

A meditative enquiry into presence: Unmaking the autoethnographic self

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Abstract

The article consists of two parts, Introduction and/or Conclusion and a Meditative Enquiry. They can be read in either order, if indeed we 'read' meditative enquiry as such. Meditative enquiry here concerns the meditative writing and/or reading of this article on presence. The enquiry is divided into numerous subheadings that encourage a slow and circular, rather than linear, narrative, and a participative reading approach, in which each section aims to return to, or arrive in, the present moment. The materiality of our presence is continuous, whether or not we are conscious of being in the present. Practicing presence is a central phenomenon addressed by all forms of meditation raising issues such as: can presence be cultivated, is present experience non-representational? What elements of experience are subjective? What are (my) embodied, non-conceptual,

insights gained from presence? The article also enacts resistance to, or an apparent inability of conscious awareness to arrive in, and stay with, what is happening in this moment. Implications are, firstly, the unmaking of: a qualitative researcher-participant's 'Self'; and the autoethnographic self within writing as creative practice. Secondly, validating a dual contribution of: meditation to philosophy and writing on presence.

Keywords:

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Meditative Enquiry

Beginning: Prior to

What might happen and what may occur, what is about to take place: the feelings and sensations of prehension as *this* takes place, are all, slowly, in the manner of the arrival of the time of an appointment but with the non-show of the event, the person, or the

‘appointed activity’, – dawning space – in which the ‘about to take place’ is fully and expectantly anticipated, are, in each and in any combination, completely, entirely and without reserve, utterly redundant. Presence aforethought would be useless in meditative enquiry.

What is not solved by belief may be discovered by action. Yet *not to act*, is necessary, in order not to pre-empt what may become a new experience. There is no way forward.

Willing, decision, action, of sorts, must be relinquished, how can this meditative effort be written, otherwise. Meditation cannot be written nor represented. It always takes place.

And yet, we might want to enquire as to how present ‘we’ is.

Arranging the leg bones, cross legged, the knees are like two parts of a tripod with the pelvic sitting bones completing a self-supporting and stable structure. Pulling back and dropping the shoulders, opening the chest, straightening the spine, there is little else to do, but wait. Perhaps resting the tip of the tongue behind the upper teeth. Sitting upright in a chair, feet resting on the floor, to sit and wait. Or, lying down, legs and arms slightly away from the body, we lie in wait. Or walking along a fixed and predetermined path for the sake of walking alone, it walks, whilst it waits. The waiting is purposeful, focused and open ended. Because the about-to-arrive has not yet arrived.

Prior to beginning: A metacognitive analysis

What was *to* take place is no longer central to my concern, yet there is a certain quite specific form, or haze, we might say cloud, of anticipation of this, so far as appearances go at least, non-event, including the proscribed and all of those things that have already been dismissed as, now, not to be included or paid attention to, despite having no idea as

to what, exactly, is permissible, acceptable or expected as ‘the present’; this I itself, is, or may be, a distraction, from facing, squarely, openly or with an effort at openness, sometimes supreme, sometimes offhand, an unknown known; *the ordinary*, and, more slowly, in the manner in which the pulse is soon felt and consciously, or otherwise, experienced to settle into another slightly slower rhythm, along with a possible deepening of the breath, after a few breaths have passed, the as-yet imperceptible ‘present’, that which is about to begin, to which *we* instead of I, as the imagined and unrealized potential I-being, or beings, which I may not yet know, is or are, not yet fully quiet – nor still – enough nor attentive to, to notice. We, that is also you and I, realize that this priming of our attention is not *of* this present in quite the same way as what we sense may be about to take place, the willing pristine naïve and perhaps hopeful intention to pay attention; it is an echo of the past, the previous state of mind, for want of a better word, that was brought, unwittingly or even half-consciously, to bear on this moment *intentionally* – almost like a faint hope to experience complete and utter presentness – the presentness of which seems to fade, both in and out of focus, drift across the present, as the slight distraction from the present-present, if there is such a thing, the one in which neither, nothing, yet, has actually happened, nor may continue to not-happen, but which we are, at the same slow time, nevertheless anticipating. Yes, again anticipating¹. The prior thought and the about to become thought of what may be about to take place, in thought, feeling or even in slight or painfully gross sensations, are each, pressing into the, imagined, ‘empty’ moment, the one we do not want to spoil, yet, as if it were their right and privilege. As if the present were in fact not full, and the appointment had not indeed

arrived whilst we were in the waiting room and our name had in fact already been called, and we are in that sense, already late. At the very least, inattentive, at most: oblivious.

