

**Dedication**

This chapter is dedicated to Miller Mair (1937-2011), who saw the poetry in Psychology.

## **Missing the Point: The Shy Story of Disappointment**

*And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

T.S. Eliot 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1963, p.14)

It was all going to be so different.

I was going to clear some space in the usual diary mess. I would sit, drink tea, and elegantly and productively enjoy this process of explorative writing, an activity rare to the point of extinction, it seems, if you are employed as a university lecturer in Clinical Psychology.

Yeah, right. Instead, the 'cleared space' has become more of a frantic, grumpy swipe at a never diminishing 'things to do' list of University 'blah', to stonily bleed out what follows. What a disappointment.

Fortunately it's all rather apt.

This chapter is in fact about 'disappointment'. I have been interested in this (perhaps strange) topic for many years and want to share something of why, hoping that it may strike a chord with you. Disappointment is one of those words that is perhaps both obvious and subtle at the same time. It is, of course, in some ways, a very familiar word, but in the exploration here I want to present it as a 'shy story'. Karen Partridge (2005) explored the way in which families produce narratives about 'our family'; often-dominant narratives, or 'boastful stories', to be rehearsed and re-told, and held and propagated by those in the family who hold more power. At the same time, however, families are likely to have 'shy stories'; less visible, less comfortable perhaps, held by less powerful family members and sometimes at odds with the more dominant family narrative.

Although this chapter is more a personal 'under-view' rather than a conceptual overview of the shy story of disappointment, based partly on my personal experience and as an NHS Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer, and latterly facilitator of mindfulness approaches, it is of course based on and linked to a range of other sources and inspirations. My appreciation for disappointment, at least in the way I've tried to explore it here, has been fed by Buddhist writing in particular, but I've also drawn briefly from influences from other traditions - Barry Mason's seminal paper in the Systemic tradition on 'Safe Uncertainty' (Mason, 1993) for example, and what could be called the 'melancholic materialist' writing of the Critical Psychologist David Smail (more on that later).

None of these sources tend to speak about disappointment (the word) in great detail as such, but do talk on related themes of suffering, uncertainty and disillusionment. In fact part of my interest in the word is how rare it is to encounter a direct and explicit exploration of the word itself and of the lived experience of a life under its aegis. For example, if, like me, one of the first things you do with task or project is to look it up on Google, and from there go to Amazon to see if anyone has written books on it, you might like to try 'Googling' disappointment. You come up with seventy-three million hits. This sounds like a lot - clearly there is a lot of disappointment out there. But compare it with some other terms - how about trauma at 127 million, anxiety 181 million, depression 269 million and crisis 582 million!

It is perhaps stretching it to use such statistics to suggest that disappointment is a 'shy story', but a search through psychological writing, available books and journals, and memories of training and teaching, does suggest that disappointment is not a popular topic. There is one notable exception that deserves a mention: the analyst and writer Ian Craib (1994) who wrote a book specifically using disappointment as a scaffold for a broad ranging psychoanalytic critique of late modernity. Given his work is one of the few psychological explorations in this area; it might seem odd not to focus on it here. However, while his work is full of rich discussions that clearly could overlap with this present much more modest offering, Craib's book, in my reading of it, essentially both explores and is written within the boundaries of a strictly psychoanalytic perspective, with disappointment being more a 'marker' for the exploration of a range of themes within that tradition.

In this case here, it is almost the other way round. Rather than using disappointment as a scaffold for a discussion of other topics, I want to keep coming back to the word itself, to move alongside and within it - to make an appointment with disappointment. Perhaps subtle 'existential' qualities such as disappointment are not butterflies you can easily catch in your net for closer examination. Rather it might be said: we are the butterfly and disappointment is so close and pervasive that it can feel like the net itself.

## **Disappointment Begins at Home**

At this point you may be wondering what relevance this topic has for the complexities of modern clinical practice. Surely disappointment is rather unremarkable in its everydayness, a word for the ordinary human hassles that, rightly, lie outside professionalized discourses of more uncommon human difficulties? Perhaps we could hold these questions open - my contention is that beyond the more obvious " I am disappointed in you; I am disappointed in me; in this, about that." - beyond this daily marker of dissatisfaction there may be something more subtle and more uneasy that this word touches.

