role in the process of its healing. It is my argument that members of the MBSR class were able to de-territorialize from the hegemonic biomedical way of treating mindfulness as a technique of self-control and management through intellectual observation of bodily processes. Through encounters with each other by trusting our own intuition and following affects and emotions, we were able to see the limitation, contradictions and fallacy in MBSR. In this sense, the MBSR facilitated a *de-territorialisation* from the codification of biomedicine.

I argue that this de-territorialisation, which was a reaction to a very new social trend, had a pre-analytical quality to it. It could not yet be clearly explained through language and discourse analysis as it happened as a reaction in an environment dominated by a certain interpretation of mindfulness. This *de-territorialisation* has been detected on the level of affect and made evident due to the application of the phenomenological approach.

Though not a Deleuzo-Guattrian, I find that Byron Good (1994) provides an example of the application of phenomenology to the study of *de-territorialisation*. In his exploration of the objective model of biomedicine via embodiment in *Rationality, Medicine and the Experience* Good notes that chronic pain de-constructs the imposed order created by biomedicine.

The highly specific “individual” nature of chronic pain without a clear source and location in the body or frequency breaks down the ordered reality of routine medical checkups, universal

diagnosis and use of daily exposure to mechanical technology. Chronic pain calls into question the ability of biomedicine to access human suffering through its objective model. In this sense the patient is no longer a subject whose condition is assessed according to an external universal system; rather it must be respected as a specific experience in an immanent reality.

Good's application of embodiment is quite helpful in understanding the process that takes place during MBSR. In my thesis, I provide examples of the embodiment of rational approaches to biomedical healing and identify the breaks caused by suffering that rupture ordered reality. Rather than focusing specifically on chronic pain, I explore my personal bouts of anxiety and depression, the inability of the MBSR course to deal adequately with these afflictions, and the sense of dissatisfaction often demonstrated by other participants of MBSR. My argument is that these incidences constitute cracks in the territory and the process that MBSR imposes, offering a fresh look and a more genuine experience of mindfulness.

Following Western thinking with its Cartesian split, if reality is not objective, it must be subjective. Therefore, at first glance it may seem that Good's analysis goes against that of Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological approach, which refuses the existence of either objective analysis or subjective reality. I intend to build upon Good's observation in a way that it informs the phenomenological approach and attempt to present a scope that does not reduce reality to the "subjective".

As Deleuze and Guattari explain the *bwo*, then is capable of *de-territorialisation*, however, it cannot escape the forces of subversion. The *bwo* is never complete, but only reorients its-self. The *bwo's re-territorialisation* is in relation to the existing system. Therefore, *de-*

territorialisation - leads to a new wave of reterritorialization, which in turn, recolonizes the body in new ways.

Re(De)Territorialisation through capitalism

Since mindfulness training, MBSR included, lies somewhere between the medical state control world and the capitalist market of self- help training, *territorialisation* through biomedicine is only half of the story of MBSR

The Deleuze Dictionary explains that Deleuze and Guattari's theory states that the development of commodity markets *de- territorializes* the socioeconomic territory of feudal agriculture and leads to the large scale production of capitalism. The force of *de- territorialisation* can be a positive force of liberating from forms of control, but in the capitalist society, it only results in even more complex *re-territorialisation*. Capitalism *de-codifies* value of the social order. Societies, as regimes of coding aim to bring certain fixed ways of being and value. Capitalism de-codifies flows of commodities, such as labor and services, which become recaptured. Capitalism, in this way, devalues institutions by reducing all value to capital and allows the appropriation and capitalization of all aspects of "culture." (Parr 2010)

De- territorialisation, understood in the current context of the use of mindfulness in therapy, must be seen in the light of the process of cultural globalization. Anthony Giddens argues that cultural globalization stands to mean "disembedding" of traditional social relations, as in the case of religious control, ethics, and morality (1990). In this sense, globalization can be understood as

de-territorialisation of capitalism, more specifically neo-liberalism. The appropriation of mindfulness from a religious context in the commercial world of self-help or even commercial psychology is such example of de-territorialisation. Capitalism, unlike the traditional forms of rule, is a sovereign who does not codify meaning, but rather it provides a hollow meaning. In this way, in the capitalist system, the values and ethics associated with mindfulness are being replaced with individualism, which lacks them.

In order to address the topic of the appropriation of mindfulness in the Western market of self-help, I will refer throughout the entire thesis to the analysis of Carrette and King (2005) in *Selling Spirituality*. Carrette and King follow and expand on the analysis of sociologist Nikolas Rose (2007) who provides examples of how Asian religions and practices are appropriate in the process of commercialization. They point in the process of branding of lifestyle and the *psychologization* of religion, which stresses the self-actualization as forces that have transformed Eastern spiritual practices.

In my thesis I argue that self-help psychology, which is in the business of motivational psychology and pursuit of happiness, central to the capitalist ideology, plays an important part in the transformation of mindfulness. I refer to Foucault's argument that the population is governed in order to promote its vitality. I further expand by using Deleuze and Guattari's analysis to elaborate on the fact that, what is being promoted instead is passivity, productivity and individualism.

Nevertheless, as Deleuze Guattari demonstrates the *bwo* is constantly in the process of *territorialize*, *de-territorialize* and *re-territorialisation*. Throughout these transformations

sudden important moments of *possibilities* open and out of them emerge unexpected trajectories, called *lines of flight*, which offer an alternative to the forces of *territorialisation*.

Lines of flight

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that in our analysis, we can follow different lines of interpretation of events and discourse: the hard or hegemonic line (trunk); the soft or reformatory line (root); and lines of flight, or the radical line (rhizome). The sporadic meeting of various forces and entities (*becoming*) forms a *rhizome*, which creates a new living system. This results in a *line of flight* from the trunk and root systems, allowing for a change in narrative and discourse.

In my thesis the analysis will follow what I consider the hard line, of the well-known rhetoric of the authoritative nature of bio-medicine with its tendency to territorialize. Furthermore, through field-work anecdotes, I will follow the soft line of MBSR originating from the sidelines of clinical psychology. I regard MBSR as a soft line because it attempts to reform the biomedical approach to therapy while still remaining scientific. Mindfulness, according to the proponents of the Mindful movement, is a step away from highly technological approaches that are reliant upon pharmaceuticals in bio-medicine. However, through descriptions of the MBSR environment, I will reveal how MBSR returns to the hard line of biomedicine, as all soft lines inevitably do according to Deleuze and Guattari; the sterile manner in which MBSR is taught is a return to the hard line, turning mindfulness into a mechanical practice, not much different from the bio-medical model.

During the seventh session of MBSR students questioned the course and engaged in direct communication, even confrontation with each other and the instructor, which resulted in a de-territorialisation, line of flight. Deleuze and Guattari instruct us how to employ the *bwo* approach and search for the lines of flight.

This is how it should be done. Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of de- territorialisation possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continua of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. (1980/1987, p. 161)

Attending to the effect in *intra-action* and *becoming* that take place during the course allows for recognizing the subtle processes of territorialisation, de (re) territorialisation, and the unexpected organic lines of flight that may occur.

Thus, the phenomenological approach in anthropology, with its method of immersion and attention to embodiment, interpreted through Deleuzo-Guattrian analysis to explain the process which the body goes through, is an insightful approach to exploring mindfulness mediation.

Part One Moving into mindfulness

Chapter 2 Prior experiences with” Mindfulness”

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

My true journey with mindfulness meditation began after I started seeing a therapist in Ottawa in 2013, who used mindfulness in her approach. In our sessions R. got me to concentrate on my body as I was experiencing bouts of anxiety. Her approach, Acceptance and Commitment therapy, were based on cognitive-behavioral therapy. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a type of psychotherapy which holds that a change in a person's view and thought patterns about the world and oneself, accompanied by changes in one's behaviour, would result in an improvement of one's psychological well-being. Acceptance and commitment therapy fuses the cognitive behavioral method with the Buddhist view that one is able to overcome the ego's neurotic tendencies through insight and behavioral changes. It could be said that the goal of ACT is comparable to Buddhism, as it aims to help individuals become less self-absorbed and more psychologically mature.

There has been some interest amongst therapist in the energy centers, known in yoga and Tibetan Buddhism as chakras, which are associated with particular glands in the body. I had learned about and worked with chakras as part of yoga training that I had previously undertaken in India. R was familiar with the relationship between the chakras and distressful mental experiences and being able to talk about this experience in relation to mental health helped me open up to R. In a way I had not been able to with

other therapists before. Although we never discussed religion or spirituality in depth, the fact that R. had some training in mediation definitely made me feel better about receiving life guidance from her.

Although ACT went beyond the body, the body has been always part of the therapy. Concentrating and paying attention to the body, or being mindful, as a directed effort was not new to me, but ACT put that in a therapeutic context. I learned to notice how anxiety rises up in my body, particularly in the chest area and solar plexus. I learned to notice how my muscles would tense, my breathing would speed up and how the solar plexus, known as the third or “will” chakra would tighten up. This newly gained awareness definitely gave me some ability to react to the bouts of anxiety. If I was not able to control them, at least I was able to recognize and anticipate them, which was useful in life situations as I was able to prepare myself. The training in slowing down my breathing, relaxing my muscles and concentrating on the present moment proved to be quite useful in managing bouts of anxiety, which I might previously have thought of as having no control over.

R. taught me that Mindfulness can also be used when regurgitating negative thoughts in moments of depression. I was to bring my attention to sensation in the body, recognize my feelings, and distance myself from my thoughts. Here, again “being in the moment” was very important as it helped being overwhelmed by thoughts and recognizing that life went on despite of my thoughts, moods and emotions. “This too shall pass,” a Buddhist teaching related the impermanent nature of life and the “self”, stressed by ACT, gave me much solace. At this point, although my knowledge of Buddhist philosophy was not comprehensive, I had gathered that according to Buddhism the point of life is not simply the avoidance of pain and gain of pleasure, but the transformation of one’ character and this transformation requires a conscious choice of changing one’s behaviour.

I saw R. Weekly for a period of a few months and through that time we explored my life and she suggested that I apply mindfulness to my entire existence. Becoming more mindful also meant identifying my values

and committing to actions and attitudes that reflect them. It did change my life, not because it introduced anything really new to me, but because it got me to remember what is valuable and to live, what I hope is, a more truthful for my life.

The Ottawa Palyul Buddhist Center

The therapy with R. prompted me to deepen my spiritual practice. I had read numerous books on Buddhism, Yoga philosophy, had taken yoga training, and attended Buddhist lectures, however, I had never committed to a particular practice, center or lineage. At this point I decided to explore the Palyul Buddhist Center in Ottawa under the advice of a friend of mine.

The Ottawa Palyul Center was set up by Anglea Shumegi, who had studied Buddhism for five years in a monastery in India and was then sent to Canada by her teacher to spread the teachings. She came to be a leading expert in the field of Asian Studies and a Professor at Carleton University. I attended her classes as part of my minor degree in religious studies. My interest, as that of many Westerners, was initially an intellectual one. I knew I was in good hands, as Angela's lectures were always taught from the heart of a spiritual seeker. They were excellent in content, but also honest, sometimes offering personal details and a dedication to the actual practice of Buddhist teachings.

The Ottawa Palyul Center is a Sangha (Buddhist spiritual community). All the work involved with running the center, including all the regular teachings (which are offered for free) is

performed by its members; the maintenance of the Dharma house facilities and the many events become possible only through their volunteering and donations. The Center also plays a major role in the lives of the Tibetan and Bhutanese communities by organizing various events and officiating ceremonies which involve spiritual elements such as weddings and yearly festival celebrations.

As part of its curriculum, The Ottawa Palyul Center offered mindfulness meditation sessions every Thursday. Once I started attending the sessions, I found myself becoming part of a new world. It happened gently without being forced, yet under the pull of expectation.

When I stepped into the Payul Center hall, it was like stepping into a wonder-world of heightened aesthetics and magic; I was surrounded by fresh cut flowers, beautiful triptika (mandala paintings) of mythological beings, and an aroma of thick incense. The space, further adorned with golden objects and ritual offerings, invoked something of a celebratory atmosphere; the offerings having been presented with reverence for the lineage of teachers from the new to the ancient and legendary.

Yellow, gold and red colours throughout the space imbued a feeling of warmth, which was augmented by the fragrance of the incense prepared from various herbs from the Tibetan mountains. The colors blue, white and yellow, corresponding to the sky, snow and sun, when intertwined with the colors of the prayer flags, yielded a feeling of crispness, lightness and clarity which I had known from my treks in the Himalayas. I suddenly remembered the euphoria

of being at high altitude, with the sunshine reflecting on the snow, joyful for the freedom from the daily grind of the fields below. Trekking through the mountains requires one to be pragmatic, tough yet respectful, gentle, focused, simple. I sense the same spirit of purposefulness at Palyul Center, both in the atmosphere and interactions.

The attitude and interactions of the Sangha members and the general feel of the place was characterized by support, respect, patience and compassion. Conversations were to the point, yet friendly. Not only Angela, but many of the members, would offer direction while also allowing one to learn on their own time and manner, however they tended to be stern with instructions of the rituals and explanation of context of ideas.

The self- consciousness, which I, suffering from anxiety, feel acutely not only in myself, but also in others, seemed not as prevalent in these interactions. People knew each other well. There was a sense of peace and wisdom, which I imagined to come from the dedication to a serious spiritual goal. It is easy to relax in such atmosphere, where a balance between personal space and communal support is given.

Once I had learned how things are done in this new world, I realized that every action was a ritual; the spinning of the ritual wheel that sends prayers into the air upon entrance, the bowing when seeing a teacher, and the rhythmical repetition of verses in Tibetan and English.

So immersed I became in this world, that I remember when I was signing up for the MBSR course, I had reached to touch the consent form to my forehead as I would do with a sacred text at Palyul. And maybe, in the world of science and commercial therapy, the legal form was indeed sacred, as it may become apparent from my discussion of my MBSR experience to follow in Montreal.

The rituals are what caught and inspired my imagination at Palyul. We would make an effigy symbolizing all that is negative within a person, and speared it with a sacred dagger. Sacred wine, blessed from the communal prayer, would be poured onto our hands and then rub into the forehead.

Angela was very helpful, just not always giving instructions but also explaining the function of a ritual. I had not just joined a foreign religion, but I also had the blessing of it being interpreted and explained to me, not by an outside scholar, but a practising scholar of the religion who went beyond mere contemplation. Buddhist Monasteries often serve as a university where the Buddhist canon and Buddhist philosophy is studied, along with ritual. It is a curious fact to this thesis that as mentioned earlier, among the vast schools of Buddhist philosophy there exists a phenomenological school of thought called Yogachara.

At Palyul Buddhism is a religion. One must believe in the mythology, or at least have a personal interpretation that is in line with the entire religion/philosophy, and, being an ortho--praxy religion (right practice vs. orthodoxy right believe), it also invites you to try it out and find out for yourself.

I immersed myself, and followed the preliminary practices that were supposed to prepare me for the more in depth mediation practices involving month long retreats. These practices were aimed at purifying the mind and involved mantra repetitions, prostration, certain visualization practices, as well as, mindfulness.