Now: Beginning (unprepared)

How is this, this *it* of the beginning, which I am beginning, or, to become a possible-I, rather than pre-judged-I, we, then, to realize newness if not by a certain sort of attentiveness, and, focus. Unlike a predator, unlike prey. Yet, in the manner of these words, percepts and preformed concepts, float, that is precisely so, because seemingly supported by some subtle material substance that has no name, that, also, are now to be superfluous to our purpose, *of arriving and beginning meditation*, as meditative awareness is preliminary to meditative enquiry, yet entirely co-occurring also, a kind of emptying out of I – with all its contents – in fact a kind of flotsam and jetsam, a type of highly distractable flow of disorderly hindrances. Noticeably. Certainly, if this *it* is not it, and possibly if it is, is *so* loud – as to make whatever *it* is, presently, inaudible. The I that was waiting, more, wanting, for the present, left wanting, might conceivably not know it when it arrives. It, however, is clearly not insignificant. There is a portentousness, that seems almost limitless in ambition, derived from hearsay, perhaps intuition, as to what may be, in fact, the outer presence of the present. It is rather intriguing. The present demands, space, prior to arriving.

Beginning preparation: A metacognitive analysis

We can only begin with the settling in, the settling down, like micro-particles in water settle, making the water appear more clear than when it was agitated, and freshly arrived,

unwittingly and precisely due to its not being, yet, in place. But we are not water, well, not entirely so. The possibility of any presence – we might, or the meditative enquiry itself might, promise us – is, how shall we say, littered with the extraneous, so much so, that, not only can we not define the edges of this so-called moment, there is no agreed circumscribed dimension of a moment – is suddenly realized – of experience – is a moment just this second or also the next? that is not both overshadowed and foreshadowed by our approach, especially when too intent: our engulfment and absorption in the halo of the previous and the tremor of the about to become, becomes obvious. Or so it is being proposed here, or simply, here.

Now: Beginning attention

The varieties of varieties, infinite and complex varieties of presences that appear to overwhelm the present, upon which we still wait, and are consistently waiting within, nevertheless appear and disappear, like haunting imaginings, or, ciphers. It is as if an insect trapped between my skin and a layer of clothing, subtly forming part of the overall myriad sensory signals I usually ignore, until it, imperceptibly crawls out across my skin and disappears, to live its life elsewhere, just about noted, from a peripheral glance or a touch on departure. Or, these ciphers of the present crawl out from my very being, float, flutter and disappear, right before my, half-closed, eyes. As if I were a dead host, distastefully so, and left partly resentful, or, possibly, are we live receptacles for live beings, as we shudder and merge with the matter that made us, possibly with a gratitude of being fully participative in this emerging moment, despite ourselves, our animal, less, animate selves. A host of larvae. Returning to the emptiness of the silence between

words, between thoughts, and thoughts of words. A strand of hair touches lightly upon a face, any such present, also occurs, like a high-speed train passing through a deserted platform where we are the sole loiterer, vividly shattering silence and dominating attention by sheer force. Skin speaks more loudly than ever before in the dawning silencing of mental chatter. We notice more and more by and by. Of this pattern, of imbrication, an apparent interlacing of present material, dovetailed between something like a tacit past and tacit emergent present, although, in this unfolding beginning, imperceptibly so, without a mark of its own, yet seamlessly woven into this endless chain of being within whose train of history of thought we are ruthlessly imprinted, consumed, moment by moment, as if such words matter. We notice more and more, that is, cumulatively, that a pattern, of sorts, is calling itself to our, newly aspirational attention. Yet no pattern that is not at one and the same time forced upon ourselves by a kind of thinking that must, as we know, be abandoned as soon as indulged.

(Beginning again)

Strange as this may seem, as has already been felt through the bones to the ground and the skin to the air, what the very waited-for moment, occurring, is doing, is both persisting *and* leaving no trace. No traceable trace. No sign. Is not the boundary of the moment and all the notions that took over...of the before and the after, simply one of the productive fictions of a narrative time that does not so much belong to us as define this particularly noticeable aspect of experience, as sequential? Where does this present beginning, begin and end? We do not know and cannot tell. Beginning to become present, starts and restarts and seems constituted, by episodes, and by return.

Now: Beginning again

We may think, despite ourselves, that it seems best to label ‘anticipation’, precisely because it has the nature, unique to beginnings, or beginning agains, of that waited for, the just about to start, and in these initial moments, of uncertain duration, something does noticeably take place that may be iterative of beginnings per se, that is, a haze, halo or cloud of the brought-towards, which necessarily fades, clears and disperses. Ordinary as this is, when it is noticed, it is quite extraordinary. A dissolving of prehension?