This 'something' that I'm alluding to may be easier to connect to as a felt experience, rather than as an object of scrutiny, so how about an experiential pause? If you are reading this book at home and you are currently alone, then go to the kitchen; try to turn off your radio, your phone, the bleep of your incoming emails. Do not turn on the kettle, but do clear your kitchen table of snacks, bills and magazines - in fact clear it of everything. Pull up a chair and sit down - if it helps you could drum your fingers on the tabletop as you

sit there. Please, just sit there, and 'hang out'; just sit there, just keep sitting there... now what? Well now nothing, really.....really; really, nothing.....

.....

How long can we bear it? And, more to the point, what is the point?

As I can't ask you in person, I can only guess how you found this 'exercise' (if we can even call sitting doing nothing at the kitchen table an exercise). Given the theme of this chapter you might assume I expected this to be an aversive experience for you, but in fact maybe it felt rather nice to sit without the usual clutter and have nothing to do.

Alternatively, you may, like I have sometimes found, have had an experience of a brief sense of peace, followed by a growing sense of restlessness tinged with anxiety. Equally possibly you may have experienced the above two lines - the other way round.

So, if left to ourselves, without too many external distractions (the kitchen table is optional), we may, if we look closely, notice a range of things - moments of peace, moments of boredom and itchiness, moments of dread and nakedness, moments of wondering what is the point of these moments.

What is the 'something' in this, which might take us into disappointment? What I'm trying to invite us to notice here is not a "state" "" not a static "thing"- rather the opposite in fact. I'm hoping we might briefly feel into the lived quality of being alive when we are not distracting ourselves - shifting, sputtering, moment-by-moment experience. Moment by moment, at the kitchen table, without our usual props - even perhaps the prop of being able to call this, for example, a 'mindfulness exercise', what might we notice? How might this offer disappointment?

If we look a little into the belly of the word "disappointment", we can find the words "appointment", "appoint", "point". Might we begin to feel we are losing the point?

Maybe (if you are at all like me) this is what we can notice as we drum our fingers on the kitchen table - a queasy and agitated feeling as we notice our mind sliding around (as it always does - but usually we don't notice it). In other words as Professor Dumbledore (Rowling, 2010) might say: - the point is constantly 'dis-apparating' (apologies - disappearing is not really a word - unless you are familiar with the world of Harry Potter, where it describes a painful, disorientating and definitely queasy ability for a person to dissolve and reappear wherever they want to go).

It is this constant falling away from whatever state of mind we can notice when less distracted that can be unsettling - that may make us queasy. Perhaps we feel less sure of ourselves if we touch into that sputtering space, and so we shore ourselves up again with restlessness ("back to my emails - Oh how I hate them...but hmm...wonder if so and so has got in contact?"). The restlessness could be both an attempt to avoid this sense of things 'sliding away' and a reflection of our awareness of its lurking constancy, and our attempt at remedy.

The word from Buddhism that could be placed here is 'dukkha' - usually translated as 'suffering', or even in this case perhaps, the pervasive 'suffering of suffering'. The word I prefer, in translation, is offered by the modern Buddhist writer David Loy, as a pervasive sense of **lack**: -

*The easiest way to understand lack is to think of it as the "shadow" of the sense of self. The Buddhist teaching of Anatta, or non-self, implies that our sense of self is a construct, an ever-changing process, which doesn't have any reality of its own. Because it lacks any reality of its own, any stable ground, this sense of self is haunted by what I've called a sense of lack or, for short, lack. The origin of this sense of lack is our inability to open up to the emptiness, or ungroundedness, of the self. Insofar as we're unable to cope with that emptiness, insofar as we deny it and shy away from it, we experience it as a sense of lack (Loy, 2008).*

"Why can't I get it together?" we ask ourselves... well, because there is a lack, an absence, in both the 'it' and the 'I' - neither can hold together for long. The disconcerting nature of not getting it together is expressed well by Chogyam Trungpa (the celebrated and provocative Tibetan Buddhist writer) who suggests above when writing about meditation: *"Nothing happens: it is absolutely boring. Sometimes you feel silly. One often asks the question, "Who is kidding whom? Am I on to something or not?" You are not on to something. Traveling the path means you get off everything, there is no place to perch.* " Chogyam Trungpa, (1976, p. 53)

In this account then, to live in the midst of disappointment, is to live with our never quite making; never quite failing to make the appointment with something we can hold on to for sure. Never quite failing also - because if we always failed utterly to get it together, that would be another static universe:- one of complete failure. This, for some of us, can be a strangely desirable perch in itself.