Mindfulness session at the Ottawa Palyul Center

On Thursday evenings we would come together in the main hall of the house for the weekly Mindfulness sessions. We opened with the typical prostration, prayer for the entire lineage of teachers and making of a spiritual resolve. Then we sat in cross-legged position on cushions on the floor. There was not much need for instructions, as the crowd, mostly experienced mediators, knew the routine well. We closed our eyes as Angela led us in meditation through simple instructions on how to follow the breath. Then, she guided us to concentrate on the sound from the street, then the room, and then in our body. We empty our minds from thoughts and meditated for about 45 minutes. Calmness and spaciousness were somehow easily achieved in the small hall. As everyone went deeper into meditation, a subtle mental state of togetherness remained. One could feel the positive intention and the sweetness of shared silence in the subdued light. Sometimes peace would come naturally, but more often, at least for me, the experience would not go as planned. The sensations resulting from the position of the body, the mind going over a certain thought, or someone's cough or fidgeting on the mat, would easily break the concentration needed to not get carried away by the mental chatter. As it often is with the counterintuitive, paradoxical ways of Buddhism, meditation requires one to work in order to relax. Refreshing and spacious valleys of peace are achieved through many clusters of thoughts, sensations and emotions.

Once the session was complete, we would sometimes dedicate the merit that was earned through this mediation, and try to mentally extend this peaceful state to certain members of the community who were facing difficult times. After the meditation sessions I noticed how my desire to ask questions and state opinions diminished. The play of the ego in people's personality when

interacting with others became more evident, and appeared almost silly compared to the peace and depth of the hour spent.

Mindfulness is not a practice that is an end to it, but it is a tool helping through in the quest of overcoming one's ego for the benefit of all sentient beings. The principal ideas in Buddhist philosophy are: incarnation, non-duality and the possibility of escaping the Samasraic (reincarnation) circle which is tied to the illusionary dual reality. According to Buddhist philosophy, one's ego and nirvana (liberation) are possible because of the doctrine of non-duality and non-self. In all reality, even the perception of separate individuals, is an illusion that can be penetrated if the mind is trained to be still. If one overcomes attachment to this world and manages to overpower the forces of hatred, greed and lust, then one can realize that there is no such a thing as a separate "self" or other. One's suffering ends, as a result of the fact that one stops to want to control the world.

Contemplating the illusory nature of self in relation to the subjective, objective split inadvertently results in the difficult question - What reincarnates if there is no self? The best answer I have heard is from Angela, who explains that the ego or self-conscious aspect of our body continues to be incarnated as long as it is not aware of its illusory nature.

In my head, appears an image of the human being as a natural dam, composed of twigs, branches, leaves and mud material, forming a kink in a free flowing, endless river. It may seem that the river, with these objects, accumulates to a solid body of its own, but it is simply a state in the flow. It may actually be even a "stuck" way of being. Another image that comes into my mind

is that of a pile of string with a knot, which the ego tries to solve by pulling on. Mindfulness, it seems, is the loosening of the knot for me.

Even when achieved, the realization does not lead to inaction in the day-to-day world, but rather it inspires one to dedicate one's life to the service of others. In this sense, we can see the parallel between Buddhism and therapy. With Therapy also contemplation and changes in behaviour liberate one from a neurotic state of being, hopefully making him/her a person.

Although escape from suffering is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists, regardless of their tradition, there is an important emphasis on compassion in the Palyul lineage.

The Palyul Center is part of the Palyul lineage, which is the oldest form of Vajrayana or Tibetan school Buddhism. Vajrayana is a later development of Mahayana Buddhism practised in Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. Mahayana Buddhism came out of the traditional Theravada Buddhism. Mahayana differs from Theravada in the importance it gives to Bodhisattva figures. According to Mahayana, the Buddha, after achieving enlightenment, decided to return to earth to help other sentient beings. Therefore, in Mahayana, and so Vajrayana, there is an emphasis on helping others and compassion as primary values for a Buddhist. Indeed, all prayers and meetings are closed by the salutation 'Om Mani Padme Hum.' Om Mani Padme Hum has many translations, but one on the occasion of closing the meditation and prayer session it is meant as a prayer for peace of all sentient beings.

Being part of Palyul required participation in rituals, the steady practice of meditation, a dedication to overcoming one's egotistical nature and service to other sentient beings. My

understanding and practice of mindfulness in the context of Palyul contrasted quite sharply with my experience of mindfulness in MBSR, to which I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Psychology and Mindfulness

(Session 1)

It is a cold, grey February day, and I'm fighting my way through the snow and wind tunnels of Montreal's city blocks. I rush onto the metro, dodging hordes of people. Many thoughts are leaping one over another and back again in my head. The winter months are hard for me; my skin has not felt the sun in a long time. I feel disconnected from the earth, from life. My social engagements have been reduced to a minimum. To someone from southern Europe, Ottawa feels like a space colony in these dark months. My head is swollen with thoughts and worries, not much different than the main character from the Moon. Buried in academic conceptions, I feel that all I am is a brain. My mind and spirit are tired of recycled thought patterns. Mindfulness based therapy for anxiety and depression has been recommended to me by a few psychologists. As a Buddhist who has explored the research on the appropriation of Asian techniques into western "culture", such as yoga, I am both hopeful and a slightly skeptical.

The course is held in one of the more affluent areas of Montreal. It is a clinic with quiet, businesslike ambience: empty rooms, modern minimal lighting, hardwood floors and bare white walls. It is quite a sterile environment, with a surprising lack of inspirational quotes, statues of Buddha, Zen fountains or other items typically found in such places.

We are sitting on chairs arranged in a circle. There is little small talk or eye contact; we are mostly looking at the teacher as we await instructions. There is a general sense of awkwardness and formality. The group is made up of urban corporate professionals. The instructor, an elderly woman in great physical shape, was in the business of high-end sales, and she also had extensive experience as a physical trainer. She has the air of a genuinely kind person.

In the round of introductions, no one volunteers more than their first name. I am the only one who mentions depression or anxiety as reasons for taking the course. Others hint at reasons, but

nothing is shared. Most say they want to reduce stress and feelings of dissatisfaction and disconnection. Dealing with “the craziness” of life is a frequent expression given to explain the interest in the course. Some say they are simply curious about mindful meditation, having heard about it from television.

Clients just listen, without asking questions or making comments. We do a simple three-minute meditation: following our breathing and dismissing thoughts passing through our mind.

People say they enjoy the restful moment, and Kindtea (the instructor’s nickname) discusses stress and relaxation. Various negative experiences and feelings are explained, in rational, scientific terms, as stress. Biological stress reactions (e.g. increased heartbeat, tension in the muscles, perspiration), and relaxation is broken down into a mechanical explanation. She discusses the clear relationship between cognitive processes such as worrying, and the physiological manifestation of shallow breathing. This is a sober, classical cognitive-based therapy.

But then...

Kindtea calls life a miracle. She talks about what others call the spiritual aspect of existence: the miraculousness of life, the complexity of life and the human body. All examples of life's miraculous nature describe processes that we know in detail, due to scientific inquiry and our understanding of chemistry, physics and biology. This applies to the human body in particular; its growth, metabolic changes, neural firing, resulting in thought, anti-bodies reacting to disease and plasticity.

There is no mention of God, or other spiritual matters such as incarnation, faith or enlightenment. Everything is rational and ordinary, nothing beyond the mundane levels of reality. All discussion and examples regarding Mindfulness meditation, refer to Kabat Zinn's teachings from books and workshops. So far there is no mention of Buddhism.

At the end of the session Kindtea bows to us, and we are unsure how to react. One person does the "Namaste" salute, now common in some yoga classes. Kindtea does not answer or suggest how one should respond, so most just adopt a polite, professional half-smile. Socially, the experience is somewhat awkward compared to other meditation groups I have been part of, and I wonder if this

could be due to a lack of cultural agreement on protocol. There is no group cohesion or the feeling of unity that often occurs during Sangha gatherings. My general feeling about the first class is that it was an aesthetic, socially-isolating, highly cerebral experience. People leave immediately after the class, making business-like small talk.

Background History of Mindfulness

Vipassana

This section will establish the connection between the Vipassana form of Mindfulness and psychological therapy. Vipassana Mindfulness meditation was the first widely popular form of Mindfulness in the West. Goenka, who promoted Vipassana in the West, could be understood as to be a part of the “Western Buddhism” himself.

In *Transformation of an Ancient tradition* (2001), James-William Coleman explains S. N. Goenka had a very “Western” style himself and ignored most of the traditional Buddhist symbols and rituals. Goenka was not a monk, nor born into a particular Buddhist tradition, but rather was a Burmese businessman. He picked up Vipassana meditation in his later life form, without receiving training in any other form of Buddhism. Goenka’s teacher, Saya Gyi U Ba Khin, was a wealthy farmer and a disciple of the renowned master Ledi Sayadaw, who taught him Anapana-sati, a form of meditation said to have been taught by the Buddha.

Goenka became an influential teacher and established meditation centers worldwide and initiated the construction of the Global Vipassana Pagoda and the Vipassana Research Institute

at *Dhamma Giri*. He leads 10-day intensive meditation retreats and taught a large number of people, thousands of whom were Westerners. In his teachings, Goenka presented Buddhism as non-sectarian, universal, and scientific in character. (Coleman 2001)

In this sense, mindfulness meditation has already been taken out of a Buddhist context by Goenka and his teacher, both being part of the wealthy elite and having received Western education and were influenced by Western ideas. Thus, already at this stage Vipassana Mindfulness was territorialized in a Western context, divorced from the elaborate Buddhist symbolism and rituals.

In America there were the three central figures in the Vipassana movement, Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, whose similar backgrounds is no coincidence. Both Goldstein and Kornfield came from Jewish homes on the East Coast, attended Ivy League Universities, and first became interested in Buddhism while volunteering for the Peace Corps in Asia where they learned mindfulness meditation. In the US they all continue the study meditation under Than Nat Han. Although Goldstein and Kornfield had not met beforehand, both were invited to teach Vipassana meditation at Trungpa's Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado in 1974. Later, Kornfield, Goldstein and Salzburg, founded the Insight Meditation Center (IMC) in Barre, Massachusetts, US. Vipassana became popular among Westerners, and the IMC established as a major retreat centre.

Goldstein and Salzberg formed the Barre, Massachusetts center and remained close to traditional Vipassana practice, while Kornfield founded the Spirit Rock Center on the West Coast, which incorporated the insights and perspectives of western psychology and other spiritual traditions. While all three played a major role in establishing the Mindfulness movement in the US, it was Kornfield who introduced it to North-American psychology. (Wilson 2014)

Eastern Influence in Western Psychology

Historically, the incorporation of meditation practices into western Buddhism, and subsequently into psychotherapy, is a very long and complex process. I have provided a general overview of western Buddhism in the introduction, and a more detailed description of the spread of the Vipassana form of Mindfulness in North-America. In the next few paragraphs, I focus on the Mindfulness movement as it pertains specifically to Mindfulness-based therapies.

Kornfield co-founded the Insight Meditation Society (IMC), which was dedicated to investigating the intersection of Western psychology and Buddhist Mindfulness. In 1977, as part of his PhD dissertation *The Psychology of Mindfulness Meditation*, Kornfield researched the effects of long-term mindfulness retreats in the United States. Kornfield captured a wide range of effects, however many were overlooked in the dissertation. One such aspect is the negative consequences of Mindfulness practice. These included nightmares, anger, pain, mood swings, fear, paranoia, hatred, uncontrollable physical movements, hallucinations and psychological tension. Another aspect that was excluded was the experience of psychic phenomena. Significant numbers of Mindfulness practitioners on retreats reported manifestations of telepathy, precognition and/or out-of-body experiences. Neither were included the highly positive effects such as stronger feelings of love, resolution of psychological tension, reduced eating, elimination of stress and anxiety, and greater concentration.

However, Kornfield also acknowledged that the healing power of mindfulness goes beyond the mediation technique. He stated that “its transforming consequences are the product of seeing through the illusion of the ego-self and discerning the fact of impermanence in a ceaselessly changing world.” So, although Kornfield changed how we think of Mindfulness in general, he also respected the original Buddhist goal. (Wilson 2014)

Kornfield's dissertation is psychological, but it also shares the Buddhist viewpoint. In the dissertation Eastern concepts, such as Karma, reincarnation and compassion are discussed. Quite relevant to this study is the fact that in his dissertation Kornfield actually advocates morality as the foundation for meditation. He cautioned about the dangers of taking mindfulness out of a Buddhist context:

“There has been such an interchange between spiritual practice and psychological growth and human potential movements that there is a prevalent notion, at least in the psychological world, that Western psychology can actually get you to the same place as spiritual practice. I think this is really quite a dangerous assumption. From my observation of how the psychological techniques work I see that although they can lead to some very useful growth and transformation, they do not develop the penetrating insight that helps one cut through the deeper layers of illusion and hallucinations about individual separateness” (Wilson 2014, p.84)

It is important to notice that although he considered psychology useful, he remained a Buddhist and regarded Buddhism as superior to psychology. His student, Kabat Zinn, however, the central figure in the mindfulness-based therapy movement, aimed to completely divorce the mindfulness mediate out its Buddhist context.

Kabat Zinn and MBSR

Kabat Zinn was introduced to Mindfulness meditation by the meditation teacher Philip Kapleau and continued to study meditation under Kornfield and Thich Nhat Hanh. In 1979 he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he conducted the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program. The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program applied Mindfulness teaching to help patients dealing with chronic pain. The program that was

later structured into an eight-week course, and renamed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), is precisely the course I followed.

While Kornfield considered the context of Buddhist teaching necessary, Zinn removed the Buddhist framework entirely. He downplayed any connection between Mindfulness and Buddhism and altered mindfulness practice heavily in order to adapt it to the scientific medical context. Wilson explains that Zinn adapted Mindfulness to therapy by over stressing and stretching a particular scientific interpretation of Dharma ('the way', or Buddhist teachings).

"Mindfulness and Dharma are best thought of as universal descriptions of the functioning of the human mind regarding the quality of one's attention in relationship to the experience of suffering and the potential for happiness. They (Mindfulness and Dharma) apply equally wherever there are human minds, just as the laws of physics apply equally everywhere in our universe." (Wilson 2014, p.135).

By stressing this scientific and universal interpretation, Zinn is able to distance himself from Buddhism. Zinn argues that he is simply following Buddhist tradition and that the Buddhism could be understood as a scientific practice, drawing a parallel to psychology. In his view Buddhism and medical science are concerned with healing, but Buddhists have been doing it from within the structure of a particular religion. Although there might be some truth to this statement, equating Buddhism with Western psychology is simply inaccurate.

As Wilson points out Kabat Zinn aimed at turning Mindfulness into a form of medical treatment. In order to present mindfulness as scientific, he argued that Buddhist philosophical ideas are just a description of natural laws and reality. He expresses his view of Buddhist philosophy in his book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. In it we find a definition of Karma, which is as creative, as it is deceptive.

“Karma means that this happens because that happened. B is connected in some way to A, every effect has an antecedent cause, and every cause an effect that is its measure and its consequence, at least at the non-quantum level. Overall, when we speak of a person’s Karma, it means the sum total of the person’s direction in life, and the tenor of the things that occur around that person, caused by antecedent conditions, actions, thoughts, feelings, sense impressions, desires.”(Zinn 1994, p.39)

In this interpretation of causal logic, Kabat-Zinn ignores all historical Buddhist teachings from various Buddhist schools and traditions about Karma. He implies that Karma is not connected to morality and immorality. He manages to avoid discussing the role of actions committed in previous lifetimes, rebirth, the invisible merit economy that can be manipulated by prayers, chanting, merit donation and other religious practices typically associated with Karma.