Beginning: With metacognitive analysis and awareness

Herein, and virtually immediately, we could say that ‘adjustment’ happens, a new situation becomes instantaneously customary, and the experience of what is, or is about to be, we realize, is not quite as we had, let us not make any niceties diminish this, violently, judged it to be. We may be simply realizing that it is indeed possible to notice the fading of a carried-into expectation, one that might have had no perceptible character in the holding of it, but that nevertheless dissipates, and opens us into a freshness that we call beginning, yet something else then almost immediately replaces the led-towards, a realization, perhaps, of the *initial* itself. The constitutive harshness of prehension becomes evident, after its ceasing, also through its halo of intensity, its texture: of impetuosity. And the manner in which it speeds over the first, to the second and third. Over time, it may dawn on us to be a natural arrogance that allowed us to continue to prejudge, and assume that *we knew this*. This this. Fact is, we knew the new, as an additive fact, and our own lack of genuine welcoming openness to the new is thereby revealed, that we are now required to put down the weapon of our intention and more

humbly or perhaps better, more simply, simply wait. (Or find a greater pre-directive intention, a divine or preordained principle, rationale or belief.) Or, wait; for the present moment to arrive freshly as any kind of itself that would surprise us, being-new and not an immediate confirmation of the recognizable, return. So lies the paradox of any beginning, the first authentic appearance of the newly born personal we want, or the newly confirmed objective we might want more, at the outset, an encounter to prove to ourselves, the freshly given and perceived data of a new experience, and that turns out, to offer evidence, material evidence in fact, that We, I, Is, are real. Actually, to be nothing but an extended shadow, not only that, but a shadow with a grandeur evident in its imposition across the full spectrum of the possible range of the potential presents we simultaneously notice, is horrifying, and not what we expected from the new, possibly, Beauty, and this difference is only realized, indeed, at the fading and foreclosing of anticipation. At that precise and unique occurrence. But the case that anticipation can extend itself, to dominate more and more moments, is evident. And that beginning brings itself to return with this quality of resistance to the new, at the same time as we relinquish it, is what becomes clear. And at, virtually, the same instant as it fades. But fades into what, clears to show what? What we thought of as new and unique? A pristine space in the beginning into which something could arrive? And if this is real, and appears self-same to our intention, only proves how hollow and insubstantial were the nature of the myriad present presents, as being only that slight gap between anticipation and adjustment. Our over eagerness to bring towards, or to gather from, is embossed and watermarked, certifying the 'present' as inauthentic, or as something ingenuous to ourselves – out of sheer impatience and an attitude of 'making do', as unreliable

witnesses we should admit – we must put these impulses aside, leave aside and relinquish prehensive anticipation for something to appear otherwise, and even more, for us to understand something that is new on its own terms, surely, in order to even allow the possibility of getting to know something, anything, that is not already in accord with what we, already, have in our possession. A different attitude is required. One that looks away whilst it receives? One that asks for nothing whatsoever and refrains from accepting should it be offered? This is, when accomplished, no mean feat. If we can say it is accomplished at all.

Now: Beginning (again)

Numerous opportunities we are somehow witnessing becoming forever lost. We lose hours. We cannot and do not let our own prejudgement go, we do not know how to become new, our own pre-knowing is somehow held onto in an impossible manner, as if clinging to clods of grassy earth at the top of this cliff were consistently preferable, with a chronic aching and searingly painful grip...to falling, into the present, which terrifies us...

Beginning (again): A metacognitive analysis

...that I seem not to know, or want to know, the present moment and that this is self-imposed, is a momentous realization, yet no sooner realized than understood, that being predisposed, by our own constitution, is to be habitual to the bone, within our biochemical reactive programme in the flesh, as autonomic, to what we fear may be, what we assume to be, falling, to certain death, way down below through what we misperceive as simply void and empty distance in which nothing could possibly be. Neither flesh, nor

bones. *The new*, a type of descent, might speak loudly and clearly of the height and breadth of our monolithic faith, in a word, such as I. The everyday unwillingness to wait or not presume that this situation – ordinary as it is – may be entirely wrong and that we are here already at our appointment and it is exactly, or even more deviously, generously available, yet we feel is not very different to what we had in fact already predicted it would be, waiting within *nothing* for that *something* to arrive, mistaking nothing for something, as nothing. Thus we are affirmed in our ignorance, and stupidly assert ourselves to have known and have interpreted ‘correctly’ the perception, or to have perceived correctly, the meaningful gestalt of this sensation of the new as “new”, or pieced together accurately the picture of this situation and finding it recognizable, despite being embedded within it, as if we had, magically, transferred some knowledge and hard-won insight from a previous experience, a previous life, perhaps. Or, lesson learned, theoretically or otherwise, had known that *it*, this moment, would be so, more or less, is, what we had authoritatively known it would be, revealed to be, perhaps through hearsay, and other such expressions of this circularity. The cycle of perpetual resistance to the moment, ingrained within the routine circuitry of a body-mind, for want of a better word. The guts of which matter are forever foreign to us, yet germane, familiar, we are strangers to ourselves. I, is a stranger.

