‘Physicalisation’: A Pedagogy of Body-Mind Cultivation for Liberation in Modern Yoga and Meditation Methods

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Abstract
This paper explores the transformation of a dualistic mind-body relationship as reported by participants in a recent qualitative study involving modern yoga and meditation practitioners. The stories of the practitioners focused strongly on transforming a body-self that was configured as a result of living a life in Western cultural contexts where philosophies of mind-body dualisms were taken to underpin daily practices. The practitioners described a well-trodden somatic pedagogical pathway towards liberation from domination that they called ‘physicalisation’. The paper illustrates physicalisation as cultivation of bodymind unity and de-identification before exploring the three dimensions of the practitioners’ embodied spatiotemporal transformations that we have termed: empowerment, mustery and negating domination.

Keywords
modern meditation and yoga, mind-body, spatiotemporal, somatic pedagogy, domination, liberation

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the experiences of a group of long-term practitioners in modern meditation and yoga methods who live in contemporary Western cultural contexts. These stories, in a variety of ways, all related experiences of ‘consciously’ transforming a body-self relationship that was believed to be configured as a result of living life in ‘Western culture’, where dominant philosophies of ‘mind-body dualisms’ were taken to underpin daily practices in limiting ways. The extracts of the stories and our interpretation of them centre on the practical experiencing of this transformation, where participants described ‘what they do’ in terms of a multidimensional transformative process we refer to as ‘physicalisation’. Lewis contends that: ‘the body
physicalizes discourses of how to engage (or how one would wish to engage) with the world.¹ He adds:

The body has the propensity to physicalize and convey its own sensibility, to become a matrix of, and for, inscription. Such a standpoint of conscious mutability highlights the body-centred battle with modernity, that the body feels changes in both its material and ideational environments.²

Hinting at conscious mutability, Lewis’ definition is helpful in framing how we might come to view how physicalisation can be seen as a deliberatively initiated body-pedagogy aimed at self-transformation. In so doing, we want to further conceptualise physicalisation in social phenomenological terms, to view it as a subjective spatiotemporal process that involves coming to feel, understand and ‘act on’ the subtle movements within the body-mind nexus. Physicalisation becomes a long-term, regular disciplined act of ‘doing’, and therefore it conveys a form of agency through the body. In effect, physicalisation connotes some of the complex embodied practical processes employed in many contemporary yoga and meditation methods to become aware of and challenge the recursive relationship between society’s (restrictive) dominant ideologies and the embodied internalisation of these for many people in everyday ‘Western life’.

In what follows, we first outline our methodological strategy for this study. We then articulate some of the key theoretical sensitivities and caveats that inform our article. Following this, we present how in our data the notion of physicalisation through modern yoga and meditation methods is found to involve two key spatiotemporal practical processes: a) the cultivation of progressive states of body and mind unity, and b) the cultivation of de-identification that resembles a form of emotional re-habituation. The remainder of the article is then devoted to illustrating how our participants practise physicalisation in ways that offer them liberation from perceived forces of social domination (both in their external and internalised forms). More specifically, they talk about three non-linear spatiotemporal experiences, which represent subjective dimensions of a cultivating sense of liberation. We have identified these dimensions as Empowerment, Mysterity and Negating domination. In presenting these data, we also begin to explore some of the narrative connections (social, cultural, historical) inherent within them. Clearly, these bodily experiences are necessarily mediated (and mitigated) by hybrid (re)invented narrative resources emerging from modern yoga and meditation methods as practised in contemporary Western cultural contexts. As such, the ideas emerging from the participants’ stories can be identified as informed by hybrid sto-

¹ Lewis 2000, p. 75.
² Lewis 2000, p. 74.
ries that are more inclined to mediate contemporary constructions of yoga and meditation rather than ‘authentic’ Asian traditions, and which the informants strongly invest in and draw upon to make sense of their experiences and changing bodily states of being in a search for narrative coherence.

Methodology and participants

The authors’ academic interest and motivations in modern meditation and yoga methods are accompanied by a long-term personal experience. For example, the principal author has studied and practised modern meditation and yoga methods for the past nine years, while the second author has studied and practised various forms of martial arts in the past ten years.

Reviews of research in modern yoga methods thus far suggest that while the physiological and psychological benefits of yoga practice—from a ‘scientific’ point of view—are potentially positive, methodological discrepancy remains a feature of this research. Part of the issue here is to do with the evaluation of these methods that have evolved from a different epistemological tradition, and rendering these practices to the falsificationist logics of ‘Western science’. Reviews of research on modern meditation methods reveal a similar pattern. In their review of research into the physical and psychological effects of meditation between 1931–96, Murphy, Donovan and Taylor point out that the main focus of much meditation research has been on ‘beginning practitioners of meditation’, and that the bulk of these studies are ‘limited by the conventional scientific insistence that results are repeatable’. They then problematise this approach pointing out that: ‘certain important experiences occur only rarely in meditation, and a science that disregards them loses important empirical results’. In contrast to this situation, this study solicited the stories of long-term experienced practitioners and through a qualitative methodology, sought to capture some of the richness of occasional epiphany-type experiences and the detail of everyday practice that Murphy, Donovan and Taylor allude to. In order to do this, the study used a life history strategy that involved eliciting participant stories via a series of semi-structured interviews, which were conducted over 12 months in the UK with ten volunteers (the stories of six of them are considered here). The identification of the participants was guided by a combination of purposeful and opportunistic sampling. Purposeful

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3 See, for example, Kirkwood et al. 2005; Pilkington et al. 2005.
5 Mason 1996.
sampling was used in order to identify long-term, experienced practitioners in contemporary meditation and yoga methods, that is at least one year of self-practice, also attending courses/retreats/classes and having established a way of life that is informed by these contemporary philosophies and practices. Opportunistic sampling provided flexibility because it allowed us to follow new leads by taking advantage of the unexpected acquaintances and relationships constructed in the field. These opportunistic sampling strategies led to interviewing long-term practitioners/teachers from a variety of methods. Although there are significant differences in the philosophies and embodied approaches used between these, making them particular in many ways to our interest in self-transformation, there was a considerable overlap in many parts of the individual accounts, which assisted us in understanding cumulatively how the participants’ stories about physicalisation might be related to self-transformation as liberation from domination.

The concept of ‘liberation’ has been explored and debated by many scholars in various disciplines, demonstrating similarities and differences in its cosmology, ontology, epistemology and connection with social life within the various Asian philosophical traditions. Regardless of these differences, the importance of the body-mind complex as the key to attaining liberation is emphasised and highlighted in all of them. As Chapple contends:

> Whether it is Jain, Buddhist, or Hinduized forms, the goal of Yoga is to bring about a cessation (nirodha) of those thought propensities that lead to continued afflicted behaviour.11

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6 Miles and Huberman 1994.
7 While beyond the scope of this article, it should be qualified that these experiences only tell part of the story because certain cases in our data suggest that modern yoga and meditation methods also have the potential to reinforce both external and internal oppression/repression and domination. When pursued in a way that reinforces ego-identification, they have the potential to lead to another subjective, spatiotemporal dimension we call Adherence. In this mode, the body pedagogies of yoga and meditation are used to objectify and dominate the body-self rather than liberate it. This mode is most prevalent when modern yoga and meditation methods are used exclusively as therapies (Clarke 1997); commodified health and fitness body projects; or in pursuit of a secularised spirituality driven by the hedonistically inspired notions of happiness and well-being (Alter 2004).
9 Koller 1993, p. 47.
10 Here, the term ‘Yoga’ signifies both what is nowadays most commonly called ‘yoga and meditation’ practice. Today, and especially in contemporary Western/ised cultural contexts, these two terms signify different practices and this is how we are using them in this paper. However, historically, in Indian languages, ‘meditation’ and ‘yoga’ are inextricably associated and there is much less of a gap between these two terms (De Michelis, 2004), and therefore specialist scholarship on Asian philosophies will often use the generic term ‘Yoga’.
In this article we choose to situate and discuss the stories of our participants through adopting a social constructivist approach by drawing on Burkitt’s theorisation of the emotional habitus, discussed in the following section, in order to frame our participants’ storied emotional transformations. Also, we adopt phenomenological lenses to develop on Yuasa’s notion of achieved body-mind unity through modern meditation and yoga cultivation practices. The six participants that are considered here are:

- **Tony** (male) a ‘dharma’ teacher, previously a journalist, who was a Buddhist monk in Thailand for several years. He has been teaching Vipassana meditation with the Insight Meditation Society worldwide for many years and also practises physical yoga occasionally.
- **Alan** (male) is studying to be a social worker, also a former rugby player and sprinter of an Afro-Caribbean background who has been involved in Tibetan Tantric-based meditation practice as taught at the Maitreya Monastery in England for about eight years.
- **Yogi-Bear** (male) is a computer engineer who has been involved in a lot of ‘spiritual groups’ as he calls them, including Indian Buddhist meditation groups, Japanese Zen groups and Neo-Advaita groups for about 30 years.