Essentially, Zinn argues that Karma does not contradict the Western scientific understanding of the world .By doing that, he gets rid of Buddhist ethics and transforms Buddhist ontology into a naturalistic (material/scientific) ontology. This allows him to treat spirituality and religion as unimportant to the healing power of mindfulness. It also allows him to isolate the mechanical process of attention as the essential element to mindfulness disregarding any other aspects of it. The entire institution of Buddhist tradition, with its philosophy, mythological importance of the student-teacher relationship, lineage, Sangha and the ethical code of the Eightfold Path are rendered of no value. What they are replaced with is an emphasis of the practice itself, isolated as a rational technique. It also replaces the role of the teacher with that of the medical professional, be it a doctor or psychologist.

Those who interpret mindfulness through bio-medicine argue that it is in fact complementary to cognitive therapy, and thus adequate for effective treatment. The language of MBSR is strictly medical, and all examples given by instructors seem rational; it appeals to Western clients because it is scientific and clinical, stripped of aesthetics and poetics as done in Buddhism. MBSR is a cognitive-behavioural therapy that alters our emotional states by changing how we think and react to particular situations. The changes in one's physiology, due to calmer thinking and perceived control over a situation, result in physiological relaxation and positive emotional states. This is known as the 'cognitive affect loop.' Behaviour is 'hacked' through the thinking process, and the mental state is calmed through relaxing exercise. However, though Mindfulness is indeed effective when applied as such a technique, it is operational (i.e. Defined for the purpose of study), and no longer has the same meaning as Mindfulness as intended by the Buddha.

In his paper Mindfulness in cultural context Kirmayer, L. J. (2015) discusses how some psychologists try to replace the term Mindfulness with 'attention,' in order to avoid the cultural complications that might arise from the word. Kirmayer notes that although this approach might miss some of the intended positive effects of mindfulness as conceived by Kornfield or even Zinn, at least it is clearer and more forth -coming than in MBSR, where the implied meaning of mindfulness is not directly stated to Clients/Patient. (Transcultural Psychiatry 52 (4))

Many "Western Buddhist," such as Rahula, have made the analogy of Buddha as a medical doctor. Kabat-Zinn uses that interpretation literally to justify and advance his approach. In his forward to *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness* we read:

"The Four Noble Truths were articulated by the Buddha in a medical framework, beginning with a specific diagnosis, dukkha (suffering) itself: then a clearly stated etiology, that the dis-ease or

dukkha has a specific cause, namely craving; a salutary prognosis, namely the possibility of a cure of the dis-ease through what he called cessation; and forth, a practical treatment plan for bringing liberation from suffering, termed *The Noble Eightfold Path*. The Buddha is a doctor, then his course of treatment belongs in a medical setting, and there should be no difficulty in making the transition.” (Didonna, 2008 p. xxvii).

This statement demonstrates Zinn’s assumed entitlement to interpret the Buddhist doctrine. In my opinion, this could be dangerous and does present an ethical problem.

Zinn intends Mindfulness to not only mean awareness and meditation, but too vaguely refer to the entire Buddhist tradition. Using the term Mindfulness in this manner helps introduce Buddhist ideas and practices to non-Buddhists without them worrying that it might come from a foreign “culture”. As Wilson points out, “when Kabat-Zinn speaks of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, what he really means is Buddhist-Based (or at least Dharma-Based) Stress Reduction” (2014, p.89). On the one hand Zinn refers to Buddhist texts and teachers, such as the Dalai Lama or Thit Nat Han, in order to obtain legitimacy, and on the other he claims that the Buddhist context is unnecessary. This makes his position hypocritical, or at least dishonest.

Kabat Zinn continued the appropriation of Mindfulness by removing it from the Buddhist framework and patenting mindfulness-based therapy. In this sense he *de-codifying and re-codifying* mindfulness, transforming it from a cultural practice into a product which can be packaged and sold to clients. I will explore in further detail these processes in Chapter Four.

Zinn’s preference for science, and his apprehension about Buddhism, reflects the general North-American societal propensity toward science and bio-medicine. Science and technology are assumed to be universal and reliable, and they seem to have reduced any aspect of existence into a purely objective and material state. This has transformed our perspective on the world, as we

are no longer satisfied with the natural; we need to seek universal truth as a “natural” (material) one. As Lock and Nguyen (2010) explain, scientific knowledge has transformed medicine into an authoritative discipline, and defined norms for what is normal, pathological, and more recently, desirable. In bio-medicine a disease must have universal cause, and hence, a universal cure. Even psychology, the science of the mind and heart, is free of unknown subjectivity, supposedly ruled by universal laws which follow rational logic. Science has given us practical, clear techniques that, presumably, could be taken out of context and applied to any ailment. In the domain of this scientific psychology, religious belief, ontology, eschatology or existential meaning need not be discussed. Officially MBSR presents mindfulness as a purely rational practice based on scientific principles, but in reality MBSR does involve wisdom and mental states typically associated with spirituality, such as gratitude and compassion.

Reflections:

The theme that emerged from the first session, and continued throughout the course, was the place of spirituality in modern rational scientific thinking. Expressions such as, “spiritual but not religious” or “I do not subscribe to any organized religion” were common, indicating a particular ambiguity towards spirituality and religion by the participants. On one hand, science, rationality and bio-medicine seem to provide the right answers, and, anecdotally, the rational thinking bias in the West is so strong that there is an American type of Buddhism called Secular Buddhism. On the other hand, interest in the exotic - in this case Eastern religions and their practices - is clear, considering the popularity of literature on Buddhism. After the first MBSR session, it is apparent that some participants consider the class as more than training in attention and breathing. The dynamics of the teacher-student relationship and intentional community are evident. Statements such as, “Let us try to be more mindful and live more present

and meaningful lives” emphasize the communal intention to change thought patterns and behaviour, and search for deeper meaning as a group. This suggests that MBSR has an unclear position with respect to the aspects of human existence that are typically addressed by religion.

Chapter 4 Automatization

A phenomenological approach in anthropology helps unpack the experiences of mindfulness meditation in general, as well the experience of taking this particular MBSR course by paying attention to setting. I have already mentioned the highly sterile, controlled, alienating experience of the class sessions.

(Session 2)

There is no incense or symbolic religious icons or statues, and no communal mantra recitation or singing, which may evoke a heightened sense of being. The only form of art in the class is poetry, and the two poems used in the first class are very literal. The

meaning is spelled out in formulating thought, and here are no metaphors, evoking of emotions or other artistic techniques are used. There is a complete lack of sensual, rich aesthetic or emotional experience; the atmosphere, or lack thereof, is part of the *life world* of the course.

It is possible that the simplistic aesthetics might be due to the heavy Zen influence on this brand of Mindfulness through Thích Nhất Hạnh, which is suggested by the rudimentary wooden benches we were offered to experiment sitting, and the brass bell used to break mediation. The minimal style of Zen monasteries is not utilitarian however. The simplicity is sought out exactly as a means of making certain raw and beautiful reality stand out. There is always a contrast between the silence and the ring of a bell, the white wall and a simple calligraphy. Ritual, although simple, are part of the experience as for example bowing and incense lighting. This simplification of the environment, probably aimed at avoiding distraction results in sterilization of the experience.

Another discussion related to the rationalization of mindfulness is the esoteric aspect of mediation practice. An interesting parallel between Buddhist beliefs and Deleuzian ideas is the conception of “winds” or “souffle vital” explained in *Deleuze and Religion* by Bryden (2002, p. 118). For Deleuze “winds” is a type of flow of energy from beings to beings which examples further his idea of living beings is being part of an ever transforming system. This idea is quite similar to the Vajrayana belief that the energy in the body has different characteristic called “winds” that are associated with the four directions. These esoteric aspects of spirituality also

relate to meditative practices in Buddhism. However MBSR is completely void of esoteric content and, in fact, such view is rejected.

An example of this disregard for the non-material in MBSR came up during this session. Kindtea stated as a response to a few questions that there is no particular time or posture when mediation should be done. According to Buddhist and Yoga philosophy, dusk and dawn are the optimal time for mediation, due to particular energy in nature. The cross legged posture is a pyramid which should center the mediator and channel the “winds.” When in class, Kindtea remarked that the time and posture should be whatever works best for the student. This is probably due to the therapeutic focus of MBSR. Theravada is much less esoteric than the rest of Buddhist school’s yet it is not devoid of it. The avoidance of esoteric topics is part of the process of the rationalization of mindfulness.

Having surveyed the setting, now let’s turn to the experience of mindfulness and what it brings out. Meditation is naturally a very personal, immediate and, sometimes pre-objective experience, in which experience is not formulated in thoughts through language. However, in the class sessions we are encouraged to share, and even analysis, our experiences. By meditating and sharing our experiences with the group, we essentially engage in a phenomenological exercise. The act of mediation is an act of the *epoche* or reduction. We bring into light aspects of our existence that we might not have noticed before. The first strongly expressed observation had to do with the way participants relate to the body.

The main observations the participants bring up as a result of the homework, is how disconnected they are from their bodies. Some examples are shared, such as having a hard time paying attention

to the breath, or always thinking of something else. Though the mediation training did help some find moments of absent-mindedness, “Going through the routine” trance-like, or distracting oneself with TV or social media are common. All participants agree that modern life is “crazy and disconnected,” and that there is a pervasive feeling of automation. Participants seem to have been aware of this beforehand and there in this session comes up the underlying assumption that we ‘Western modern people’ (a term used by both the instructor and students) are like zombies, on autopilot due to the highly structured mechanized lives we live. This is repeated so often that it is almost taken for granted.

These descriptions give us a window into the way participants feel about their bodies and how they relate to the world. These reports tell us about the embodiment of undercurrent social movements affecting our beliefs such as the criticism of modern life. Participants feel that their bodies and life have become automatized.

The view of the “modern” person, as described by participants, alienated and machine like, can be understood as an expression of Weber’s idea of the ‘iron cage’ as described in Weber’s seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). According to Weber

individuals are disconnected from nature, work, each other and, ultimately, from themselves and that experience is alienating and depressing.

This view of the modern person has become part of the western intellectual discourse and has reached the general public. As Campbell, Colin explains in *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism* (2005). Romantic Movement in the arts against the Enlightenment movement in philosophy and science in Europe following the industrial revolution criticized mechanization, but also the rationalization of the human experience and idealized nature.

In the late 20 century, this interest entered? The fields of nutrition and health creating a niche for a new industry. Alternative medicine in the forms of natural supplements, treatments, homeopathy, various forms of massage, yoga and body talk, a therapy using “listening “to the body’s responses as a form of diagnosis became popular. Mindfulness- based therapies are a variation of this movement within psychotherapy. (Wilson 2014)

The Canadian psychiatrist Gabor Matte (2011) presents the message “listen to the body” in his book *When the Body Says No*. The body send signals that can give us insight about our mental state, signals that the intellect is unable to register on its own. For example, rushes and gastric problems are often symptoms of stress induced by how the individual is handling their life. Matte argues that we should not ignore such signs, as they indicate that we need to make changes in our lives

Furthermore, MBSR is a reaction to bio-medicine as Mindfulness offers an alternative to pharmaceutical drugs. The biomedical model has caused the over -prescription of pharmaceuticals in North America for milder forms of anxiety and depression. The anti-

pharmaceutical attitude and the aim to empower the natural body is part of the appeal of the Mindfulness based therapy movement. . In this sense MBSR is a continuation of this movement away from the automatic modes of modern life, calling one to pay more attention to the body.

However, anthropologists have already questioned some of the alternative therapies, and their underlying assumptions. For example, in her Master's Thesis *Disordering "Order"; Learning how to eat in a recovery from an eating disorder*, Angela Plant (2014) explores eating disorders to reveal overconfidence in the body's ability to self- heal. She finds that the central message of many alternative therapies, which is to 'listen to your body,' oversimplifies health issues and in many cases is not enough to overcome a disorder. I intend to further explore this aspect of oversimplification of health issues with respect to Mindfulness- based therapies in Part Two of the thesis.

Reflection

While the meditations and exercises on mindful observation of the body, I noticed that with this method there is much focus on the body, the breath, the heartbeat and walking. If one has a thought, one's attention is to be brought back to the body by concentrating on the breath, the nostrils, the rising stomach or the feet touching the ground. This leads to controlling one's thoughts by reducing them to the only observation of automatic bodily movements and processes. In my personal experience, there is something almost mechanistic about this meditation technique.

The group atmosphere in the class as we focused on the body and tried to access a peaceful place individually, was of formal, non-personal, reserved, controlled and safe interaction. This manner of meditation, and the overall atmosphere of the course, made me more aware of the “disconnection” (as described by some participants) of modern life and it seems to actually be perpetuating it.

The desire to break away from modern life can be understood in Deleuzian terms as *de-territorialisation*. Modern life has as territorialised the body to be a machine in the grind-of-modern-life-regiment-time at work and home: commuting and dealing with the bureaucratic, urban environments dominate by machines and procedures and artificial time.

Bio-medicine is part of the hard-line of the modern way of life we have created for ourselves. It represents the ‘established hegemonic cultural order’ (*the tree*). The radical root of the tree is an attempt to reform the *tree*. MBSR provides a *soft-line* an attempt to change this way of being as it instructs to slow down, reflect and get in touch with the body. It is a *soft-line* growing out and from biomedical systems and bending the *hard line*.

However, this *soft-line* does not result in a real change. Deleuze and Guattari described the nature reformative radical root by stating “... the fascicular system does not really break with dualism, with the complementarity between a subject and an object, a natural reality and a spiritual reality: unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object.” (1987, p.6). MBSR is such a root, which aims at getting back to a more natural state, arguably more present. However, since it excludes aesthetics, and reduces mindfulness mediation to a mechanized technique, it fails to achieve its goal and returns to the tree of technological mechanical bio-medicine.

Yet the manner and setting in which it does it, actually perpetuates the alienated and mechanic experience of *being-in the world* (a mood of existence according to Heidegger, which comes neither from the "outside" nor from the "inside," but arises from being-in-the-world.) The focus of attention on automatic processes reduces the entire experience of being human. It stresses exactly the rational, mechanical aspects of our being science and bio-medicine take as essential. This mechanical form of mindfulness meditation results in the body being territorialized by bio-medicine, through coding and reinforcing already coded beliefs and ways of relating to the world.

Thus, though MBSR is a movement against the classical bio-medicine and its use of pharmaceutical medication, it still reinforces the hegemony of a materialistic view of reality with its Cartesian split. Mindfulness is reduced to an act of intellectual observation of bodily states and processes. Though it attempts to get in touch with the personal humanity of the patient, it does so in a one-sided manner and may oversimplify the process of healing.

Nevertheless, MBSR does claim to address problems that often have an existential if not spiritual dimension: the lack of autonomy, meaning or connection with oneself or the surrounding world, and the consequent depression. These themes, and spirituality, are discussed in the following sections. Coincidentally, my encounter with a yoga teacher in the group during the second session resulted in deep reflection.

Chapter 5 Religious authority, guidance and trust

(Session 3)

“There is no goal in meditation.” The goal, advises Kindtea “makes us attached, striving for something. It prevents us from being in the moment, from accepting things as they are.”

MBSR presents many promises for health benefits. It carries in its name “Stress Reduction” and is recommended for anxiety, stress and depression. Yet, we are told that, the goal is not to be more relaxed or healthy, but just to observe. In actuality, there is a goal and it is to learn to tolerate the existing negative status.