Beginning (again): Iterative analysis

Is unbeginning, persisting, ridiculous, if we were to think about it? As this nothing happens. But we do not think, willingly, we do not actively emote willingly, we do not search and seek for sensation willingly or with the eagerness of well-made choices,

because, to do so, to be so, would be thoroughly inhuman. Do we persist, in the cognitive, out of love or desire for love? And we lose love more often than we find it, here, whilst waiting. We live in something enough like the present to be acceptable, acceptably present. No. We pre-empt what may already be taking place right under our nose, so to speak, in a moment of hubris. And is this not the moment by which things are grasped prior to their offering? The self-same, not the present moment, we are – seemingly, repeatedly and diligently – acting into, rather than opening onto, or into the nothing that is arriving, as we speak. Under which we speak. Over which we speak. In a manner of speaking, writing. Who is premised on the debt of the foregoing? None other than a spendthrift who feels owed what is not yet available and takes what is not freely given. That an ethical moment is dawning here, is apparent.

Now: Beginning awareness

The double distraction, the pre – and the post – are, characteristically, present to awareness, near or as close as possible to the beginning as is feasible, for research purposes, in this recreation, always re-creation, of a situation of our own making. The situation of our own making. That we do not notice that an anticipatory element has evaporated at the micro-second, or quantum scale whereby the textures that constitute our ordinary experience, because what is so remarkable as sitting or lying down, standing or walking, are both perceived and embodied, and cannot be differentiated, or experienced, qualitatively, differently, as separate...

Beginning (again): With awareness

A door possibly, or advent, may be occurring, if we were to follow St Teresa into a type of Interior Castle, but one that is not, architecturally speaking, yet to be built, and structurally, *could* not be built. Would we even know how to construct a meditative experience, post-qualitatively? It would be far too dangerous to be left to our own devices. Or too, too easy and therefore, disingenuous, to claim it as being of our own making. Despite the fact, no-one else is thinking our thoughts or breathing our breath. Supposedly. Whose open doors do we cross, as threshold after threshold comes and goes? Not mine. And are we not inevitably following, rather than leading, towards this full and complete arrival?

Now: Beginning awareness (again)

Then, after a miniature caesura, of virtually insignificant non-resistance and nonperception, a willingness even to disbelieve, or, with deep irony, the exact same predisposition – of resistance for all of the above, but this time *towards* the new, the novel and the different, as if our very survival depended on discovering within all of the overly rehearsed: a glitch, unrecognized and unrecognizable, clarity, a different possibility, arises... Something else extraordinary, something else ordinary despite being infrequent, perhaps by virtue of it occurring less often and hence having this quantitative character of infrequency, alone, happens. We begin something new. This grabs our attention. And the fearfully inspired violence that constitutes and signifies the heaviness of expectantly lying in wait, rather than simply waiting for waiting's sake, appears over, and our name is called just at the parallel realization that it is our name that is being called, virtually simultaneously, whilst with very little, if not zero perceived, delay, that

we answer: 'Yes', in recognition of being called before awareness that our own name was named. This all at once, occurs.

Beginning awareness (again): A metacognitive analysis

A moment of a validation of ordinary experience as ordinary experience of epistemic certainty of itself embodied as the world, says yes to itself with an autochthonic familiar name that is not my name.

Now: Beginning (again)

A new synchrony arrives that is not the immediately before nor emergent after but the *simultaneous*, the *all at once*, everything-all-at-once, within which we too, in our myriad bodies taking place, because, the facticity of there being both nowhere and no one else to be, strikes us as self-evident, and the strange and extraordinary phenomena of light that is the light of, the light within and the thing lit, or the thoroughly riven sound within the body cavities that is also the sound without, space within and outside ourselves, as vibration, movement and continuous oscillation, neither one nor more, but as much the fabric of sound as a singular sound: sounds.