Whether it is helpful to characterize this, as disappointment is questionable. I do continue though to feel struck by the word, partly because it is gentler (neither 'clinical' nor pathologising) than some other words that can speak to existential holes we may fall into, words like: 'trauma' or 'damage'. It is also more personal than the generic word 'suffering'; able to contain both the homely and everyday ("I've had a disappointing day on eBay") and even the summation of a sense of our lives as a whole. For example Carl Jung, written near to his death, and found in the last chapter of his memoir: 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections', writes: *"I am astonished, disappointed, pleased with myself. I am distressed, depressed, rapturous. I am all these things at once, and cannot add up the sum."* (Jung, 1961, p. 358).

More specifically I am struck by disappointment, because, unlike trauma and tragedy - nobody much seems to want to buy it.

## From Kitchen to Clinic: Disappointment in Therap

If disappointment could be described, as I have above, as a subtle but pervasive sense of never quite reaching a reliable point of arrival, of never quite having got it together, how does our way of living with this manifest itself, individually and collectively?

It is obviously not possible to do justice to such questions in this short space. It also feels important to keep our feet on the ground, to keep close to the actual experience of the moment, keeping close, as it were, to the kitchen table. Perhaps when we fly with speculation, or even conceptualization, this might be one of our strategies of avoiding touching this unsettling ground of things not quite adding up.

So at this point I would invite a pause – before sharing anything more with you I wonder what you might take from this chapter so far, and if it were a lens, what do you notice about your working life, your life as a whole even, when looked at through the lens of disappointment?

*For I have known them all already, known them all:  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.*

*T.S. Eliot, 'Prufrock'*

What **do** you notice when you consider disappointment in your life? Regrets, frustrations, sadness's, boredom? Something abstract, or something concrete? Remembering perhaps some of the things, the big things and the little, that haven't quite worked out, as we would like? Or does disappointment take you nowhere – to nothing in particular?

Even if nothing came to mind, pausing to consider our own sense of disappointment, in any one moment, can arguably be helpful; partly as perhaps this is a refreshingly 'counter-cultural' activity, and partly perhaps, writing or reading about it as a topic, as we are here, could distance ourselves too much from the 'felt sense' of our own experience of 'lack', right now. For myself, -right now-, I feel somewhat 'hollow chested', tired and uninspired, but sitting pretty all the same, five floors up, in University splendour. How about you?

If though, we turn this lens more generally on to our experience, and specifically our experience of the various therapeutic industries (which I assume many readers share), the clinics and many acronymic teams of 'health and social care': what might we notice?

The Clinical Psychologist and writer David Smail has arguably brought an unusually honest gaze to the selling of therapeutic potency. For example he writes: *"What seems more commonly to be the case is that therapist and patient arrive at a brilliantly illuminating formulation of how s/he got to be in his/her particular predicament, but the latter finds that, despite valiant effort and earnest desire, s/he fails miserably to put matters right."* David Smail (1999, p.35)

Perhaps this is an overstatement? I think it does contain within it a truth, or at least, a truth that chimes with my own experience. This is, that in the midst of all the products of

therapeutic potency, of outcome measures, evidence bases, and payment by results, it may be hard to acknowledge the ever-present sense of 'lack' in our therapeutic endeavour.

Now hang on a minute writer. So much for keeping your feet on the ground and avoiding speculation - are you really making a crass generalization that all therapy ends in failure?!

No, and nor does David Smail. He argues that therapeutic spaces can be tremendously comforting and encouraging. But notice his words - comfort, encouragement. They imply no resolution, no outcome, no 'working through', no point of 'insight', and no place to perch. Yet, so much of the industry of therapy is predicated on resolution. As Barry Mason explores in his paper on the close cousin of disappointment - uncertainty:

*Although the search for solutions can be seen as positive, a danger is that we can fall into the trap of seeing solutions in absolute terms. We get caught up in looking for the 'right' answer; somewhere out there is the new reality, the solution waiting to be discovered. The search for what is right, the search for solutions, the search for the correct way, I would suggest leads into a minefield.*

Barry Mason (1993, p.192).