Mindfulness can help with not be reactive in a situation with negative stress and so dissipate stress. This is achieved by “sitting with the negative” and requires training to “bare” the pain or stress. Furthermore, MBSR also addresses depressive states by teaching how to get out of the circular thought pattern that occurs when one becomes depressed, known in psychology as rumination. In his book *Mindfulness way through Depression* (year) Zinn tries to demonstrate to readers that they contribute to their problem by trying to solve their problems through thinking. Observing is, in fact, an effective method in reducing both anxious and depressive states. (Zinn 2007)

However, this is not to say that when engaging than the practice of Mindfulness one does not have a goal and is indifferent to the result. The goal is in fact improvement of these states.

Mindfulness in MBSR and in Buddhism seems to share an approach, but there is a qualitative difference that, put in context, does make a difference between two approaches. Buddhism accepts the life essence as dukkha (suffering). It does not provide techniques of achieving peace for human beings struggling in the cycle of reincarnation; rather it offers a way of breaking that cycle. The role of mindfulness in Buddhism is to make one self-aware and to strengthen the resolve to overcome the ego-state of illusion causing this. This goal is clearly a spiritual one.

Zinn's position, that there is no difference between MBSR and Buddhism, is incorrect as MBSR clearly does not address any of the above concerns, but rather has a medical goal to provide a state of health by applying mindfulness as a psychological tool. In Zinn's lectures and books we find the advice to "just be". In MBSR on the one hand, we "just are" and we "simply celebrate life", on the other hand, we actively practice psychological training for stress reduction, which is supposed to help with other problems as well, such as depression, rather than accepting them. This inconsistency will come up again and again during the training.

The course does not discuss any life philosophy. The closest to a philosophy or to some ethical system came from is a list of attitudes to adopt during the course – curiosity, gratitude, and open-mindedness. As a part of today's exercise we assign these terms to reflect on, with a group of three people. One of the people is a yoga instructor – C., who has had a lot of training in

meditation. During the exercise she remarks stand out as she seems to perceive some kind of a bigger picture, of which mindfulness, MBSR, and all in the group are part of. In her view all the attitudes go together and represent a certain way of being- of “higher consciousness”, growth” and “an evolution.”

Later, I get a chance to talk to C. As we walk to the station and ride the metro together. During our conversation she shares that in her opinion the others in the class do not yet see the bigger picture of self -improving, as the journey to enlightenment that we have stepped into.

Conversations on spirituality

First conversation

C. talks about a mixed bag of Eastern esoteric teachers and traditions she follows. She quotes, spiritual teachers from various Eastern paths, such as Vivakanda and Yanager, throwing in some Buddha and Dalai Lama. Her opinion is that MBSR is useful; it is ” wonderful” because, it introduces spirituality to

“Westerners” (her choice of terminology) who believe only in science and would not be otherwise open to it. She gives me examples of how teachers such Vivakanda and Yoganada have seen that the Westerners disassociate which lead them to emphasize the *asanas*, which are the physical exercises in the yoga training they popularized in the West. Their view was that they could use the *asanas* as a way to get to the “Westerners,” who are otherwise unaware of higher realities and energies such as the chakra points.

There is a reinforcement of the myth of the spiritual East and the materialistic and disconnected from oneself Westerner, this time perpetuated by the missionary gurus.

It is interesting to notice that, neither of these teachers, nor C., chose to discuss Western traditions of spirituality, such as Christianity. This preference for Eastern spiritual traditions dates as far back as the 19th century. One large organization inspired by Eastern philosophy that attracts many influential intellectuals in Europe and North-America is the Theosophical Society. Followers of the Theosophical Society and other such organization were the first to invite Eastern teachers and translate their writings. Among such teachers were Suzuki, Tulku and Trugpa Rimpoche, who as explained in the introduction, were responsible for establishing the Western type of Buddhism in North America. (Coleman 2010) In this sense, the mindfulness

movement is part of a tradition in Canada, which appropriates Buddhism within in its own “culture”.

The appropriation of practices involves a process of de-contextualization, which has serious implications. Carrette and King (2005) discuss “pick and mix” Western practice of selecting some ideas that one agrees with, while at the same time discarding others. King and Carrette state that this practice is a door to deregulation, a neo-liberalization of opening all traditions, cultural property to be commoditized; de-coded and axiomatization in Deleuzian terms.) MBSR is an example of an alliance between science and the phenomena of Western (Modernist) Buddhism, which has become possible due to its acclaimed secularisation. MBSR is the result of open market cultural capital in the fertile ground of social and spiritual” democratization.”

Furthermore, the “pick and mix” practice allows the appropriator to escape any affiliation with the tradition they are borrowing from. This not only insures no accountability on the part of the appropriator but also allows him/her to distance from aspects of the tradition, which may not be in his/her interests. This takes us back to the discussion of religious appropriation and Zinn’s interpretation of the concept of *skillful means*.

Skillful Means

As Wilson notes *skillful means* (in Sanskrit *-upaya*) refers to an important concept in Buddhism, one that Western Buddhists often point to when adapting the Buddhism philosophy and practices. Essentially, it means adjusting the teaching of Buddhism to fit the capacities of the particular

audience in different situations. The idea originates from the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, such as Zen. It finds its clearest explanation in the Lotus Sutra, in which the Buddha proclaims that many of his previous teachings were just skillful or expedient means meant to entice ignorant people to begin practicing Buddhism. Now, however, he is prepared to reveal the truest, highest teachings of Buddhism, which seem to contradict the earlier ones because those were just partial or false ideas designed for people of lower capacities.

By using *skillful means* Kabat-Zinn justifies his approach with the example of Guatama Buddha. He claims that he, just as Buddha did, is changing aspects of the tradition to better suit the different circumstances, in this case modern US. In Zinn's interpretation, these changes can mean using only English rather than an Asian language or terms to transmit Buddhism, or charging money for teachings normally provided for free. Invocation of the doctrine of *skillful means* is nearly universal in Western Buddhism and is part of the reason why Western *sanghas* are very different in a manner than Asian ones. (Purser 2014)

Here I must note that the Palyul Sangha is an exception, as it conducts manners in accordance to the Palyul lineage of a Nighma branch of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Although the concepts are clarified in English and sometimes interpreted as to be better understood by Westerners, the message is delivered within the frame of traditional Buddhist philosophy and knowledge.

In most Western *sanhga* the applications of *skillful means* do not involve deception, and there is a general respect for the tradition. Kabat-Zinn's development of MBSR is an application of *skillful means*, which not only changes in where, how, and for what ends Buddhism is taught, it intentionally obscures the connection between mindfulness and Buddhism. It even goes as far as

claiming, that this concealment is in fact for the better interests of the universal Dharma as more people would be able to benefit from the Buddha's teachings.

According to Zinn if suffering can be prevented by teaching a Buddhist meditation technique, then there is no reason to identify it as such. He goes as far as representing himself as a new stage in the development of Buddhism. Wilson quotes Zinn, who declares that:

“One might say that in order for Buddhism to be maximally effective as a Dharma vehicle at this stage in the evolution of the planet, and for its sorely needed medicine to be maximally effective, it may have to give up being Buddhism in any formal religious sense, or at least give up any attachment to it in name or form, to Buddhism”. (2014, p.92)

Zinn claims that, the best way for achieving the Buddhist goal of ending suffering is to give way to biomedicine. In this sense, he is actively participating in the diminishing of appreciation of the role of the healing power entire Buddhist tradition with its teachings, master (teacher) lineage, rituals and temples.

Second conversation

After the next class I asked Kindtea how she feels about the possible separation between those interested in a higher goal and those who don't "get it" yet. It seems to me that there are different audiences, who have different expectations for the class?" I ask. Her answer is that she tries to teach the technique

and what people take from it depends on them. She had shared previously in one of the classes that she thinks of herself as a Bodhisattva. I asked her if she directs students to a Buddhist center. She answers that, yes she does, but not only to Buddhist centers, also towards yoga, or whatever the person appears to be drawn to.

I asked her whether she thinks this technique is valuable just in itself without the rest of the training hinting at my personal opinion. She responds that something is better than nothing. So it seems that Kindtea plays the role of spiritual teacher and secular instructor at the same time. The center seems to be both spiritual and not. The group signifies one thing to some and another to others. This spiritual aspect of the group is never discussed publicly. Kindtea adds that the progress of the student depends on their commitment and maturity: How often they meditate? Do they choose to change their lifestyle? Do they examine some of the uncomfortable issues that may come up as they “face themselves” more truly? Ultimately. It is up to them. This

assumption means that those interested would carry on with their practice and those who are not interested will lose interest. The course then could be said to be selling superficial training for those too busy. In this sense the course still attracts the clients who are not ready to be seriously committed and prefer to follow exercises, offering them some value for their fee.

Being a Bodhisattva presupposes that one is enlightened. Assuming that Kindtea does not actually consider herself a Buddha, I will understand her remark as meaning that she has received some spiritual training and has dedicated her time to help others follow this path. This appropriation of the term is another example of interpreting and changing Buddhist terms, according to one's personal understanding. It may be mostly harmless, but it does indicate that Kindtea does subscribe to a particular narrative. One learns and meditates in order to liberate oneself to help another liberate themselves: this is the Bodhisattva model that comes from Mahayana Buddhism. So Kindtea wears more than "one hat."

On the one hand, for the ones who have not awakened to a spiritual path as, the MBSR instructor, she gives practical advice on behavioural, cognitive techniques; on the other hand, as the teacher or MBSR trainer, she unofficially wears the hat of spiritual teacher who assists with the spiritual journey of the participant - the "Dharma" - "the way." Since this position is not formally declared in any way, the instructor is able to do these things, escaping any accountability and responsibility.

The topic emerging from the conversation with Kindtea, and the entire MBSR course, is the peculiar relationship of the individual with spirituality and religion. How are we to understand this peculiar relationship?

My argument is that while the mindfulness enthusiasts welcome the anti-modernity discourse, MBSR as a social phenomenon takes place in the cultural environment of “post-modernity”.

Bauman (2013) believes that modernity has been followed by the emergence of a postmodern society. The age of Enlightenment had greatly challenged religion and Western society which has become in many aspects secular. In modernity, science and humanism replaced religion as the central cultural narrative. The postmodern age, creates a cultural vacuum with no ultimate moral authority, one is free to create for oneself. Freedom has become the overriding priority and there is resistance to any attempt to inhibit individual desires and people are constantly expected to choose for themselves how they wish to behave. Collective moral restraints have been markedly reduced. However, the removal of constraints has generated a constant sense of insecurity. If one is not constrained by the national interest, religious morality, nor even the norms of one's neighbours, then how is one to live? I will go further into this discussion in the next two chapters dedicated to the topic of the role of MBSR in the current Canadian society.

Reflection

Kindtea gives out homework to be practised during the week. The private meditations during the first week reveal a certain resistance in me. Reflecting on those, I realize how this hyper-vigilance that is an integral part of my being serves as a form of defence. It is as if my mind tries to control by understanding. In psychology this human tendency is known as intellectualization or rationalization. Both are considered strategies of ego defences, so that the person is removed from the difficult experience emotionally, and perceives some amount of control. I do not want to fall into this trap of the mind. I want

to be lighter and freer; do not ask too many questions and see too many inconsistencies; to let go and just “be.” But the uneasy feeling grows in me. A red light flashes in the murky insides of my being. For now I am caught between the inkling of the intuition and half- formed thought.

I have been questioning myself throughout the week following the first few sessions. In the last few years I have found a balance between Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and the Palyul Buddhist Centre to satisfy my existential quest and deal with my troubles, labelled as “anxiety depression,” but the feeling of uneasiness is rising up.

The Palyul center is the furthest from Western Buddhism one can get in Canada. It follows from an unbroken thousand year tradition of the Palyul lineage of the Nygmay school of Tibetan (Vajrayana) Buddhism. Angela herself had studied in The Nogdrol monastery in India for five years until she was instructed to spread the knowledge. The rituals, the prayers at the centre, follow the traditional Palyul form and are mostly in Tibetan with some translation in English. Everybody at the centre has been a student for more than five, some fifteen years. Most members of this centre have been through the preliminary practices and gone into a retreat. Following the tradition that one must prepare for meditation and then dedicate oneself to a serious practice, retreats are months long. The preliminary practices involve simple practice such as prostration, and can take years to complete. The Tibetan monk who is in charge of the centre visits yearly. These things instill great respect and trust in me about this place.

Now, I am invited to let my intellectual defences down, and open myself up to the guidance of an instructor who is neither a psychologist nor affiliated with any school of Buddhism. I am suspending my judgment, I am told by Kindtea, in order to learn more. The phrase that is repeated often in the MBSR is “trust the processes”. To “trust the process,” in an environment in which so little is discussed, that bears signs of trickery, is an unsettling invitation. Religion and spirituality are serious matters to me. I am to surrender in the hands of Zinn and Kindtea, who offer free form elaborations of Buddhists teachings, which I don’t have any good reason to respect.

Being educated in critical thinking, I realize that all ideas are ultimately open to interpretation and there is nothing inherently problematic in that. I wish I could find peace in simply "being in my body," yet I admit to myself that I yearn for a solid truth - an unshakable faith and straight forward answers.

Open-mindedness is an attitude, to come back to the attitudes suggested in class, and is necessary when one wants to achieve something new; but it also leaves one vulnerable, similar to the leap of faith that one might face if joining a cult. It strips him/her of the defenses of the intellect - and are they not there for a purpose? "Just be." "Go with the process." Both sound like ideal propaganda slogans. Somehow the overconfidence in bio-medicine, the intentional ambiguity about spirituality and the lack of any sociopolitical discussion is alarming.

However, I seem to be the only one in the class feeling that way. Is my over-analytical mind the problem? My feeling of depression and confusion are flaring up. Why can't I just overlook the internal contradictions, get along with the program and find that inner peace?

Chapter 6 Variation on Mindfulness Meditation (Are we engaging or disengaging?)

(Session 4)

In the last two classes we have been applying mindfulness techniques to other activities. We ate a raisin slowly. We didn't just eat it, but we looked at it, we played with it, smelled and ate it really... really... really... s-l-o-w-l-y. We were given a homework exercise on slow eating. People have previously

reported, as expected, that they were eating absent-minded.

Actually there exists an entire course on Mindful Eating (along with Mindful Sex, Exercise and Work).

Today's exercise is Mindful Walking. This technique is a traditional meditation from Taoist and Buddhist traditions. Once again, the pace is slowed down significantly. People report that it is difficult. They lose balance, time passes slowly, and they experience frustration. Some, however, report more focus. Then we do yoga for forty-five minutes. We do it slow-mindfully.

Despite all of my mindfulness, I am not able notice anything significantly different from any regular yoga class that I have taken in different yoga studios in Ottawa. In the second part we discuss stress. We do not need to be "The manager of the universe" Kindtea tells us. We do not need to be in charge of everything. We discuss different scenarios of stress. All examples that are given or shared are safe, nothing too jarring is brought up. There is no talk of poverty, sickness or death, but rather topics circle around the stresses of work. Traffic. Kids yelling.

All jokes in the class pertain to one's "inappropriate" habits, desires or defaults, such as the amount of cookies that one has recently eaten, expressed with such a pleasurable guilt that one might think an actual taboo is being discussed. The entire class feels safe, controlled and unnatural. I have not even had the chance to actually get to know my classmates personally, as one would in other group meetings such as, sport or religion. Are clients accepting themselves or each other any more than the first time they entered the course? Are they transformed? Are they now more able to cope with what was bothering them before?

