

**My experience of being present.  
A Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry**

*Nick Brown-Haysom 2018*

*A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Psychotherapy at the Auckland University of Technology*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The quality of the therapist's presence is accepted as an important factor in facilitating the therapeutic relationship, and the consequent success of psychodynamic psychotherapy, yet for this therapist in training presence has, at times, been an elusive and even mysterious conundrum.

Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry, a process that aligns well with this researcher's Buddhist faith and psychotherapeutic philosophy, of kindly surrendering to experience, is used as a methodology and method to elevate to consciousness and discern some of the subjective determinants and experiences of presence.

Significant findings on the topic of presence are presented, including subjective responses to 'absence' and the impact of 'kind attendance'; these findings synthesised to inform a 'System of being present / not being present'. Implications for the teaching and practice of psychotherapy are discussed.

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Nick Brown-Haysom (candidate).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Garjana Kosanke, my supervisor for this dissertation, has taught me more with her kind and firm presence, about the topic of being present, than I could have possibly conceptualised before this research began. I will always be grateful, thank you Garjana.

The Dharma (the Buddha's teachings), to me, is a reference to wisdom already within us and all around us. I have read approximately a dozen Dharma books, the specifics of which I sometimes struggle to recall but the flavour of which, upon reflection, runs throughout this research. To my ever supportive and wise friends in the Triratna Sangha who may read this dissertation, you may well recognise the Dharma inherent in my writing, any non-direct reference or acknowledgement of a particular aspect is not intentional but a reflection of how much these beloved teachings have seeped in.

As I read this entire script it has embedded the relentlessly kind and accepting flavour of my clinical supervisor for 2018, Joanne Emmens. I am grateful for your spirit Joanne.

Curiosity, for reasons explained in the dissertation, has not always come easily to me. To Steve Appel who models a bottomless well of curiosity, thank you.

To Margot Solomon and Keith Tudor who selflessly and generously conducted the heuristic research discussion group, thank you for embodying this delightfully intense methodology.

Tash, my partner, has perhaps the unfairest role to play in this research. Often representing the fantasised object that never was, or could possibly be, forever failing expectations in a moment when she just wanted to make a cup of tea. Dear Tash, lets continue to learn about each other and care; one of my greatest wishes for this research is that it becomes easier for us to be together, to be present with each other.

## CHAPTER 1: ALL ROADS LEAD...

*“We know now that it is not the understanding ascribed from without by a distant voice that cures the broken human spirit. It is the resonating presence of the other.”  
(Madonna, 2017)*

### ***Dam it!***

In late 2014 in preparation for an interview to gain acceptance into the Graduate Diploma of Psychotherapy course, now culminating in this Master’s dissertation, I reflected on what I most appreciated from my own therapy that began 14 years previously. Something inside me moved when the idea of my therapist’s unmitigated attention, his mere but full presence, was that which I most valued, and in hindsight treasured.

Shift forward to May 2017 and a mid-year formative assessment of my own burgeoning psychotherapy practice; I received the following comments from a clinical supervisor.

*“Even though you have demonstrated emotional sensitivity and a capacity for empathic resonance, you continued showing difficulties with remaining consistently and congruently present with the emotional expressions of your clients in the face of the disclosure of troubling material.” (G. Kosanke. personal communication, June 2017)*

The quality that I most valued as a client, a quality deemed critical for successful psychotherapy (Epstein, 1995; Baldwin, 2000; Stuckey, 2001; Gellar, Pos & Colosimo, 2012; Hayes & Vinca, 2017; Madonna, 2017), I was consistently failing to attain as a therapist. Dam it!

Understanding my own experience of how presence is attained or interrupted had become a topic I could not now ignore. The mandatory requirements of the Masters of Psychotherapy course may well be the catalyst for this attention but immersed in the Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry research process (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002), presence, and its emerging and affecting array of synonyms and antonyms, quickly became a predicament in my life (Sela-Smith, 2002) ratifying my research question:

*What is my experience of being present?*

In this introductory chapter I attempt to describe some of the roads that have led to the acquisition of knowledge and insight regarding my own presence becoming both a professional and personal necessity, some working definitions of the key terms

referenced throughout this research and aspects of my existing relationship with being present. I also reference a structure for the remaining elements of this dissertation.

### ***A professional necessity***

I train in and practice psychodynamic psychotherapy, focused on working with clients to reveal unconscious conflicts and relational patterns, most likely developed early in life, that may be contributing to current maladaptive functioning. This therapy relies on a strong and trusting therapeutic relationship where the client becomes increasingly comfortable accessing and disclosing painful material. Presence as an essential element for relationship, and relationship as an essential quality for healing is a dominant theme throughout the literature and the evolution of psychotherapy (Stern, 2004; Geller, Pos & Colosimo, 2012; Turpin, 2014; Hayes & Vinca, 2017; Madonna, 2017); I further elucidate this theme in Chapter Three, “A literature “view””.

Buddhist psychotherapy, predominantly the work of Mark Epstein (1989, 1995, 2010) also informs my theorising and practice of psychotherapy; in particular the compassion practices where the inevitability of human suffering is accepted rather than resisted. His notion of kindly surrendering to experience in order to facilitate insight and change closely aligns with Sela-Smith’s (2001) Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry research methodology planned for this project as outlined in Chapter Two: Methodology and Method.

For this beginning therapist being present can represent as an almost stuttering quality, eluding me for reasons sometimes not understood but which may resemble some of the challenges to presence identified in the literature (Robbins, 1998; Geller & Siegal, 2017); these could perhaps be best summarised by Pemberton (1977), as ‘not knowing one’s self’. Freud (1912), when prescribing psychoanalysis to trainees who were struggling to implement what might be defined as his version of presence i.e. ‘free floating attention’, possibly recognised these unconscious impediments which have now been further elucidated including the therapist’s own attachment patterns, history of abandonment, developmental history, propensity to cognise, cultural conditioning and spiritual dearth (Robbins, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Geller & Siegal, 2017; Denton, 2017; Madonna, 2017).

### ***Defining presence***

Geller (2013), has defined therapeutic presence “as bringing one’s whole self into the encounter, being completely in the moment physically, emotionally, cognitively,

spiritually and relationally” (p.209). Pemberton (1977) concluded that therapists with presence have awareness, acceptance and appreciation. Epstein (1995) refers to presence as an “openness as well as attentiveness to all that is relevant” (p.109), and Madonna (2017) summarises presence, as perhaps being whatever the client needs to stay in psychotherapy and move towards eventual relatedness.

Despite advocating its apparent necessity many authors reviewed (Robbins, 1998; Stuckey, 2001; Stern, 2004; Tannen & Daniels, 2010; Geller & Greenberg, 2012; Bazzano, 2013) also emphasise the difficulty in grasping what presence actually is. Stern (2004), renowned for a career dedicated to the ‘present moment’ of psychotherapy emphasised, the nature of presence is transient and dynamic, its expression unpredictable, and it can become confused in our efforts to explicate it. Stern echoes my own experience of presence as mystical and mysterious as does Marcel (1951) who supports the belief that presence cannot be objectified or explained only felt; thus the focus on subjective experience and on creative explication inherent in the heuristic methodology and method (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002) used for this research. This link between understanding presence and the proposed methodology is further explored in Chapter Two.

### ***A mysterious tonic***

Immediately following the aforementioned assessment of my own difficulties with remaining present with my psychotherapy clients, I responded in what felt like desperation, with a renewed dedication, after a period of not being able, to my practice of Buddhist meditation. In beginning to research the topic of the therapist’s presence, meditation, mindfulness and spirituality including Buddhism are frequently referenced in the psychotherapy literature (Speeth, 1982; McCollum & Gerhart, 2010; Tannen & Daniels, 2010; Gellar & Greenberg, 2012) as tonics for non-presence and are explored further when examining the literature in Chapter Three.

In what seemed like an almost magical response my ability to remain present with my clients improved dramatically and almost instantly once, in a more concentrated effort, I practiced being present with and by myself in meditation. I experienced this as becoming more contemplative in my sessions as a trainee psychotherapist, more creative and less reactive, less in my head and more in my whole being, thinking and feeling became less discernible, my feeling responses to clients’ specific presentations (as opposed to being

blurred with my own responses to relationship) becoming more discernible and I experienced an increased vitality and awareness post the sessions.

This experienced, but as yet un-deciphered, effect of meditation, and of the even less expressed dynamic of the effect of my own spiritual life, on my being present have been significant in stimulating my curiosity around this topic. As an ongoing and increasingly important part of my life meditation and Buddhism and the associated surrender to experience will inform all phases of this heuristic study.

### ***Meeting what I am afraid of...***

But if it were only that simple; whilst experienced as a facilitator of presence, a disturbing and frightening event while in meditation, where it felt as if I experienced my own self, my own presence, perhaps too fully, was behind the almost one-year cessation of my meditation practice and is another road that has led to this question of presence. Summarised, it was at the time, an event where I felt an immense pain in my own presence and introduces another idea that will be also examined in the literature subsequently discussed; that is how one's own development may affect our ability, or even unconscious desire or aversion to being present. This rather shocking experience feels fundamental to understanding my own capacity for being present and provides context and motivation for this study, so I detail it more fully in the following paragraphs.

In mid 2016 while studying and becoming familiar with the idea of the 'cut-off' abused child in a disturbed and often dissociated client, and with the confidence and trust of being held warmly and expertly by my supervisors and therapist, I started to consider my own cut-off child in a wondering about the pre-verbal me. With the words of an Experiential Training Group facilitator, "go deeper", ringing in my mind I began the Metta Bhavana, a Buddhist loving kindness meditation, that firstly involves an acknowledgement of, and surrender to, one's own emotional and body experience. I initially projected 'metta' (Buddhist Sanskrit word interpreted as loving kindness), to the cut off child in me, somewhere in the depths of my pelvis, and surrendered as I have never before. In a new experience I was able to recognise and be kind to what felt like 'all of myself'. Next in the meditation I brought this 'whole self' including perhaps for the first time 'my forgotten child-self' into relationship with a trusted friend, by directing metta his way. What occurred next was a vigorous somatic happening; toxic, foul tastes filled my mouth and it screwed up so tight the creases in my face burned, my head began to tip to the left and I began to groan and dribble, I became aware of every muscle in my legs

and arms. I was both frightened and curious; I could alter the intensity of the response by bringing myself in and out of contact with various people in my imagination. I was very aware, as connected and present as I have ever been. Although frightening this was also somewhat strangely comforting; I got a deep sense that what felt like some kind of resonating trauma, was what I have been avoiding in one way or another my whole life.

As I sat to meditate in the year post I could not; with the memory of this experience immediately coming to mind, interrupting and scaring me as I went to begin a practice of surrendering to my own present state. It was only the necessity of being present with my clients in mid 2017, as per my explanation above that took me back 'to the mat', and when I did this memory, though still 'tasted', had lost its potency. Surrendering to unknown fears, and acknowledging and where possible not submitting, (Ghent, 1990) to resistance (Sela-Smith, 2002) informs much of the data collected as part of this heuristic research; this data is synthesised and presented in "Chapter Four: Findings" and "Chapter Five: Discussion" of this dissertation.

### ***Not selling***

For 20 years prior to this training I worked in corporate communications, attempting, often with my most urgent and anxious self to help resolve challenges that some of New Zealand's most well-known companies had in communicating with their key stakeholders. By identifying something of myself in a problem presented to me I could present something back to my large corporate clients that was faux original but felt familiar enough to both of us so as to not upset anyone. I was 'selling solutions' to emotionally desolate big companies on whom I was dependent for a livelihood and often there was pressure to come up with something 'quick and great'.

It is enlightening and challenging to link this prior vocation to my felt sense of pressure as a therapist to become involved in and solve problems, and how this detracts from being present; it is sadly ironic, that those I am attempting to help now bear the same label, "clients", "theory" perhaps metaphorically replacing the ideas I use to try and sell. In my current training I have benefitted from the support of supervisors in working into this dynamic; they have acknowledged I have a different and still elusive mode that thrives in the psychotherapeutic work, which we have labelled "songwriter". I carry a card in my wallet with scribbled reflections on both the "songwriter mode", and the now outdated "work mode". The former carries an ease, emotional presence, a strong desire for authenticity, a desire to help communicate a private suffering, melody, rhythm and

the ability to imagine and create; there is also distance as in a non-proximity, what feels like elevation, non-identification, a lack of searching, and holding the desire to know as an impossibility, which leads to a kind and present curiosity that is still new for me. There is less fear and moments of equanimity.

### ***People of presence***

Being a person fully present is I will declare an aspiration as well as a professional requirement and this has been stimulated by the qualities of a small number of people I have encountered in my life. In addition to my original therapist, who moved me with his stillness, capacity to bear and stay with emotional intensity and particularly his capacity to quietly end the sessions when I was in distress, there have been others whose presence has held me in a way that has provided considerable comfort.

### ***Onwards***

The intensity of the door closing with a psychotherapy client shone the brightest of lights on how I am. Can I stay with the raw emotion of the other? How do I try and get away? What allows me to stay? What particular deficits and advantages do I bring to this encounter? These questions cannot be wondered about in isolation (Peltz, 1998; Madonna, 2017), as these dynamics were born in the relationships in my life and so this is how they need to be examined in this research. It is surrendering to and recording these responses and being present to subjective experience that will provide the data for this research. I have elucidated some of my current understanding of my experience of presence; the remainder of this research is dedicated to making conscious currently unconscious responses and in doing so transforming the researcher into a more relationship able psychotherapist, family and community member, friend and human.

The context and initial motivation for this research is my challenge, as a beginning psychotherapist, to remain present to the deepest emotional pain of my clients; this is also the gap in the research (Tannen & Daniels, 2010), where the subjective experience of presence for beginning therapists seems yet to be explored and expressed with the rigor required for tacit knowing and transformation (Sela-Smith, 2002).

In the following chapter I detail the methodology and method in conducting this research before introducing a “view” of relevant literature in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four I present the findings of this research and finish with a discussion in Chapter Five where I outline some implications relevant to the literature, the theory and practice of

psychotherapy in relation to presence, the training of new therapists and any further research that may be relevant in the context of these findings.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

*“...through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with real knowledge of the human soul” (p. 81) Carl Jung*

As I was beginning to formulate this dissertation, Jung’s (1953) quote above was intuitively poignant, congruent with the most impactful learning of my psychotherapy training to date and was received with a poetic resonance that invoked a warming presence. Whilst affirming of my interest in the Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry methodology (Sela-Smith, 2002), six months into this intentionally transformational process I can be now be critical of Jung, i.e. I now have an inkling of knowledge that there is no ‘real knowledge’, especially of the human soul, and that this surrender to not knowing, or perhaps to the resistance of ‘needing to know’, is closely related to my own capacity for being present.

In this chapter I recognise my process and rationale for selecting the Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry (Sela-Smith, 2002) methodology including a discussion of how it is a philosophical and theoretical match for both the topic of enquiry and my subjective way of learning. I then detail via an explicit method how I have surrendered to the six phases of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), before introducing a section on research scope, duration, possible pitfalls and ethics; I finish the chapter with a specific exclusion from this research.

### ***Why Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry?***

The most pressing concern at the beginning of the most substantial academic project I have undertaken was, ‘Could I stay present to something, anything, for such a sustained period of time in order to complete this research?’ My engagement with almost everything (I only add the ‘almost’ because I am becoming allergic to absolutes) in my life has had a stuttering quality as outlined in Chapter One but more specifically here; how applying just enough attention has led to enough success so as to not be shamed; and how a propensity to say ‘yes’ to things has led to the next stuttering project. Sela-Smith’s (2002) take on Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic research methodology has ‘bubbled to the surface’ because of its acceptance of, and interest in, these types of subjective resistances i.e. it encourages surrender to, and examination of, one’s own way of being, rather than collusion with the submissive resistance of how I ‘should be’.