Again, as well as not implying that therapy is a failure although it may often be a disappointment – (for an attempt made to acknowledge this explicitly within a therapy service see Moss, 2002) I'm not at all wanting to imply that you and I, as therapists are not sensitive to the lack of realism in all this talk of outcomes, results, solutions and – latterly- 'payment by results'.

But it would not be surprising, that if we struggle at the kitchen table to lean into the queasy 'lacking' quality of moment by moment experience, this is likely to be reflected at other tables too? One reflection of this struggle may be the increasing divergence of a public language of therapeutic potency (anyone for CBT?) and our own private experience of that potency, or otherwise. Yet, this gap between the rhetoric and the reality remains a 'shy story'.

How could we begin to speak up for this shy story – at work?

*It is as if I stand in the doorway of my office, waiting.*

*The patient enters and makes a lunge at me, a desperate attempt to pull me into the fantasy of taking care of him. I step aside.*

*The patient falls to the floor, disappointed and bewildered.*

Sheldon Kopp (1976, p. 5).

I suspect it is getting harder to let anyone hit the floor. Yet, perhaps, if we took to heart this image, we might provide a way into acknowledging that we will, inevitably, be a disappointment to the people who 'receive our service' (and to ourselves), in that we will not be able to answer that longing for 'somewhere to perch'; that longing for somewhere and someone to shore us up, to help us finally arrive, to really make the appointment.

For myself, I have found that curiosity into someone's expectations of what help might mean while trying to remain neutral to that expectation, can lead us into disappointment pretty quickly. But here the issue (as hopefully might be clear from this chapter as a whole)

is not how/whether we might avoid disappointment, but rather how we make space for that quality once it is visible. We perhaps can be very helpful to others and ourselves if we can help make space to acknowledge both the disappointments within our lives and specifically of professional help (given or received; past or present).

Sometimes there can be a sense of relief in an acknowledgement that our lives, that life itself, doesn't add up, that we don't arrive. It can contribute to a de-pathologising process possibly, to a rejection of the cycle of hope/fear that therapy rooted in pathology can engender (hope for symptom resolution/fear of being trapped with the symptom). However it is naïve to think it always **feels** helpful. Sometimes disappointment can lead to anger, to the frustration for example of not being offered a diagnosis as a place to land; or frustration that our attempts to feel good about being helpful hasn't been reciprocated. And increasingly our health care economy arguably encourages an obscuring of the slippery outcomes of therapy. We are - after all – being paid for a successful appointment.

**How** we make space for disappointment in our therapeutic work - I can't say. Perhaps we can discover it for ourselves? Extremely often I have found it more helpful to step for inspiration outside the walls of therapeutic text books (how often are these in the domain of modesty about therapeutic power?) and look elsewhere. If I kid myself into thinking I should be helping people (such as myself) better to overcome their difficulties I might be well placed to watch a film like 'All or Nothing' by Mike Leigh, which has no 'closure' and no outcome... *"It's about connecting. I don't think it arrives at completely comfortable conclusions. You certainly don't walk away from it thinking that everything is all tied up and fine. But I do feel that the spirit of the film points towards hopeful possibilities"* (Mike Leigh, in: Cardullo, 2008, p. 239).

Recently I was struck by the stark, intelligent (and playful) honesty in the recent autobiographical writing of comedian and writer Stephen Fry: -

*It is no part of my business with you to maintain that I now fully know myself, but I think I can profess convincingly that I do at least know myself well enough to be nothing but doubtful and distrustful when it comes to any claims of solutions, cures and arrivals at final destinations.*

Stephen Fry, (2010, p. 23).

The insight of Fry's, alone (but also echoing Barry Mason and David Smail earlier), can be a lead into how I might inhabit disappointment in my work, and help others do so too. For example how might our 'outcome' letters reflect Fry's comments, or our reflections in supervision, or team discussions?

Perhaps, before we begin to have an action plan on disappointment, we might just let go and connect, as Mike Leigh might suggest; connect with our felt experiences day to day, through our "evenings, mornings and afternoons".