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13 Yuasa 1987. Yuasa, similar to Nagatomo 1992, writes within a set of widely accepted, historically constructed oppositions of ‘Western dualism’ and ‘Eastern holism’ (personal communication with G. Samuel). However, we suggest that their ideas related to the body-mind are useful in understanding our participants’ storied transformations because they rightly acknowledge that the body has its own agency and is a source of self-transformation.
14 A Buddhist Indian practice based on developments in the Theravada tradition. Emphasises reflexive awareness of bodily sensations, breath, feelings, thoughts, emotions etc. Central themes of meditation practice also include the cultivation of ‘compassion’ and ‘happiness’.
15 This centre is part of the Tibetan Foundation, which is an extension of the so-called Church of Shambhala Vajrayana Maitreya Sangha. The ‘teachings’ are an amalgam of New Age, Christian and Tibetan Buddhist ideas and practices that include: ‘soul therapy’, ‘charkra initiations’, the use of ‘tools’ or pendants for healing and meditation, exorcism and others.
16 Japanese Zen meditation is based on developments in the Indian Mahayana tradition in Japan. Common techniques in the Zen tradition include: awareness of posture, breathing and the koan practice (linguistically meaningless dialogues that aim at shaking the practitioner, so as to help him/her let go of habitual activities of the mind). The role of the teacher is central.
17 Here we refer to the Neo-Advaita Vedanta practice as taught by Gangaji (an American disciple of Papaji in the lineage of the Indian sage Ramana Maharishi). This practice originates from the Hindu philosophical school of Vedanta. ‘Advaita’ means non-duality and the aim of the practice is liberation through dissolution of individuality. Gangaji’s teachings focus on the ‘true’ nature of the human being, which is not the body or the mind but ‘eternal absolute awareness’. The guru is essential and the practice is called Satsang (sat = true, sanga = company). In Satsangs, practitioners gather together and perform a form of self-inquiry and self-questioning: Who am I? They listen to the guru and they may read scriptures, which they then meditate on (not
John (male) is a driving instructor who had practised Transcendental Meditation (TM)\textsuperscript{18} for 25 years and once disillusioned, he abstained from any form of meditation for five years until he came across the Neo-Advaita method, which he has been following for ten years.

Sofie (female) is a writer and has practised different modern yoga and meditation methods but has been a dedicated Asthanga yoga\textsuperscript{19} practitioner for around five years.

Fiona (female) is an Asthanga yoga teacher/practitioner. She has been involved in various modern meditation and yoga practices for 20 years. She was taught yoga in India by an Indian yoga teacher on a one-to-one basis. She owns her own yoga studio and has been teaching for over 10 years.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were coded using HyperResearch\textsuperscript{TM} software package and following Lieblich \textit{et al.}, they were then subjected to a holistic-content analysis.\textsuperscript{20} This involves, as Patton comments, ‘identifying coherent and important examples, themes, and patterns in the data . . . that are examples of the same underlying idea, issues or concept’.\textsuperscript{21} However, in so doing constant reference was made to how these emerging themes related consistently to the stories individuals told as a whole.

Theoretical sensitivities and caveats

Although, historically, there have been several views about the body-mind relationship within the Western cultural tradition, it is the simplistic Cartesian

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\textsuperscript{18} The Transcendental Meditation method was founded by the Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who argued that it derived from the Indian Vedic tradition. It commonly involves mantra recitation. The mantras are secret and are supposed to be chosen by the teachers specifically for each individual.

\textsuperscript{19} Asthanga yoga was originally taught by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois of Mysore in India. It is a modern form that seeks to embody the eight ‘limbs’ of yoga as expounded by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. It is a physically demanding practice, energetic, ‘aerobic’ and flowing in style, and aims at focusing the mind and body, as well as at regulating prana (life, vital force). It involves breathing regulation, internal locks (bhandas) and drishtis (gaze), which are all associated with particular postures. Bhandas involve sustained contraction of a group of muscles that assist the practitioner in maintaining a posture and moving in and out of it. Drishtis involve instructions for directing the gaze to either the thumb, or the third eye (between the eyebrows), or the palm, the navel, the tongue etc. Mantras are also used.

\textsuperscript{20} Lieblich \textit{et al.} 1998.

\textsuperscript{21} Patton 1987, p. 46.
dualism of mind and body that has been the predominant idea. Within this philosophical tradition, the relationship between the body and the mind is broadly considered an interaction of two distinct entities (Descrates’ interactionalism): either an interaction that has ‘God’ as the intermediary (occasionalism), or a simultaneous correlation between separate events (parallelism).\textsuperscript{22} A subsequent dualism that emerges is between the mind-spirit and matter, which is very common in many contemporary Christian religious traditions.\textsuperscript{23} The mind-body dichotomisation in the West, which informs the ‘logic of domination’,\textsuperscript{24} underpins an additional layer of dualisms that includes reason-emotion, male-female and culture-nature, constructing interlinked embodied social patterns of domination.\textsuperscript{25} Many thinkers have demonstrated how the social landscape that emerged from European scientific enlightenment and its expansionist motivations is littered with these binary logics, particularly gendered ones, which are then internalised and used (consciously or otherwise) to dominate.\textsuperscript{26} The result of this is seen in many embodied forms of alienation and discrimination including racism, class, sexism, healthism, disablism, consumerism and materialism. It is also seen in the ways people engage in a variety of body-self practices like dieting,\textsuperscript{27} exercise, and sport,\textsuperscript{28} in order to fulfil the idealised embodied states constructed by such dualistic thinking. The principal feature of this dualistic engagement that can of course be found within any contemporary culture is exemplified in Shilling’s notion of the ‘body as a project’, in which the body is objectified (mind/rationality dominates over the body/emotion), analysed and controlled and the forces of society are imposed upon the body through everyday practice and thought.\textsuperscript{29}

Arguably, such binary practical logics-turned discourses have become quite sophisticated and employ a number of pedagogies that foster emotional dispositions, which essentialise the mind and de-valorise the body, thereby promoting oppressive (external—from society) and repressive (internal—from within repressive) ideologies and body practices in the lives of well socialised individuals. These individuals are implicitly taken to be the ones whose bodies disappear from experience in everyday life, only to reappear or dys-appear when

\textsuperscript{22} Rintala 1991. We also point out the mind-body theories of reductionism and epiphenomenalism.
\textsuperscript{23} Synott 1993.
\textsuperscript{24} Warren 1988.
\textsuperscript{25} Orr 2002.
\textsuperscript{26} Keller 1985; Butler 1993; Classen 1997; Seidler 1997; Bourdieu 2001.
\textsuperscript{27} Turner 1984; Monaghan 2007; Crossley 2005.
\textsuperscript{28} Hoberman 1992; Trujillo 1995; Shilling 2005; Sparkes 2004.
\textsuperscript{29} Shilling 1993.
they go wrong in some way.\textsuperscript{30} The emotional dispositions or the ‘emotional habitus’ fostered in such body pedagogies refers to unconsciously learned techniques of bodily control, manners, modes of conduct, modes of feeling and thinking, which are conditioned, mobilised and elaborated by processes of socialisation.\textsuperscript{31} Shilling and Mellor call these processes of socialisation that are the ‘central means’ through which cultures mediate emotional habituses and corporeal dispositions, ‘body pedagogics’.\textsuperscript{32} The bodily techniques (for example, social structures like regulations, controls, practices and rituals) learned in the body pedagogics form dispositions that not only produce, but also suppress people’s emotions.\textsuperscript{33} In other words, techniques of the body forge emotional dispositions (non-determined embodied emotional habits), which can evoke particular emotions in certain situations.

Depending whether the controls and regulations used by the body or for the body are producing or restricting/suppressing emotions, then the emotional habitus could manifest itself on a continuum ranging from the productive to the restrictive/suppressive. In this way, the productive and restrictive function of the social structures, as well as of the subsequent emotional dispositions, strongly link the emotional habitus to social relations of power. An example of this can be found in the way Frank ties emotion with desire and social relations to illustrate how some ill bodies come to ’lack desire’ (restrictive emotional function) and show tendencies, for instance, to dominate over their bodies and over others—an emotional habitus based around dualism and denial—whereas other ill bodies that remain ’productive of desire’ (pro-

\textsuperscript{30} Leder 1990.