There was one brief moment that I observed something happened that was different from the usual flow of the class: Kind tea gave an example of **the** current war and how our worries are nothing compared to that. There were no comments.

There is a person from a Middle Eastern country. Someone mentions the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. She changes her posture

upon hearing the comment. Clasp hands. Looks down. It goes unnoticed. A brief silence, and we are back to half smiles.

This class is unsettling in two ways. First, it is a perfect example of how once an idea is packaged and applied to many aspects of life and it can be sold to millions. Second, it exemplifies how mindfulness has been transformed from a practice making us facing life to one that shields us from it.

Mindfulness has become quite popular and is well loved by therapists. One of the Senior Psychologists on the panel of the Canadian program *the Agenda* (on TVO in 2014), which featured the theme of mental health in Canada as part of a massive federal campaign, swore in the efficacy of mindfulness. Her answer to mental health problems was, in her one chosen word, “mindfulness.” “It is simple, free and available to everybody” she assured the public. There was a general agreement on the panel that the science indeed backed up this claim. It is surprising that the trained psychiatrists on the panel had nothing to add to such claim. There was no discussion of possible shortcomings or areas mindfulness may not address. Mindfulness has become the kind of simple “one fits all” formula popular amongst the consumers and entrepreneurs.

Although not all applications of mindfulness to therapy belongs to Zinn, he is still one of the main “authorities” on it, even beyond MBSR. The market, however, allows for other variations on the theme and for various authors to take a piece of the pie. There is no denying that mindfulness has become popular, not just among some doctors, but has left the hospitals and counselling office and is on TV and in magazines. It has become part of the pop-culture. It is a very successful brand. Oprah and other TV personalities have had TV programming dedicated to

the topic of Mindfulness. There exists a magazine with the same name, a number of books, as well as various workshops on mindful eating, working, sex, and so on, led by instructors with various degrees in training in psychotherapy.

The formula which MBSR seems to follow is one familiar to the self-help movement. The “cure” consists of one’s ability to connect to *the source, the inner child, inner peace or one’s body*, under the instructions of the “specialist.” This “approach” is then applied to all aspects to one’s life in order to transform them, as in the case of mindful yoga, walking and eating. As the practice deepens the customer needs further instruction in applying this “technique.” The possibility of the creation of an entire market of books and workshops opens up. As many students in the MBSR class share - it is much easier to pay for the course and be instructed them to try to apply it by oneself. There is, of course, even an app that suggests when and how long to meditate. The purchasing of books, tapes, apps, reduces the practice from a personal spiritual practice in any case to another form of consumerism.

In *Selling Spirituality* Carrette & King (2005) discuss the commercialization of the “inner” or the spiritual. They begin the discussion by analyzing branding in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Carrette & King begin their study by referring to John Grant’s *The New Marketing Manifesto* (2000). In his book Grant argues for the existence of three “ages” of branding. First, “the trademark” at the turn of the twentieth century, where a product represented “quality, reliability and safety;” second, “the age of aspiration”, roughly from the 1930s to the 1950s, where the brand reflected the buyer’s social ideals and desire for certain values connected with the product, promoting a need to “keep up with the Jones’s”. Finally, Grant argues that we are now seeing the third age of branding, where the boundary between brands and other aspects of life is disappearing.

In the post-modern world, parts of “culture” disappear and others are made to appear. According to Grant, following the breakdown of the traditional society and “tradition loss”, individuals are “tradition hungry”, in the sense of needing ideas to live by. This is the age of ‘inward ideas’ where brands are the new ‘traditions.’ In such a situation the corporate world is now in a position to step in and provide such meanings. The sociologist Nikolas Rose (2007) explains that the self-actualization movement in psychology has reduced religious experience of seeking to remake the ‘self’ in order to achieve self-realization and self-fulfillment. We will return to the topic of the self as a *project* of modernity, and the contrast to the Buddhist view of non-self, in relation to therapy, in the upcoming chapters.

This takeover the spiritual aspect of “culture” by the market would be no surprise to Deleuze, who argues that capitalism engages in a form of de-territorialisation that decodes value and reduces encounters to monetary transaction. As mentioned in the theory section, capitalism, then provides a hollow meaning as it functions by decoding rather than coding. Capitalism does not offer any ethical, moral code or philosophy other of that of the satisfaction of the need of the consumer.

So far, from the MBSR class it has become clear that the need MBSR is supposed to address has to do with some form of transforming one’s way of being, from a mechanized, automatized, stressed, possibly anxious or depressed, to a state that is more “aware” of, or “in touch” with, oneself and their surroundings.

The class is unsettling in another way. At this point, the raisin eating, the yoga, the walking meditation with the lack of any other instruction teachings, basically dissolves into constantly adding mindfulness in front of every activity. The word seems to be used to describe -attention as a psychological state. And more often than not the attention is directed at pleasant activities such

as eating and yoga. It maximizes enjoyment while minimizing distress, defusing daily distress and ignoring any serious form of it. Typically, the critique of the modern way of life, expressed in previous classes, involves political analysis of society. Colonization, industrialization, extraction of resources, exploitation and urban poverty are topics that are linked to the alienating feeling of modernity. Any such topics are avoided in the class. Rather, there is an emphasis on the personal responsibility of finding “peace.”

Protests are starting again here in Montreal. This time, the issue is not only the tuition hikes, but also austerity and the privatization of still socially oriented Quebec province. There is no talk of any of this in the class. The downtown area is blocked. Later, 700 000 people from the entire province will gather in the streets below. But the noise does not carry to the clinic. These are parallel realities. The world’s problem seems quite far from the comfortable studio in the rich urban centre.

As a student, I am directly affected by the tuition hikes that are being protested. While taking the course I was also involved in advocating against post residency fees, precarious academic employment and the general trend towards the corporatization of the Canadian Universities. And so I ask myself: Does MBSR help us - the practitioners - to be more aware of ourselves, life and surroundings? Or are we simply learning to get comfortable with the status quo?

Considered in the light of the observation and reflections of the class so far, the main question of the study of how mindfulness is being done begs another new question: If MBSR does actually teach a way of how to live a more “connected,” possibly “saner,” way of life, then what kind of instruction regarding one’s connection to the outside world is passed on?

Chapter 7 Ethical guidance

(Session 5)

I arrive early and pick up a magazine in the waiting room. It is called “Mindfulness.” I am surprised to see a police officer on the cover. The title explains that the magazine contains a few articles on the use of mindfulness in the Police and military. The article puts forward the argument that police will be able to serve better if mindful. It also lists a number of academic papers on the use of mindfulness in the military, in which mindfulness is presented as a technique to achieve calm and concentration. I ask myself to what end: to become the perfect killing machine, maybe?

So I wonder on the purpose of this approach. If truly mindful, would, police officers consider the human being standing in front of them, or would their training help them feel more at peace with pulling the trigger? I puzzle over this problematic implication of mindfulness. Later I find a relevant discussion of this topic in a book I picked up at the Palyul Centre in Ottawa. “Mindfulness in Plain English” is written for a Western audience by a Shri Lankan Buddhist monk Gunaratana. (2011) .A student poses the question

“Can I shoot an animal with the right intention for food?” The answer of the monk is negative. Even though the intention might be appropriate the act of ending a life is unwholesome. This is followed by an explanation of wholesome, unwholesome and neutral actions, as well, as a discussion of the eight-fold path and the five precepts

In Buddhism, as mentioned in the introduction, the Eight-fold path of and the five precepts are moral instructions. The precepts are essentially commitments to abstain from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. Undertaking the five precepts is part of both lay Buddhist initiation and regular lay Buddhist devotional practices. These, together

with the values of compassion and non-violence, from the Buddhist ethical, moral code, are completely avoided as topics of discussion within the MBSR course.

As the trans-cultural psychiatrist anthropologist Kirmayer (2015) notes, the emphasis in MBSR, and psychiatry in general, put on the physiological mechanisms of Mindfulness neglects its social and value based aspects. He points out that taking refuge in the monastic community (Sangha) requires letting go of the quotidian goals of getting ahead—indeed, the renunciation of family, social status, and other attachments—and re-socialization into a different moral order that would ground meditative practice and the pursuit of liberation. The insights achieved through study, ritual observance, and meditative practice emerged within this institutional context. This suggests that meditative practice requires a clear framework of goals and values and a socially grounded interpretative system that helps to give experience meaning and moral significance.

Furthermore, another really important element of Buddhism that bears relevance to the ethical dimension of mindfulness, the doctrine of *no self*, is completely ignored in MBSR. The next section will analyze how the removal of the doctrine of *no self* leaves space for the Western value of individualism to mix in and effect how mindfulness is being done in Canada.

The doctrine of *no self* and the dangers of Individualism

The doctrine of *no self* in Buddhism is related to the doctrine of *non-duality*. All reality is ultimately a whole and the goal of Buddhist practice is to realise this *non-duality*. Its realization cannot lead to anything but compassion as one appreciates others as part of the whole. This is an aspect of Mindfulness that is completely lost in the MBSR.

Geoffrey Samuel (2015) discusses the absence of the doctrine of no-self in Western mindfulness. He suggests that this notion of no-self creates unavoidable tension with Western values of individualism that constructs, strengthen and aggrandizes the personal self. In this sense, the omission of the doctrine of the no-self is a reflection of the Western, particularly North American, cultural context. Since, in Western psychotherapy, a strong ego is regarded as a sign of mental health, the way Mindfulness is taught excludes the doctrine of no-self. I will return to this idea in Chapter 10 in which Kornfield's story illustrates this preference for the personal *self* in the Western therapeutic application of Mindfulness.

Antoine Panagioti (2015) points to an important aspect of the arguments against the enduring self in the Western interpretation of Buddhism. He argues that "The doctrine of no-self has ethical implications. It makes individualism unacceptable because it is based on illusion which causes suffering both for the deluded individuals and others. " (p.6)

Then the question arises - why is the doctrine of no-self, liberation, compassion, eightfold-path not, at least, mentioned in MBSR? "Mindfulness has nothing to do with religion or Buddhism" Kindtea quotes Kabat Zinn. This statement sounds a bit absurd considering that Zinn would have not heard of Mindfulness if it was not for his Buddhist training. Mindfulness-based therapy instructors often allude to the origins of mindfulness in order to grant it legitimacy, using the inner peace achieved by Buddhist Monks as advertisement for their product. Trying to simultaneously disassociate mindfulness from Buddhism seems completely inappropriate.

There appears to be an assumption in MBSR that, whatever results from the inner space provided by the meditation, will be less reactive therefore more conscious and healthier. Does the simple act of bringing attention to something result in a necessarily more "conscious" and therefore more desirable way of being?

In Western psychology strong ego equates good health. In Buddhism an individual controlled by his ego and intellect is diluted and unhappy. The first seeks to strengthen it, the second, to weaken it. In MBSR, after hours of mindfulness training, certain patterns of behaviour or *programs* have been made conscious and altered, and the ego has become possibly more spontaneous in turn.

It depends on what is meant by “conscious.” If under consciousness is understood physiological awareness, then the answer is one is indeed more aware. However, if consciousness is understood in Buddhist terms as “higher state” signified by mental clarity and ability to empathise, then the answer is not so clear.

In Buddhism awareness is used to start the work of compassionate service to others in need. It is also channelled to enter deeper transcendental meditation states such as Bodhi Chita (meaning simultaneously Buddha mind and heart), with the ultimate purpose being the achievement of nirvana. The question I posit at this point is, after MBSR has brought some new level of awareness should it also offer some guidance regarding new ways of thinking or feeling? From a therapeutic point of view, this would be the perfect time to try to build new habits and reevaluate one’s life. Instead, what one is to do is left entirely up to them.

I never had an opportunity to discuss this question with MBSR participants, nor Kindtea.

However, this exact question did come up in a discussion with a friend who is deeply fond of Vipassana mindfulness meditation. Erin’s view is that, once we become more mindful we stop being reactive; we stop committing unconscious violence and we are more able to listen to our hearts. And in our hearts, we are all ultimately good. This belief, ironically, is my belief too. But

I wonder - is that not a dangerous path in a society that actively supports competition and individuality?

Understood through Deleuzian analysis, MBSR seeks to de-territorialize the *bwo* from the automatic ways of life, automatic physical responses, emotional reactivity, set behavioral patterns, and the preoccupations of the overly rational mind - such as planning for the future and mowing over the past. Mindfulness and MBSR is useful in achieving this as testified by people in the class and has been my personal experience.

In order to solidify and ensure the preservation and implementation of insight, the Buddhist traditions, as do other religions, provide instructions regarding behaviour. Buddhism offers its followers role models in the form of the teacher, the Buddha, and other revered figures of the mythology. It prescribes the Eightfold path .Without these aspects of the tradition, de-territorialisation training (*liberation*) becomes dangerous.

In his book *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* (1973) Trungpa warns of such a trap he calls Complete Egohood: the state in which the ego, having realized the relative and illusionary nature of phenomena, *enthrones* itself as the center of the universe. Although, not openly spiritual, MBSR could be “enlightening” as it liberates oneself of pre-existing conditioning, yet it does not offer any further guidance. And, as would follow from Deleuzian analysis, the *bwo* then becomes re-territorialized in the capitalist “culture” of empowering the individual, rather than seeking self-understanding. The theme of territorialisation of MBSR will be further addressed in Part Two, where I discuss the next sessions, providing answers and generating further questions.

Part 2 Going Deeper

Chapter 8 The experience of Mindfulness

Having provided a brief survey of what the MBSR course looks and feels like, I would now like to turn to the actual practice of mindfulness meditation, as well as, towards what one would consider “personal” dilemmas that it caused me to face. Mindfulness, when explored in a serious fashion, can be similar to therapy, as it reveals clearly the negative or neurotic thoughts and emotions one might carry. It also could bring into attention to existing conflicts.

The method in Phenomenology, meditation and Mindfulness-based therapy

As the thesis emerges from living experiences which were not designed to be an academic study the methodology involved is that of an auto-ethnography. My observations are indeed very “personal”. Rather than interviewing, I rely on intra-actions, some of which in the form of conversations I had with the instructor participants through the course. Moreover, the act of immersion in both the practice of mindfulness meditation and the course is central to the phenomenological methodology.

Similarly, the *epoche* method of phenomenology also engages in this process, since we are not meant to dwell on thoughts but rather aim to be in the present moment and bracket preconceived notions and to experience reality directly. Cogan (2006) describes *epoche* (reduction) as” a

technique that allows one to voluntarily sustain the awakening force of astonishment so that conceptual cognition can be carried throughout intentional analysis, thus bringing the “knowing” of astonishment into our everyday experience. Through this method, the researchers participate directly in the practice and gain intimate insight.

This parallel between the act of meditation and the phenomenological method consisting in the focus on the body and the attitude of an open mind makes phenomenology an appropriate theoretical approach for the anthropological study of meditation. As Csordas (1990, 1994) points out, a direct experiential approach allows anthropologists to do ethnography from the body and not ethnography of the body. Indeed, I could not imagine being able to study and analyze MBSR without actually having practiced meditation.

In order to properly study MBSR the researcher must actively engage in the practice of meditation. Methodologically meditation and Phenomenology share the same approach of direct experience, even *awe*. The mindful gaze, closing at the moment, has the potential of transforming the moment into a fresh, rich and awe-aspiring experience.

So that the reader get a deeper appreciating of MBSR I will briefly present how mindfulness is classically described and how I have come to experience it after more than two years of practice.