Hmm, 'let go and connect' ...this sounds simple (or simplistic), or maybe, just too enigmatic? How do we connect with the immediacy of our lived experience, particularly and especially in the midst of work? Perhaps we might value enlisting the services of a really good 'reflecting team' – that only we can see. When I think of reflecting teams, at best I think of support, attentiveness, curiosity, naivety, friendliness, humour and playfulness (yes this is the systemic equivalent of fantasy football). Maybe our reflecting

team can accompany us through all those moments of arrival and departure, of comings together and fallings apart, of appointments and disappointments.

But, although you are reading, and I am writing, this chapter now, for how long can you and I stay curious towards the shadowy 'lack' in our professional selves; how long before we might forget our kindly attentive 'Team', how long before we don't really want to listen to what they might have to offer? We have appointments to keep, after all.

Maybe I should mention in passing that my only attempt to put on a workshop on disappointment for Clinical Psychologists was cancelled due to 'lack of interest'.

### **Mindfulness comes to the Rescue?**

*I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.*  
T.S. Eliot, 'Prufrock'

Within this shy story, there is itself a shy story, about a boastful story - the story of the rise of mindfulness.

For surely that is what we have been talking about? I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that I teach mindfulness, and then we have gone on to do an experiential exercise that looked suspiciously like a mindfulness practice, and from there to talk about Buddhism. Isn't it time to come clean and admit that the answer to disappointment, as well as to so much else, lies in mindfulness?

Going by the advertising and marketing of mindfulness on the web and elsewhere, it may imply that mindfulness may well be the answer to disappointment. Promises of 'greater focus and calmness', or 'controlling our emotions and impulses' and other desirable forms of self-improvement, can be found in some of this marketing. I suspect I've been responsible for similar promises myself. But increasingly I wonder if there may be more need of ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty about the promises of mindfulness, than the current marketing seems to suggest. In short, mindfulness as an industry may ironically also be reluctant to sit at its own empty kitchen table.

A vivid example at present is my role in facilitating mindfulness groups. These groups are almost always offered in the context of time limited eight week courses. Our experience is that participants and facilitators alike can get caught up with the idea of a developmental journey across the eight weeks - worrying as participants that they can't come back to week five if they missed week four; worrying as facilitators that we don't offer material in week three that comes from week seven "because they may not be ready for it". We are also increasingly aware of a narrative from a range of sources about the need for "Advanced Courses in Mindfulness."

I'm not intending to dismiss these attitudes. For example it is quite understandable to need time to get a feel for being in a group such as a mindfulness group either as a participant, experiencing sitting in silence with others or as facilitators thinking carefully about what we offer. However at its heart it could be said that mindfulness invites us into the unresolved present moment, where there is nowhere to develop from or to. As such, mindfulness is an extremely simple practice which paradoxically can feel very difficult to embody, very intangible (Moss & Barnes, 2008) and, dare I say it; can feel at times rather disappointing ("I don't seem to be getting anywhere with this"). In other words, mindfulness practice is not different from our sitting at the kitchen table practice. Yet ironically even here as participants, facilitators, or as the new breed of 'mindfulness professionals' we can get caught up in wanting somewhere to perch. This may be in the growing proliferation of manuals of mindfulness instruction which reinforce a developmental fantasy of mindfulness; or in the ever growing range of books and CDs telling us how to practice or in the outcome measures recording symptom reduction after attending an eight week course. All of this may put us in danger of turning the heart of falling apart into the world of 'getting it together'.

None of this is intended as a critique of mindfulness per se, which at its heart and its roots, is one of the few but not the only, domains that seem able to help us move towards disappointment, to cradle our fear of lack in the arms of loving kindness. Rather it may be more the other 'm' word at fault here: marketing - the inevitable desire for a new brand of therapy to sell itself to the industry, and to the consumer, and if anything this is the antithesis of something to buy - it is 'lack'.

Yet there does seem to be something genuine here as well. We are buying into the heart of mindfulness, literally and metaphorically, if the rise in books, CDs and courses in mindfulness, compassion, acceptance and other related topics is anything to go by. This may suggest a greater willingness or desperation to look into our suffering, and hear the message, that comes through from some of the great writers in that tradition. For example consider this quote from the dustcover of a recent book by the writer Pema Chodron: *-"Things are always in transition if we could only realize it. Nothing ever sums itself up in the way that we would like to dream about. The off-centre, in between state is an ideal situation, a situation in which we don't get caught."* (1997, back cover).