\textsuperscript{31} Burkitt 1999. The term ‘emotional habitus’ encompasses the nature of emotion, its function, and importantly, how it associates with power relations in society. Burkitt theorises emotions as multidimensional biological and socio-cultural complexes constituted in human relations through communicative expressions registered on and in the body. He also sees emotions as embodied responses or bodily techniques, which are instilled through social relations from the earliest years of infancy onwards, and are the foundation for later forms of action and thought (p. 118). Elias also used the idea of habitus but Burkitt’s usage reflects Bourdieu rather than Elias’ definition of the term.

\textsuperscript{32} Shilling and Mellor 2007, p. 533. They state: ‘Specifically, body pedagogics refers to the central means through which a culture seeks to transmit its main corporeal techniques, skills, dispositions and beliefs, the experiences typically associated with acquiring these attributes, and the actual embodied changes resulting from this process…. While it has limited affinities with Mauss’s (1971) notion of “techniques of the body”, and Foucault’s (1986) “technologies of the self”, its focus highlights the relationship between the pedagogies and lived experience of culture marginalised by Mauss, and the experiential and ontological dimensions of human embodiment neglected by Foucault’.

\textsuperscript{33} Burkitt 1999.
ductive emotional function) tend to associate with their own bodies and others in communicative ways.\textsuperscript{34}

Modern meditation and yoga methods as practised today all over the world could be seen as practical pedagogies that can either enhance an embodied, fully associative mode of self and other relatedness, or else encourage a disassociating, objectified body-self-other relationship, and thus reinforce the phenomenal experience of dualism that is inherent in being human, whilst subsequently reinforcing binary logics and Cartesian discourses. In other words, modern meditation and yoga methods today emphasise modes of engaging with the body and self depending on the degree and nature of their re-appropriation and accommodation that serve the particular emotional and social needs of individuals, groups of people and societies.

It is important to note that similar to the Western philosophical tradition, the ‘Asian tradition’ is not uniform and Cartesian body-mind dualisms can also be found, for example, in ancient India amongst other Asian cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, Staal argues, the view of a plurality of onionskin-like layers or ‘sheaths’ (kosa) found in the classical Indian doctrine and accepted by both Hinduism and Buddhism is the prevailing idea of Indian thought. Due to the increased adaptation of classical Yoga, modern versions (for example, ‘physical yoga’ and ‘seated meditation’) that have been influenced by New Age thinking, amongst other influences,\textsuperscript{36} tend to emphasise the achievement of a ‘synthesis’ between the ‘dualistic body and mind’. Many of these modern methods appear as ‘fully synthetic’ embodied cultivation practices that ‘oppose’ the disembodied pedagogies of Cartesian dualism, which are perceived by many practitioners to be solely a ‘Western’ phenomenon. Alongside this, the assumption that body-mind unity is essentially embedded in the indigenous embodied practices and philosophies of a ‘mystical East’ is an Orientalist idealisation of the nature of experience in the ‘Eastern traditions’.\textsuperscript{37} Of course, the imposition of Western scientific validation that seeks to re-accommodate Yoga from being a doctrine or a set of speculative beliefs into ‘Yoga Science’ and ‘an objective technique for training the body and mind so as to comprehend ultimate reality’ adds to the above picture.\textsuperscript{38}

However, it is important to emphasise that although we acknowledge the power of hybrid discourses as they are inscribed on the body, we suggest following Shilling, that the body is multidimensional and it is also a source and

\textsuperscript{34} Frank 1997.
\textsuperscript{35} Staal 1993, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{36} See De Michelis 2004.
\textsuperscript{37} Said 1989.
\textsuperscript{38} Alter 2004, p. 33.
a site of agency and not merely written and inscribed by story/discourse/narrative in ways which then and only then allow a degree of agency.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore we stress the material and sensuous dimensions of human action and relatedness as Shotter does in his notion of ‘knowing of the third kind’,\textsuperscript{40} hence arguing that people act ‘by drawing on tacit and corporeal levels of understanding through which the social world is constantly made anew’.\textsuperscript{41} Consequently,

The body is not simply a product of relations of power, but also of relations of communication and transformation, and as such is equipped with a variety of dispositions, capacities and potentialities that allow for agency and the constant possibility of social change.\textsuperscript{42}

The instances of cultural adaptability of more classical forms of Yoga that we highlighted above are part of a series of transformations that have been taking place due to the ongoing cultural exchange between ‘West’ and ‘East’ which particularly intensified during the mid to late 1800s onwards (with the emergence of Western and Indian modernities).\textsuperscript{43} This exchange has provided many socio-historical reasons for the re-invention of Yoga and the re-objectification and narrativisation of the phenomenal body in accordance to the powerful social forces of Orientalism, reflexive modernisation and commodification that are strongly present in our contemporary culture.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, we suggest that modern meditation and yoga pedagogies are better understood within a globalised modern context as being (re)-invented traditions\textsuperscript{45} that emerge during periods of social change and tend to fulfil the particular needs of the current cultures, groups and individuals. Although (re)-invented traditions are supposed to provide a degree of continuity and meaning amidst change, they paradoxically contribute to that change.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{39} Shilling 2005.
\textsuperscript{40} Shotter 1993, cited in Burkitt 1999, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{41} Burkitt 1999, p. 71, paraphrasing Shotter 1993.
\textsuperscript{42} Burkitt 1999, p. 108, where he explains how Young’s 1990 account of ‘breasted experience’ illustrates the ways that the female agentic body can resist male-dominated social and sexual order.
\textsuperscript{43} Alter 2004; De Michelis 2004.
\textsuperscript{44} See Brown and Leledaki forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{45} Hobsbawm 1983, brackets added to signify a multiple process of re-invention. According to Hobsbawm (1983, p. 1), invented traditions are: ‘A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with [a suitable historic] the past […] insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of “invented” traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition’.
\textsuperscript{46} Hobsbawm 1983.
Nevertheless, we argue that although our practitioners invest in their practices and therefore draw on ‘fragments’ of such Orientalist discourses and narratives—not necessarily the narratives as a whole—that best help them to interpret what they feel at the time and attach meaning to their felt experiences, it is the practice-induced bodily sensations that emerge and drive their stories, which are then subjectively crafted from the narrative resources at their disposal. Consequently, we do not seek to validate the practitioners’ subjective experiences of physicalisation and liberation. Also, we do not focus on historically tracing their stories in a detailed way but present them. We acknowledge that a detailed historical contextualisation of the stories would be interesting methodologically and could be done in another article, however, here it would detract too much from the focus of the stories and the transformations we analyse.

Physicalisation as cultivation of bodymind unity

The view that the body-mind relationship is ‘an achievement of cultivated unity’ had a strong presence in the stories of the six practitioners, which further illustrated that this cultivated unity was firmly grounded, expressed and interpreted in, with and through the lived body in practice. As Yogi-Bear refers to his Buddhist meditation technique of ‘observing his breath’, he illustrates what this achievement means to him:

> It’s just something to focus on because then it’s easier to have an awareness of thoughts coming and going if you have something to focus on. I think all meditation really is a process of focusing energy, isn’t it? That’s what meditation is, it’s bringing together all your energies into one point in a way. Well, normally our energies are dissipated everywhere, a lot of energy gets wasted in spurious thoughts, anxieties and projections into the future and the past, and meditation if it’s done properly, should enable you to focus the energy that’s wasted in all this projection into the present, such that the awareness is on what is actually happening. (Yogi-Bear)

The use of breathing exercises as one of the meditative techniques of self-cultivation is documented in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Upanishads, the Pali Canon and the Mahayana Sutras, to name a few of the classical texts. The role of breathing is today emphasised in many modern Buddhist meditation

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47 We have started exploring the historical contextualisations of modern meditation and yoga methods in Brown and Leledaki forthcoming.
methods like Zen and Vipassana\textsuperscript{50} as a means to ‘control’ the practitioner’s thoughts, calm the mind and ultimately attain ‘religious insight’, and has been documented by various scholars.\textsuperscript{51} Also, the value of these breathing techniques in therapy and psychotherapy as tools for attaining ‘relaxation’ and ‘self-control’ is evidenced in the literature that seeks to illustrate the ‘scientific value’ of this body technique.\textsuperscript{52}

Baumann argues that such ‘meditational techniques’ became the central means for the transplantation of Buddhism from Asian to Western regions because their use portrayed ‘Buddhism’ not as an ‘old’, ritualised, religious practice but as a ‘new’, pragmatic, practical and ‘rational’ path of self-cultivation.\textsuperscript{53} Therefore, discourses like holism, wellness and pragmatic rationalism\textsuperscript{54} have penetrated the practitioners’ psyches, who tend to thematise their phenomenal body experiences with their practices according to these discourses.