In opening to this methodology, I have also strongly related to the writing of Emmanuel Ghent (1990) and the transformational possibilities of surrendering to one's own subjectivity rather than submitting to the power of others. In addition, the Buddhist teachings on mindful and kind acceptance of 'what is' have contributed productively when read with Sela-Smith and Ghent in mind. As a practical demonstration, the final selection of this methodology has thus not so much been a choice but an application of structure and rigour to what I already tacitly believe as useful and meaningful ways to learn.

#### *A philosophical and theoretical match*

As my learning and practice of psychotherapy has progressed, I have a growing faith in empirical process. Although I struggle to retain words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, and sciences i.e. to observe methodically; I am moved emotionally, spiritually, relationally, kinaesthetically, and cognitively to the experience of 'being with' (Sultan, 2019). In what feels like a primitive interpretation I have come to know myself as 'an experiential learner'; to put this in the context of the methodology heuristic research is a recording of sensory experience *and* its inferential constructs in what William James (as cited in Sultan, 2019) has called radical empiricism.

I am a pākehā (Māori word for non-indigenous people in Aotearoa New Zealand) male, conditioned in a post-positive society to 'know'. i.e. to know the answer, the one truth, and if I do not know it then it is my obligation, necessitated by my privilege to learn it. My subjectivity seemed to allow for this; i.e. I learnt to read and write easily and have what I now recognise as a creative streak that allows me to synthesise concepts and experiences to make meaning. All of this has allowed for some material flourishing. My conditioning also includes a family of origin, who due to unspeakable and overwhelming trauma has incentivised 'not knowing', that there is pain in 'finding out more' and a consequential tuning down of curiosity. It is only psychological suffering that has forced my encounters with psychotherapy and Buddhism and granted me freedom's born of socially constructed wisdom as per that advocated by heuristic research, and yet as an only sometimes conscious reflex, my own experience of beginning to 'know' can still lead me to 'close down' once I learn something new e.g. "this is it, this is all that needs to be known, it is the answer I'm certain". I hypothesise this is somewhat due to the societal and familial forces explained above. This 'closing down' feels like it is at the heart of my research – it is what I want to know about, as it can prematurely curtail my ability to be present and to make relationship with clients

conducive to effective psychotherapy; thus the relevance of full immersion, recognition and inclusion of my own emerging values, creative expression, focus on personal meaning and essential nature of the topic, mandatory in heuristic inquiry.

I did consider other qualitative methodologies, including hermeneutics and thematic analysis however due to their prescribed distance between felt experience and learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), compared to Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry, I believe they had the potential to complement my resistance to being present, perhaps even permitting 'unconscious' distractions (Sela-Smith, 2002), from the very experience I was wishing to explore. My learning whilst studying for this Master's degree has become profoundly associated with 'staying with' felt experience, thus to continue with another methodology presented a considerable risk in pouring a year's effort into something that would not return the best possible outcome.

Whilst acknowledging the pivotal role of the phenomenon of my own experience to be explored, others' knowledge including one academic supervisor seen fortnightly, individual clinical supervisor (weekly), group clinical supervisor (fortnightly on average), personal therapist (weekly), senior Buddhist Sangha (weekly) and psychotherapy colleagues (almost daily) have been essential to this process; as per Sultan (2019) "the researcher's experience acts as a frame of reference for co-creating novel understandings of the living experience that is being explored with the main purpose to comprehend it profoundly and holistically" (p. 27). Evidence of these interactions and consequent learning will be presented in the Findings chapter of this dissertation.

### ***Surrendering to the present moment as method***

Sela-Smith's (2002) Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry, an evolution of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic methodology, has become the natural methodology for which to conduct my research because of its unrelenting focus on surrendering to the felt nature of subjective experience.

As referenced in Chapter One, Stern (2004), echoes my own experience of presence as mystical and mysterious, as does Marcel (1951) who intimates that presence cannot be objectified or explained only felt, thus the focus on subjective experience and on creative explication inherent in the heuristic methodology and method (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002) used for this research.

It dawns on me as I record the detail of this method, that the almost year-long research has been an exercise in constantly coming back to the present moment; the entire project, via the method outlined subsequently is akin to the stages of a mindfulness meditation. A challenge then is that language, absent in meditation, is inherent in academic research and according to Stern (1985) can have an alienating effect on self-experience, and can cause estrangement from one's own personal experience where only representations of things can be talked about. Polanyi (1969), upon whose philosophy of tacit knowledge Moustakas (1990) founded heuristic methodology, believed that all knowledge is either tacit knowledge or founded on tacit knowledge, and that the earliest foundation of such knowledge is pre-verbal and "disconnected from the verbal thinking self" (Sela-Smith, 2002). Sela-Smith, as per my own experience of deep rooted learning as a client of psychotherapy and student of Buddhism, believes then that transformations in flawed tacit knowledge "must take place through thought that is connected to pre-verbal, body based, global experiences of wholes rather than reflective reason" (p. 62); as per the findings in Chapter Four, it is the creative expression of song, poetry and illustration that has allowed this tacit knowledge to emerge, where language has often been 'dreamt' rather than cognitively arranged.

In preparing my initial research proposal for this dissertation I uncovered a tension between the surrendering and releasing of control required in Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry in order to discover what each stage has to offer, and the mandatory requirements of a Master's dissertation that include word counts, academic standards, restricted timeframes and prescribed learning outcomes. The six phases of heuristic research which include Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication and Creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990), along with a structured program of data collection and analysis provide a frame for which to hold this tension. I liken this structure to how a firm psychotherapeutic frame allows clients' increasing freedom to surrender and explore what is not yet known.

## ***Surrendering to the six phases of heuristic experience***

Sela-Smith (2002) writes

To participate in this heuristic self-inquiry, the researcher must experience self-dialogue, be willing to use feeling to enter the tacit dimension and allow intuition to make connections in the structures of tacit knowledge. The researcher must remain internally focused and dwell within the feelings of the tacit dimension, allowing the six phases to unfold naturally by surrendering to the feeling state of the subjective "I". Instead of rigorous planning and controlling of the steps, the researcher must release control and discover whatever the stage has to offer. If any one of these phases is not completed with full integrity, heuristic research is not successfully accomplished. (p. 63)

### *1. Initial Engagement*

Chapter One of this dissertation outlined the initial engagement process, how the question of my own presence, through autobiographical experience, became unable to ignore. My research question had several permutations before it distilled into its current form; in particular 'abandonment' rather than 'being present' was for November and December 2017 the central theme. My initial journaling was in relation to this topic; immersed almost immediately in a painful, and what manifested as a somewhat destructive encounter between my internal and external world, it felt like I was entering a labyrinth (Sultan, 2019) from which I could not exit, no matter the holding power of the heuristic methodology.

The link to my experience of being present was made, in conjunction with supervision, in that I am deeply interested in not abandoning, psychically, my clients in psychotherapy, and that as a more aspirational quality I am deeply interested in being present. Sela-Smith (2002) describes this process of considering something less threatening as possibly unconscious resistance and a risk of splitting focus. This question is intentionally open-ended and acts as only a guide to self-discovery (Sela-Smith, 2002); it will emerge in the findings chapter of this research report that abandonment (unbearable absence) and being present, are intimately related and, for me, impossible to separate no matter the language of the research question.

### *2. Immersion*

As per Moustakas' (1990) reference to the non-lineal nature of the heuristic process it has been difficult to discern where the "initial engagement" phase ended, and the "immersion" phase began as it happened naturally and quite unplanned (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Regular journaling, on average four-five times per week, during the April-July 2018 period has produced almost 100 entries and 50,000 words of data. It is the freedom afforded by ten years of psychotherapy as a client and three and half years as a trainee psychotherapist, and a training course with an emphasis on personal reflexivity, in addition to the allowing sentiment of this methodology, which has put 'anything on the table' in the spirit of free association within these journal writings. The regularity and dedication to this writing is new to me, with much less stuttering, depth has been a result. My regular meditation and Buddhist study also inform this data gathering process.

Sela-Smith's (2002) six components (p. 69) intrinsic to Heuristic Research and interpreted below for my purposes have been integral to keeping the project on task and so giving this freedom of expression a scientific frame;

- i. I have experienced being present and not being present
- ii. This has emerged as an intense and passionate concern
- iii. I have surrendered, and surrendered again, to the question of 'What is my experience of being present?'
- iv. Self-dialogue, and not just a simple reporting of feelings is evidenced in the findings of this report.
- v. Whilst others have been consulted, this is a self-search.
- vi. Transformation has been experienced and is evidenced in the Findings and Discussion chapters of this report.

Although initially intended to precede these phases it would be inauthentic to separate out my examination of literature from the initial engagement, immersion, illumination and explication phases; this inclusion provided for a deeper engagement with the literature than previously attained in academic work. I have thus intentionally placed "Chapter Three: A literature "view"" after this Methodology and Method chapter, as initial themes via means of reflective responses to the literature, begin to emerge and provide a natural segue to the dedicated Findings chapter which follows Chapter Three. Additional detail of my literature engagement rationale and method introduces Chapter Three.

During the immersion phase of this research I have also conducted approximately 200 sessions of clinical work as a trainee psychotherapist with my own clients. After each session I spend five-ten minutes writing up notes, and this year for the purpose of informing this research, with a particular focus on my experience of being present. Excerpts from these notes, which reflect only my own personal process and maintain my clients' total confidentiality, also inform the findings.

It seems everything has become, at times, crystallised around this research question (Sela-Smith, 2002) including also family, friends, my passionate hobby of surfing and writing and playing music.

### 3. *Incubation*

Detaching myself from this question has been difficult given the phenomenon's 'total' nature, however space for discernment and fostering the intention and ability to see that many different things may be inherent in the same phenomena has been essential.

During August and September 2018, I reduced focus on writing this dissertation instead working on a clinical case study. Rather than writing about the felt experience of being present it became a practical application in being so, but with a strong emphasis on the experience of someone else.

Also, as an intentioned incubation my Buddhist practice provided a systematic, detached but not "not feeling", safe and trusted means of practicing this phase. Its focus on the external cosmos, the transcendental, kindness and compassion, wisdom and archetypes leaves me feeling lighter, and generally more comfortable with my own presence. It tends to loosen the grip that my own conditioning has on my experience. My Buddhist practice creates space, not for thinking, but for experiencing, beginning with the senses. Surfing and music provide a similar response, much more so if practiced in conjunction with Buddhism.

I drive for up to two hours, four-five days per week, and this became a productive period of incubation listening to music or more increasingly being mindfully aware of body and thoughts.

As per all of the phases of this research, incubation is non-linear, and has provided relief and spaciousness in response to any of the other sometimes more intense phases, at the same time reducing inputs to allow the tacit dimension space and time to re-organise (Sela-Smith, 2002). Incubation has been inconsistent in duration stretching from moments to weeks.

It is important to note that it can be difficult to quieten my intense self-critic during these periods, feeling that I 'should' be doing something to shift this project forward, relating perhaps to a fear of what I might find out if I stand still, as expressed in Chapter One. In the spirit of pre-verbal tacit knowing I wonder also if there is a resemblance of a very painful "waiting to be found" when I stop. This is an example of how this methodology can, if attended to, shine a bright light on resistances at each phase.

#### 4. *Illumination*

The heuristic process is non-linear – during and post the regular reviews of my writing, in following intuitive clues, "drawing on energy with a tacit dimension and surrendering" (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010), metaphorical thin ropes veiled as snakes (Sela-Smith, 2002) sometimes linked together to form a map to my inner experience rather than a noose strangling it; at these times I sometimes experienced illumination.

Sela-Smith (2002) described illumination as allowing for previously dissociated aspects of the self to be integrated in moments when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of wholes and clusters of wholes that form themes inherent to the question. The illumination phase was the most personally troubling and joyfully satisfying of all the phases; to re-organise tacit knowing, to let resistances drop, to surrender is to get to know parts of myself I did not previously, these parts are sometimes 'ugly, and yet some have been the source of wonderful realisation.

Several themes have been illuminated as per the later Findings chapter. This phase occurred naturally and unplanned as I became able to recognise, interpret, experience or correct that which was previously unknown, providing I was able to maintain a receptivity to accept modifications of existing understandings (Sela-Smith, 2002); it occurred spontaneously post a period of incubation due to a thorough engagement with the data that was generated in the immersion phase.

As a method of engagement with my own journaled data, in addition to the almost constant informal engagement, I included three formal reviews. The first review included the highlighting of particular writing that moved me in relation to the research question. The second review coded the highlighted text into two separate colours representing two main but loose themes that emerged, “presence and absence”. The third stage was detailed “mark-ups” of the ideas, themes and links that emerged which began to synthesise into coherent findings.

#### 5. *Explication*

The Explication phase is about deep and thorough examining of the qualities of my experience of being present that emerged during the illumination phase. For me in this phase as demonstrated in the findings, a complete picture began to form, including new views, themes and patterns (Moustakas, 1990).

Inherent in all of these phases are the previously studied and mostly, but not always, conscious processes of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). These processes are;

- i. Identify with focus of enquiry
- ii. Self-dialogue
- iii. Tacit knowing
- iv. Intuition
- v. Indwelling
- vi. Focussing
- vii. Internal frame of reference.

This researcher’s understanding and engagement with these processes is exemplified and made explicit in the presentation of the findings in Chapter 4.

#### 6. *Creative Synthesis*

The entire findings chapter in particular has evolved, following a phase of solitude and meditation into a creative expression of my whole human experience of the study of my experience of being present. I partake in song writing, and music and lyrics have emerged to represent the previously unconscious tacit knowing and the sometimes-ineffable outcomes.

### **Duration, scope, possible pitfalls and ethical considerations**

Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry is a process that is not easy to establish clear boundaries to, with regards to duration and scope. It is a creative endeavour where surrender leads to a particular freedom to enter deeply into subjective experience, at the same time it requires rigour and thoroughness; the method outlined above provided this although there were some pitfalls. While cognitively aware, I was not prepared for the depth and completeness of the immersion and the pain of attempting to associate what has been disassociated (Sela-Smith, 2002); this awareness informed a due care and consideration in regard to myself and important relationships including fortnightly supervision meetings, my own weekly psychotherapy and regular spiritual practice.

Ethical approval was not required for this research, as I did not gather data from participants. My own experience of being or not being present with psychotherapy clients, family, colleagues and friends informed this study yet I did not write about these people specifically enough for them to be identifiable.

### **Exclusions**

Importantly this research excludes objective countertransference (Robbins, 1988) rather focusing on my subjective and total experience (Sela-Smith, 2002) of being present, in and out of the therapeutic encounter, that once better known may allow for greater recognition and discernment of countertransference responses particular to specific clients or client groups (Geller & Greenberg, 2012). This exclusion is further ratified and referred to again in the Discussion chapter that concludes this dissertation.

### **Summary of methodology and method chapter**

In this chapter I have recognised the natural theoretical and philosophical fit of the Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry methodology with how this researcher already learns and how the methodology is inherent in the topic of enquiry.

In explicating in detail, the six phases of heuristic research, I have also detailed my own research method; a method that has generated a considerable depth of engagement, insight and transformation as detailed in the Findings and Discussion chapters. Not included in this chapter was detail of the method of engagement with relevant literature, this detail opens the following chapter, "A literature "view"".