Now: Beginning (again) a metacognitive awareness

Calmness descends, and ascends, simultaneously, because, there is no longer *direction*, nor *centre*. The previous object, as if we could call the slow and repetitive attempt to simply finds one's own beginning in an object as seemingly intangible as the presence of

presence, the moment ‘pure’ and ‘simple’ (that now, laughably, is referred to as such because it is not only the opposite of both, but both both; pure and simple, impure and complex, approximately speaking) this object of beginning does in fact take place in front of the very (half-closed) eyes it is right before. Transparently, the name to which we responded when called, we knew, as if whispered, is not our own name, no longer belongs to us in anything like the manner in which we customarily possess; knowledge, identity or form, in that it is, equally and nondualistically, formless. Not neither here nor there but both here and there, and not here and not there, in and yes, there is some kind of extensive *within* in which beginning appears to occur – although it is clearly not a differentiated – from-outside – within – we take our place, outside, being open, which brings an indifferent and highly neutral sense of quietness, because there is not any other, forever vacillating, subject–object, although it must be said that the object of being in the present, the one that brought us here, has a textured momentum of its own. Possibilities arise, as this moment, the primary, obligation: to *stay* or better *rest* whilst awake, and stay here with ease, occurs, to rest all of one’s bones.

Now: Beginning anew

The way one feels, say, *the very first time* we manage to coordinate our balance with momentum and not fall off a bike whilst learning to ride, as a child. Performing the first step after the first step, and not falling, as an infant. Likewise, receive into one’s child hands a precious, precarious and surprisingly too large gift, the holding of which, prior to opening, to be given something, cumbersome, feared, to be older than this age, and unknown, has the seriousness of a duty, that sets itself apart as being, endless, yet we

know, fleeting and delicious. Yet here it is, it is, indeed, here. Materially, continuous with the same.

Now: Beginning anew a metacognitive awareness

It (formerly I, we and us, our and my) without depth, because where is the edge of the edgeless, also extends, much further and farther than had been imaginable, how this experience is to be experienced, is also open, indifferently, casually and with complete and utter abandon, abundance, that what we were is now merely an aspect of a fragment of a particle of a gas that is seemingly saturated by space and silence, encompassing not only all that had been but all that could ever be, and not be, how, the horizon of the possible present becomes infinitely present,

Now: Beginning (again) with iterative analysis

until distantly and approaching, suddenly or slowly, it is hard to tell, the previous, that is to say, all of the above, effortful effort, habituation, at some point, resumes, returns and sooner or later, *it*, is returned to the about to be and the almost arrived, and the known unknown, the halo, cloud and mist of what it is that is casually and personally known, put up with, borne with grit, along with what now appear to be old acquaintances of consciousness, like familiar ghosts, arriving into the vast domains where words like ‘quietness’ or ‘spaciousness’, neither of which suffice because they are so much overused to be precise enough, like memory sounds of pure and simple, are left, struggling, to indicate the absolute stillness and the depthless emptiness, ridiculous in their noisy poetry, as representations, clanging cymbals, yet are the only terms which are called to be

used in such a context, are no longer sufficient either, rather, they are the holding places in a flow of *its events*, shallow, as to be nothing like...

Now: Beginning

the memory of...glittering light upon ripples of water, gracefully, and incisively, dreamily appearing and vanishing, in pure contingency, yet of an equal and perfectly proportioned grain, texture and rhythm so as to be somewhat consistent with something like itself...

Now: Beginning (again with analysis)

...it is, that is formerly 'we are', once more known, adjusted to and accommodated, and limited thereby into the body, it, seemingly chose the only route back into the same, self-same repetition, that may have, yet, brought it here, through an inchoate word, once more and once more inhabiting something formerly *known*, yet and yet, lost again to the present...

Now: Beginning (again)

...yet warmed, struck, reverberating, like a bell sounding throughout the whole body, tingling, at multiple octaves; all at once, with the infinitely appearing, at least, non-totalizing totality, as a tremor, the grains of which, at a quantum level perhaps, rhythmically entrain to some other sound, some other light, that is non-other than sound, or light, not visible, but as the body of it, its body-world, within, in a manner of speaking, it pulses within. Sounded like a bell within and around the embryonic beginning within

great beginning, those possible vastness's we now know, knew, as real, present, from which beginning flows, glittering, across a ground of sorts, as a breeze, of sorts, passes through us, formerly, *it*, now, *absent*.