Influenced by such fused narratives but driven by bodily sensations, Yogi-Bear describes physicalisation as cultivated ‘bodymind’ unity, storying a particular way of attending towards his phenomenal body. Hence, by calling attention to his breath moving (the movements of his body) or as he says by ‘focusing energy’, he talks about opening his embodied awareness to the movements of his mind (also to his body/breath moving) in terms of ‘being easier to have an awareness’. However, instead of merely watching his breath in a detached way (hyper-reflection and detached feelings of mind over body control), Yogi-Bear talks about gradually immersing with his breath, and ‘bringing together all his energies’. In his interviews, Yogi-Bear, like most participants, would illustrate how the movements of his breath, as well as the movements of his sensations, closely reflected emotional balance or imbalance, indicating that what he perceived as a unified relationship between his body and his mind is reflected through the balancing of his emotional habitus. These kinds of descriptions connect closely with the accounts of a number of contemporary scholars like Yuasa, Morley and Zarrilli, to name a few, who have explored the cultivation of body-mind unity through various methods like yoga,\textsuperscript{55} Zen meditation\textsuperscript{56} and Indian martial arts,\textsuperscript{57} and have strongly suggested the link between experiences of breath and emotional states.

\textsuperscript{50} See Baumann 2001.
\textsuperscript{52} See Kabat-Zinn 1994; Mason and Hargreaves 2001; Shapiro 2003; Shannahoff-Khalsa 2004.
\textsuperscript{53} Baumann 2001.
\textsuperscript{54} See Alter 2005.
\textsuperscript{55} Yuasa 1987; Morley 2001.
\textsuperscript{56} Yuasa 1987.
\textsuperscript{57} Zarrilli 2004.
Yogi-Bear also describes his broadened and refined sense of embodied perception and feeling in terms of capturing ‘what is actually happening’ in his ‘present moment’,58 which indicates that physicalisation is grounded in the ‘body as space’ but also in the ‘body as time’, and that achieving body-mind unification is a spatiotemporal phenomenon. By tuning into his ‘thoughts coming and going’ through his body and staying in his present moment-experience, Yogi-Bear subsequently describes how for him this cultivates an ‘embodied understanding’ about the nature of his preconceptions and stereotypic thought that constitute his restrictive emotional habitus. He recognises that his ‘energies normally are dissipated everywhere’, further suggesting an awareness of his disembodied, disassociated and disconnected every-day manner of emotional experiencing. For Yogi-Bear, this disassociation refers to an uncoordinated, unattuned way of being (body-mind disassociation), which has become a habitual pattern, and which is based on potentially disempowering preconceptions and beliefs that are usually ‘hidden’ from his every-day awareness.

We suggest that physicalisation as it is storied here by our practitioners is an ‘active’ (agentic) form of knowledge production for self-transformation by creating a more open, panoramic sense of embodied awareness, which is simultaneously corporeal, cognitive and ‘scientific’. This form of awareness is tacit, immediate59 and is narrativised as allowing the practitioners to encounter their restrictive emotional habitus against ‘the background canvas of self-grasping sensation of one’s body’.60 It is also narrativised as allowing them to detect when attention strays from the ‘present moment’, and potentially enables them to transform their every-day mode of disembodied experiencing to a more fully embodied activity. To illustrate the process of this storied bodily change we now turn to explore some of the informants’ accounts, which describe physicalisation as de-identification.

**Physicalisation as de-identification**

Although a term and a linguistic practice adopted in contemporary forms of narrative therapy,61 ‘de-identification’ or ‘de-attachment’ from a fixed sense of

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58 ‘Being in the present moment’ is another theme that is used by many modern yoga and meditation methods, which is evidence of the pragmatic, scientific and psychotherapeutic value attributed to the meditational techniques employed by the practitioners today.

59 It is also very close to Bar-Or Cohen’s 2006 application of Langer’s 1979 ‘non-discursive logic’ which ‘can grasp a full, undetailed, unnamed picture at one glance’ (p. 85).

60 Yuasa 1987, p. 72.

61 White and Epstein 1990.
self, of thoughts, sensations and feelings is a common theme found in the
philosophies of many modern yoga and meditation methods. In contrast to its
more cognitively-oriented counterpart in narrative therapy, the participants
described physicalisation as de-identification as a form of emotional re-habit-
uation grounded in a cultivated body-mind unity. Some participants talked
about ‘lifting up’ attachment or the ‘hook to the self’, to their thoughts and to
their habitual attitudes by ‘confronting’ them or by ‘staying still’ and non-
internalising them. As Yogi-Bear relates:

The fact that you are sat still means that you can’t escape from whatever sensations
are arising or whatever thoughts. Normally, when you are not sitting and meditat-
ing, normally when you are getting an uncomfortable sensation you might sort of
shift, or if you get unpleasant thoughts you might sort of switch on the radio, you
know, distract yourself, whereas when you sit it’s a good opportunity to actually
have to confront these sensations that come up and the thoughts. (Yogi-Bear)

For Yogi Bear, as for many participants in the study, the cultivation of inner
stillness (calm and concentration) is in itself an achieved unified body-mind
experience of non-reactive engagement with personal and social life. Inner
stillness, one of the intended outcomes of modern meditation and yoga prac-
tices, has been explored by various contemporary scholars in different disci-
plines. The participants in the study articulate physicalisation as the sensual,
spatiotemporal, kinaesthetic quality of inner stillness. For example, in his tes-
timony above, Yogi-Bear articulates his engagement with his restrictive emo-
tional habitus as ‘sitting still’, indicating that the somatic, tacit knowledge he
generates about his habitus during the meditative process enables him to
interfere with the re-active pattern of his normal socially-conditioned behav-
ior. For him and for other participants who might be influenced by contem-
porary Buddhist narrative resources that emphasise holism and pragmatism,
physicalisation as de-identification connotes a pedagogy based on body-self-
movement (in an embodied, inner experiential sense) whereby, as Thrift puts
it, he ‘gathers stillness’ as a manner of engaging with his restrictive emotional
habitus. Therefore, rather than habitually moving along with these silently
repressed emotions and reacting unconsciously, Yogi-Bear ‘acts passively’ and
‘stops’ moving. This enables him to cultivate a potential for choosing to change
his habitual experiencing and enactment of oppression and repression. This
value of stillness as a non-reactive attitude is also illustrated in Fiona’s state-
ment when she explains:

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62 See Hanh et al. 1992; Bucknell and Kang 1997; Sabatini and Heron 2000; Barnhart and
Huang 2001; Fisher 2006; Brantley and Kabat-Zinn 2007. Also, ‘perfect stillness of mind’ or
‘one-pointedness’ concentration is a theme that Gombrich 1988 finds similar between Buddhist
and Hindu classical traditions and their practices.
63 Thrift 2000.
Some postures are difficult, some are easy, we just glide through . . . and that’s why I said a bit like life really because it is a mirror: you can get angry doing this, you can get upset, you can get all kinds of emotions doing this practice. (Fiona)

It is with long-term practice that Fiona comes to ‘glide through’ (not get stuck in) the postures, whereby she simultaneously fully immerses with the body (postures/breath) and de-identifies from the body. Getting into, staying with and getting out from the postures whilst maintaining inner stillness (gliding through) becomes an embodied form of engagement with herself in practice and eventually with her life as a whole. Fiona’s testimony is also evidence of the increased emphasis that modern forms of physical yoga put on the performance of asanas, and the practical, pragmatic value associated with this performance. Unlike physical yoga, in classical Yoga the performance of postures was considered only a minor part of the practice and primarily aimed at assisting the practitioner in seated meditation. Other participants, like John, use different embodied metaphors to describe physicalisation as de-identification (in the sense of inner, experiential movement). He says:

I have a sense of increased non-attachment of things not impinging on me quite so hard. I saw a videotape by Wayne Liquorman and she talks about—you have a pendulum swinging—and it was a very good analogy and they say that when you are completely identified with your ego, that you are down at the bottom, and so the swings are very big. Positive, negative, love, hate, and whatever—and as you identify less with that you move up the pendulum—so the movements are still there but they are much smaller. And then eventually in enlightenment there are no movements at all. And so it feels like I have moved up the pendulum. And so yes, things still happen in my life but there isn’t quite the—I was going to say there is the intensity but there is less impact. Less impact, in that I take it less personally. (John)