### CHAPTER 3 – “A LITERATURE “VIEW””

In this chapter I introduce and explain a method of engaging with literature that is consistent with the structure, rigour and level of personal surrender necessary for successful heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002). I then, with depth rather than breadth as an explicit intention, record my engagement with eight separate pieces of literature selected to frame for the researcher and the reader, the topic of enquiry, that being my own experience of being present.

***“A ‘view’ of the literature, not a ‘review’” (K. Tudor, personal communication, June 2018)***

As per Sela-Smith’s (2002) interpretation of the heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990), the literature engaged with in this chapter is not exhaustive but that which has evoked a personal response, a softening and surrendering (Sela-Smith, 2002) to what has now become an unavoidable question regarding the ineffable quality (Pemberton, 1977; Stern, 2004) of my own experience of being present.

As I have engaged with the literature, a number of articles and books (Stucky, 2001; Tannen & Daniels, 2010; Geller & Greenberg, 2012), particularly over the last thirty years, have introduced the notion that presence, and being present, is an essential yet under researched phenomena. My initial findings confirmed as much but upon further exploration and consideration, the capacity for and experience of being present perhaps underpins much of our work as psychotherapists and clients, and when open to this broader understanding the amount of literature is overwhelming.

Several articles and books were sourced searching the Psychcentral database. Search terms included;

psychotherapy AND ‘therapeutic presence’

psychotherap\* AND ‘therap\* presence’

‘psychotherap\* presence’

106 search results were returned which when duplication and irrelevant results were deleted, reduced to 54 results. Although, as explained further in this chapter, the experience of being present manifests in many parts of life, I am conducting this research in a psychotherapeutic context, thus the inclusion of a reference to ‘psychotherapy’ in the search terms. The concept of presence is trans-theoretical (Geller & Greenberg, 2012)

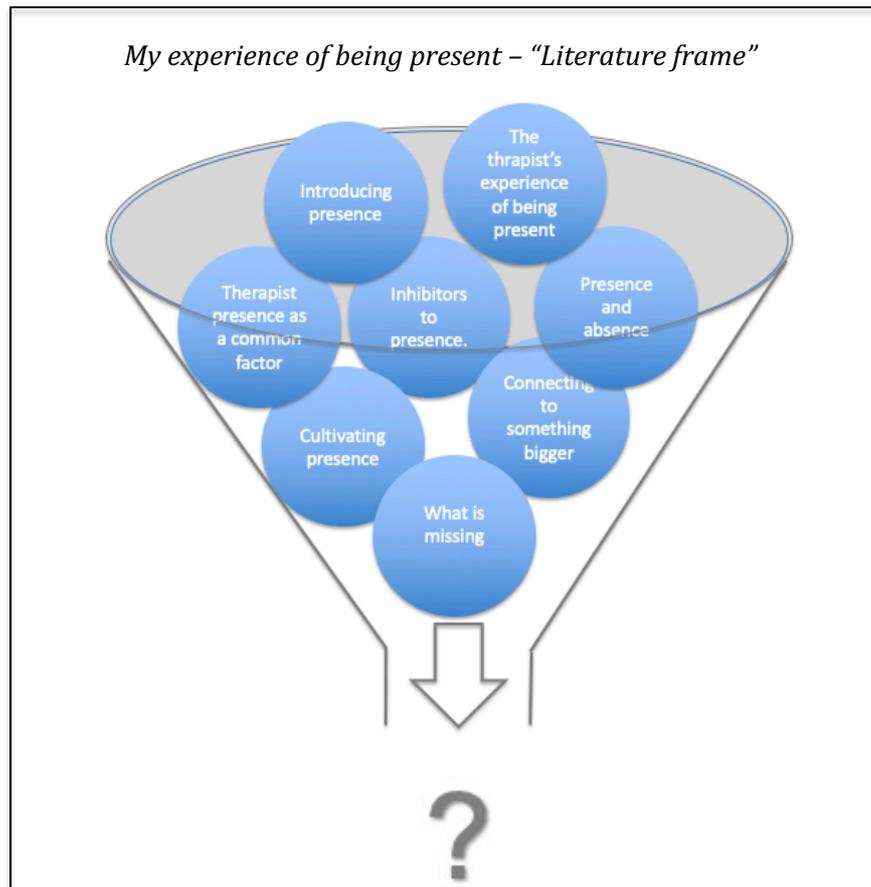
and thus whilst relevant literature has been accessed predominantly from psychotherapeutic sources, some other disciplines such as nursing, art therapy and counselling have been referenced within the literature.

The context and initial motivation for this research is my challenge, as a beginning psychotherapist, to remain present to the deepest emotional pain of my clients; this is also the gap in the literature where the subjective experience of presence for beginning therapists seems under explored with only one result from the Psychcentral search (McCollum & Gehart, 2010) returned.

Literature has also been personally sourced from colleagues, supervisors, teachers, Buddhist Sangha and Google searches. The heuristic process has facilitated openness to 'whatever has crossed my desk' and this is difficult to separate from the more systematic search process.

Ultimately, the literature engaged with in this chapter, as well as been personally moving, has been selected to frame, inform and stimulate the heuristic process of a beginning therapist, learning about my own process of being present. Much like the heuristic process itself, designed to engender some scientific method to subjective experience, this framing has a structured and systematic underpinning allowing for the subjective, and for me, unstructured process of learning.

The following diagram summarises the framing process, the sub-headings are key considerations of the literature examined and how the reading and writing contributes something that cannot be totally known to the heuristic process.



*Figure 1: “My experience of being present “Literature frame”*

In the sourcing and reviewing of the literature I have continued to be immersed in the heuristic process of self-search, self-dialogue and self-discovery; so the literature rather than being compared and contrasted, reviewed and synthesized has presented itself to the consciousness of me, the investigator, as perception, sense, intuition or knowledge (M. Solomon, personal communication, April 2018) and representing an invitation for further elucidation, done so in both the *Critique* and *Reflection* section of each piece of literature examined.

Eight articles/chapters were chosen for the research framing process; each are reviewed under a heading which summarizes the relevant content. The headings are listed below and provide a top-level view of how this literature framed the research:

- An introduction to being present with the emotions of clients
- Presence as a common factor in the success of psychotherapy
- Therapists’ experience of presence
- Cultivating capacity for being present for beginning therapists

- Considering presence from a Buddhist psychotherapy perspective
- What of non-presence?
- Presence versus attention
- The power of presence

As will be explicated in the Findings and Discussion chapters the depth attained in treating the literature this way added significantly to informing the data gathered.

There has been other literature referenced in this dissertation but not engaged with to the depth attained in this chapter. This literature including most predominantly, Pemberton (1977), Daniel Stern (2004), Turpin, (2014) and Anālayo (2015) has provided background knowledge in order to confidently engage with the topic.

**1. *An introduction to being present with the emotions of clients:***

Madonna, J. (Ed.). (2016). *Emotional presence in psychoanalysis: theory and clinical applications*. Retrieved from <http://ebookcentral.proquest>.

*Background*

Madonna's writing connects to the heart of my topic and thus serves as an introduction to other literature I have utilised to frame this research.

He traces the evolution of psychoanalysis and being present; it proceeds into the inter-subjective and relational turns where he begins referencing those who advocate the inevitable emotional involvement of the analyst.

Madonna writes of the analyst's ability to "sense, think and feel the experience of the patient" (p. 1). He adds to this the dynamic of the person with which one is present, and how this may affect the level of presence i.e. how physically, intellectually, emotionally close one may be.

An idea emerged in his clinical case studies where he references his relationship with three in-session 'refuges' (my word) from fear; for him these were theory, breathing and praying, perhaps allowing him to regain his presence.

Madonna references in several ways the notion that the analyst's accepting presence whilst receiving and holding the patients' omnipotent sense of destructive power allows the patients to discharge in language. He accepts, as per my own experience, the analyst's

subjective propensities can be debilitating, and that premature, thus pre-emptive, therapeutic responses are an expressed resistance to allowing the patients' "objective inductions to grow within" (p. 4).

#### *Critiquing Madonna*

Madonna, for me, loses clarity as he proceeds into the inter-subjective and relational turns where he begins referencing those who advocate the inevitable emotional involvement of the analyst, and leads to analyst disclosure as an element of being present; technique, specific to the analyst and patient, are presented via examples that perhaps can only be examples and not universal learning; they are in this way perhaps empowering in themselves.

In reflecting on a patient encounter Madonna seems overly justifying in the portrayal of his attempts to gain closeness with a lonely patient via his own disclosure. To me his disclosure is at risk of being reactionary and premature as it may bear a relationship to the patient's unconscious they are both yet to know – perhaps also a symptom of my own experience of losing presence with a client.

#### *Reflections on Madonna*

My reflections can be summarized in three questions; What of partial presence? What of the analyst's resistance? How to turn towards these responses, to surrender and learn? Nevertheless, Madonna's clinical example of an analyst learning, through their own inability to 'stay with' a schizophrenic patient, is inspiring.

On reflection, I remain somewhat daunted by the challenge of being present as a "good mother" would, as Madonna refers to, without having had the consistent experience of one. Mitigating this concern for me, Madonna introduces the idea of attitude in relation to therapeutic presence and I find this refreshing; attitude is perhaps something that can be practiced and improved, it is a position, perhaps a point of safety. It raises the question for me, how do self-determination and surrender co-exist? This question is further explored in the findings of this research.

## **2. Presence as a common factor in the success of psychotherapy**

Tina Tannen & M. Harry Daniels (2010) Counsellor presence: bridging the gap between wisdom and new knowledge, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 38(1), 1-15, doi: 10.1080/03069880903408661

### *Background*

Tannen and Daniels define presence as the counsellor's way of being with a client, as distinguished from the application of technique, and review qualitative and quantitative research on factors leading to relationship, pointing to the lack of dedicated research on presence. They point out that recycling studies leaves a "poverty of language" (p. 8) and a "false sense of precision" (p. 8.) They conclude from their findings that the therapeutic relationship is critical for positive therapeutic outcomes, and that particular therapist qualities which amount to presence, are a common factor contributing to therapeutic relationship.

The Buddhist notion of "not knowing" is introduced by Tannen and Daniels and how this may allow for "unconditional presence". This writer's knowledge of Buddhism and in particular the notion of enlightenment being an unconditioned state points to the impossibility of "perfect presence"; this is supported when Tannen and Daniels introduce the idea, informed by medical literature, that being present maybe a continuum rather than dichotomous. This is congruent with another argument from Tannen and Daniels who point to previous studies of therapeutic relationship being "atomistic rather than holistic" and which ignore complex phenomena like "presence fragmenting" (p.9), thus perhaps distorting "the entire story" (p. 9) by just examining the small pieces.

Tannen & Daniels introduce the therapist's comfort with ambiguity as allowing for presence and refer to qualities such as "open to change" (p. 3) and refer to Jennings et al. (2003) who introduce therapists' paradoxical characteristics such as "drive to mastery *and* never a sense of having fully arrived", "ability to be deeply present with another *and* often preferring solitude", and "great at giving of self *and* nurturing of self" (Jennings et al. 2003, p 65, italics in the original).

An irony becomes clear to Tannen and Daniels that the meta-analyses used to inform the bulk of the assertions about presence, provide breadth but not depth to the moment by moment personal encounter, and that these type of process phenomena fall outside the linear, predictable world that can be known objectively, as per the positivist science paradigm.

### *Critique of Tannen & Daniels*

Tannen and Daniels critique the unexplained discrepancy between counsellor and client perceptions of what makes up a therapeutic relationship. They explain that it is client ratings of relationships that tend to predict outcomes; nevertheless, as the discrepancies have yet to be explained they call into question all existing models of measuring relationship; in response I contest that if I do not know my own experience of being present the client may never know.

The authors are perhaps rather positivist themselves in their outlook despite their critique of such a paradigm. For example, they restrict further studies of presence in the future to three possible categories, (i) a conceptual framework that possibly moves towards a common language, (ii) investigations into the counsellor's (therapist's) experience of presence and (iii) examinations of the therapeutic value of presence from the perspective of both client and counsellor (p. 11). I find especially the idea of a common language most restrictive and am in fact stimulated into presence by the uncommon language of poetry and song.

### *My reflections on Tannen & Daniels*

My research has, at times, felt somewhat self-indulgent as a sample of only one therapist's experience of presence; this unease could perhaps be linked to the positivist social and cultural paradigm Tannen and Daniels refer to. i.e. those best able to rationalise their argument hold power, so there is something excessively vulnerable in what I am doing.

When I surrender to this process and the "impossibility of objectivity" (p. 10) this makes room for my constructed understanding of the phenomena. Thus, this article is rather affirming, if somewhat contradictory with its own sometimes positivist leanings, despite its critique of such a paradigm. Perhaps all this illustrates is the challenge that such ineffable, and perhaps even transcendent states, present for researchers.

Several points at the end maybe useful in informing the discussion chapter including Tannen and Daniels ideas on modifying teaching to accommodate more holistic learning experiences that focus on the whole person, counsellor and client alike, and the consideration of various factors in selecting counsellors for training which may better indicate talent or propensity for being present.

### **3. Therapists' experience of presence**

Geller, S. M., & Greenberg, L. S. (2011). Therapeutic presence: Therapists' experience of presence in the therapeutic encounter. *Person Centred & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 1(1-2), 71-86. doi: 10.1080/14770757.2002.9688279

#### *Background:*

Geller and Greenberg, in the context of Carl Rogers (1980, p. 129) reference the healing properties of presence, introduce the gift of therapeutic presence which “allows space for the numinous and spiritual dimension to emerge” (p. 73), “a belief we are not isolated and part of something larger” (p. 73).

The purpose of their qualitative study, where they interviewed seven expert and experienced therapists mostly from the humanistic/experiential traditions, already identified as proponents of presence, was to understand the qualities of presence in the therapeutic encounter.

The meanings of the transcribed interviews were condensed and categorised qualitatively into brief statements of presence and sensed checked by three other expert therapists.

Geller & Greenberg's findings, as represented in Figure 2 below, were presented as “A Model of Therapeutic Presence” (p. 76) in three domains;

- (i) Preparing the ground for presence where both aspects of the therapists' lives and their pre-session routines were examined.
- (ii) The process that the therapists engage in with regards to being present i.e. what they do, including receptivity, inwardly attending and extending and contact.
- (iii) The actual in session experience of presence itself i.e. what presence feels like under the headings of immersion, expansion, grounding and being with the client.

<i>Preparing the Ground for Presence</i>	<i>Process of Presence</i>	<i>Experiencing Presence</i>
<p><b>Pre-session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Intention for presence</li> <li>· Clearing a space</li> <li>· Putting aside self-concerns</li> <li>· Bracketing (theories, preconceptions, therapy plans)</li> <li>· Attitude of openness, acceptance, interest and non-judgment</li> </ul> <p><b>In Life</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Philosophical commitment to presence</li> <li>· Personal Growth</li> <li>· Practicing presence in own life</li> <li>· Meditation</li> <li>· Ongoing care for self and own needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Receptivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Open, accepting, allowing</li> <li>· Sensory/bodily receptivity</li> <li>· Listening with the third ear</li> <li>· Extrasensory perception/communication</li> </ul> <p><b>Inwardly Attending</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Self as instrument</li> <li>· Increased spontaneity/creativity</li> <li>· Trust</li> <li>· Authenticity/congruence</li> <li>· Returning to the present moment</li> </ul> <p><b>Extending and Contact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Accessible</li> <li>· Meeting</li> <li>· Transparency/congruence</li> <li>· Intuitive responding</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immersion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Absorption</li> <li>· Experiencing deeply with non-attachment</li> <li>· Present-centered (intimacy with moment)</li> <li>· Aware, alert, focused</li> </ul> <p><b>Expansion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Timelessness</li> <li>· Energy and flow</li> <li>· Inner spaciousness</li> <li>· Enhanced awareness, sensation and perception</li> <li>· Enhanced quality of thought and emotional experiencing</li> </ul> <p><b>Grounding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Centered, steady, grounded</li> <li>· Inclusion</li> <li>· Trust and ease</li> </ul> <p><b>Being With and For the Client</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Intention for client's healing</li> <li>· Awe, respect, love</li> <li>· Lack of self-conscious awareness</li> </ul>

Figure 2: "A Model of Therapist' Presence in the Therapeutic Relationship" (p. 76)

### *Critique of Geller and Greenberg*

The individual subjective experiences of the therapists interviewed were barely communicated in this research, only the aggregated themes. This is useful in building a model of presence as per their goal but provides little to 'connect' with for this reader in a felt sense, although all of the themes presented are experienced as relevant.