One concentrates on a point, typically the breath. One pays attention to one's thoughts, trying to

neither run wild with them, nor suppress them, but rather to let them come to their natural end. Eventually this internal chatter slows down. One feels more capable of controlling it. The gap between thoughts or even emotions widens. One is less reactive to thoughts, emotions and stimuli. The way I experience it is 'listening to life rather than talking to life'.

This is also how I aim to write on the topic. I slow down and allow emotions filter through the writing. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1964) did in *the Eye and Mind* as a political move to not just criticize science, but to do it otherwise by writing like a painter. That is to say: writing poetically. This I attempt, with a very similar intent, especially when writing the reflective sections of each chapter.

The application of mindfulness

The therapeutic value of mindfulness practice is well summarized in the book *Calming the Emotional Storm* (Van 2012), which has become one of the central book-manuals for Mindfulness therapy. If one is able to stop or slow down the flow of thoughts and emotions, one is not triggering oneself further into negativity, stopping a vicious cycle and so beginning a process of healing. Another aspect of the therapeutic value is that, one has the opportunity to acknowledge one's emotions and to even become somewhat comfortable with them. The attitude of non-judgment which is stressed in MBSR does help with both being able to better cope with outside negative situations and self-acceptance. One learns to be less psychologically harsh towards oneself and others. This attitude can lead to less repression of one's feelings, which is healthier psychologically. The non-judgmental attitude can help tolerate uncomfortable environments.

The brake in the thought-flow allows for less identification with the internal narrative we tell ourselves about the past or the future. One sees a possibility of a creative opening where one can actively write a new narrative. This gives the practitioner's freedom as he or she becomes less automatic. It opens a gap. What fills the open gap is probably very specific to each individual yet in the MBSR it is subtly guided.

The place of thinking and “culture” in the study of Mindfulness-based therapy

In meditation the body is experienced as the totality of thoughts, sensations and emotions. Thoughts, emotion and physiological processes influence each other as they constitute the same process of consciousness. Cognitive psychology, on which MBSR is largely based on, maintains that one is able to know one's conscious or automatic patterns of behavior, thinking or feeling and change them. Thus, this approach results in giving precedence to thought as dictating action, breaking up this movement as a two -step procedure. In this sense the body becomes aware of itself. Both cognitive therapy and Buddhism attend to cognition and emotions, however, cognitive therapy supposes that cognition is separate and decisive in making emotion while Buddhism (and phenomenology) considers them to be equally important and in need of working together.

Mindful meditation is an unusual form of *epoche* as what is being perceived is the element of awareness turned towards the body itself. The practices of self -awareness, psychotherapy or Buddhist training are an acts of embodying self- awareness. This fact makes the study of mindfulness meditation very difficult for first hand direct participatory approach, even

counterintuitive. However, I believe this is the only way of exploring the topic. Mindfulness does have a similar effect of heightened “self”-consciousness, which animates and gives new dimension to practice, thus making it possible to write about it differently.

Cognitive based therapy, from which MBSR originates, looks at all aspects of human psychology; thinking, emotions and behavior. It focuses, however, on changing behavior through changing the thinking patterns (narrative). Similarly, in Buddhism, although meditation aims at getting to a state beyond thinking, achieves that by reducing thinking, while, also observing the thinking and reflection on one’s thoughts is important. In mindfulness meditation one observes the illusionary nature of the thinking mind.

Therefore, thinking, although delusional -it creates a false perceived sense of a separate “self”, is central to overcoming the illusion of independent “self”. The examination of thinking is central to both therapy and Buddhism. In this sense the study of MBSR requires the examination of the thought processes of the people practicing it, including their reflexive thinking about one’s thinking or mediation. The study must examine all equally sensation, emotions, cognition and behavior. Then it follows that even in the phenomenological approach, with its aim at a pre-objective state of mind, must also incorporate of thinking as part of embodiment.

I start my exploration from a point of a *bwo* that carries the territory of a Western cultural background. I am also aware of other possible world views, as well as of my own conditioning thanks to the analysis and exploration of social scientist, philosophers and thinkers in the many different places in the world. Therefore, similarly to the concept of “self” I keep the notion of “culture” provisionally. I find it to be useful and unavoidable starting point from which to further learn about the way it territorialize the *bwo*.

This is a way rather than replacing “culture” with *life world*, I propose to use both; *life world* when describing my lived, experienced and “culture” when discussing the realities that I access second hand as information through books for example. I use *life world* when talking about the experiences at Payul Centre or the MBSR. However, I also resort to the discourse of “culture” when trying to analyze things which I have not experienced first-hand, but as people and societies have and do reflect upon themselves. How people think, reflect and analyze is meaningful. Deleuze and Guattari analysis allows us to explore both *life worlds* and culture.

Raising the question of “culture” leads us to a paradox, which as mention in the theoretical chapter, puzzles Western philosophers, be it even phenomenologist, more than the Buddhists. How can we be simultaneously part of a web of existence and yet separate units? According to Buddhism there exists no independent ‘self’ but the existence of a state of perceived ‘self’ is not denied. Phenomenology also tries to go beyond the subjective, objective divide. However, although this might be the goal in phenomenology, we do act in our daily life as separate, private, unities, possibly with the exceptions of those of those who claim to be enlightened. Despite philosophical examination of reality Merleau Ponty remained and acted as an individual. Therefore, through the thesis, I bracket the “self”, ultimately understood as illusionary. However, I do not deny its existence in everyday life and the role it plays in the processes through which the *bwo* goes through.

If we jump to only studying the senses and affect and go directly to the projective we will would be actually skipping a step. We would then be unable to tackle this apparent dilemma. I propose

that we provisionally recognize the existence of a perceived” self” as a way to liberate from it. Embodiment along with the model of *bwo* must also recognize the existence of” self.”

Phenomenology must aim at grasping the concept no independent “self” rather than its denial. This is the only way to go beyond the subjective objective dichotomy.

Although part of a *web*, the human being has a unique experience. It represents a focus point, through which’s prism the web is perceived. Consciously aware of, it is the ultimate result of spiritual practice, such as meditation. I propose that it is also the goal of the phenomenologist, who should aim at not only writing about the pre-objective, but also at transforming oneself in such a way, that he or she able to maintain and perceive both the inner “self” and the larger “web”. This could be achieved in the tradition of the Greek philosopher for whom philosophy also meant a personal examination thorough logic as well as meditation. This is why we must include the “self”-reflective thinking, as well as, analysis when studying of Mindfulness based therapy.

My argument is that knowing this, we cannot simply study the historical background and describe the forces set in motion that alter mindfulness. We must also focus on the ways in which mindful state is interpreted, lived and acted upon by the individual undergoing training in mindfulness-based therapy. It is this process of interpretation which I refer to as” the how’ of the embodiment of the social phenomena of mindfulness -based therapy in my research question.

Self- awareness in MBSR is done strictly rationally as a machine scanning itself. The focus is on thoughts and sensations which are observed in detachment, rather than being deeply felt.

Emotional aspects, as we will continue to see, are mainly ignored.

not fight the pain yet to accept it, to let it “sink in.”

Indeed, while practicing mindfulness in painful situations, I have observed how concentration does allow me to bear the pain more. It is a sort of 'toughening up.' Once having passed through the initial knee-jerk reaction of wanting to pull away from the immediate sensation, I have been able to develop greater resistance to pain. Not being afraid, one is indeed able to bear more. But there seems to be a limit to this approach.

Kindtea says that we the modern Westerners (her choice of words) do not know how to tolerate pain and that we always search for a quick fix in a drug. Kindtea asks: How do we handle stress and pain? Give me an example of a challenging situation?

I gave an example of a sinus infection from the previous week. I had been braving the -30 February while trying to stay positive – attempting to fight off negative thoughts and moods – however, failing. The physical pain and discomfort has brought to a state of psychological depression. I shared that mindfulness in this case gave me little solace. The teacher explains that mindfulness

is a process that acts as a life insurance, rather than a cure. Her interpretation is that it gives us a better ability to resist. Mindfulness builds resilience.

At this, mindfulness training does indeed connect us with the human condition a little closer. The emotional component I had shared, however, remains ignored. I have observed Kindtea's particular reaction when participants attempt to express sadness and confusion, or discuss problems that overwhelm them. The advice and message is that although we might not have control over the environment we do have a control over our reaction.

When meditating one can observe one's emotions while fighting to stay in "on one's mind." Thoughts and sensations arise and eventually fade away. In these meditations I noticed a direct correlation between the discomfort I get from the flare up of a chronic sinus infection and a complete drop in energy; my inability to be resistant to the stress of the world both environmental and emotional. I sense a sinking feeling of letting the helplessness take over. It creates a conflict. I am not able to manage the stress through these mindfulness techniques. I have hit my upper limit, the feedback that I must recognize rather than try to push through.

Suffering has a humbling effect; it deflates the ego and cries for our attention, insisting that we

take care of it. It interrupts the plans of the mind and forces us to take inventory of our circumstances, limitations and sometimes the need to change our ways. Just as the Chinese character for crisis also suggests opportunity, suffering is often the time when personal transformation occurs. The first step in solving the problem is recognizing its existence, which is possible through the feedback from the environment, inviting us to change. My intuitive understanding is proven to be correct, when I later find out that the emotional shutting of the immune system is indeed a symptom of psychological issues which need to be addressed. The act of mindfulness solicits the acknowledgment of the severity of pain, true recognition of its breadth and mass, and then - and only then - its actual acceptance.

I would like to underline the importance of focusing on suffering when analyzing MBSR. Being a form of therapy, MBSR claims to deal with suffering. Exploring suffering is, I think, also central to the phenomenological approach in anthropology. Kleinman, using a phenomenological approach in anthropology, points to suffering as to a crucial element of making sense of the world. For Kleinman, the point of convergence between an anthropology of experience and the study of religion, is suffering; “not so much in the sense of theodicy as in the sense in which it constitutes the stuff of experience that summons inquiry (1997, p. 316). It is when the “subjective” suffering is informed by the context that one can make sense of it. The personal “vex and ‘choke” is what eventually allows Kleinman to understand depression as it is experienced in Chinese “culture”, which does not encourage public display of emotional states. Similarly, certain affective signs of suffering experienced by students in the course, along with me personally, revealed a hidden reality in MBSR.

As briefly mentioned earlier, an example of the central function of pain in shaping reality relevant to MBSR, is found in the work of Byron Good. In *Rationality, Medicine and the Experience* (1994), Good employs a phenomenological approach in anthropology to explore the role of chronic pain when deconstructing the Objectivist model of science. Good explains that the routine and instrumental rationality of biomedicine attempts to reorder the lives and worlds that have been ruled by pain. The use of routine medical procedures is aimed at managing and structuring the rapturous suffering which constitutes the common sense reality that the patient is experiencing. Rather than acknowledging and opening this experience to moral reflection, the regime of the hospital manages the patient in a process Good calls the *colonization* of the *life-world*. The process, he describes, can be understood as a territorialisation of the body by biomedicine. Similarly, Mindfulness, which is an invitation to open one's experience up to raw reality, done within the context of MBSR, tries to colonize the *life-world* of pain through a technique of "coping" through attention. Pain, unpleasant events, and disturbing realities are "coped with," "managed," "tolerated."

As mentioned earlier, a true embodied study will look at *all* aspects of the human being including the emotions, sensations, and thoughts, not only those recognized through cognitive therapy, but also experiences such as intuition, sixth sense and spiritual states. According to cognitive science the mind affects the body and vice versa. Although claiming to teach acceptance, MBSR encourages the rational mind to govern the experiences. Both Buddhism and psychotherapy aim at controlling emotions and in fact, that can be very beneficial to one's well-being. My argument is that in order to control something one must be aware of it. In this version of MBSR, it felt as if we are taught to suppress rather than control.

MBSR holds an internal contradiction that is very important. It is supposed to be a reaction to a deterministic-objective medical-model, which offers salvation through the technical efficacy of medicines. MBSR has supposedly reformed that model by empowering the patient who, in biomedicine, is not seen as an actor but as an object to be intervening on. MBSR claims to achieve this by teaching the patient how to accept the pain and despair while still being at peace with it, but rather than doing that, it merely teaches techniques for managing it. Thus MBSR shies away from the deeper reality of the human condition, that of '*duhka*' - suffering, pain, old-age, sickness and their inescapably addressed first and foremost by Buddhism.

Nevertheless the territorialisation is not final. Good finds out that chronic pain, due to its sporadic and non-localized nature, breaks down this routine by breaking down time and space. It is part of the reality of the patient that is inaccessible to the physician. He comments, "Chronic pain challenges a central tenet of biomedicine - that objective knowledge of the human body and of disease is possible apart from subjective experience." (p.117) Similarly, in MBSR the control or management is possible when trying to direct attention or tackling small stressors. However, suffering changes this illusion of control and breaks down the hold of MBSR.

Good's analysis breaks down the objective model of reality, but that does not mean we should accept a subjective model either. In Deleuzian and Buddhist philosophical frameworks, the *bwo* is simultaneously part of smaller and larger realities. We cannot deny that we have personal experiences that affect us deeply. These are not separate from the outside world, and therefore we are not sovereign of our personal world. Our sensations and emotions are part of the make up

this world.

Embracing pain and suffering de-territorialize the illusion of control, of the intellect and enables us to re-examine our place in the world and our relation to it. It can actually force us to open up to possibilities, encounters and circumstances in which we can transform. A humbling occurs within us, as we realize that we must work with the environment, with our bodies, with the limitations of reality and nature, rather than conquer, overcome and override our pain by way of medicine. My argument is then that using mindfulness as taught in the MBSR actually deters us from experiencing reality; instead it continues the legacy of a materialistic and technological approach to life with its tendency to control.

In MBSR amongst a mostly well-off clientele, the course costing over 600\$, the suffering is muted. It perks up, however, here and there - in a tear, distant stare, or in surprising anger, as we will see in the next two chapters. My thesis is an auto-ethnography and as such it offers only a glimpse of the various ways in which mindfulness is done and undone in an MBSR course. Having had a different instructor, a different group it is possible that suffering would have been explored. Yet, just as cognitive therapy, MBSR is short in duration. It is also an introduction to meditation for many. In my thesis, I try to present how the existing factors of bio-medical and cognitive psychology assumptions and those of the Self-help industry make such an interpretation of mindfulness possible.

Chapter 10

Sadness

(Session 7)

The session opens with an awkward long silence in the room. Much like when no student wants to answer a question put forward. After all, the format of the course has been lecturing heavy.

The intention I believe is to look life as it is. I had a hard time, bearing silence due to my anxiety, but through mindfulness I have learned to bear it accepting what is and not wanting to take control or leave. Here, it feels more like a sterile lack of initiative rather than the surrender of the meditation hall. No special insight seems to come from it just awkwardness and boredom.

We continue with listening exercises: Two people are to listen to each other without displaying any body language that could lead the speaker to form an impression about the listener's emotional reaction. We are not supposed to give any feedback, even if it is empathy, whatever the story. I have some experience with this from

my volunteer days as a counselor. However, the counselors are supposed to show empathy, maybe not exaggerated, but some empathy is always assumed. This is different. It is incredibly unnatural for me. With much forcing I manage to do it. I find that trying to control my reaction like this actually impedes my ability to listen rather than enhances it as I am focusing on managing this unnatural behavior rather than listening.