The metaphor of a pendulum swinging signifying life and the emotional swings of the ego-self (ego-identification) is one of the most popular narratives used by many contemporary teachers in the Neo-Advaita method and merits some interpretation. John equates his emotional habitus to the horizontal motion of the pendulum and his ego-identification to the vertical, downward motion. ‘No movement at all’ that occurs in what he believes enlightenment to be, implies having no sense of a separate ego-self that identifies with his emotions changing. Therefore, although there is emotional life happening (anger, amusement, fear, appreciation etc.), there is no sense of ownership, and so no identification with these emotions. Consequently, ‘moving up the pendulum’ signifies a twofold process: a) cultivation of stillness (active passivity) as an active embodied manner of engagement with his ego-oriented thoughts,

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64 Paradoxically though, John’s and other practitioners’ storied de-identification with their emotional swings translates (expression/communication) into a more productive emotional habitus.
feelings, emotions and behaviour, and b) transformation of his ‘existential feelings’\textsuperscript{65} that can lead to transmuting his emotion: from a restrictive to a more productive emotional habitus that we consider later in this article. Ratcliffe argues that existential feelings are different from what we commonly call emotions,\textsuperscript{66} because they are ‘ways of finding oneself in the world’\textsuperscript{67} and include ‘bodily feelings that are not felt as objects of perception but as world orientations, ways of being integrated into the world as a whole’\textsuperscript{68}. In other words, existential feelings are tacit responses to conditioned situations and function as ‘presupposed spaces of experiential possibility’, and thus are not fully objectified.\textsuperscript{69}

We argue that the participants in this study thematise physicalisation as de-identification in spatiotemporal terms. They indicate their transforming experience as a spatiotemporal phenomenon, whereby they can create subjective dimensions from which to enhance resistance to oppressive and repressive discourses that they are increasingly aware of as a result of cultivating body-mind unity. It is the body pedagogic use of these subjective spatiotemporal dimensions that we now turn to explore and illustrate next in our discussion.

**Physicalisation and empowerment: moving towards a resolution of inner conflict**

Like de-identification, ‘empowerment’ is also a widely used concept, which is strongly linked to a range of academic fields including psychotherapy,\textsuperscript{70} feminism,\textsuperscript{71} feminist sport studies,\textsuperscript{72} social work,\textsuperscript{73} as well as business studies, management, pedagogy and community studies.\textsuperscript{74} Empowerment has also been explored as being a positive changing effect on individuals and society through applying modern meditation and yoga methods of practice in a variety of

\textsuperscript{65} Ratcliffe 2005, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{66} As Ratcliffe 2005, p. 46 argues, what we commonly define as emotions are usually directed towards an object, an event, a situation, whereas existential feelings ‘embrace the world as a whole’. Therefore, ‘although emotions might structure the way that these objects are experienced’, they do not constitute one’s sense of ‘being of those objects’ (p. 46). Existential feelings are usually communicated through metaphors.
\textsuperscript{67} Ratcliffe 2005, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{68} Ratcliffe 2005, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{69} Ratcliffe 2005, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{70} Nelson \textit{et al}. 2001; Fitzsimons and Fuller 2002.
\textsuperscript{71} Oakley 2000.
\textsuperscript{72} Blinde \textit{et al}. 1993; Birrell and Theberge 1994.
\textsuperscript{73} Salleebey 2002.
\textsuperscript{74} Renblad 2003.
contexts. Therefore, empowerment is a term coming with a cultural baggage that is context-specific and carries multiple meanings and definitions depending on that context. The participants in the study talk of their sense of empowerment as a cultivated experience grounded in bodily (inner/outer) movement. This experience is storied as one spatiotemporal subjective dimension they move in and out from (by creating it) through their practices. Yogi-Bear illustrates how for him the dual process of body-mind unity and de-identification creates empowerment, when he comments:

One time if the sensations arose I would have to act on it, so if I got really angry I would have to either throw something, shout or even physically attack people—that's not very constructive. . . . What I can do now, I can actually allow this anger or whatever to arise, to build up and it can dissipate. I can just let it, I don't have to act on it now or not to the same extent [as before]. I do not suppress it, no, I mean I feel it, there is a difference between feeling anger and actually acting on it because it is just, anger it's just an emotion, it's a sensation, it's nothing other than that. I used to feel it in my fingertips . . . (Yogi-Bear)

Yogi-Bear’s comments on emotional suppression indicate that not only domination is felt at the microphysical level but that it also ‘operates unconsciously or covertly in areas that are seemingly insulated by virtue of their apparent insignificance’ until somehow domination is brought up to his embodied awareness. Yogi-Bear explains that with his meditation practice he is accessing and tuning into his impermanent but habitual sensations of anger (the somatic component of his emotional habitus), thereby becoming more able to tune into his oppressive or repressive thoughts and biases (the feeling component of his emotional habitus). In this way he is more able to adopt a somatic way (‘staying still’ and ‘allowing to dissipate’) to productively engage with his anger.

Yogi-Bear claims to create/cultivate empowerment by ‘choosing’ to focus on more productive emotional dispositions as opposed to restrictive dispositions (ego-attachment) for enactment in his life-world. Indeed, this value-laden interpretation of emotion, where ‘wholesome’ actions and ‘positive’ emotions or ‘states of mind’ are preferred to ‘unwholesome’ actions and ‘negative’ emotions or ‘states of mind’, is common in the cultivation traditions within modern Buddhism and Hinduism. This value judgment rests on the claims that some emotions are afflicting and cause suffering (a result of repression,

76 Alter 1993, p. 66.
77 Alter 1993, p. 65.
78 See Williams 2000; Sangharakshita-Bikshu 2001; Chapple 2007.
suppression), and so are ethically bounded.\textsuperscript{79} This view of people’s emotional selves is claimed to stand in contrast to the Aristotelian/Western notion that all emotions are healthy as long as they are not excessive or inappropriate to specific time and place.\textsuperscript{80} Very often, this antithesis is narrativised within the discourses found in various modern meditation and yoga methods that ‘treat ethical action as a currency’,\textsuperscript{81} thereby perpetuating the ‘East’-‘West’ cultural divide and then commercialising it.

Our interpretation of Yogi-Bear’s statement above is congruous with Orr’s suggestions about the empowering effects that modern Buddhist, so-called ‘mindfulness’ practices can have on enabling students in education to choose what kind of attitudes to preserve or not as a result of the awareness they are developing of the stereotypic nature of their thoughts and the deeply sedimented, non-conscious processes by which such thoughts become embedded in both body and mind.\textsuperscript{82} Orr’s feminist approach is very useful from a theoretical perspective because it attempts to break away from the cognitive definitions of empowerment. However, although useful in analytically approaching Dogen’s idea of non-thinking\textsuperscript{83} and Kabat-Zinn’s concept of non-judgmental awareness\textsuperscript{84} as a means for empowerment, her account seems to underestimate the religious significance that these body pedagogies might have to many people who engage in them over an extended period. Accounting for such self-transformative and empowering somatic experiences that are thematised as religiously inspired ‘bodily immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ is important because as Shilling and Mellor note, these body pedagogics are ‘central to the embodied dynamics of religious traditions’ and are integral to body pedagogics that today are used—consciously—to ‘confront’ and oppose ‘rationalism’, ‘instrumentality’ and the Cartesian docility found in late modernity.\textsuperscript{85} For some of our participants, bodily immanence and transcendence are corporeal experiences that are thematised as being profound and transformational. Alan’s testimony alludes to this in the following:

Imagine that you feel that you have to marry a white woman to get on in society because you’re black . . . imagine that as a black person you have to conform to your innate blackness for you might want to dress slightly differently. . . . Yet imagine on

\textsuperscript{79} Solomon 1995; Ekman et al. 2005.
\textsuperscript{80} Solomon 1995; Ekman et al. 2005.
\textsuperscript{81} Gombrich 1988, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{82} Orr 2002.
\textsuperscript{83} Dogen 1976. Dogen Zenji, an influential Japanese philosopher and celebrated Zen master. He discussed the concept of ‘non-thinking’ in his writings entitled A Universal Recommendation for Zazen (Fukanzazen-gi) which, according to Yuho Yokoi 1976, was written in 1277.
\textsuperscript{84} Kabat-Zinn 2000.
\textsuperscript{85} Shilling and Mellor 2007, p. 534.
the highest level it doesn't matter what colour you are... but it's a process just like my gender, my race, my caste, it's about who I am—that's part of who I am, so now I've put an incredible weight off—I feel I can say what I want, do what I want because I feel more integrated in my nature, in my colour. (Alan)