There was no continuum of 'non-present to present' put forth in this article, nor any mention of what it felt like to 'not be present', which could give the false impression that the therapists interviewed are somewhat enlightened beings. This is also perhaps a critique of my training which seemed to be working to the philosophy 'if you do all of these things e.g. your own therapy, Experiential Training group, engage in reflexivity etc, being able to be present with the client will ensue.' This is not my experience and will be examined further in the Findings and Discussion chapters.

### *Reflections on Geller and Greenberg*

The process of presence as identified by Geller and Greenberg as being an 'all of life' activity is poignant to me and particularly relevant for my research. The noticing of presence and absence, and being present with many different emotional situations, the most challenging perhaps being my own family and the various transferences that ensue, is a practice ground for this therapist in training.

Their description of the in-session experience of being present, to me, 'fills a gap' in the work of Daniel Stern (2004) where the present moment in psychotherapy is prioritised, but the therapist's experience within that not described in the detail Geller and Greenberg do.

Geller and Greenberg's model of presence is succinct and provides for me the most suitable mirror I have found to reflect my own experiences of presence and thus has the potential to become integral to both the method and findings of my research.

#### ***4. Cultivating capacity for being present for beginning therapists***

McCollum, E. E., & Gehart, D. R. (2010). Using mindfulness meditation to teach beginning therapists therapeutic presence: A qualitative study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(3), 347–360, doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2010.00214

##### *Background*

McCollum and Gehart teach marital and family therapy at Master's level and used thematic analysis to determine the effects of daily meditation practice on thirteen of their students' capacity for presence in the therapeutic encounter.

Thirteen students, new to clinical rotations, were encountering anxiety and other challenges common to beginning therapists. They recorded in daily journals both negative and positive outcomes of their experience of mindfulness practice and training on their clinical practice.

Four themes and several sub-themes were identified once the student's data was analysed:

- (i) Being present in their sessions: Mindfulness practice helped them be present in sessions which included a number of dimensions; attending to their inner experience, being aware of what was happening with clients and bringing these together in interactions.

- (ii) Effects of meditation: Including being generally calmer, being able to manage inner chatter, slowing down in session and better managing boundaries and emotional responses between sessions.
- (iii) Shift in mode: Students became more comfortable in 'being mode' and compared to 'doing' mode and began to practice shifting between these modes.
- (iv) Compassion and acceptance: Students experienced increases in compassion and acceptance toward self and toward their clients as well as a fresh sense of "shared humanity" (p. 351)

#### *Reflections on McCollum and Gehart*

This article resonated in a unique way compared with all the other literature I have reviewed in detail; as well as the broad themes identified closely resembling my own experience of returning to my mindfulness practice as per "the mysterious tonic" in Chapter 1, there were many direct quotes from beginning therapist's in relation to their own clinical practice. One example stood out where a beginning therapist reported a fresh capacity to remain present with intense or difficult material;

"All of his angst was filling me up. He was projecting everything on to me, and I was soaking it up like a sponge, and not by choice! I could feel my insides constricting and my own throat getting dry. I felt as if I had "touched a nerve" inadvertently, and he felt really exposed by my observation. Like the last time something similar happened, I steeled myself by breathing and remaining focused. Despite the high level of anxiety in the room, I felt confident in a way I didn't expect; it was as if my memory of the last similar encounter rushed up into my consciousness and there I was, all over again, just breathing, maintaining eye contact and a firm position of body language, and a measured, calm voice. The client began to settle down a little, and slumped back onto the couch." (p. 353)

#### *Critique of McCollum and Gehart*

In my experience of meditation there can be difficulties and at times negative consequences. This is why experienced teachers, especially in psychotherapeutic settings, will often open meditation sessions with explicit caution. It is somewhat surprising to me that no negative outcomes of meditation were presented. In this study the teachers of the students who participated were also the researchers; this may have influenced the findings excessive positivity.

## ***5. Considering presence from a Buddhist psychotherapy perspective***

Epstein, M. (1995). Thoughts without a thinker. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 82(3),391-406.

### *Background*

Epstein discusses some common ideas of Buddhism and psychoanalysis, particularly that it is the identification and fascination with an illusionary ego (in psychoanalytic terms narcissism) that if we give ourselves over to, can appear as something solid and ideal. He points out the Buddha teaches us that suffering is inevitable unless we wake up and choose to know the vanity of our cares, ambitions and pains.

Epstein states that meditation, in fact all of the Buddha's teaching, rather than reifying these illusions sets to shine a kind and accepting light on these inevitable imperfections.

"the cause of his fright lies in his error, his ignorance, his illusion. If the true nature of the rope is recognised, his tranquillity of mind will come back to him; he will feel relieved; he will be joyful and happy" (p. 395).

Epstein highlights the dilemma that is the inherent impossibility of deciphering who we are because of the indivisibility of subject and object and that the Buddha's way of resolving this is to encourage "not knowing", paying no attention to the illusory thoughts that may occur; Epstein quotes Zen and suggests to only "doubt more and more deeply" (p. 399). Doubt then becomes mystical - the Buddha would not even talk about eternalism, infinite or finite, life after death or the difference, if there was one, between a body and a soul. I am amazed what tensions he could hold, I can be fidgety if the client 'cannot get out of his bedroom to go to work!'

He links the Buddha's notion that two types of craving cause suffering; craving for sense pleasure and craving for existence/non-existence. He says the Buddha's teaching is essentially an attempt to establish "Freud's reality principle" with regards to the "appearing self" (p. 401).

Epstein introduces the Buddha's idea of the "middle way", just as western psychologists have recognised a falseness in either extremes of a longing for existence or non-existence. He does not however deny a sense of self, but counselled, as per his references to Rank (1926), against self as a static entity.

### *Inhibiting Presence*

Epstein compares the Buddha's notion of suffering as an inevitable truth and Freud's notion of the inevitability of suffering bought about by the child's untenable sexual desire and/or their helplessness and dependence, and the permanent scar that results in a felt sense of inferiority.

Epstein refers to Reich (1949) and the tension, the hardening that detracts from affective contact should this sexual dissatisfaction concretize and Rank (1926) who described how the ego seeks to unburden itself by making use of another, and when a person because of fear, insecurity or confusion cannot love they become "imprisoned by individuality" (p. 397) Rank (1926) suggests our suffering is rooted in a kind of "inevitable separation anxiety" (p. 124) rather than a process of separation and union. The fear we have in birth becomes a fear in life – Epstein suggests that Narcissus is trying to screen out such fears. He references Winnicott (1965) and the coherence that a 'false self' can provide if such fears have not been processed sufficiently in early object relations, the child living as if there is no Mother. Dukkha (Buddhist notion of suffering) for Winnicott is permanent isolation (non-presence).

All these foundational psychoanalytic theorists Epstein says refer to an unreachable original state of perfection that our identities coalesce around; understanding these notions has become critical in my understanding of what inhibits my own presence as presented in the findings of this report.

### *Critique of Epstein*

I find it hard to critique Epstein because he seems to have a determined openness; he is not trying to find the congruent parts, they are just there. One is never better than the other – perhaps this is a critique – he is not pointing to any shortfalls of either way. If he did, he would perhaps close down the doubt that all the protagonists are advocating.

### *Reflections on Epstein*

The congruent and seemingly unbiased integration of two worldviews provides solid ground on which to stand and also takes away the need for any solid ground.

In reading Epstein, the inevitable process of being a human present in the world becomes acceptable – perhaps it is this wisdom, similar wisdom to Tangi Hepi in a paper reviewed

subsequently, that allows for presence, essentially the release of holding on to an ideal of me, and an ideal to which anyone else should aspire. As I write this the beauty in the imperfection arises, from both inside me and out, and I get a taste of “I could now see anything, and it would not shake me from this belief”. Unshaken in this belief means in no way would I be unshaken, rather perhaps comfortable to shake.

An abiding sense of inferiority is no help for the analyst. This relates to a concept of ‘needlessness’, that inspired by my own therapist, is perhaps a core component of being fully present with another and can describe my own experience of being present.

### **6. What of non-presence?**

Peltz, R. (1998). The dialectic of presence and absence: Impasses and the retrieval of meaning states. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. 8(3),385-409.

#### *Background*

Peltz situates psychoanalysis as a meaning making relationship dependent on the capacity of the analyst, patient or both, to contain the anxieties present within the dialectic of absence and presence. I have become interested in how the author views impasses in the therapeutic relationship as breakdowns “in which the presence and absence are polarised and the ability to constitute presence out of absence is lost” (p. 385).

Peltz speaks to the developmental capacity for presence; “The psychic negotiation of the actual comings and goings of the primary objects of infancy and the critical impressions that are associated with these events will determine the extent to which we are available for movement and psychological creativity or are constricted by a stagnant, two-dimensional internal world.” (p. 388). She relates presence to a Kleinian metaphorical good breast, to absolute immediacy and to blissful unity. Absence she relates to Bion’s (1962) “no breast experience – all that is fearful, frustrating dreadful and unknown”.

She references Winnicott (1968) and illustrates the above with the example of a child who is able to play after her mother has left and is able to locate her presence; the play objects contain in their presence the mother’s absence. The same child left for too long or whose mother was emotionally absent would lose relationship with the mother while she was not there and “presence and absence become polarized into the idealisation of pure presence and the horror of pure absence” (p. 389). Peltz believes that when both the therapist and the client experience this polarization and cannot maintain the tension of

the dialect of presence and absence, a “coercive realm of non-meaning” (p. 387) can arise, if maintained leading to impasses characterized by uncontained anxieties and projective identifications (p. 387).

Peltz also maintains that in therapy a new negotiation of absence and presence is possible by offering a “new presence” (p. 396); and the hope that comes with it, often followed quickly by the dread associated with the consequent new absence inevitable in the dialect. She believes that new meaning can only emerge on the capacity of both analyst and client to sustain “the simultaneous existence of being both present and absent to each other” (p. 396) and that if achieved a new space is revealed where freedom can be embraced (p. 407).

#### *Critique of Peltz*

Peltz seems to situate the entire therapeutic encounter against the backdrop of the dialect of presence and absence, whilst useful for this research perhaps this has created “an idealisation of pure presence” of the topic for this writer. i.e. it is perhaps too much presence.

#### *Reflections on Peltz*

This article represents for me knowing what it is like to bear the presence or absence of any relationship, even with ones-self, at any point of life in or outside of the therapeutic encounter and it stimulated an integrating light bulb moment. Absence and presence as a developmental dynamic described by Peltz and summarised above has affected a considerable portion of my life in the form of an almost complex PTSD (Walker, 2014) response; where early-life maternal absence resembled, stimulates a reflex similar to that described by my clinical supervisor and recounted in Chapter 1.

My insight is the idea of staying present whilst with the absence and presence dialectic as I have illustrated in the simple diagram below.



*Figure 3: “Being present with Presence and Absence”*

As detailed in the findings of this report, immersing myself in the topic of presence initially swamped me in absence. i.e. I struggled to stay present as the trauma of absence

seemed everywhere; to add this extra level of discernment where it is possible to consider being present whilst with even extreme absence (and presence) is a revelation. The benefits of meditation and practicing this “being present” even with ones-self, now make more sense to me.

### **7. Presence versus attention**

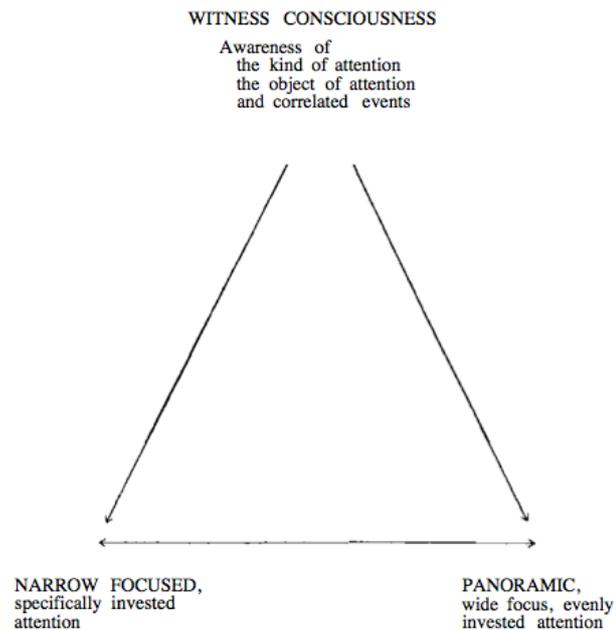
Speeth, K. R., (1982). On psychotherapeutic attention. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 14(2), 141-160.

*“The typical psychotherapist enters private practice feeling ethically committed to giving attention to each client, to establishing and maintaining rapport, and to sustaining sensitive contact regardless of subject matter, emotional tone, or context. Without further training, such requirements are about as easy to follow as the exoteric “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (p. 141).*

#### *Background*

Speeth attests that because therapists work in the “realm of the vague and ephemeral” (p. 142) they must apply themselves to the “exacting art of paying attention” (p. 142). Her description of “paying attention” closely resembles the experience of “being present” as per definitions previously explicated in Chapter One.

She specifies a perceived dearth in training in this area but then, unlike other writers provides detailed descriptions of how one could pay attention (be present). Meditation training as well as the therapist’s own therapy are portrayed as cultivators of the therapist’s ability to pay attention. She then breaks down psychotherapeutic attention into raw sensory data and the division of therapeutic attention in terms of object, i.e. “inside and outside via the development of what the Sufi’s call a “special organ of perception”” (p. 143). She also breaks down the type of focus we might have when being present; narrow focus or panoramic focus and a witnessing of that focus as per the following figure (p. 144);



*Figure 4: "The division of therapeutic attention in terms of focus" (p.144)*

Speeth identifies a fluctuation that can occur, "inside to outside, wide to narrow" (p. 144) and likens this process to various typology of meditation techniques taught in different schools of Buddhism and to Freud's (1912) notion of free-floating attention.

Speeth introduces the term, and the benefits and dangers, of "grokking" where the therapist via identification temporarily matches the inner experience of the other, a place where "empathy can be built" (p. 150), but also a place where one can lose the sense of one's self in an experience of non-presence.

#### *Critique of Speeth*

Speeth makes no mention of bodily sensations despite the attention she pays to the therapist attending fully or "witnessing" their own experience; this seems contrary to my understanding of current counter-transference and eastern meditation literature. Where in the physiology of the therapist does the panoramic versus concentrated attention that is described in the article 'sit' in this therapist? The acknowledgement and attestation of such sensations would perhaps take the reader out of just their heads and into a body of information it seems Speeth would appreciate, given her subscription to the aforementioned ideas.