I face my partner and I settle at expressing empathy through my eyes. The story is a heavy one, much heavier than other stories shared so far. It involves the acceptance of the death of a close person. There are some emotions apparent; the person was tearing up. The really interesting insight comes from the fact that the person shares that he realized he cried for himself, as he had been sad but had repressed it. He realized that he has been bottling up this feeling until he was encouraged to feel it. The story moved me: I have experienced the same feeling in different circumstances. I feel an urge to reassure, to show empathy, but I hold back as per the instructions.

The story I tell has to do with my experience of isolation. I describe my feeling of disconnection from the interests of the majority of people, as in this class for example. I talk about a feeling of depression and my attempts to connect.

My partner asks a question that stands out. He asks, "What is the exact feeling?" He mentions that isolation is not really one of the basic feelings of anger, sadness, and fear. I have to think about that. Although I still could not put my finger on it, his comment and his genuine compassion for my struggle makes me realize something. There has been another layer of emotion I had not acknowledged, and it was along the lines of frustration, even anger.

*After, I decide to share my desire to show empathy towards him. I tell a bit about my personal experience with the exercise. He shares a bit of his. He **says** that he had wanted to show empathy as well. I remember that he had mentioned dissatisfaction and depression through the course.*

*It is hard to know exactly the feeling of my partner, but I could say that feelings of joy, ease, freedom, hope, gratitude, and care are all present. The encounter was unplanned, unexpected, and interrupted **by** the end of the exercise. Yet it lingers in my field. Based on further eye contact and smiles I would say something of it stayed with each of us.*

There is a sense of connection and affinity between us. After the class we take a walk together. There is a certain softness about him and a certain introspective quality. I also remember that he had mentioned that he had been to mediation centers before. I learn that he had joined the MBSR because he liked meditating in groups.

I felt a connection to my partner that night. I felt that the conversation after the exercise part was over was important and special. It was healing for me. The reality of our experience was validated by our acknowledgment and the braveness to face each

other's and our own pain. The sharing of this pain, that so far might have been kept private, legitimized it. It made clear the importance of sharing negative emotions.

Not only did I get to feel another person's pain and hope, but also I shared mine. Together we tried to make sense of the world. This was a very healing experience. The themes were hard, yet it was a joyous experience for both as he later shared.

My partner's comment echoes that of others who have shared that they enjoy the communal aspect of the class. Does MBSR also serve as type of anonymous, short term, secular Sangha provides a community? It certainly does feel like that sometimes. Kindtea refers to the group as a Sangha. The course is not supposed to be Buddhist. However, this community is not an organic community which eats prays and does things together. There is some desire for such community and, as my experience with my partner has shown, this community could be healed. Yet, MBSR chooses to not tap into that need while still opting to be purely a psychological technique in

the format of a course. Could it be that what some people following the course need is exactly that spontaneous feeling of community?

The goal of the exercise seems to indirectly give instructions that one should be in control and rational. The desired personality appears to be that of Spock from Star Trek- beyond emotions while overcoming difficulties. People in the class have indeed given him as an example of mindfulness. Here lies the problem; Spock is fictional. He is not the desirable role model, as he is not human and humans learn through mistakes.

This attitude of favoring dominion of rational mind over one's life is pertinent to the topic of MBSR. It is important to note that, according to Buddhism, simple intellectual understanding is not enough to overcome the erroneous way of being and achieve liberation from it. This is the reason Buddhism emphasizes the practice of meditation and performance of rituals along with the intellectual study of scripture. It is my argument that as MBSR's simplification of the serious, long, and sometimes emotionally challenging practice of meditation is an act of "throwing out the baby with the bath water". It's another form of the intellectual "Western Buddhism" which risks simply intellectually contemplating transformation of the "self" rather than actually inducing it.

Although projections and overreaction may indeed negatively impact the way we relate to the world, encounters also enrich our existence. Communication is something of a plus value that

emerges in-between living beings. It is not something “out there”, to be objectively resolved, but here and now, messy, not fair, not easy to solve, with not one party holding the answer. It is a dialog and exchange. It can surprise and show us new perspectives. Sometimes one must allow oneself to make the projections in order to realize them. One must wrongly empathize in order to realize that his/her empathy is out of place. Otherwise a possibility of true encounter is missed.

This encounter was charged with affect. The fact that no exact word exists to describe and explain the feeling it evoked indicates that what took place was in the pre-objective realm, as Merleau-Ponty would call it, in which affect operates. The sharing and the connection seem to flow between us. The charge of intra-action felt stronger than other intra-actions in the class. The emotions displayed were stronger than in other intra - actions. There was a certain “feeling” of release of energy being held back.

As Deleuze and Guattari indicate, an encounter is a creative event that generates a new reality. This encounter was a becoming in which an unscripted, uncontrolled encounter opens space for possibility. This *intra-action* was a spontaneous *becoming* which offered a new way of experiencing myself and our relationship as students to the class. It changes the possible narrative.

This intra-action was a *rhizome* as it happened haphazardly. If we had not been paired our affective charge might not have been met with resonant charge and the *intra-action* would have taken a different turn. As it happened unexpectedly, organically, in the periphery of the structure of the course, even a little against it, was certainly a *line of flight*. I was able to follow that line only because I followed my affect and intuition and because it had a certain charge. In this sense this intra-action opened a possibility and brought some life to the course, some relevance. It created the possibility to change the course of the class from a well-crafted program into an

opportunity of actually engaging with direct immanent reality.

This encounter actually made me realize that other such intra-actions were in the realm of the potential, but the actual potential was never actualized because of the particular setting of the course. In fact, the decision to defy the rules and explore my own connection gave me a sense of relief which made me actually consider starting to openly challenge the MBSR structure and approach.

Kornfield's podcast

As homework we are given a Jack Kornfield podcast to listen to. In the podcast, Kornfield discusses hard times and difficulties in life. His main message throughout is that although we feel pain we do not suffer. The message is about rising above suffering, reaching a victory, and happy endings. The choice of stories is important as, although Kornfield accepts suffering as part of life, the accent is on perseverance, on being a survivor. They are all happy ending stories in which people persevere through disease, loss of a partner,

or other difficulties.

It is interesting to note that we were not given examples of people who had to lose something and suffer deeply. Wouldn't an example of true mindfulness be a person on the death bed, or who has lost a dear one, yet who still embraces life and maybe celebrates it? Throughout the entire course we do not discuss sadness or fear which is emotions that reveal one's vulnerability. Of all possible emotions, the only emotion the class focuses on is anger and how to control it. MBSR seems to help build a stronger; more defined and controlled sense of "self" and ego rather than to use the challenges in life to help see through the illusory separation. So what does a person in the MBSR take home?

Reflection

The stories touch me as I have also experienced difficult times in my life. Mindfulness was one of the major tools I was given to work with when dealing with my "depression". I tried to suppress the feelings that came with it, but that actually did not work. In fact, on the contrary, I had to pay attention to, and learn from, emotional states I have avoided. It was not a pleasant experience of bubble baths and sweet teas. The process was hard, there was a lot of doubt, unclarity, existential figuring out. I was led by a therapist. During this time I had to accept many limitations,

many painful truths, I had to feel the sadness, the anxiety. Similarly to my encounter with pain, the Mindful attitude had made me encounter limitation. I was humbled. I had to face myself and accept. Only then was I able to live with it somehow. It was not a simple switch from denial to acceptance as MBSR seems to suggest. It was a process and ongoing exercise. There were no guarantees of happy endings. The goal, it seems to me, is not a happy ending, but rather is it to step out of the perceived self. There is a certain kindness and gentleness in mindfulness. It is gentleness towards the perceived “self”. It invites one not to push, manipulate, and control, but to appreciate, face, and rejoice opening what might be hiding behind the perceived self. My sense is that I would not have learned it through MBSR.

If no serious examples are really given does MBSR really possess the healing power to transcend the *self* (ego)? The message that MBSR seemed to send is that the mind is able to control its reaction and in this way to establish some control over the environment. In other words, MBSR seems to suggest we should try to dominate the world rather to find peace in being part of it. This is what I refer to by “how suffering is handled in the course” in the previous chapters. It is managed rather than experienced and learned from. One reason for this version of mindfulness is that MBSR shares the values and attitudes of science and bio-medicine, and these determine its incomplete treatment of Mindfulness.

The scientific method, emerged in the 17th century, combined an aspiration for a better understanding of “the laws of nature” with the promise of substantial social benefits. Francis Bacon put particular emphasis on this image, which he takes to be the guiding principle of his new vision of science and practical knowledge (Leiss 1974, p.19). With the development of medicine the human body, as part the natural world, was also to be controlled and its limitations overcome.

Although according to the World Health Organization health is, “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”, there is an emphasis on physical survival in biomedicine-The question of what is “a life worth living”, and why bio-medicine seems to be unable to address it, is most evident in the area of life support and fatal disease care. Due to its highly technological nature the only narrative bio-medicine offers is that of physical treatment, management of disease, and pain relief. Since it is based on a materialistic view of reality which is completely divorced from religion, the only salvation, it offers is the continuation of biological life and the management of physiological symptoms. It is incapable of addressing the quality of life.

A poignant example of this bias comes from Lisa Stevenson’s book, *Life beside Itself*, (2014) in which she tries to answer the question why, despite all the care bestowed on them, so many Inuit youths continue to take their own lives. The root of the problem lies, according to the author, in a particular regime of care that she calls “anonymous care.” Anonymous care refers to a kind of mechanical, bureaucratic rationality in medicine where, to quote Stevenson, “it doesn’t matter who you are, just that you stay alive” (p.7). The governmental approach favoring bio-medical interventions manage to avoid much more relevant and uncomfortable issues of inequality and cultural assimilation. Pure physical existence, describes by Giorgio Agamben (1995) as *zoe-life* - becomes more important than the *bio life* (life with a meaning), as far as biomedicine is involved. The emphasis is on the preservation of the physical dimension of life rather than those concerned with purpose, values and dignity.

It is hard to enter this discussion without adopting the Cartesian split already ingrained in western world view. So I regard *bio* and *zoe* life as an artificial distinction created by the materialism of bio-medicine. This emphasis on well-being which, measured by one’s ability to function has an

effect of circumventing ethical and spiritual questions. Although the book tackles much more serious issues in a much more troubled environment than MBSR, the issues discussed are still relevant in the study of mindfulness based therapies as MBSR is a medical tool and has the potential to be a political pacifier.

MBSR as self-surveillance technique

The message of self-control in MBSR, beyond being psychological advice, has a political dimension. MBSR's aspect of social control can be understood through the influence of positive psychology and self-help on the practice.

Although created by a physician, MBSR, due to its polarization, has become a self-help or a pop psychology phenomenon. As self-help therapy, MBSR could be seen as what Foucault calls a “Technology of the Self”. The technology of the Self is, “a voluntary practice by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.” (Foucault 1992, 1984). Rather than therapy administered by a psychiatrist, MBSR is a tool for the individual to improve upon his/herself and fashion him/herself as less stressed, less depressed, more balanced, and so more actualized. Thus perpetuating and even strengthening the illusion of a separate self.

Nothing exemplifies better the technology of the “self” as the phenomena of Self Help psychology. With *Self Help Inc.* Mc Gee (2007) explains that self- help and positive psychology originate from organizational and corporate management psychology. It stresses affirmations and pep talks, encourages focusing on the solution rather than the problem. It puts the emphasis on

the individual who has to find happiness. If unable to do so, the fault is found in his or her personal attitude, rather than in the possibly inescapable outside circumstances. It is based on the North-American “self-made man” ideal, and is very individualistic, as it stresses strong “self” rather than relying on others. In a society where the gap between rich and poor is growing, the middle class shrinking, and job security and benefits taken away by neo-liberal forces, “the self” becomes a resource: a source for producing positivity. In this way positivist psychology indoctrinates individuals within the neo-liberal program argues McGee.

Once understood as a technique of the self, MBSR could further be interpreted as a technique of self-surveillance. As explained earlier; self-surveillance is a technique through which the individual polices himself so that he or she follows the socially accepted norms. Bruno and Vaz (2002) note in *Types of Self-Surveillance: from abnormality to individuals ‘at risk’*: “Self-surveillance is also based on the cultural postulation that certain thoughts and actions are dangerous or unwholesome to the constitution of the individual as a subject.” (1(3): 272-291). According to Foucault, society postulates what is “unwholesome”, and the individual regulates the citizen’s behavior. In the context of current society, as Foucault suggests, the psychiatrist has taken the role of the priest: these today postulations come from the fields of biomedicine and psychology. As mentioned earlier, since MBSR is not strictly a medical phenomenon, but also a commodity and a trend, these forces come from more particularly positivist psychology.

In this sense the postulation made by positive psychology is that of the “unwholesome” or “negative” vs the “positive” and “productive attitude”. If one feels depressed, stressed, or frustrated, then the problem must be with one’s “self” and one must self-regulate. MBSR teaches that one is in control of their reactions to the world. Instead of changing them one would focus on managing those unpleasant psychological states or emotions by trying to achieve “inner

peace”. MBSR activates the” self” to re-orient its focus and interpretation of the situation. In this way, mindfulness, intentionally or not, serves as a social and political pacifier.

MBSR territorializes the body, mitigating any negative reactions our participation in society may result in. Slovo Zizek explains in *From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism* how this particular interpretation of Western Buddhism could allow the privileged troubled consumer to find “peace” in an otherwise unsettling reality: “The individual preserves his/her right to be well aware of how worthless this spectacle is; and that what really matters to him/her is the peace of the inner “Self” to which they know they can always withdraw to.” (2001, p.1)

Carrette and King demonstrate how the psychological focus on the individual serves the existing status quo of capitalism and consumerism and to the extent that it could serve as a form of social control. They argue that:

“What is never raised is the possibility that the ‘difficult life’ is itself part of the problem of modern psychological understanding of the” self” in the western consumer societies. Eastern ideas have certainly provided some nourishment in a disillusioned world, but in our view they are palliative for the ills of a consumer society, rather than addressing the underlying social problems that create the need for such works in the first place. This is because popular psychology and spirituality fail to draw attention to the wider social, economic process, but rather they are reconfigured and hidden behind the capitalist doctrines of individual liberty and free choice.”

(2005, p.130)

Understood in the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework, the body becomes territorialized in MBSR through the instruction to control and manage so called “negative” states. The project of self-improvement, self-actualization, ironically becomes a form of *re-territorization*. Rather than a spontaneous striving it becomes a mandate. One is to be healthier and happier if one is able to

manage oneself better by the act of self-monitoring of mindfulness. In this sense the *two* internalizing and enforcing the process of *territorialization* upon itself through self-surveillance in the practice of mindfulness. In this sense, mindfulness done in this way can then be understood as what Foucault calls micro-fascism; a force that makes us desire that which imprisons us.

The motto of “not being the manager of the universe” is a quite useful and comfortable way of actually doing exactly the opposite of what mindfulness is asking us to do. Mindfulness is an opportunity to take a straight look at the raw reality of life. However, Mindfulness practiced with this motto invites to do the opposite: to escape from the challenges. It releases us from responsibility and any guilt we might have about our complacency in society.

However, the *territorialization* has been never final and complete. Already in this session the nomadic subjectivity had started to crack the MBSR dominion. In the next session the affective energy, anger re-territorializes the group’s passivity. It creates, at least for me personally, a *line of* flight from the grip of the doctrine of positive psychology within this MBSR’s interpretation of mindfulness.