Alan had repeatedly shared his stories of inner conflict and frustration produced from living in a society where he believed racist stereotypes are still common. He would talk about his consequent feelings of fragmentation and oppression that emerged in many situations in his every-day life. In his efforts to feel ‘less lacking’ and more ‘fulfilled’ and ‘whole’, he talked about how he used to conform to his black identity and internalise identifications with such objects of his desire as ‘whiteness’. Characteristically, he assumed a ‘race identity’ by saying how sometimes he would feel ‘anglified’ or even ‘white’. According to Sheshadri-Crooks, who builds on a Lacanian framework:

Race is a regime of visibility that secures our investment in racial identity. We make such an investment because the unconscious signifier, Whiteness, which founds the logic of racial difference, promises wholeness.86

However, while whiteness separates in terms of what is visually natural, the desire for a racial identity satisfies a deeper desire for feeling complete and satisfied.87 In his attempts to fill this lack through his practice, Alan comes to inhabit a ‘religiously’ inspired transcendent space, a ‘higher level’ that gives him a sense of ‘spiritual’ belonging, and which is characterised by feelings of self-other integration, self-acceptance, relief and connection. Alan suggests here that disinvestment in the ‘racial regime of looking’88 can be cultivated through physicalisation in his practice by cultivating a sense of self that is an impersonal, fluid and free-from-stereotypes ‘process’ rather than a self visually marked by the socially constructed stereotypes surrounding phenotypical features. The idea of the ‘self as a process’ is one of the fundamental concepts akin to the philosophical Buddhist teachings related to the nature of the self that inform Alan’s modern meditative practice.89

Alan sacralises physicalisation by describing it as an inner (phenomenological/somatic) movement of his self that is sustained by his particular ‘spiritual’ values. In doing so, he moves from a sense of powerlessness coming from feelings of oppression towards a sense of empowerment that results from transcending his ordinary perception of his body-self and subsequently

86 Sheshadri-Crooks 2000, p. 21.
87 As Lacan 1979 has argued, lack is constitutive of subjectivity because the emergence between the person as an infant (becoming a subject) and the symbolic (social order through language) is never fully complete or completable.
89 Ho 1995.
transmuting his restrictive emotional habitus to a more productive one. Overall, Alan’s account illustrates physicalisation and empowerment as a movement towards resolving his inner conflict by dissolving his misidentifications and creating a more ‘real’, yet subjective, immanent sacred dimension. Along similar lines, Sofie relates her experiences:

> For me the Asthanga [yoga] practice and my experience with Asthanga has been incredibly profound and I know that that huge change that I went through at the time where I was just really floundering I didn’t really know where I belonged, who I was, what I was doing—then having that and then sort of practising that, I thought well it doesn’t matter—I have this—this is what I can do and this is what centres me this is what brings me back to myself and the core, which is you know connection with God or Spirit or whatever you call it—but it is connecting the body with that and I think that is extremely important because we are in our bodies. (Sofie)

In Vivekananda’s writings, we find similar descriptions of modern yoga as leading to a ‘return to the absolute’ or ‘God’. However, rather than ‘a disembodied state of spiritual liberation’ or an otherworldly existence (renunciation), Sofie’s ‘return to the origin’ is a somatic, progressive process that aims at ‘overcoming’ or ‘dealing with’ her ‘suffering’. Whicher argues that the goal of classical Yoga, similar to Samkhya and Buddhism, is to overcome dissatisfaction by bringing about, in the case of Yoga, a ‘return’ of the gunas to the ‘origin’, ‘a kind of reabsorption into the transcendent purity itself’. Therefore, if we employ Whicher’s alternative interpretation of the Yoga Sutras, rather than identifying with the processes of her body-mind, Sofie seeks to ‘cease’ her misidentification with these processes by transforming her self-understanding (epistemologically and morally) through the purification and illumination of her embodied mind.

This change of her embodied perception through physicalisation feels like connecting with the sacred and acquiring a new sense of belonging and ontological security, that we might describe as a sense of empowerment coming

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93 The three gunas: the sattva or intelligence, the rajas or activity and the tamas or inertia, are the constituents of the prakrti (the source of psychophysical being), which is often opposed to purusa (pure consciousness, or real nature).
96 Such transformations often confirm the promise of ontological security and enhanced agency made by the practices, adding to their allure in providing what Giddens 1990 calls an
from a state of immanence by connecting to what Sheets-Johnstone calls the ‘core self’. Sofi’s core, sacred self is ‘fundamentally animate and animated’ being simultaneously immanent and physicalised. Like Alan, physicalisation provides Sofi with, what Berger metaphorically calls, a ‘sacred canopy’, and her account illustrates how, through tacit awareness and subsequent matured knowledge, she seeks to progressively dissolve her misidentification with her ‘ignorant self’ that suffers, and therefore somatically associate with her intrinsic nature, or ‘core’ (purusa). In short, such transformations of the participants’ existential feelings appear to help them move towards resolving a number of personal conflicts deeply buried in their restrictive emotional habitus.

In view of the above, the stories of our practitioners describe their cultivated sense of empowerment as an inner movement towards a subjective, immanent, sacred and transcendent dimension from which they have the potential to feel more able to resist oppressive or repressive embodied experiences and to enhance their sense of agency. However, although there was a significant indication of a cultivated sense of empowerment in many of the stories of our informants, some of these stories also described a different spatiotemporal experience that we define as Mustery. This signified another form of liberation from domination that the practitioners tend to ‘move in and out from’. We now go on to illustrate and discuss this emerging idea of Mustery.

Physicalisation and mustery: moving towards a spontaneous existential transformation of the self

As described, empowerment is a term which is so engrained with Western semantic cultural baggage that in our post-modern times as scholars we use it to describe a variety of positive transformative experiences that involve the individual, or/and the community, or/and the society. Also, the concept of empowerment is often underpinned by a view of an essential relationship ontological cocoon, or to use Berger’s 1990 metaphor, a reconstructed sacred canopy with alternative plausibility structures for individuals that provide ontological explanations for religious life.

97 Sheets-Johnstone 1999. The author suggests on p. 502 that ‘the core self is an existential self, a pre-eminently bodily presence that carries with it a sense of coherence, agency, affectivity and continuity’.
99 Berger 1990.
100 See Palihawadana 2003 for a discussion of the Theravada perspective on the causation and resolution of conflicts.
101 See Renblad 2003 for a discussion about how empowerment is used in each of these contexts.
between the body-mind, and experiencing it is often regarded predominantly a cognitive process.\textsuperscript{102} Hence, we suggest that the term ‘mystery’, as it is used by Yuasa, is more appropriate to describe in kinaesthetic terms how the body and the mind are ‘brought together’ by means of personal cultivation.\textsuperscript{103} Also, some contemporary interpretations of modern meditation and yoga methods tend to assume an evolutionary relationship between the body and the mind and a variable degree of integration.\textsuperscript{104} It is worth noting here that this evolutionary cosmological model predominated during the twentieth century with the Yoga renaissance through Western Romantic influences and it is different to the cyclical cosmological model found in classical Yoga traditions.\textsuperscript{106}

Experiences of mystery were distinctive from those of empowerment because they involved an increased experiential, somaesthetic movement of the body-self towards more profound transformations of the practitioners’ existential feelings. In effect, for the participants in this study, physicalisation as cultivation of body-mind unity and as de-identification at some point in their long-term engagement with their practices ceased to be what they felt they would do to themselves. Rather, physicalisation referred to an automatic, spontaneous opening to a spatiotemporal subjective dimension that some of them articulated as a somaesthetic opening to ‘what is’, ‘the unknown’ or ‘life’. The spontaneity of what is thematised as ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ epiphanic experiences—often called ‘mystical’—in various modern meditation and yoga methods has been reported and analysed by many scholars, but in this article we are more interested in how related storied experiences might affect social power relations.\textsuperscript{107} In the following illustration, John relates to a one-week continuous transformative experience that has left a residual impression on him, since attending a Neo-Advaita Satsang\textsuperscript{108} in Germany:

I just—my mind just disappeared. I don’t have a mind. It disappeared and everything around me was this—that’s badly phrased—all there was silent stillness. And it was all the way through me, and it was carried on into the environment into the buildings and other people—and that’s all there was silent, quiet bliss, very quiet. That’s all there was and this deep contentment. (John)