Introduction and/or Conclusion

Presence, whilst presupposing indebtedness, evokes an educational dynamic of learning from (one's) experience. One of our contemporary dilemmas is that we are not present to our own experience; and that this is itself productive of misunderstanding, if not ethical collapse. Every form of meta-text (title, abstract, introduction and/or conclusion, subheading) is a formal gesture towards the metacognitive, and to the function of something like awareness within consciousness of itself that is, in one sense, an impossible object of nonduality; the experience of experience. If meditative enquiry is thus a form of attention, can each moment be enacted via 'text' in place of other more common 'objects' for meditation, such as the breath? What follows is less an explanation, analysis or even justification of the enquiry, more a guide to the recent literature and thinking that either led to, or followed, its production.

Meditative enquiry is distinctive as a research method in that it is formulated from Martine Batchelor's terms 'experiential enquiry' and 'creative awareness' used in various contexts, based on her years of study and practice in the Korean Son (Zen) tradition. Her practice and teaching in the West has often been aligned with the secular buddhist approach of her husband, Stephen Batchelor (Stephens in Harris 2021). Meditative enquiry is not derived from any formal instruction, rather, it has emerged out of my years

of practice of meditative approaches deeply indebted to this western form of Korean Zen meditation taught by Martine Batchelor (1999, 2001, 2007, 2019). Its distinctiveness is that it employs a non-representational approach, one that is culturally, philosophically and implicitly, influenced by teachings from the Zen tradition.

The ‘Self’ of the ‘Author’ as ‘Researcher’ – has a representational presence required by academic writing on human experience that is most apparent in diverse forms of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a creative practice. Art practices also embody presence in unique ways, yet the logical-sequential constraints of representationalist accounts of such practices often hinge on syntactical convention, that is to say, it is axiomatic that AI can recreate presence through such means. We construct a ‘narrative-constituting-self’ as we hear or imagine moments of ‘lived experience’ filtered through our lived experience as readers, of these registers of formality, and forms of research ‘output’ or artistic production, named or described by the ‘maker’ behind the work.

Some examples of highly contingent narrativizing, yet emerging as credible methods from both art and consciousness studies, that address this postmodern crisis of presence, are found in this journal. Each might reflect a re-positioning of presence, the first in the art object, the second in the text itself. Seers and Penwill’s ‘Fractured consciousness’ where: ‘Perhaps art has a unique position in consciousness as it has a particular and specific mode of reflexivity, a self-reflexivity that can inculcate thought about thinking itself’ (2017: 168) is an excellent example of the value for artists of interrogating subjectification. They continue: ‘With this meta-narrative of thought about thought

triggered by an artwork, I believe that the viewer can simultaneously perceive both causal and a-causal events in an object or image' (2017: 168). To this we must add 'writing' and to writing here is implied 'meditative enquiry' in and of the moment as our object: writerly and/or readerly presence. Another article also establishing a post-qualitative positionality, via this journal, is 'Here and there: An artist's writing as aesthetic form' (Francis, 2010). This latter article brilliantly embodies coherence of the writerly object, the text in its ability to enact a 'staging' of writerly performativity to underline the role of text in self-consciously doing just that; creating presence, without the 'subjectivity' of its author.

What introductions and/or conclusions do, as all other forms of meta-text, is attempt to bring 'experience' to an end, resolution, or, an arbitrary beginning. The task of the meditative enquiry was to stay focused on its purpose: experiential presence. However, this object inspired by the Zen tradition is part of a cultural inheritance and pedagogic lineage antithetical to text, transmitted outside of the scriptures as part of an oral and iconographic cultural heritage, and hence an ideal vehicle that critiques, not only text itself, but representational thinking through language.

This question, long shared across philosophy, literature and creative arts research is well summed up in 'Presence and Absence' a section in the chapter on 'Phenomenological Writing' in Van Manen's central work in the overlapping concerns of these fields (2014: 367). This is also a wonderful text for cataloguing the diverse varieties of contemporary phenomenology, aside of course, from a Meditative Approach, which is not yet

recognised as such. At the heart of Van Manen's section on presence and referred to only in passing here, is a prime motivation for re-visiting presence, the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence that is Derrida's encounter with Husserl's phenomenology. It is this moment perhaps more than any other that re-defined postmodern philosophy's de-centring of the very notion of the 'living present', as precursor to text, as prior to representation, and primary, and that marked presence as an infinitely deferring play against absence and the impossibility of self-identity (Cisney 2014). This enquiry throws itself in at the deep end of the problem of presence in language, in an effort to experience it for oneself, escape the shadow of the dualisms of presence/absence, life/death, yet ask similar questions raised by Derrida of Husserl's approach, described with such clarity in Cisney's study guide *Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon* (2014: 60).