Chapter 11 Anger

(Session 7)

This week we continued on the topic of emotions and dedicated the class to discussing anger. This turned out to be the most animated

session by far. Not only did we have an animated group discussion, but the conversation got so heated up that we were no longer following the general structure of the course. I will speak of the general nature of the discussion in order to respect the confidentiality of the clients. People took to expressing their definitions of the word anger with gusto. They got up from their chairs or cushions. They disagreed, interrupted and questioned. Discussing examples of anger, students told stories based on situations either from home or from work. The stories were about conflict and dealing with temperamental bosses, incompetent employees, clients and family members. This was the first time people shared stories, they shared things that had shaken them up. In their tones of voice and expressions on their face, one could see frustration, anger, sadness and depression. Similarly, from the comments others made towards the person sharing, empathy was shared. People empathize with themes of abusive bosses, the importance of being in a hierarchical structure, the financial dependency on a job, job insecurity. During this session for the

first time I brought up current political and social issues such as austerity and my comments were discussed rather than turned down by Kindtea.

Kindtea tried to illuminate stories from a psychological angle. She talked about how if one could be mindful, centered and non-reactive, and how this would prevent miscommunication and escalation from happening. These comments were being appreciated and reflected upon. However, there were also comments and general dissatisfaction about power dynamics at work and in the home. People talked of authoritative brothers, fathers and bosses. Although we all were reflecting and learning from Kindtea's suggestions, many of us were not fully convinced. At this time, being Mindful did not seem like enough of an option for some clients.

Exercise: Role play of Confrontation

Two people play out a moment of confrontation in the parking lot.

Two groups are supposed to give instructions to their respective

teammate of how to react according to the situation with cards saying "more aggressive," "less aggressive and "assertive". People get quite involved in the role-play. A participant brings the important point of commitment to communication and how a desire for collaboration is necessary for any conflict resolution. He expresses that in a family context, he is assured that **the** commitment is serious, but he is not sure that in the outside world the same is true. Other clients share that in certain situations they are incapable of not reacting. That it feels unnatural. Some expressed the worry that if they do not react to the situation would not change. Giving examples from her life, Kindtea explains that the point is more about how one handles one's self. Some clients raise doubt in the good faith of others and of the success rate of communication. Some doubt their ability to handle a situation and of general dissatisfaction from various sources. For the first time Kindtea is finding herself having to defend and convince. A couple of students preferred the passivity approach in the exercise, choosing mindfulness as the best way to handle the

situation. They admit they prefer to repress anger and downplay their dissatisfaction, but expressed doubt in its effectiveness in changing the situation. Others stated that they are unable to remain stoic, and want to conceal their anger. There is a discussion and a consensus that reactive behavior is not helpful, but that action is necessary in a conflict situation.

Kindtea gives a metaphor of being in a bubble, where one is committed to peace but is not affected by the world, not touched by the arrows of negativity coming from the world. One client says that it does not feel natural to stay in this bubble. This metaphor captures exactly the problem with the conception of Mindfulness in MBSR. I express my view to the class if use this metaphor of a bubble, then we better feel the arrows and let them enter the bubble. Only then can we feel the suffering the world inflicts upon on us and others. Only then collaboration begins as we recognize the feedback we might have not registered until. In this act of the world we can heal our broken connection to it due

to the illusionary “self” and become more harmonious with the web. I have directly challenged the course and Kindtea does not answer. Surprisingly the one student that throughout the course has been the most enthusiastic about Mindfulness and the most diligent in his practice, questioned the method and actually agrees with my interpretation of the metaphor Kindtea seems a little frustrated and uncomfortable with the manner the session was going.

Curiously, this dynamic would have been welcomed in the context of Buddhism. As Thích Nhất Hạnh has written, "Our attitude is to take care of anger. We don't suppress or hate it, or run away from it. We just breathe gently and cradle our anger in our arms with the utmost tenderness." Anger in Tantric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism provides an energy, which can be used to transform oneself. In Buddhist terms it is the “fire which burns the ego”. Indeed, Trungpa Rinpoche taught that negative emotions are in essence five wisdoms. The wisdom side of anger, for example, is discriminating awareness. (Haire, (2007). 46(3), 305-311.) In Buddhism, as it is in psychotherapy one can only overcome one’s conditioning if one is aware of it. The particular conflict, need or addiction almost demands to be dealt with and if it is recognized than it can be addressed and transformed .Only at this point, one becomes freer as the ego has lost some of its charges.

At this moment, I personally feel good - stimulated and passionate. I enjoy my conversation with Kindtea and my classmates, as it feels really genuine. This session reinforces my suspicion that the attitude of “trusting the process” does muzzle dialogue and critical thinking and that self-

help is in fact a form of pacification. Nevertheless, my faith in real communication is coming back. This session returns my faith in the ability to discuss difficult topics and to try to make sense of Mindfulness. I feel relieved, as if at least it feels that there was a point in taking this course. This session invigorated me to get engaged with the world, which in my case is through student activism.

The energy that was present at this session had been undeniable. Thanks to the selected method of direct experience focused on the effect and intra-action I was able to *feel its* importance. What had occurred was a collective affective response which broke through the structure of the MBSR course. Understood in Deleuzian terms the session was *a line of flight* from the MBSR micro-fascism. If any transformation within the clients occurred during the course, it was in session seven. The *iron cage* dissolved, people seemed to be facing, not only each other, but beyond. The hold of the perceived ego was relaxed rather than reinforced, offering a fertile ground for further mindfulness. This session provided “the staff of life” which is examined in therapy. The frustration, resentment along with depression and anxiety are exactly the starting point of exploring behavioral patterns, maladaptive coping mechanism or even trauma.

MBSR claims to teach acceptance, but in fact, the message it seems to send, encourages avoidance of suffering and dealing with negative external circumstances. The session had brought up a discussion that was animated with the frustration, pain and confusion which are often part of daily life. It is these states that have always been the playground for Buddhist training. It somehow helped us to reconnect and experience, for a brief moment, a state closer to

no-duality and no-self.

My participation in this course had taken me on a journey. It had transformed me in internal ways, while it had also stimulated my academic interest in the mindfulness-based therapy phenomenon. The pent up resentment that I had half-consciously been holding against this practice was released. I felt less alienated and less critical of the attempts of my classmates to achieve peace. I thought less in terms of them vs. me, but rather I saw all classmates as other human beings that now I was more willing to engage with. I was more open to trust and to let go, at least for a little while, of the cynical attitude of my over-vigilant mind. This allowed, at least me, to find the connection between my personal world and the society at large and tackle existential issues such as those of purpose and happiness. I was inspired to practice more Mindfulness. However, MBSR did not convince me in letting go completely of my critical thinking or investigating some which somehow “does not feel right”.

Conclusion

My two-month immersion in mindfulness as taught by MBSR has provoked a strong emotional reaction and has sparked interesting realizations. Curiously, those are not the insights one would associate with meditative contemplation. Rather, they are insights regarding the social phenomena of mindfulness and the way it is taught in a peculiar clinical setting.

MBSR appeared to be a mixture of self-help psychological counseling, vaguely overseen by

accredited psychologists and a vessel for unspoken spirituality. In MBSR mindfulness has been highly commoditized, taken out of context re-interpreted and void of any ethical conduct guidance.

While Buddhist traditions are not homogenous and evolve overtime the phenomenon of western appropriation of mindfulness in therapy presents a quite drastic turn in evolution the of the practice .As explained in the introduction some eastern teacher such as Goenka and Trungpa Rimpoche have themselves self-democratize and commercialized Buddhist teachings. However, their teachings remained close to both Buddha's teachings and traditional ways of passing spiritual knowledge. The mindfulness movement and particularly MBSR however is a different story .It has completely altered the entire message and philosophy that comes along with it. What I do caution against in my thesis is the simplistic understand of Buddhist concepts as presented by MBSR or other forms mindfulness based psychology.

The “personal” emotional involvement focusing on affect and intra-action has allowed peeking through the cracks of the façade of this mostly impenetrable business. In the sixth session, the empathy my partners and I exchanged, along with the willingness to break the rules, resulted in a healing experience. The energy of the last session led many of the students to lose their ‘Zen’ - like cool, to questioning the course and their ability to practice mindfulness or its effectiveness.

All of these somehow revealed the central contradiction of MBSR. MBSR, influenced positive psychology, reduces mindfulness to a coping tool which relies on self- control and neglects heavier negative emotions and experience. While mindfulness is supposed to deepen experience and help deal with reality, in MBSR it actually became a way out of it.

In this thesis, I suggest that a major reason for the particular therapeutic outcome MBSR heeds lies in the difference between the Eastern concept of no-independent self and interdependence and a strong notion of the *self* in western psychology. Buddhism seeks to overcome the illusion of an independent self. Immersion in in-depth therapy such as ACT may actually result in a transformation of one's ego. Mindfulness as presented by MBSR, however, runs the risk of strengthening the sense of *self*, reinforcing the alienation and self-centeredness possibly responsible for the problems MBSR claims to help alleviate. This approach to the *self* also carries important social implications in the context of a materialist capitalist.

Throughout the course, the *bwo* has been subjected to the territorializing force of MBSR. Mindfulness has become equivalent to the act of managing emotions, particularly negative ones. In the bio-political context MBSR can be understood as a self-surveillance technique, which puts the responsibility of wellbeing onto the individual.

Traditional western psychology has looked for the root of impeding well-being within the individual and only recently has the socio-environmental factors become part of a more cohesive approach. MBSR puts the emphasis on dealing with the personal problems while socioeconomic aspects of reality are ignored. Interpreted in this way mindfulness permits the individual to manage personal stress and carry on in a socially acceptable manner, easing one's discontent towards the societal status quo and impeding social criticisms. This take on mindfulness is a far cry from the Buddhist notion of interdependence.

I do not deny that the religious institution of Buddhism may have been forces of territorialization and have resulted in the preservation of the socio-political status quo. In this thesis, I contrast the western democratization and commercialization of Buddhism not with the institutions of Buddhism but rather the Buddhist teachings and tradition. I argue that in MBSR the ethical guidelines attached to mindfulness that serve to tame one's ego become lost.

It is possible that adherence to rituals, lineage and precepts do territorialize, but I suggest that we focus on the function they are designed to perform. They are techniques for overcoming one's ego. My argument is that before we rush to discard a tradition and democratize it, we would benefit from truly appreciating it, with all its complexity, by actually following the instruction and reaping the benefits. This is the aim of this thesis.

I suggest we follow and actually experience the journey that the Buddha's teaching layout. I do not agree with the position that Buddhism benefits from the "democratization" in other words the abandonment of such important techniques. As I have stated in the thesis this is throwing the baby with the bath water. Overcoming the ego does require work according to Buddhism and that is why practices, such as mindfulness, exist.

The unspoken or half spoken desire for spirituality in the course suggests an unaddressed need. I do not advocate for a turn back to any traditional form of religion. However, through this thesis I try to offer an appreciation of the value of traditions such as lineage, rituals and code of ethics. Rather than stating that eastern spirituality is of more value I simply bring forward the fact that something is being lost and open to discussion at the conclusion the question of moral guidance. I aim to bring the reader's attention to the moral, ethical dilemma we are faced with of having refuted religion, but also being at a lost for a moral compass.

The events of the course suggest something of an answer to the question of ethical guidance that has become urgent throughout this exploration. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of immanence maintains that "good" person is one who is free, rational and strong. As Smith explains in Deleuze and the question of desire: Towards an immanent theory of ethics 'that exercises its capacity for being affected in such a way that its power of acting increases to the point where it produces active affections and adequate ideas.' (Smith p.125). In this way mindfulness, when done consciously by keeping in mind its potentially territorializing abilities, can be employed to engage in the immanent ethics. Yet another question remains: Having done away with traditional ethical codes of religions such as Buddhism or Christianity, how do we go about collectively negotiating our newly found freedom in a moral manner?

Bibliography

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford University Press

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Post humanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." *Signs* 40.1 (2014).

Bauman, Z. (2013). *Modernity and ambivalence*. John Wiley & Sons.

Bignall, Simone, and Paul Patton. *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Bryden, M. (2002). *Deleuze and Religion* Bryden, M. (2002). Routledge.

Bowker, J. (Ed.). (1997). *The Oxford dictionary of world religions*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Carrette, J. R., & King, R. (2005). *Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion*. Psychology Press.

Cogan, J. (2006). *The phenomenological reduction*. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2006) <http://philpapers.org/rec/COGTPR.3pm>, 22, 2016)

Coleman, J. W. (2002). *The New Buddhism: The western transformation of an ancient tradition*. Oxford University Press.

T. W. Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha, Part II*. London: Luzac and Company, 1910: 32

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2014). *What is philosophy?*. Columbia University Press.

Good, B. (1994). *Medicine, rationality and experience: an anthropological perspective* (No. 1990). Cambridge University Press.

Grant, J. (1999). *The new marketing manifesto: The 12 rules for building successful brands in the 21st century*. Texere.

Gunaratana, B., & Gunaratana, H. (2011). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Simon and Schuster.

Haire, M. (2007). Transforming consciousness. *Sophia*, 46(3), 305-311.

Jones, S. L. H., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C. (2013). *Handbook of auto ethnography*. Left Coast Press,

Kirmayer, L. J. (2015). Mindfulness in cultural context. *Transcultural psychiatry*, 52(4), 447-469.

Kaufman, E., & Heller, K. J. (Eds.). (1998). *Deleuze & Guattari: new mappings in politics, philosophy, and culture*. U of Minnesota Press.

Krieger, Nancy. 2005 Embodiment: A Conceptual Glossary of Epidemiology. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59: 350-355.

Leiss, W. (1974). Critical theory and its future. *Political Theory*, 2(3), 330-349.

Lock, M., & Nguyen, V. K. (2010). *An anthropology of biomedicine*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lopez Jr, D. S. (2009). *Buddhism and Science: A guide for the perplexed*. University of Chicago Press.

Lutz, Catherine, and Geoffrey M. White. 1986 The Anthropology of Emotions. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15:405-436

Matthews, B. (Ed.). (2006). *Buddhism in Canada*. Routledge.

McCagney, N. (1997) *Nagarjuana and the Philosophy of Openness*. Rowman & Littlefield.

McGee, M. (2005). *Self-help, Inc.: Makeover culture in American life*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). Eye and mind. *Images: A Reader*, 131-134.

Merleau-Ponty, M., & Lefort, C. (1968). *The visible and the invisible: followed by working notes*. Northwestern University Press.

Neimanis, A. (2007). Becoming-grizzly: Bodily molecularity and the animal that becomes. *PhaenEx*, 2(2), 279-308.

Rose, Nicolas (2007) *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*,

Pagis, M. (2008). *Cultivating Selves: Vipassana Meditation and the Microsociology of Experience*. ProQuest.

Pagis, M. (2009). Embodied self-reflexivity. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 72(3), 265-283.

Pagis, M. (2010). From abstract concepts of experiential knowledge: Embodying enlightenment in a meditation center. *Qualitative Sociology*, 33(4), 469-489.

Pagis, M. (2010). Producing intersubjectivity in silence: An ethnographic study of meditation practice. *Ethnography*, 11(2), 309-328. Incorporated.

Parr, A. (Ed.). (2010). *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh University Press.

Patton, Paul.(2002.)*Deleuze and the Political*. Routledge,

Preston, David L. (1988)*The social organization of Zen practice: Constructing transcultural reality*. Cambridge University Press

Smith, D. W. (2011). Deleuze and the question of desire: Towards an immanent theory of ethics. *Deleuze and ethics*

Stevenson, L. (2014). *Life beside itself: Imagining care in the Canadian Arctic*. University of California Press.

Stoller, Paul (1989) *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Harvard University Press