\textsuperscript{102} Kasulis 1987 in Yuasa 1987, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{103} Yuasa 1987.
\textsuperscript{104} See Yuasa 1987; Nagatomo 1992.
\textsuperscript{105} Kasulis 1987 in Yuasa 1987.
\textsuperscript{106} De Michelis 2004.
\textsuperscript{107} See Davidson 1984; Laughlin 1994; Austin 1998; Barnes 2001; Roy 2001; Lidke 2005; Lukoff 2007.
\textsuperscript{108} The term Satsang defines an assembly of persons who are looking at the nature of Truth. It is used in some Vedantic traditions in India to describe a retreat or a course or a single session of ‘spiritual’ practice.
John’s articulated feeling of his ‘mind having disappeared’ and of a spontaneous sense of ‘stillness’ and ‘silence’ describe physicalisation as body–mind unity and as de-identification in terms of being automatic, spontaneous kinesthetic phenomena. His storied experience closely reflects Lambie and Marcel’s description of ‘semantic satiation (experienced loss of meaning) and phonological disintegration’,\(^{109}\) in which subject–object dichotomies collapse and a sensual subjective spatiotemporal dimension opens up permeating and unifying with the world. We suggest that this dimension is thematised as a more comprehensive non-dualism of ‘bodymindworld’ unity (we add also with one’s ‘true nature’, for some practitioners)—a mystery. The perceived inner and outer dissolution of John’s sense of self could be seen as kinaesthetic forms of lived experience that are often thematised by some practitioners as phenomenal experiences of immanence and transcendence.\(^{110}\) Of course, we need to be mindful that Orientalist constructions of such ‘transcendental’ and ‘mystical’ experiences have fed the fascination of Western practitioners to engage with modern yoga and meditation methods,\(^{111}\) but the key point we wish to make here is that for contemporary practitioners the body/sensation become central to opening up these transformative experiences.

Moreover, the deep contentment that John feels because he feels released from ‘his mind’—or the misidentification with the processes of his embodied ‘mind’—is an important theme in his storied experience of mystery. Misidentification with the processes of the ‘mind’ often brings about emotions like anger, fear, insecurity, guilt, shame, feelings of depression etc., which Barbalet argues could emerge from the distribution of insufficient power in relationships felt through body and mind.\(^{112}\) John illustrates the potential of transforming his personal and social relationships when he explains how he feels now (at the time of the interview) after his spontaneous epiphanic experience during the Neo-Advaita Satsang, saying: ‘I feel much more relaxed in myself and I think much more open with other people and much less critical as well’. (John)

Given that modern yoga and meditation methods are tried-out pedagogies that have turned into re-invented social practices, the significance of the social space of the Satsang to John’s epiphanic transformation cannot be underestimated. For John and other practitioners, the relationship between ‘inner spacing’ and the ‘external’ space of the natural place (mountain, pilgrimage, river

\(^{110}\) This also links with what Merleau Ponty 1962 has described as moving into or assuming a pre-reflective mode of being, or equally, tapping into a primal capacity for sense making (Sheets-Johnstone 1999).
\(^{111}\) King 1999.
\(^{112}\) Barbalet 2002.
etc.), retreat, course, classroom and even designated room for practice in one's house is important because it is organised and conditioned in such a way so as to invoke transformation.\textsuperscript{113} The different rules applied in these external spaces encourage isolation and a ‘turning inwards’ to the embodied ‘present moment’, and often include lack of communication and other external stimuli. Additional rules regarding eating habits, contact with the teachers/gurus, behaviour and timing of ritualised activities; distribution of personal/social space in relation to the personal/social space of the teachers and the volunteer workers in a course or retreat; culturally traditional, modern or minimal room decorations, particular set-up, acoustics and so on, further enhance this external effect. Consequently, the participants create (in physicalisation) the particular spatialities and temporalities of their inner transformative experiences through the rules, resources and specific behaviours they adopt in the retreats/satsangs/courses etc., which, in turn, inhabit their body-selves through their creation. It is this ‘becoming’ in the sense portrayed by Deleuze and Guattari that results in a cultivated feeling of belonging and (re)-forging of a collective identity of solidarity.\textsuperscript{114} As Leach describes:

Through the repetition of those rituals the spaces are ‘remembered’, such that those participating re-inscribe themselves into the space, re-evoking corporeal memories of previous enactments. The rituals are naturalised through these corporeal memory acts, and the spaces in which they are enacted become spaces of belonging.\textsuperscript{115}

Other participants in this study storied their sense of mystery as a transformation of their existential feelings, in which they would have a sense of self as being ‘bare existence’ and ‘an infinite’. Tony elucidates:

The sense of being more inwardly absorbed in the body tends to come naturally, the thought life gets much less. And the main thing is a sense of presence, not me but a sense of presence, presence of life, kind of—a sense of life without any walls, without any method, without any technique, without nothing, no scaffolding just naked, bare existence, an infinite. And when it goes from the mental understanding in the heart, you know, very deep understanding, it makes one feel more ease with life in some rather beautiful way. (Tony)

The natural immersion of Tony’s body-mind indicated in his words, ‘sinking deep into the body naturally’, suggests that physicalisation here involves a higher degree of unity that can lead to a spontaneous opening towards a spatiotemporal subjective dimension arising from mystery. For Tony, who is

\textsuperscript{114} Deleuze and Guattari 1987.
\textsuperscript{115} Leach 2005, p. 302.
influenced by modern Buddhist narrative resources, physicalisation acts as a means for feeling life as ‘presence’, for acquiring mustery or ‘a stance to feeling life (in the double sense of both a grasp of life, and emotional attunement to it),’ which he draws on as a resource for cognition, communication, behaviour and other forms of experience. In this instance, mustery experiences indicate a transformation of Tony’s existential feelings that constitute the ‘basic structure of “being there”, a “hold on things” that functions as a presupposed context for all intellectual and practical activity’. From such an experiential stance, Tony feels he is more able to respond spontaneously, creatively and more ‘free’ without being dragged down by oppressive/repressive stereotypic thought and pre-conceptions. We suggest that these are the particular dispositions (samskaras/sankharas) of an ego-attached personality that need to be overcome. For Tony, tacit awareness is integral to his cultivated sense of mustery because it encourages a somaesthetic, temporal form of engagement with his life, which can potentially resist or suspend the cognitive reification of oppressive socio-stereotypical binarisms, as well as the subsequent experience of identification and emotional attachment to and with them.

The stories of these practitioners describe their cultivated experience of mustery as an increased degree of achieved integration between bodymind-world and a spontaneous movement towards a somaesthetic, spatiotemporal dimension of existential openness from which they can respond in an emotionally attuned manner. However, we also identified another, qualitatively different experience of liberation from domination that some of the participants storied as another kind of somaesthetic, spatiotemporal subjective dimension that they would move in and out from, which we have called Negating domination. We turn to illustrate this in the following section.

Physicalisation and the negating of domination: moving towards non-internalising oppression/repression

Our definition of the term ‘negating domination’ draws substantially from Nagatomo’s contemporary analysis of Dogen’s ‘non-thinking’ as a cultivated mode of being that modern meditation and yoga practitioners want to achieve through continuous practice. The way we use ‘negation’ here, ‘is not primarily

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116 Thrift 2000, pp. 45–6, parentheses in original.
117 Ratcliffe 2005, p. 46.
118 Dissanayake 1993, parentheses added.
the logical negation, but is entailed in a somatic negation’ of domination.\textsuperscript{120} Nagatomo argues negation, ‘as it is used in somatic negation, may be taken to be a practical procedure for epistemological transformation, or reorientation’.\textsuperscript{121} This practical procedure is what we refer to as physicalisation. Therefore, unlike intellectual-logical negation of domination, somatic negation of domination describes the productive use of the practitioners transformed existential feelings, allowing them to resist the internalisation of oppressive/repressive social discourses, even though they remain open and accepting. Tony illustrates this idea in the following:

My immediate response would be, the teachings, the practices, the meditations have probably protected me from a lot, a lot of suffering, I just get the sense because if I hadn’t practised, if I hadn’t listened to these teachings, if I hadn’t been a Buddhist monk, if I hadn’t meditated, I’d probably have ups and downs of nightmares in life. (Tony)

The idea of the practice of modern meditation and yoga being not merely pedagogies but a kind of somatically-induced protective practice opens up a new dimension for the pedagogical function of these modern methods and also for how we might think about liberation from internalised social forces of domination. It is the ‘free inner emotional spaciousness’ that the participants tell they create that operates like a membrane, with which one can let go but also be open to allow in.\textsuperscript{122} This spaciousness allows resistance to domination but also becomes a resource that Tony draws on to protect himself in his everyday social encounters. As John adds:

Detachment is the wrong word—but the things that are here in your consciousness aren’t directly impinging on you—you cannot be touched by these things. And because you can’t be touched by them or damaged by them or hurt by them—you’re free. And when you are free you are free to express this love, and this bliss that is who you are. (John)

The ‘things’ John refers to can be oppressive and/or repressive, thoughts, feelings and attitudes that he recognises but does not respond to physically or intellectually. Moving from being emotionally attached to these towards feeling unreliant upon them would suggest that physicalisation as cultivated bodymindworld unity and as de-identification is the means through which John moves from being ‘vulnerable’ to social domination (expressed through a restrictive emotional habitus) to being ‘protected’ from social domination.