### *Reflections on Speeth*

In the confluence of east and west Speeth clearly states something I have intuited but not been able to express and thus I found the teachings integrative and somewhat allowing. In particular her description of a fluctuating process of being present, including the inevitability and temporary usefulness of identifications (which I have perhaps resisted as an inhibitor of presence) comes from a place of the therapist accepting as well as paying attention to ones-self. Intentionally working with the inevitability of non-presence, a regular and intentional coming back to being present via a technique she calls “self-remembering”(p. 149), as per meditation, sits well with my own experience and contains a useful irony for me; that when we can remember ones-self, the self of the therapist somewhat dissolves as we regain our full awareness of the other.

### **8. The power of presence**

Denton, E. (2017). The Power of presence: A journey with Tangi Hepi. *Gestalt Journal of Australia & New Zealand*, 14(1), 59-76.

#### *Background*

Tangi Hepi was a successful and respected drug and alcohol counsellor who counselled to a traditional Māori model learnt from his Kuia (grandmother). Denton when exploring reasons for Hepi’s effectiveness found that it was his personal qualities, particularly his powerful presence, that arose.

The paper opens with reference to Hepi’s whakapapa or ancestry, immediately this illuminates a lack of connection with my own. How does one be truly present if you do not know where you are from? In Māori culture one’s whakapapa can be traced back to the gods papatuanuku and tane, the earth mother and father; this sense of connection to all that has come before, in my mind invokes a particular type of presence; on a more rational level it suggests a connection with whoever you are with as they will also be descendant of the same universal founders.

This universal model was applied as he got his clients to trace their lives back, recording significant milestones each year, he then applied a metaphor of a developing seed and the influences of their environments on this developing seed. From the dawn of the universe to the intricate details of his clients lives Hepi appeared to have a solid place to stand. Hepi’s beliefs were a living spiritual and intellectual map of living; they were brought alive with pictures and diagrams that did not provide an answer, but an illustration of a universal process.

His beliefs, his system of living, not just practicing counselling, allowed for an awareness of infinite inputs and the promotion of a wondering and welcoming curiosity from therapist and client in response. In my data capture I will attempt to begin to focus on, be aware of and open to these elements, with a view to process and not answers.

Hepi had a method for being present but not a theory. Denton quotes Yalom (1980)

If you want patients to think you know what you're doing be an active, vigorous structuring guide. However, be prepared to accept that such a strategy gets in the way of the growth of the patient and probably impedes responsibility assumption. (p. 267-268)

At the end of her paper Denton discusses affect. When we can regulate affect, as per Hepi, we are adaptive, engaged, authentic and available for interpersonal play and exploration. This strikes a bone; perhaps the reactivity I battle with in the clinical training is in fact an inability to regulate affect. How when dis-regulated "we do not feel safe, our sense of agency and well-being is diminished, as is our availability for inter-subjective relating. We are detached from self-experience and from experiencing others. Our sense of reality is off" (p. 71).

#### *Qualities of Presence*

Hepi's presence was for Denton expansive, emitting radiance of something "larger than", solid and reliable; a quality of absorption also emanated, "a black hole for negativity and fear" (p. 64), and a sanctuary; a place where one could safely cry and feel the pain of existence. "He had a knack of opening the door to another reality", a person who was very grounded – physically and psychologically. His totally holistic view gave him a "quiet confidence" (p. 65), Denton compares this to Roger's congruence (without a reference), but to me Hepi's mystical quality adds a layer to this as exemplified in the following quotes:

"He sat there like a rock, immovable, solid, an anchor point. Just as the magic might also be in the silence, it might also be in the stillness" (p. 68).

"The old way was softer more melodic, and it carried with it a feeling of the ancestors, - the concept of things that are true things that are honest to the bone and things that are tapu, conveying a significance beyond the words" (p. 68).

### *Critique of Denton*

This is Tangi Hepi's way. Its beauty and apparent efficacy may well be in its universal epistemology and application, but it is his subjective response to his unique conditioning; how could one learn to be present his way?

Yes, he had a strong spiritual connection, something that I aspire to as I have recognised its holding nature, one that allows me to be present, but I have no kuia whose wisdom in which to bathe. I am learning spirituality, a faith that there is plenty we do not know, but how will I go without ever having an attentive parent to ease my anxiety under pressure?

### *Reflections on Denton:*

This is a profound paper bedded in the experience of being with someone with a powerful presence, a trained therapist and researcher whose heart opened to that of the research subject.

This "other reality" (p. 64) described by Denton and experienced with Hepi seems aligned to an experience, especially early in my own psychotherapy treatment, of coming out of therapy; how could the sky be bluer, the birds singing clearer and more beautiful after crying about something I did not quite understand. Perhaps being present is contagious, is this all we are trying to do with our clients? This could have been Denton's experience with Hepi.

Is being present with another being comfortable being in motion, in process? Hepi seemed comfortable with this, which is paradoxical with a supposed stillness I had unconsciously formulated. The provisional title of this dissertation was "still here" a contrary thought is "still moving", or "flowing here". Denton agrees, "when all of the information flowing from the therapist is in harmony it gives rise to a presence that engenders trust" (p. 67).

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have selected literature to engage with deeply, in both a systematic and organic way, in order to frame the research of my experience of being present. The literature has been critiqued and reflected upon whilst I have been simultaneously immersed in Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry. As will become obvious in the following Findings and Discussion chapters this method of "viewing" the literature has generated depth and informed considerably the phenomenological aspects of this research.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS - "ATTENDING TO ABSENCE"**

### ***THE WEIGHT OF ABSENCE***

Starting this chapter has been difficult until an illumination following a coffee infused, somewhat joyful, drop-off of my 12-year-old child to school; a presence then an absence, poignant and not painful, to engage with and to create from.

Instead of my default self-critic, I feel compassion for myself as to why I could not recommence writing, why I struggled to revisit, focus on, and dwell with ten months of data; the illumination being the impossible challenge of being present with the weight, the pain, the anticipated annihilation of every absence I have ever felt. But this heuristic process, after again bringing forth a resistance that felt like it would forever harden to diamond, has for the time being, softened, not to mush, but to an endo-skeletoned (Rey, 1986), self-supporting, mobile, hard and soft, sensing, emoting, living and dying, physical and spiritual form, a human form; a form inevitably suffering, but not actually under threat, that can write of my own experience of being present (absent).

In this chapter I present the findings of this Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry. Absence and/or non-presence is introduced in detail as an inevitable companion to presence and this informs the structure of the chapter. Throughout the chapter I have often used one example of phenomenology, a depiction, to introduce a theme and then I detail and interpret an illumination, a transformation and sometimes a creative synthesis and not always in this order. I finish the chapter with two transformational findings that apply directly to my burgeoning practice of psychotherapy.

### ***Being present with absence***

The presence of absence, or the increasingly conscious expectation or momentary perception of absence, since making the decision to commit to a dissertation on my experience of being present has been a surprising and dominant finding; in fact, the decision to focus on my experience of being present immediately shone a new and agonising spotlight on even the smallest absences. This first-time receptivity to absence feels like a calibration process, as to what is significant, what is not, what is real and what is imagined, what are the actual consequences and what are the complex traumatic and increasingly conscious imaginations (Walker, 2014) of a younger me. This section of my findings chapter will focus on my experience of the challenge of being present with absence.

### ***Absence is everywhere***

*"If you think your enlightened go spend a week with your family"*

*Ram Das*

Family life for me has been a cacophony of transferences and emotional flashbacks (Walker, 2014); the immersion in this heuristic process revealing a fog of past and present, where toying with bringing my undefended present self has revealed an aloneness available in every sentence of an avoidant partner (mother). This experience of being present has at times been excruciating and at times illuminating; a secondary question has emerged, one I have at times attempted to avoid but whose only lucid response is surrender.

*"If my mother was emotionally absent how can I possibly be present?"*

*Personal journal, 26 June 2018*

The daunting task of the presence 'required' as a psychotherapist and indeed a parent and partner are elucidated in this extra question, and the degree of saturation in the research topic, initially surprising, now seems inevitable.

I refer to Epstein (2010) who in a spoken interview references Winnicott, "The "good-enough" mother does not need to be taught, but intuitively knows her task, in relation to her child's anger: to simply survive, not to retaliate or abandon, but simply to survive". I respect Epstein, my response though a subjective, "how"?

In my work as a trainee psychotherapist, clients losing presence, or their narratives of absence, can often be a dominant theme and my reactions can be dyadic i.e. "I'm here, I'm not here". Inherent in the methodology, this dissertation is dedicated to a creative response and at the same time it seems necessary to elucidate these 'reactive' responses, to know them, to embrace them as conditioned data in order to be able to monitor and know my experience of, my process of, being present (absent). Below I have used one example of the phenomenology to set the scene for four themes that have arisen in response to absence, in the context of my question; subsequent illuminations follow;

### ***Conditioned responses to absence***

#### ***1. "Moulding"***

During the immersion phase of this research I disagreed with my mother's enablement of my co-dependent older brother and experienced for the first time in as long as I can

remember a short dose of her unbridled wrath. I recorded my rage filled response and emphatic aloneness; in contrast a lifetime of what I have now called “moulding” became evident.

As a baby my mother was depressed, for the first time grieving her own mother’s death in the fresh absence of a supportive mother-in-law. My brother, one year older, was “born angry”, an ‘accidental’ third I was “quiet and content”.

I wonder now about what age one is capable of conforming, of working things out so as to keep mother happy, not just shutting off but in redesigning my expression to fit with the power around me. This, for most of my life, has felt, or can feel like the real me, such is the depth of the conditioning. My creative faculty useful in placating, even impressing power, and capable of propelling my previous career in corporate communications.

The illumination came while driving on back country roads, in staying present with what seems like the “real”, with my rage and loneliness, I began to “dream” my experience. A plasticine mould came to mind, of how I can fit around the face of power, matching and meeting the smallest expression and then producing a polished and painted replica, shiny and new so the moulded one, and the replicator, can immediately feel better about themselves in this reconstituted and palatable impression of reality. But nothing is addressed, only painted over, and in the process although initially intoxicated, I become absent, disappearing into the form of the other. How alluring this process is, the present moment snatched and contrived so all can feel better, and how one can then worship this “made-up” version. It is a strategy designed to allure, so prevalent, it is disturbing to discover.

The capacity to dream this scene (images of plasticine and polished moulds), rather than participate in it, is an experience of being present that I did not anticipate, a developmental task I now experientially grasp and the capacity and awareness of it a transformation resulting from this heuristic process.

Moulding as I have described seems driven by a short-term fix, a phobic and then manic/obsessive response to the psychological pain of myself or the other, and I believe in my case, pain that mostly belongs to history. To “dream” and not feel compelled to “mould” was an experience that seemed like it happened outside of me, for a few moments in a transcendental realm. Unlike unconsciously participating in the moulding

process, which seems like a race, with the finish line non-feeling, dreaming of the moulding as a process was not completed seeking a resolution. Instead learning and freedom became an outcome on that backroad drive that had the summer sky bluer and the notes from the car stereo clearer, as grief and compassion became possible.

Nearing the end of this explication phase a new song emerges quickly. Writing and experiencing the freedom that seems to espouse from a sustained engagement synthesises and brings the tacit forward to be known.

***“Keeping it Down”<sup>1</sup>***

***By Nick Brown-Haysom***

*Is it dead yet?  
Is it dead yet?  
Is it dead yet?  
Is it dead yet?*

*Can I cry yet?  
Can I cry yet?  
Can I cry yet?  
Can I cry yet?*

*For the life that was told me  
For the method was sold me  
For keeping it down  
For keeping it down*

*Is it life yet?  
Is it life yet?  
Is it life yet?  
If is life yet?*

*Can I laugh yet?  
Can I laugh yet?  
Can I laugh yet?  
Can I laugh yet?*

*For the life that was told me  
For the way it was sold me  
For keeping it down  
For keeping it down*

The audio recording, which can be heard using the reference in the footnote, is made crudely minutes after the song was written, I have found these initial recordings intoxicating in themselves, (I just want to listen to it over and over) as the road to the unconscious seems open, presence captured, my ache which has often been denied available and not resisted, sustaining of my own presence even in the listening.

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<sup>1</sup> Audio recording at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CPoKoC-zjb-0Bbc-o83VbdkM98BkTcqy>

I have cried often in conducting this research, as I have approached a genuine presence with myself, as per dreaming the moulding process above. What happens next often surprises; it is a heightening of the senses. As per my car ride recounted previously, sounds, touch sensations, temperature, the speed of the car all seem to become, more distinct and more discernible. In somehow processing this old hurt, in being able to dream it, the most primitive aspect of experience, the most current, becomes available to me and compassion and the noticing of beauty ensues. At times like this, when able to be present, I can know in this moment, as per the song lyrics above, “it” is dead. “It” the resistance leading non-presence; the transformation afforded by this research process not “keeping it down”.

## 2. *“Waiting”*

Procrastination has been a shame addled and asphyxiating noose on this heuristic process. It has and will affect the depth achieved especially in the explication phase of this dissertation as days put aside to write have been spent doing, or not doing, other things.

My data is dominated with different angles on the why’s and wherefores, my critic now silent in my dawn illumination, a time when I typically do not write. Somewhere in the middle of the night as I woke in distress again, about this work not done, I gave up. I was not just trying it out as another strategy, I meant it, and the tacit knowledge of the “Is it dead yet?” lyric becomes known and for the time being, it is OK for “it” to die. “Can I cry yet?” No, as part of me wants to do something and part of me does not, the relief of crying is not forthcoming. Perhaps when this work is handed in, I may be able to grieve the not insignificant portion of my life spent in this state. I will attempt to make meaning of some of this phenomenon in the context of my research question.

Early in this process I could identify the requirement for being present with myself, with my own experience, as an obvious necessity for the heuristic method to work. Only late in this process, as the pain of resistance became too much to bear, could I dream (wonder) about this phenomenon of not being able to stay present with myself, and only in the tiny spaces between the cruel and incessant self-critic and the initially comforting and then severely regretted and detail forgotten days and weeks of the subsequent avoidant behaviour.

It is Joanne Emmens (J. Emmens, personal communication, May 2018), my kind and insightful clinical supervisor who introduced, what I believe is her original idea; “procrastination as waiting”. This idea, although received months before any illumination, has become a sturdy rope on which to climb down to the non-bearable, and consequently avoided aloneness, inherent in the conditions of absence I have created for attempting to write. Emmens’ idea, I imagine, is centred on that when procrastinating we are in fact waiting for some help; this particular type of aloneness I can only conclude traces back to the earliest part of my life. In dwelling inwards and processing this time alone as per the many entries in my journal, I encounter the helpless baby, and how this state of shame can be denied. And as per a baby when help does not arrive how it could feel like I am going to die; this is evidenced in the extreme by the depths of depression attained (for the first time my therapist suggested antidepressant medication) and suicidal thoughts that have disturbingly and repeatedly entered my mind, sadly and starkly out of perspective with the actual consequences of not getting this work done. As kindness ensues and being present with this level of disturbance is now sometimes able to be tolerated, I can see it for the myth it is; as per a repeated intervention with various psychotherapy clients; “I understand the fear is real but what you are afraid of is perhaps no longer”.

It is not the thinking and feeling part of this dissertation I have put off. Phenomenon has been deeply considered, felt and discussed. The phases and the concepts imbedded in heurism have been a natural fit, but beginning writing, despite a capacity and love for expressive writing not so, perhaps because of this phobic response to absence. Endorsing and resembling this type of response to absence is my relationship with sleep; I value sleep, but I put off going to sleep. Those quiet moments before sleep, like before writing, requires an engagement with oneself; to lie down quietly with no stimulation, only your own sensations, thoughts and emotions. Like writing and sleep I can, for similar reasons, avoid beginning meditation.