In terms of Education and Buddhism such work as Ergas, (2015) not only proposes Buddhist 'mindfulness' as a form of pedagogy, that is, educational enquiry, but cites the neuroscience that allows 'mindwandering' to be articulated as an ordinary condition of consciousness which education theory neglects and perhaps only meditation can genuinely illuminate. Cognitive science has befriended Buddhism, and mindfulness, more wholeheartedly than other disciplines. Contemporary and emergent Buddhisms are further contextualized, in a set of introductory texts, by myself elsewhere (Stephens cited in Harris 2021) as providing post-metaphysical, immanent forms of praxis. This is not then an article about Buddhism, meditation or mindfulness, as such. Yet mindfulness research is founded on similar premises to much experiential educational theory, that of embodied cognition (Varela et al. 1991) an area of cognitive science itself indebted to

phenomenology. The question of new knowledge, how novelty arises is also a prime motivator in Deleuze's work as a philosopher of material embodiment, and hence the popularity of adopting Deleuze's work in arts and humanities education (Semetsky 2006) where also for St. Pierre (2004) 'the subject undone' subtiles her approach to a 'deleuzian education' that later extends to new forms of experiential enquiry (2017).

The field of embodied cognition then, extends notions of presence to an innate intelligence found in the body and material context in general, human and non-human, whilst defining cognition as a distributed activity outside of the brain, and is still seen as radical neuroscience (Kiverstein and Miller 2015). Embodied cognition is 30 years old and the widely adopted model of describing embodiment as 4EA (embodied, embedded, extended, enacted, affective) likewise, yet still in education, arguably, little understood. Phenomenology, its post-phenomenological forms and its precise relations to meditation are well summarized in a recent article by Stone and Zahavi (2021). They consider meditative practices as fundamentally different to phenomenology in that mediation, they argue, is not a form of philosophy, despite many claims that meditation has similarities with the phenomenological reduction and epoché, as described in early phenomenology by Husserl. I would argue that meditative enquiry is post-phenomenological in that meditative presence is neither transcendental nor psychological in Husserl's terms. Despite meditation being clearly non-philosophical, embracing non-conceptual experience, its ability to interrupt or disrupt habitual thinking might well lead to philosophical insight.

For some established research perspectives on mindfulness a phenomenological approach has been key to the habilitation of Buddhism, such as in Warren Brown and Corden (2009). A clear example which outlines the supposed similarities and affinities, and whilst reductively aligning mindfulness with attention, without depth of discussion (or we might assume, practice) they usefully align mindfulness with emotion, anticipating later research on affect and Buddhism. The interest in connecting phenomenology with mindfulness is founded on numerous works by key scientists who were also drawn to Buddhist practice – as a personal commitment – such as Engles and Varela in the early 1980’s who helped established the strong connections between Buddhist practice and neuroscience in organizations such as the Mind and Life Institute. As already mentioned this has now contributed to the establishment of embodied cognition. More critically, Dan Zahavi brings a depth of philosophical resources back to mindfulness study (Zahavi and Sone 2021) and aims to question some naïve assumptions that mindfulness is phenomenological.

For others, qualitative research into mindfulness practitioners (Stelter 2009) has revealed new aspects of embodied cognition, greatly informing practices of well-being that have driven current trends in compassionate pedagogies, whilst providing more insight into meditative experience. More recent research, using interpretive phenomenological analysis with meditation practitioners (Ekici et al. 2018) aims to get even closer through representational narrative accounts, typifying a trend towards serious study of meditative experience with curiosity, openness and veracity. Even recent work on concepts such as ‘nonconscious cognition’ and the broader project to connect new materialist and

contemporary non-human systems with fully extended notions of animal, plant and digital technology-supported cognition relates to meditation as a positive case, see for example Hayles (2017: 60). Despite all these efforts, very few voices attempt to promote meditative practice as research, of which this article is an example.

Meditative enquiry as research, educational or otherwise, certainly has aspects in common with Ashwani Kumar's 'Meditative Inquiry' (2013). However, his model is derived from the primary influence of Krishnamurti's philosophy (1895–1986), an Indian philosopher, educator and prolific religious thinker and founder, combined with James B. MacDonald (1925–83) the humanist educationalist concerned with a depth of personal, self-reflection, social concern and eventually the importance of faith in education. Kumar's existentialist approach sets out how 'awareness' practices ultimately transform consciousness by dissolving basic features of internal conflict, and is liberatory in nature, yet it does not fully address the problem of 'representationalism' nor relate to the contemporary questions raised here in the fields of materialist research, writing and creative practice. He also extends his formulation of inquiry towards 'dialogic meditative inquiry' (DMI) in later work (2019).