\textsuperscript{120} Nagatomo 1992, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{121} Nagatomo 1992, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{122} See also Todres 2007 who talks about the value of creating ‘spaciousness’ in the context of psychotherapy.
(expressed through a productive emotional habitus). Therefore, it is through the modification of emotional behaviour by cultivating more favourable dispositions (de-identification and awareness) that one is able to deal with suffering (and therefore domination). Tony and John here talk about a particular ‘relationship’ to domination that they cultivate through their practices, which is detached but nevertheless relational because there is openness and acceptance. Fiona explicitly articulates this relationship when she says:

> Without getting hooked into it [wave from pain to pleasure] but at the same time not forgetting to be compassionate, so you can sort of be cut off from here up—so intellectually you can say yeah right I don't need to attach but that can mean separation because the heart is not open but you need to fully absorb and still have non-attachment. (Fiona)

These storied experiences suggest that one can cultivate a relationship with one’s own limitations, in which vulnerability is not avoided but known, explored and embraced. Todres, who explores Zen narrative resources in his work, argues that these methods may create a ‘soulful space’ or ‘the mixing of vulnerability and the kind of freedom that embodies a willingness to “wear” and “move” within the vulnerabilities of this human realm’.

This response is typical for some of our participants who storied a cultivated sense of negating domination that we might think of as a subjective, somaesthetic, spatiotemporal dimension that the practitioners move in and out from depending on the achieved degree of bodymindworld integration, and thus the extent of their self-transformation. Tony’s experience as a meditation teacher of people with disabilities illustrates this point succinctly:

> The word disabled is, you know, it’s a nice, kind word but it is used in relationship to others who are so called abled, it is dualism again problematic. It can lead to a feeling of comparing, disappointment, something missing etc., and all life would be so much better ‘if only I had’, ‘if only I could’ and that’s all part of the construct of being disabled. So, dharma teachings are a teaching to be able to see the body as body, to use Buddhist language here, so instead of ‘oh I got something missing’, or ‘I can’t’, to actually say, here is the body, full of elements, vibrating, a sensation of life—to get behind the construct ‘I am’ and to ‘get to what is’. The only way out from the idea something is missing is to look at what is present: life is present and therefore the sitting for those who can sit, walking for those who can walk [as forms of meditation] becomes a way of just seeing the body as elements, not a way of constructing of what is present and what is missing. (Tony)

Therefore, negating domination is storied as involving an intrinsic response to relations of power, in which the practitioners’ soma is not invested with or

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124 Todres 2007, p. 162.
charged with the activation of feelings of domination (suppression/repres-
sion). As Whicher in his alternative reading of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
argues, at the 'higher state of purification... the yogi is disconnected (viyoga)
from all patterns of action motivated by the ego'.  In effect, the practitioner
is potentially more able to transmute fear into excitement and interest, and
anger into compassion on a more regular and near-spontaneous basis. In other
words, rather than removing or denying emotion, one becomes more able to
channel emotion in alternative ways by means of an open, embodied and
creative mode of responding and engaging with themselves, others and their
environment.

Concluding Comments

In summary, we suggest that through physicalisation the practitioners create,
are open to and move in and out from certain spatiotemporal dimensions that
we suggest are thematised as empowerment, mastery and negating domina-
tion depending on the achieved degree of bodymindworld unity. The lived
experience of becoming and ultimately being these spatiotemporal dimen-
sions conveys a strong sense of freedom and liberation that is also ethically
 bounded. In contrast to other contemporary forms of voluntary self-transfor-
mation, such as narrative therapy or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT),
there are modern meditation and yoga methods that promote the self-cultiva-
tion of supra-normal states of being and liberation, rather than merely the
correction of states of illness, disease or disorder *per se*.

The account of liberation from domination we provide is perhaps distinct
from these and other contemporary attempts to rearticulate freedom and
domination in relation to embodiment because of the perspective it adopts
about the starting and end points of the mind-body relationship. Moreover, it
also differs in the way, as we hope we have illustrated, that it proposes that
physicalisation as cultivation through modern meditation and yoga can be
seen as a somatic pedagogy that very often (not always) seeks 'as its end not
power, but the recognition of mind-body (world) integration'  and the 'ele-
vation of various capacities of the body-mind from average normality to a
supra-normal standard'.  Overtime, physicalisation as cultivation of libera-
tion leads to what Todres articulates as ‘harmonising emptiness with form’,  

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126 Ozawa-De-Silva 2002, p. 36, parentheses added.
127 Yuasa 1987, p. 208.
or sustaining both the non-egoic core (‘non-separative being there’) and the ego (‘ego specialised engagement’).\textsuperscript{129}

We have illustrated physicalisation as cultivation of liberation from stereotypic thoughts, attitudes and emotions that are nurtured in a range of oppressive social binarisms. The gradual re-appropriation of the practitioners’ misidentification with a fixed and conditioned identity results in an enhanced embodied perception that thematises the self as an impermanent, fluid, spatiotemporal process (sometimes sacralised), or else into an unconditioned, unchanging, pure reality. This ‘liberated self’ is often seen as the answer to the ego-centred, disembodied and disassociated sense of self that is prevalent in the lives of the practitioners before they began their respective practices. It also becomes a value for an ethos that allows for “uniting” epistemologically with the world,\textsuperscript{130} and has the potential to radically transform how the practitioners relate to confrontations with social power (for example, arising from ethnic minority status, class, gender or disability) in their lives.

Furthermore, by achieving increased degrees of bodymindworld unity (‘epistemic oneness’),\textsuperscript{131} through regular practice, the practitioners claim to develop the ability to move in and out from the spatiotemporal, subjective dimensions of empowerment, mustery and negating domination more frequently. Although we do not suggest that this is a predictable, evolutionary, linear process, we are inclined to suspect that due to the temporality of the practitioners’ achieved sense of movement through these dimensions, the more somaesthetically-minded they become, the more they can move from seeking power through cultivation towards ‘organic continuity, balance, and integration in contrast to the discontinuity, imbalance, and disintegration inherent in afflicted identity’.\textsuperscript{132} In light of this, we suggest that modern yoga and meditation methods, despite the high degree of adaptation, can promote somatic pedagogies that potentially move beyond defining achievement in terms of improvement or ‘realisation’ towards defining achievement more as an ‘unfolding’—a creative process of openness that potentially moves beyond empowerment and liberation from domination. Therefore, moving (in an experiential sense) from empowerment to mustery to negating domination could be seen as a pedagogical pathway (of cultivation) towards ‘embodied or living liberation’: a more profound transformation of embodied perception.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{129} Todres 2007, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{130} Whicher 2002, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{132} Whicher 2002, p. 201.
We consider that this transformational pedagogy shares conceptual affinities with Bar-Or Cohen’s ideas of *somatic codes* that emerge through a cultivated sense of body-mind unity, in which she argues:

> When thought and body are one, words become somatic codes, echoing the body in movement, deferential to its dynamics…. They link our bodies together and permit the social passage of body, form, culture, and meaning; they thereby also fluidly link the qualities of innerness and outerness of our somatic experience.134

However, in one important sense, the stories of liberation we have explored here go one step further in this process because of the way they begin to show us how the practitioners’ stories of achieving ‘bodymindworld unity’ and ‘ego-de-identification’ are driven by their bodily sensations and informed by hybrid narrative resources. Also, how these, as it were, embodied processes connect with the somaesthetic, spatio-kinetic experiences of relating to power and domination, hence challenging and resisting them at a practical level.

References


134 Bar-Or Cohen 2006, p. 89.