### 3. *“Worrying”*

The topic of this dissertation, because of the sheer magnitude and domination of this feeling state could have been “worry”, the research question, *“What is my experience of being worried?”*. Worried about getting this work finished, worried about money, worried about important relationships, worried about my ability and capacity to be a psychotherapist, worried what people think of me and especially what people perceive of, and what my super-ego labels, a lack of effort. Although virtually none of the narrative of

my almost 50,000 words of raw data collected in my journal is directly about worry, it has emerged on review as a prominent finding, as a response to absence or the inability to be present with myself.

The space to say to myself; “You seem worried?” as I might in caring for a child, illuminated the theme and allowed for the shame to recede. In my own therapy it is often these simple, minimal statements that have allowed me to engage and allowed space for me to become present. “Keeping it down” as per the theme of the song above suggests a tacit understanding of a felt prohibition of curiosity in addition to the prohibition of explication of ideas. Curiosity could be an “awake relative” of dreaming and for me it is not an inherent trait, likely a response to unspeakable family trauma as to what might be found out if one asks questions. In many instances throughout this heuristic process, perhaps because of it, curiosity has illuminated as an antidote to worry and consequently facilitates being present; the heightening of the senses and onset of compassion and beauty as per that depicted in “moulding” above.

#### 4. “Venging”

*“In July my therapist lent me a CD because she thought I may relate to some of the lyrical content of the songs. I got into my car and opened the CD cover, but no disk was in there, I shrugged my shoulders and drove off; the next morning I forgot the first appointment of a new client”*

“Keeping it down” may also reveal a tacit knowing about how the absent object can often not become the object of vengeance, how this particular type of vengeance is compelled to be transferred if one does not feel freely permitted to express. The illumination being, as the above depiction so forcefully illustrates and as much of my experience during this heuristic process resembles, that it is inevitably my own capacity or desire to be present that can be unconsciously forsaken. Fighting for presence, for me, does not seem to work; “Is it dead yet?”, a longing for this way to be dead.

This subjective method of avoiding then hating has been repeatedly labelled by a respected friend and colleague, Jenny Woods, who practices Lacanian psychotherapy, as “jouissance” (J. Woods, personal communication, May 2018); a once comforting (the destructive feelings seem better out than in) but ultimately self-destructive pattern, as a fight is continued, for me, with someone who is no longer there, or perhaps who was never there. When the waiting is over, and help does arrive, in the form of an interested partner, concerned teacher or friend it can be as if they are responsible for some unbearable and consequently unfelt absence, and vengeance can be taken. If the

relationship to this object “stand-in” is intimate, then vengeance can be explicit, the result being distance rather than proximity, and extended absence rather than a capacity or desire of either party to be present around anger. If the relationship to the stand-in object is perceived not able to bear my anger, this vengeance may be taken via a “leaving”; absence rather than presence an obvious outcome – very sadly I can see this pattern with my own children on occasion as they can experience the absence of a father whose father was not present. This illumination is felt viscerally and with grief, as I consider the original motivation for this study and becoming absent in the face of the most difficult emotional material of my clients.

### ***KINDLY ATTENDING***

I begin this section with a creative synthesis, an explication of several illuminations following six months immersion in this process. This poem, the first I have ever written, emerged in response to an ethical dilemma.

#### ***“A Broken Doll”***

***by Nick Brown-Haysom***

*A pocket of me, not all  
A broken doll  
Kept and cherished for what made it,  
For how it is broken*

*“Forget me”  
Whispers the broken doll  
And I will make myself known  
In lonely panic tearing the day*

*“Treasure me”  
Imagine my pieces together  
Regularly, as to do it easily  
Cracked and incomplete*

*And I will be ok  
Just remembered  
And not real  
Happy in the wind or in the seagull’s eye*

*I love you once were an unbroken doll*

The poem, to me, stands for how kind attention to the beauty of inevitable imperfections makes available another reality, beyond just the suffering, where something (somebody) impermanent can be loved for all that they are now.

It is in the experience of kindly attending to this crisis, via writing my journal, dedicated reflection and meditation that my experience of being present became known, in

response to something that was initially drowned in guilt and shame and from which I wished to run. The poem carries a flavour of many of the recorded experiences of the final part of the immersion phase of this research; on reflection it now is becoming true to me that knowledge of how to care and be kind is tacit. The in-attendance or neglect of a maternal figure perhaps interrupts this being, somehow interrupts the flow, but it does not, for me, take it. The poem records how I can with kind attention, be present with my own most troubling material but acknowledges also that it takes regular practice.

The sustained indwelling of heuristic research has, for me, meant consistently finding new pockets of pain. Also, as per the methodology, persistently attending to this has allowed for subsequent illumination, not in the fulfillment of the fantasy that suffering will cease, rather that somehow it is brought into perspective, that it is smaller in the context of something larger – I have “cracks” and I am “broken” but this is only “a pocket” and not all of me. This has been the discovery of my experience of being present. I include the following inspirational quote from Friedrich Nietzsche which explicates a particular flavour of attending and how it allows for my own capacity and desire to be present with myself and others;

“How can man know himself? It is a dark, mysterious business: if a hare has seven skins, a man may skin himself seventy times seven times without being able to say, “Now that is truly you; that is no longer your outside.” It is also an agonizing, hazardous undertaking thus to dig into oneself, to climb down toughly and directly into the tunnels of one’s being. How easy it is thereby to give oneself such injuries as no doctor can heal. Moreover, why should it even be necessary given that everything bears witness to our being — our friendships and animosities, our glances and handshakes, our memories and all that we forget, our books as well as our pens. For the most important inquiry, however, there is a method. Let the young soul survey its own life with a view of the following question: “What have you truly loved thus far? What has ever uplifted your soul, what has dominated and delighted it at the same time?” Assemble these revered objects in a row before you, and perhaps they, will reveal a law by their nature and their order: the fundamental law of your very self. Compare these objects, see how they complement, enlarge, outdo, transfigure one another; how they form a ladder on whose steps you have been climbing up to yourself so far; for your true self does not lie buried deep within you, but rather rises immeasurably high above you, or at least above what you commonly take to be your I.”

*Nietzsche (1965) in the essay “Schopenhauer as Educator”*

Each of the reactions to absence recounted in the previous section of this dissertation resolved in a creative response, in heuristic terms an illumination, this has only been achieved when I have been able to create a space, inevitably through kindness and compassion, often in response to surrendering rather than resisting emotional pain.

### ***Acceptance of subjectivity***

*“This being that becomes from the arising of this that arises, this being that does not become from the ceasing of this that ceases.”*

*Ancient Buddhist proverb*

It is when I can accept my own subjectivity, when I am comfortable being singular, original, different and the pressure of conforming subsides that I can become present to be connected with, to create, to wonder and to dream.

My Buddhist practice is integral in the acceptance of the unique and everchanging aspects of self, this proverb explicating an intuition held previous to this relatively newfound faith, accepting that we are all contingent on conditions, and that if these conditions change so does the being. This heuristic process has been integral and integrating in my increasing acceptance that we can never know all of how these conditions have manifested; the variety and amount of ‘data’ produced in just fifteen minutes of writing per day and the overwhelm in “trying to work it all out” is testament to this. The only truth perhaps is that there have been conditions and that these conditions are everchanging. Somewhere in losing the energy to decipher, to be rather than to do, allows for presence.

### ***Discovering composure***

Epstein (2010) in an on-line interview reflects my own intuition;

I think there is something in that intuitive sense that one needs to survive, without the need to abandon. To stay in that place allows an experience of both separation and union, so that it continues to unfold in an ongoing way.

My Buddhist faith is experience proven, increasing my ability to not get blown around by what is referred to in Buddhism as “the worldly winds”, to let things unfold in an ongoing-way and to confidently relax, as per the quality of Tangi Hepi’s presence recounted previously.

Many times, in my journal writing I have “free associated” on my experience of being present. I include the following in its entirety because it perhaps synthesises my ideas on letting things unfold, in an ongoing way, but that this requires an understanding, a practiced and ongoing engagement with the self in order to retain the composure required to let this happen.

“relaxed, caring and kind, sad, reflective, calm, ready for anything, life flowing by, like my nose splits experience as if it comes towards me, past my mouth and eyes and then behind me. What if I am to turn around, perhaps this is not presence, looking behind me at what has happened all mixed up like water flowing over a log or a boulder in a river, now turbulent, impossible to make out. And when it’s too much the turbulence is also upriver, reflected, bounced, currents interfering. Presence is knowing our own shape well enough to understand how the river flows, how the flow of another may hit our surface and respond. Recognising how big the river is getting, or perhaps presence is just staying with that tumult, keeping a kind eye on a river that may now be out of control even if we don’t understand, until we can explore the nuances of the current, its reflections and refractions, but the flow is constantly changing and perhaps presence is also recognising and accepting that we can never know it all at once – perhaps if we are present in this way we will know instances – when I meet the river where she is, right at that moment, every now and again – it seems like this will happen less if we are anxiously looking.”

Personal journal April 25, 2018.

### ***Buddha as mother***

Another intuition resolving into an illumination from continued engagement in this incompletable process, is the subjective belief that the universal wisdom of the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) for me, becomes representative of a form of maternal holding. Something in to whose eyes I can metaphorically gaze and uncover a more palatable and kinder version of the truth. Somewhere where love is inherent in the language and the spirit. It is not by coincidence that in this part of my findings there are more references to external sources as this help is critical for me in kindly accepting myself and the world around me, it is something I am learning.

Epstein (2010) from the same interview says;

But the Buddha’s notion of freedom is different – recognising we are often estranged from both our experience and our day to day reality of the here and now, the Buddha suggested a way to cure ourselves. This did not involve exploration of the sexual and aggressive instincts per se, as Freud suggested, but instead involved the uncovering of the instinct for self-certainty.

In this research I have and engaged with, and become more intimate with ‘doubt’, as conditioned by the caregivers whose neglect ‘cannot’ be named or communicated. Doubt fed by non-communication holds the prospect of something else; this something I experience as a vacuum, a neurotic longing for certainty and so a constant disappointment as the fantasised objects fail to deliver such certainty.

When able to recognise this mode, I can become composed; change is inevitable, suffering is inevitable, and kindness and beauty are available if one is not distracted by this unquenchable thirst for certainty.

### ***Renunciation***

I have for almost the entire duration of this process felt a great pressure to be present, that being present is essential for a satisfying life and for my work. I am also aware that something is perhaps needed to be given up, renounced (“Is it dead yet?”), in order for presence to become achievable. But how when one so consistently feels a dearth, a vacuum, a deficit, a lack, can one give something up?

I have learnt in this process that what is to be renounced, what has to be accepted, is the impossibility of “knowing”. It is a mythological and fantastical construction of past deprivation, that to survive one needs to invent an ideal place. It dawns on me that I have perhaps been attempting to renunciate the opposite. A song I wrote two years ago explicates this transformation as I interpret a completely different meaning now than that intended when I wrote it.

*I do not know  
And the reason I don't  
I know like the back of my hand  
It's the moment I don't try  
Is the moment I know why  
Know why it is  
I do not know*

When I wrote this song “not trying” was a voice from my super-ego telling me I needed to try harder in order “to know”. This now makes me laugh. My interpretation of the tacit knowledge coming forth, only due to the surrender necessary in this research, is that “the moment I don't try”, is the moment I can accept “not knowing” and forgo the maniacal pursuit of knowing.

No wonder my challenge in being present! It seems like I have been attempting to stay present with a mis-truth, that something can be solved; my lack of capacity, willingness to be present is perhaps an unconscious expression of my value of truth. This could explain my aversion to Geller & Greenberg (2012) as per the earlier literature review, and the

prescribed “process of presence”, that as soon as these things are listed something is reduced and inevitably missed, the subjective. For me the not knowing is a void that can only be lived with, survived in fact, in a state of wonder, by dreaming; in not trying to touch the transcendental the transcendental is possible.

This ‘not knowing’, proposed by psychotherapy and my Buddhist practice allows for my own unique truth in a moment and an acceptance of my present self. To “honour my truth”, allows the unconscious freedom from the impossibility of ‘posthumously’ attempting to reshape the neglected childhood as exemplified in the reactive responses to absence in the previous section.

***“A SYSTEM OF BEING PRESENT/NOT BEING PRESENT”***

“And so perhaps these two maxims are not opposites at all? Perhaps the one simply says that man should have a centre and the other that he should also have a periphery? That educating philosopher of whom I dreamed would, I came to think, not only discover the central force, he would also know how to prevent its acting destructively on the other forces: his educational task would, it seemed to me, be to mould the whole man into a living solar and planetary system and to understand its higher laws of motion.”

Nietzsche (1965) in the essay “Schopenhauer as Educator”.

The following illustration was created well before my discovery of Nietzsche’s commentary on Schopenhauer above, and in no way do I propose to fully “understand its higher laws of motion”. Yet it seems like I did locate a “system of my own presence” via a graphic illustration which represented at the time of creation, and continues to represent post explication, much of what I have learnt from this research on my own subjective experience of being present.

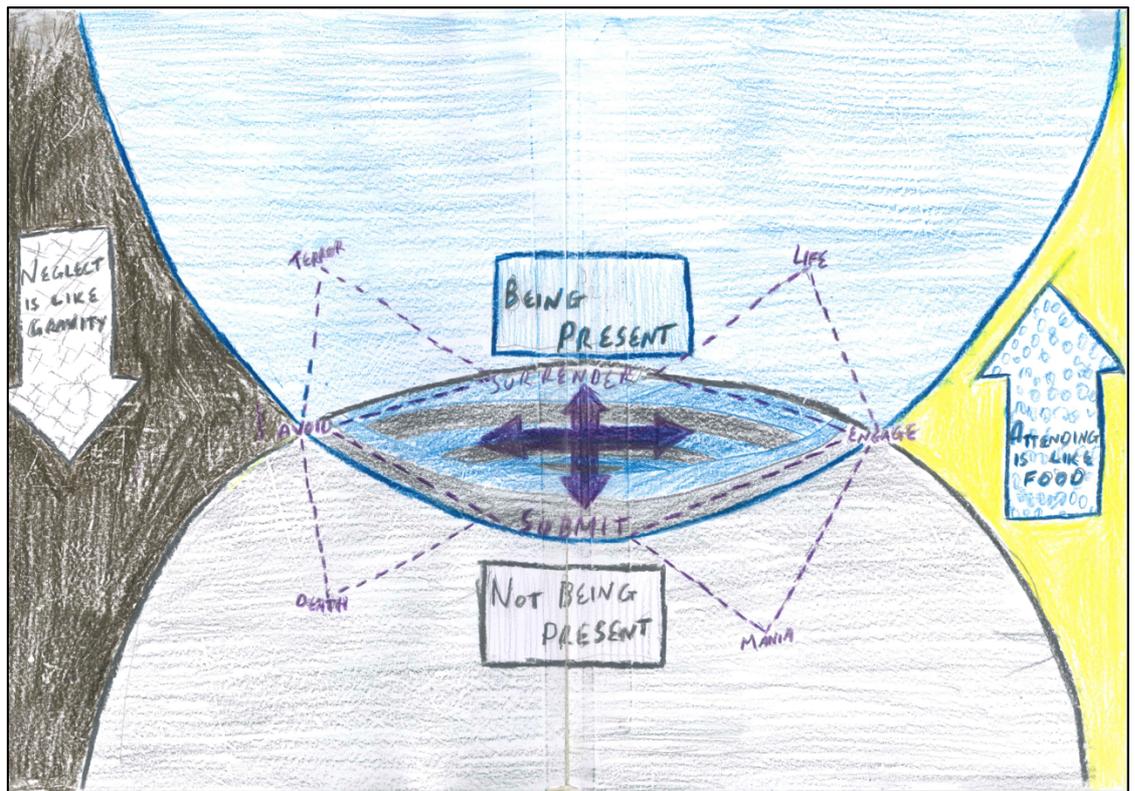


Figure 5: “A system of being present/not being present” (see appendix 1 for larger and full colour depiction)

It began with two planets. Blue, a colour that in Buddhism represents imperturbability, is the shade of the planet of “Being Present”, dark grey, intuitively the planet of “Not Being Present”. The overlapping of the two planets represents the synthesis of the phenomena, ideas, experiences and illuminations of this heuristic process – that being present or not being present is, for me, an ever changing multidimensional continuum (as represented by the stripes which if possible to draw with crayon might have been infinitely narrow and intertwined), subjected to two pairs of sometimes conscious forces; the “avoid-engage” pair and the “surrender-submit” pair.