In furthering contemporary critical research Lather and St. Pierre concisely point out that by 'giving up' both 'phenomenology and logical positivism', we also give up 'representational logic' (2013: 630). By doing this they distance themselves from 'descriptive phenomenology' the earlier Husserlian version, and align more with interpretive phenomenology, the type employed by later phenomenologists and akin to

forms of creative academic writing and autoethnography, where meanings of world making experience are foregrounded. However, already having contributed to the collection of more radical critique of assumptions of identity in interpretive autoethnography (Jackson and Mazzei 2009), St.Pierre also problematises presence in her afterword ‘Decentering voice in qualitative inquiry’ (2009: 221-236).

Meditative enquiry in this instance aims to take this experimentalism further and embody what a post-intentional phenomenology or deleuzoguatarrian experiment (Vagle and Hofsess 2016) might be. Affects, sensations and thoughts of presence thus position *beginning* as the motif-refrain of a meditative awareness of the presence that ‘writes’, whilst writing occurs. This article welcomes the post-qualitative outlined in Lather and St Pierre (2013) and proposes meditative enquiry as a valid method of enquiry that exemplifies a Buddhist-inspired contribution to post-qualitative research, indeed to post-phenomenological philosophy. Characterized by non-attachment, non-conceptual or non-cognitive content, this experiential method scrutinizes all qualitative data of self-knowledge through foregrounding metacognition and awareness of language and, theoretically at least, starts from a position of non-Self. Meditative enquiry is thus also a means of ceasing self-making in order to create ethico-onto-epistemological (Barad 2007) moments of possibility, a form of Buddhist praxis, the Zen element of which emphasises action, or non-action, as primarily demonstrative spiritual experience, here enacted via academic writing. This meditative enquiry – it is hoped – offers unique insights into how presence occurs in language, through the practices of writing and reading meditatively. Informed, like Barad’s approach to a pre-ontological ethics of obligation, found also in

Levinas (1993), these are each ethical methods that decentre the Subject, in ways that could be broadly termed non-western, a point echoed by Hayles (2017: 60), or, tangentially western.

Vagle and Hofsess (2016) then, in terms of post-phenomenology and in reference to Barad, ‘theorize an entangled post-reflexivity that aims to incite methodological movements and possibilities for qualitative inquiry’. The problem they encapsulate of course, is that by writing cogently and with a rigour towards explication, notions of entanglement are not often realized in academic writing. It could be, however, that an ‘open, recursive and process-oriented framework for validity’ (Cho and Trent 2006), opens up validity for meditative enquiry in post-qualitative research.

Sympathetically, Claire Colebrook, a leading theorist of materiality describes what I would call subtle materialism of a meditative type when she speculates: ‘It is *this* potentiality of nonrealization, of dispersion, of remaining inert and refusing to be oneself that frees matter from the human, through the human’ (Colebrook 2008: 82, original emphasis) and in terms of the work-being-art and her readings of Deleuze, also: ‘Once conceptual, functional, and affective singularities can be freed from the lived, to be experienced in their pure state, we arrive at a new notion of becoming, “the pure form of empty time in general” (Deleuze 1994: 207 cited in Colebrook 2008:78)

This can be, I would argue, non-other than an embodied (non-philosophical but not anti-philosophical) realization of Śūnyata, emptiness, in Buddhist terms. A notion from Zen which, it is clear, Deleuze was himself very well aware (1996) and utilized strategically. Whilst presence appears in the text as poetically embellished, represented via colourful

analogies, and reified, these are ‘literary’ devices used to disrupt academic normativity. Any notion of ‘special’ experience is, after it is experienced, according to my meditation teacher Martine Batchelor, simply like manure that is put on the flower beds; the ordinary infrequent, and neither better nor more important than other experiences or insights gained in the next present, into which we arrive, empty-handed.

In summary, there is no value in qualitative data without the facticity of presence, yet the quality of that presence is rarely questioned. In the ‘meditative enquiry’ part of this article, text was used to disrupt the normative logic of a representational narrated self and (re)create thoughts, feelings and sensations of the iterative and circular processes of ‘arriving’ into presence, *beginning*, that is one of the preconditions of meditative awareness as educational enquiry. A moment when the Self itself may not have had the resources it needs to become performative, and intentionality we might say, is still emergent. This may facilitate a recognition of the non-conceptual in embodiment as nondualistic presence, and acknowledge how meditative enquiry, whilst appearing futile for cognitive logic of linguistic and linear types, might yet deepen presence in new and contributory ways.

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¹ After writing, I became familiar with an excellent book on ‘anticipation’ in its wider cultural, philosophical and art and design contexts, that also addresses the contemporary ‘present’, see Brassat and O’Reilly in References.