“Surrender-submit” is essentially the degree to which I am bound or not bound to conform to the other. In surrender I am kindly accepting of my conditioned and total subjectivity; I am comfortable in my own skin. In total submission I am resistant to all that is my own experience, instead submitting to the other; be it the real other or the “transferred” fantasy object via responses such as “moulding”, “waiting”, “venging”, “worrying” or something else ‘other focused’. I have experienced during this research process that surrendering leads me towards being more present and submitting less so.

The “avoid-engage” pair refers to my own choice in response to particular, and more material, phenomena. For example I have something to do; do I turn towards it or away from it? Or in the clinic someone shows me their distress; am I compelled to turn towards or away? Do I avoid or engage?

The model illuminated a system of presence when I wondered what would happen when combining the two sets of forces; triangles then naturally formed as seen in the original drawing and reproduced in the four figures that follow.

*Surrender and engage (Fig. 6):* To surrender to my subjectivity and to choose to engage is *life* inducing. This heuristic process surrendered to and engaged with has enlivened me via the illuminations and creativity that, in an un-special way, feel uniquely mine

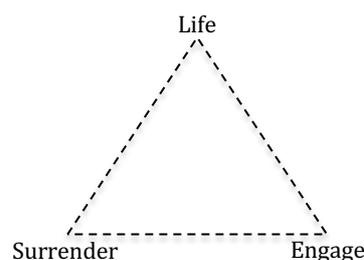


Figure 6: “Surrender – engage - life”

*Surrender and avoid (Fig.7):* Although represented by a single feeling, “terror” in the original drawing, surrender and avoidance, in the context of dreaming my data leads to *feeling* of any type and subsequently presence. An example would be the aloneness I became able to feel once surrendering to my state of procrastination (avoidance) as explained above.

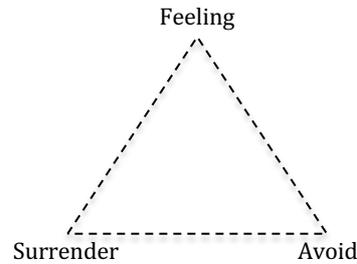


Figure 7: “Surrender – avoid - feeling”

*Submit and avoid (Fig. 8):* In the example depicted previously the forgetting of an appointment with a client might be the metaphorical *death*, when I unconsciously submitted to my therapist forgetting me and choosing in that moment to avoid the associated pain. I also equate this deadness to a state of depression; in my experience ongoing submission and avoidance will eventually “castrate” the imagination, and a state of depression where the enlivening creativity available in presence becomes inaccessible.

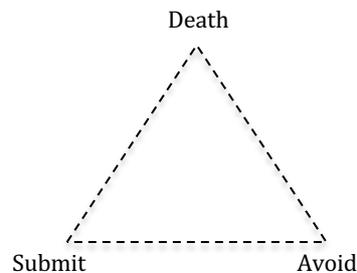


Figure 8: “Submit – avoid - death”

*Submit and engage (Fig. 9):* An example of this non-presence inducing combination of forces is in attempting to write this dissertation, in submitting only to the requirements (experienced as pressure and worry) of the university, my supervisor and the psychotherapeutic readers I imagine, rather than surrendering to my own experience and creativity. The response is one of *mania*, a non-present and resistant “doing” only for external expectation, and only to make something painful go away, rather than to create something.

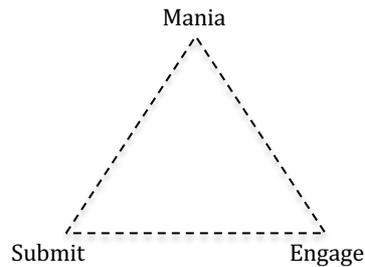


Figure 9: "Submit – engage - mania"

There are two other arrows, "Neglect" and "Attend" on the original illustration, that sit outside of the 'planets of presence and non-presence' and depict more universal and/or spiritual forces of nourishing attendance and the weightiness, the capacity to bring down, of neglect. These forces could be depicting 'how one lives'.

This system is not meant as an answer, instead a way of dreaming about being present, with all of the data gathered; it is also what was dreamt. As per the other synthesised creations of song and poetry in this dissertation, the experience of being present was most clearly, most authentically, most lovingly, most selflessly, most energetically and most satisfyingly felt in the creating. The creation then becomes something cherished, a representation of those moments, or succession of moments when I felt fully present, highly conscious of the forces that are in play, the degree of consciousness depending on the forces themselves. It is not crucial that the creativity is captured, as per meditation and the practice of psychotherapy, it is the practice of kind attendance and surrender that allows for presence, even with the most threatening of life's data.

This system also suggests fluidity; as per my conception of presence, one can move from "death" to "life" or from "feeling" to "mania", and back again, in a moment. I cannot know an outcome in the positivist sense, what I do understand with more lucidity and self-fulfilling curiosity is, as Nietzsche refers to above, "a central force" which is perhaps a combination of my own subjectivity and a universal sense of kindness and compassion, as well as a conceptualisation of "the destructive forces"; this is an enlivening and transformative result of this research.

There is joy in the release of the notion, perhaps unconsciously held on to for the vast majority of this heuristic endeavour, that "I must be present". In this system there is non-presence, its half the picture, to observe, to be curious of and to not know.

### ***PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC FINDINGS:***

In this final section of the findings chapter I will detail two specific findings in relation to my experience of being present that apply specifically to my practice as a beginning psychotherapist. The first finding is a surprising outcome of the mutual and dedicated presence shared with my academic supervisor for the duration of this project which has unearthed a particular tacit knowing in regard to my understanding of the theory of how psychotherapy works. The second, a synthesis of my psychotherapeutic training, my Buddhist study and the immersion in the question of my own experience of being present.

#### ***1. Learning theory from the presence of another...and not a book.***

Perhaps it is a subjective synthesis of developmental history, constitution, my experience with psychotherapy when entering this course and the way that psychotherapy has been taught, that has led my becoming pre-occupied with what is broken. In my training I have spent four years attempting to understand the theories of various pathologies, defences, resistances and trauma and theories of how to treat and be with; coinciding is the theory of the therapist's integration via the reflexivity prescribed in the training, my choice of Buddhism amplifying this self-learning.

My supervisor for this dissertation has for two years previous been my clinical supervisor, perhaps an unusual sequence but one that was intuitively sought. It is only in this supervisor/ supervisee relationship, I believe due to the relentlessly kind, authentic and consistent focus of my supervisor on what was not broken, combined with the compulsory engagement of this heuristic process and an increased understanding of being present/not being present, that I have learnt something of the healing power of relationship, as per the theories expounded in the multi-modal research. My critical learning is that it was not that I 'ingested' my supervisor as a 'good object', as per my previous cognitive and subjective interpretation of the theory of healing. Her unconditional support of my immersion in this process and my dedication, even in times when I could not work, did not replace an internalised and self-critical bad object, but made available safety and space for a kinder, more composed, less easily startled, self-accepting, aware and unique presence to emerge; a tacit knowing was allowed to come forth, interference by way of my own resistant reactions subsided. Perhaps another way of considering this is that in the combination of trusted relationship and heuristic process I have been 'forced' to become even more familiar with what is broken, in order to unearth the tacit knowledge of what can never be broken.

This is an adjustment to my theory of how psychotherapy “works”, and it was gained not in therapy, not in a book, but in a supervisor relationship with the depth and surrender of the heuristic process and a topic of being present. This learning is intuitive, and I have acknowledged the subjectivity; I do not claim it is true for everyone.

## **2. *Getting myself out of the way***

Martin Buber is interpreted in an online blog (Meaninglessness, n.d.);

Human beings should begin with themselves (by searching their own hearts, integrating themselves, and finding their particular meaning), they should not end with themselves: One begins with oneself in order to forget oneself and to immerse oneself into the world; one comprehends oneself in order not to be preoccupied with oneself.

A fundamental finding of this research in respect to my own practice of psychotherapy, and a paradox that in itself unearths, for me, the more dreamt and transcendental state of being present, is that when I am most “out of my own way” I am most present for the other; when I am least there, I am most there.

This heuristic research process, as per critique of the methodology, can sometimes feel self-indulgent as one enters, what can at times, seem like an unquenchable search for the sources of one’s own pain. And it is my formative Buddhist education and practice that helps me to understand and describe, be comfortable with, even treasure, the quality of emptiness that eventually emerges when one looks at anything long enough, and from that emptiness how compassion can naturally arise (Anālayo, 2015).

This sustained looking, and eventual and imperfect capacity to “see through”, has nurtured a burgeoning faith in and a method of, psychotherapy – a method where I am able to be more out of the way and more with the other. Not because I have seen all my pain and seen through it; but perhaps because I have experientially discovered for myself and practiced the process of “seeing through”.

Emptiness has, in my psychodynamic training, been located as a sometimes-terrifying state of inconceivable absence, my meditation outlined in the introductory chapter perhaps a vivid encounter of such. Yet emptiness in Buddhist terms, as it has eventuated for me due to this sustained engagement, can hold great promise (Epstein, 1989).

The result for me has been that the initial “weakness” of my clinical work, as per my motivation to complete this dissertation, is now deemed, as per the final assessments of

my practice to conclude this Masters of Psychotherapy training, a strength. “Staying consistently and emotionally present with my clients in the face of the disclosure of troubling material” is less frightening, my methods of avoiding now better known and “seen through”.

Perhaps the most personally satisfying aspect of this discovered capacity to “see through” is an energy for life, even joy, that arises as I get myself out of the way, to be present with others even in their deepest pain.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

*This entire project has had the transformational effect of ‘taking me out of my head’, ‘Is it dead yet?’. For the honourable purpose of academia and shared learning, in this chapter, I have come back to my head and it has hurt. As in the creations of song, poetry or artwork indeed the ineffable quality of presence itself, to explain it further, indeed to ‘sell it’ is contrary to what I have found most fulfilling in this learning. I have the strong impulse, “if you have not got what I am on about by now then so be it”. As per other resistances identified in this work, with the kind and expert help of my supervisor, this too was eventually “seen through” and nobody died.*

*Personal reflection, 24 November 2018*

I begin the chapter with a brief summary of the subjective findings of this research, I then broaden the discussion outlining some implications relevant to the literature presented earlier in this dissertation, the theory and practice of psychotherapy in relation to presence, the training of new therapists and any further research that may be relevant in the context of these findings. Throughout I will include relevant strengths and weaknesses of this research and present some ideas for the future of the topic of presence. I then bring the discussion back in tighter, with a reflection on my own future in relation to the research question and conclude, in honour of my question, with an experience of being present.

### ***Brief summary of findings***

My experience of being present seems indelibly linked with conscious and kind attendance and the intention and capacity to know my relationship with absence.

When surrendering to and engaging with my own experience regularly, creating a context of attendance rather than neglect, I can feel, live, and with my senses active, confidently be present with more of what is with me at this moment, including the experience of another. In being present I can create, I can work, and I can see beauty. The craving for “something better” subsides until inevitably presence, often in the face of a perceived absence, cannot be maintained; and for me subjective reactions such as “moulding”, “waiting”, “worrying” or “venging” may ensue. That there is also beauty in these inevitable, imperfect and temporary states of non-presence makes available another reality – one that can be dreamt and never known by cognitive attempts to decipher. This newly respected and learnt difference in the type of effort required, built from greater acceptance of the impossibility of certainty, makes available composure in times of crisis,

and allows for change, for deep learning, for transformation and for once again being present.

Kindness and compassion have been a consistent facilitator, and outcome, of engaging with presence through this heuristic process and learning that this resource is inherent, sometimes interfered with, but not taken away, is a joyful and empowering realisation and transformation. This transformation has positively affected my understanding of, and capacity and enthusiasm for, a “being” and not “doing” psychotherapist.

***Findings discussed in reference to the literature “viewed” in Chapter Three***

Geller and Greenberg’s (2012) “process of presence” encompassing one’s ‘whole of experience’, allowed for some initial freedom in my research, to move beyond the therapeutic encounter in order to fully engage in discovery. In contrast to my findings the concept of ‘not being present’ was un-referenced by Geller and Greenberg, for me this became “half the story”, requiring more intricate investigation in order to understand my experience ‘being present’.

Peltz (1998), and her acknowledgement of absence as a critical developmental and therapeutic dynamic perhaps informed this heuristic self-search inquiry more than any other reading. My “coercive realms of non-meaning” when absence could not be tolerated, were un-intentionally but gratefully discovered and represented in my findings as “moulding, waiting, worrying and venging”. The un-wilting presence of my supervisor, possibly Peltz’s “new presence” (p. 387), allowed for a newly identified capacity to sustain the “simultaneous existence of presence and absence” (p. 394) and a consequent flow of creativity, a positive developmental outcome according to Peltz.

Tannen and Daniel’s (2010) identified a gap in subjective “depth” research which, if filled, may start to inform a common language on the topic of the therapist’s presence. From my findings it is the category of “conditioned responses to absence”, that generated depth and could provide some common ground for other researchers to begin their own enquiry. An irony, and in contrast to my findings, it is in the creation of “uncommon language” of poetry and song that stimulates and encapsulates presence and suggests something of the challenge of objectivity.

McCullum and Gerhart (2010) as per my findings concluded meditation helped beginning therapists begin to understand their experience of being present and not being present.

The individual responses of the trainee therapists, compared with Geller and Greenberg's aggregated responses were useful "routes" to the discovery of my own, thus endorsing Tannen and Daniel's (2010) calls for more subjectively informed research in this area.

Speeth (1982), despite referencing Eastern meditation sources where awareness of the body is often a facilitator of presence, has little mention of the body and this runs parallel to my research. On reflection my research starts with, and eventually "sees through" psychological resistance, ultimately finding the body by means of heightened sensory perception – this is perhaps representative of a psychotherapeutic method of becoming present and a discussion point later in ideas for future research.

Epstein's (1995) interpretation of Freud, Bion and Winnicott, writing as a Buddhist psychotherapist, mirrored my own experience with this heuristic process. Particularly in regard to his expressions of what I have called "seeing through" the never-can-be-known ideal or fantasy, and the subsequent reduction in fear and increased capacity to dream and create; this has deeply affected my way of thinking about psychotherapy. Doubt identified as a fertile practice ground by Epstein, is still an edge for me with which to become more familiar, one where I can struggle to maintain presence and make meaning of absence (Peltz 1998).

Denton's (2017) writing where he identifies Tangi Hepi as a person of presence, represents in retrospect of my findings, what a confluence of sustained presence might look like. Hepi symbolises 'presence' as a noun rather than a verb or adjective – this is not where my research ended up taking me as I remained with the "how", "why" and "why not". Hepi's epitome of presence remains an aspiration, with a consideration for further research into the qualities of individuals who are perceived to have a "powerful" presence. This aligns with three of the articles "viewed" (Geller & Greenberg, 2012; McCollum & Gerhart, 2010; Tannen & McDaniels, 2010), where research deduced that it was ultimately the other's (client's) perception of the therapist's presence that impacted relationship. An opportunity for further research in relation to this study, may be to gain an understanding of those I am in relationship with, and how they perceived my presence during the course of this heuristic process.

***Implications of findings to psychotherapy:***

As identified earlier there is little research into the trainee therapist's subjective experience of being present; so, although I will discuss implications of my findings for the

practice of psychotherapy, psychotherapy theory and for further research it is all in the context of training, as this is my context. I am grateful for my training and all of the teachers who have kindly shared their expertise and themselves; any critique of what was missing or what has not worked for me is shared with the intention to inform mutual learning.

1. *A new theory of presence - "System of being present/not being present"*

I will now briefly discuss the "System of being present/not being present", a creative synthesis of this heuristic process as presented in the findings. As per my introduction it is widely accepted that being present facilitates relationship and relationship facilitates change and healing in the psychotherapeutic relationship; I would like to propose also, based on my findings, that it is significant to also become familiar with the subjective initiators and modes of not being present (absence) in order to facilitate relationship and subsequently change and healing. This is new theory, or possibly new language describing old theory, and although welcomed by supervisors, colleagues and academic staff when initially presented it is now formally presented for discussion purposes with the intention of receiving feedback as to why and how it could be improved, or why it may work. Whilst the theory "feels" original there are significant influencers in its creation, in particular the influence of Emmanuel Ghent (1990) and his paper *Masochism, submission, surrender: Masochism as a perversion of surrender* which was referenced in the Method and Methodology chapter of this work, was significant. He advocates, as does this "system", not only insight and understanding but transformation as one engages with unknown parts of ourselves "yearning to be known" (p. 211).

*Initial discussion of the "System of being present/not being present"*

- i. The system is intended to throw up different questions/answers to all that may use it; the two pairs of forces "surrender-submit" and "avoid-engage" provide a platform for which one can formulate one's own subjective responses, but these too are up for comment. One could present the model as follows, and subjects could fill in the quadrants to just see what arises for them. For example, based on my initial experience the "surrender-engage" quadrant returned "life"

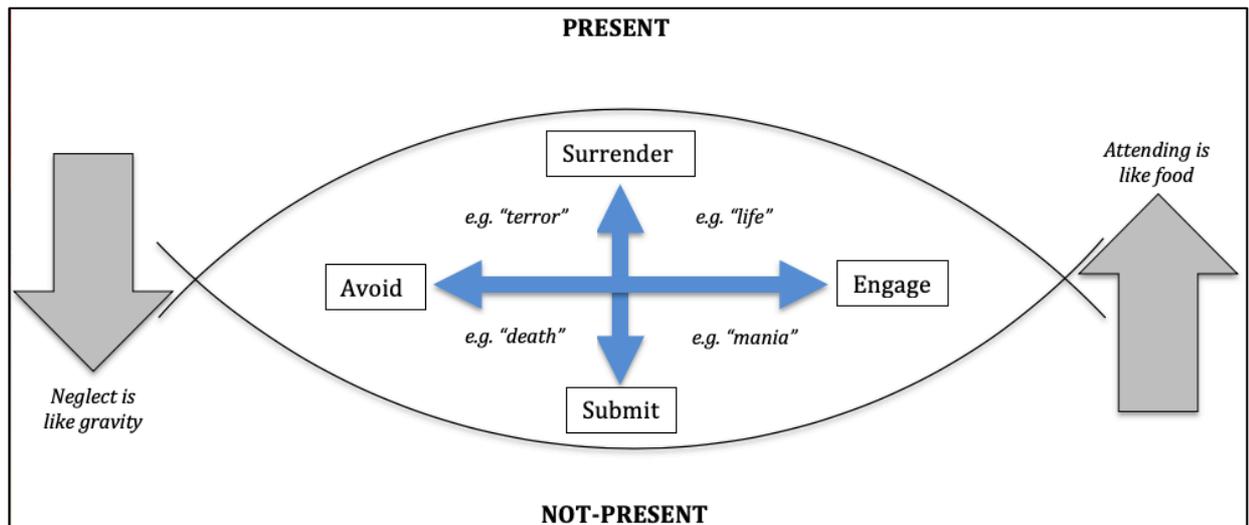


Figure 10: "System of being present/not being present"

- ii. It is intended as non-positivist, that is being present is not a necessity. Remaining, or returning to engagement with the reactions that evoke non-presence are, as per meditation, as important as being present. This is contrary to much of the literature viewed on presence and I believe could reduce the constricting forces of shame and expectation that can hinder learning.
- iii. The "System of being present/not being present" allows for both atomistic and holistic (Tannen & Daniels, 2010) consideration of the subject's presence. i.e. what are some specific responses that affect our being present/not being present, and where does one "generally" sit on the quadrant, and to what extent as a life practice do we "attend" or "neglect"?
- iv. The intention of this study has been to unearth my own experience of being present, and findings tended towards becoming familiar with recurring reactions in order to understand where or why I have not maintained presence. This has specifically excluded countertransference in the clinical setting with the intention of better knowing myself first in order to improve comprehension of counter-transference responses. In discussing the "System of being present/not being present" in retrospect, it could be applied also to specific relationships and perhaps useful in examining countertransference responses e.g. With what particular clients or client presentations does one more easily surrender, or one is more prone to submitting? With what particular clients or client presentations does one consciously or

unconsciously avoid or are more prone to engaging? What are the subsequent responses and where do they sit on the system?

2. *Teaching presence*

In entering and completing my Masters of Psychotherapy training it seemed implicit, as I imagine it is in other similar trainings, that if one completed all of the clinical training, including supervision and the required reflexivity and prescribed amount of one's own personal psychotherapy, integration will occur and a capacity for being present even with clients' most troubling emotional material will emerge. This was not the case for me, (it required the much deeper engagement of this research) and I wonder if this is also the case for some others; this following section discusses my findings in the context of how one might "teach presence" to psychotherapy students.

i. *Name the topic of 'presence'*

The topic of 'presence', apart from one line in the middle of a prescribed "learning outcome" has not been explicitly 'named' throughout my Masters of Psychotherapy course, despite the topic seemingly implicit to much of what I have been expected to become competent in. Conceivably what could happen first for the topic is that it becomes named, as something important to engage with for learning therapists, rather than remain largely unspoken. Presence named for discussion rather than a standard, an ineffable system rather than a manual and a subjective experience to be shared rather than a positivist leaning.

ii. *Take the pressure off*

As per my findings it has not been a "how to" guide in respect of presence that has helped me to understand my own, but a freedom extended in the methodology and method of heuristic research that has resulted in a "system" to possibly take trainees through; i.e. "how do I be present, in a way that is useful for me as a psychotherapist?" As per my findings this requires an easing of the felt pressure to be present, easing judgement and allowing for the creative responses of the trainee to emerge through coming to know intimately their more reactive responses. I realise now that having a formative assessment process, where one is freer to learn from losing capacity to be present, was essential for me to engage with this process.

iii. *Presence as a conduit to engage with the subject's spirituality*

The data gathering, and the synthesised findings of this dissertation are presented, unreservedly, in the context of my practice of Buddhism, acknowledged in the opening sequence and inherent throughout. I am not preaching the benefits of Buddhism yet the learning about my own experience of being present would not have emerged without kindly attending to my own suffering as per my faith in the Dharma (Buddhist teachings).

As per my experience, and as per the literature “viewed” in Chapter Three the topic of presence can be a natural meeting point between East and West, and as per Hepi (Denton, 2017) between the indigenous and dominant cultures. Presence is a secular term, both subjective and somewhat universal, that could be a lever to keep opening something up, something (to consciously contradict myself above) un-nameable, that when engaged with long enough inevitably and eventually, in my experience, brings the “cannot be known” of spirituality into a constructive light. Training programs despite acknowledging spirit as necessity, in my experience shy away and leave it to the student; as per my findings the topic of presence could perhaps become a conduit.

3. *Teaching absence*

A considerable portion of the findings in this dissertation of my experience of being present have highlighted and emphasised how painful even the smallest absences can feel. As I consider how old reactions can burst forth in not always conscious responses to the smallest of expressions from another, particularly in the relationships closest to me, the welfare of my colleagues comes to mind.

As observed in my training approximately 1/3 of my colleagues had long term partner relationships end. As per the teaching staff whose existing awareness of this phenomenon now seems complicit, I have at times nonchalantly joined in with the departmental nodding; “yes, yes, this is what happens in our training”. My own experience, with my own partner and children during this research and the heightened sensitivity to absence now propels me to surrender to this phenomenon with a more dedicated engagement.

I can feel the positivist, 'needing certainty' part of me want to come up with a dedicated solution to help trainees in the future, but perhaps based on my own experience all that is required is a continuing acknowledgement that an increased demand for, and experience of, being present may expose a real or fantasised absence of those around us, that for a time may feel unbearable.

This finding could also be applied in the practice of psychotherapy. As our clients begin to gain capacity to be present, they also may experience these extreme absences; to empathically recognise this as such could be useful for the practitioner and client alike.

4. *Heuristic self-search inquiry research as clinical practice training*

As identified in the findings there has been an increase in my capacity to stay present with my psychotherapy clients and a subsequent improvement in client relationships as a result of this research. A hypothesis has emerged that I propose for discussion; that it was not only the topic of presence that has led this change, but the heuristic self-search inquiry research process itself. The commitment to surrender to even the most painful and repressed aspects of the researcher mandatory in this methodology and engaged with fully in my method, have led to a self-acceptance and self-understanding that now allows me to better "be and stay" with the other.

Perhaps for other trainees who, like I, are facing a particular challenge in the clinic this way of researching may not only fulfil an academic research requirement but also provide an experience critical for safe and increasingly expert clinical practice.

Other particular conditions of the research have been interesting and could be replicated in order for this idea to take maximum effect. i.e. a clinical supervisor who then becomes a heuristic research academic supervisor, the three-year duration of the supervisor/supervisee relationship, and what seemed like the critical nature of our pairing (how we were matched) seemed to reap the most insight at the end of our third year.

### ***Limits and strengths of this research***

The limit of this research is perhaps that it is limitless; after all, what is it to examine every moment? My findings tell me that the experience of being present has changed significantly throughout the course of the study and can never truly be known; and yet the dedicated engagement with and surrender to something ever-changing that can never be known has been transformational, via a new-found courage and particular type of satisfaction.

Another limit is that heuristic self-search inquiry as proposed by Sela-Smith (2002) is of course only one person's experience, the question being its generalisability and how applicable is it to others? I remain curious about this but take comfort from the learning I have experienced from reading others deeply reflective and subjective research.

A strength of this research has been the combination of the subject, the methodology and method, and the topic of enquiry. The ineffable has remained so yet the engagement and the surrender has meant resistance, sometimes painfully, has been "seen through" and regularly unearthed insight, wonder and energy. Without the relentless deep engagement demanded by the methodology this would not have been so.

### ***One more idea for further research***

#### *Two routes to presence?*

My findings, examined in the context of my training in psychodynamic psychotherapy have taken a predictable route, i.e. I have first engaged with resistance, eventually seeing through to experience presence as real and full-bodied sensory phenomenon, before ultimately touching the transcendental. This is a method that has allowed for considerable learning as per the structure of heuristic self-search inquiry. In Eastern meditation methods of discovering and experiencing presence, the body is the first port of call and this is noticeably missing from my findings. I wonder about the comparison and contrast of these two ways and if indeed it is robust enough a topic for further research.

### ***What happens next for me?***

My main wonder, as I finish this research project is about retention, not of knowledge, but of a way. It is the continued engagement as identified many times through the narrative that seems to have reaped the greatest reward and I fear that something will

“turn off” that has been “turned on” – at times it inevitably will, but as a consistent and now revered way, I sincerely hope it will not.

It is the practice of psychotherapy and the continued interest and increasing love for my clients that is now my motivation; I am constantly reminded that for me surrender is the only way. This new-found capacity to ‘be present with’ and interest in, awareness of and care for when I cannot, seems like a life’s work.

### **Conclusion**

*“How I have missed this writing, even though I can’t remember what I have written, the looking, the finding or not finding, the acceptance of what or what is not found, the settling that can then happen and then the stillness that can follow – clocks ticking and birds chirping, back tight, breath heard, chest rising and falling, love tasted, just there not made or forced, with a flavour of sadness but still love. Nothing needed, some beauty even in this sad love. What happens if I go into a session flavoured with still and sad love? That is how I am, in this minute, that is how it starts. What of my regard for ‘Client N’ who is about to come in? He is a loveable man.”*

*Dissertation journal 26 June 2018*

### *A final experience of being present*

Deep in the immersion phase of this research I went down to my studio to meditate, professing to my partner before I did, “right I’m going to write today”. She said in a kindly voice that for a moment confused my sense of anticipation that she would leave me (metaphorically) in that moment, “you can do it”.

Upon arriving in my studio, I looked at a photo of a far-south surf beach, opened a couple of random books, one by Sangharakshita (1995) on Buddhist ritual, another by Jung (1953), another by Rogers (1980). It seems whenever I read these men something stirs beyond my brain. Tingling comfort, some form of relaxation, of trust that they have discovered something so true to them that grace and eloquence flows, fuelled by but separate from the words, and I can feel my own.

I begin my half-hour, five-stage, loving kindness (Metta Bhavana) meditation and attempt to first identify “however I am” as moments pass. My attention drops below the waste but above my genitals. I have found it hard in the last few months to find self-compassion, and I turn to that part of me that expects to be abandoned by my partner and immediately feel lonely, a flicker of love and compassion flow, and some relief that I have found myself.

The next stage is to direct loving kindness towards a friend, I choose a spiritual mentor that I was with yesterday. As soon as I saw him, I felt warmth and could feel how much I missed him. In the meditation I dearly wanted to be with him, then it came into my mind how yesterday he said he was going to be away for five months this year. I took my “fear of been left” self to him, grateful that I could feel the loneliness, and felt love and compassion. Then my eyes screwed up tight and began tearing, my mouth turned down so hard that it hurt as my body reacted for the second such time in meditation (the first detailed in the introductory chapter); this time I had an idea of what was happening, and I am less afraid. In the moment I can engage, and I recognise the intensity of this feeling as resembling a baby, the full-bodied clench, desperate, deathly pain.

Then a blackness behind my eyes, an infinite space opens up, silence and quiet, some joy, and a sense of strength and adventurousness, what feels like masculinity, and my eyes and mouth relax. I feel alive, the meditation bells that I set to direct the different stages of the meditation come and go and I am not bothered; with remarkable clarity I am able to attend to the moments fully.

My meditation continues with a neutral person, an Indian fellow that sold me pizza yesterday and in moments I can taste the peace and stillness of equanimity – I am not connected to this person, relief is not sought, obligation and need for approval do not emerge. Then on to directing loving kindness to a difficult person, the ex-partner of a client who texted me yesterday explaining and justifying her reasoning for breaking it off with my client. I feel my compassion clear and open, non-judging and spacious for her and my client, with no need for right and wrong.

As I finish writing I can feel my presence leave as the demands of the dissertation come forth and some story making as to what might impress or upset the protagonists in my life.

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## **APPENDICES**

1. "System of being present/not being present" – larger version of original drawing.

Appendix 1: System of being present/not being present