## Conclusion

Our appointment with disappointment need not be miserable. As we sit at our kitchen table we might find our attention turns outwards, taking in, as if for the first time, the light of the sun falling on the home appliances that surround us, or the patina of the wood that we have eaten at a thousand times. A disquieting transience on the 'inside' can sometimes become a poignant transience on the 'outside' - the moment-by-moment beauty of everyday objects and spaces.

David Smail coined the term "outsight" to denote a possible shift in perspective, not just for an individual, but also as a challenge to those of us in the therapeutic industry, who can get caught with notions of fixed internal states. While in his writing, "outsight", is much more than a simple possibility of "looking out", the word itself, for me, invites a turning outwards and towards the world at hand. In all that constant changing, texture, colour, and light, what is there to be disappointed in?

*And would it have been worth it, after all,  
 Would it have been worthwhile,  
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—  
 And this, and so much more?*  
 T. S. Eliot, 'Prufrock'

The table I am at right now is not a kitchen table but a library desk, high on the third floor. It is close to Christmas and the library is almost empty. Dusk has settled but men at work are still hammering up the road outside. Through the window the imposing building opposite is now reduced to glowing squares of light, gradually going out.

### **Epilogue: A hundred Visions and Revisions**

*"Please can you elaborate a bit more here on your influences and approaches...as well as explain a bit more to the uninitiated what you mean by melancholic materialism and disappointment. We wonder if you could also say something about how you are connecting disappointment and uncertainty.....  
 Can you give us a bit more of a glimpse of how these ideas show in the international space between you and clients you and colleagues etc. with the odd example..... You have more words to play with. Hoping you can make something of these comments. Hoping you could get this back to us by end of May".*

*Best wishes  
 Karen and Sue  
 (Personal Communication 2012)*

Perhaps one of the shadows cast by the written word is that of permanency, of having fixed your point of view, creating the final, polished and finished article. Seen through the lens of disappointment this is all rather too neat. Life is always and all the time subject to constant revision but the finished article is not.

So where are we now? I'm back in the library and perhaps aptly someone is sitting in 'my' seat, so that I have to sit four chairs down the row. Hence my view is slightly but significantly shifted. I can no longer see the same aspect of the building opposite; the men hammering down the road have laid down their tools and moved on; it is May and not Christmas, although the weather doesn't seem to have been informed as it is foggy with wetness. My complaint that started the chapter is, if anything, worse, but right now I'd love some tedious emails to attend to rather than write any more (just checked them again). Why?

A Buddhist friend once commented that a constant checking of emails is an act of re-assurance that we are alive. We have a moment of openness - a moment of space without narrative - a micro moment perhaps - we touch the void - we panic - we cling to the cliff - the computer says yes.

Ok, it might not be email for you; it might be text, the radio, the ironing, meetings, eating, but I wonder if most of us have these hooks to hold when 'lack' opens up. Of course emails need to be answered and the ironing needs to be done, but if you are like me, I add an extra intent. As I sit at this library desk, my mind keeps drifting off, and it's hard work bringing it back here, right now. In fact even writing about this makes me a bit nauseous. So, like other "creative" people (i.e. all of us) I moan about all that admin, all that blah. But without blah, we have the uncertainty of not knowing, which has to be the precursor of creativity. In this way, uncertainty and disappointment are both twins and strangers. Twins because they share that uneasy sliding away quality, sliding away from the known, and from what we are hanging on to, but also strangers - how can we be uncertain and disappointed at the same time?

As we fall off the cliff face of our expectations, disappointment looks up achingly to what we have lost, while uncertainty looks down to where we are going.

### **Missing the Dead-Line**

After a four week hiatus, when it rained and rained, May turned into June, the deadline for this chapter came and went and I have attended to a lot of very important emails (do you believe me?), I've crawled back to peer anxiously at this chapter. Much to my surprise no one has finished it for me in my absence. And, yesterday I put my knee out and am in some discomfort - or maybe I could call it a minor reminder of the melancholy in materialism:

*And what founds our common humanity is not so much the brute fact of the body's objective materiality as its subjective vulnerability. In the final analysis we all feel the same because we are all constructed in the same way. If you prick us, we bleed. It is **this** [authors emphasis], which is true whoever you are, and however strong, or weak, or beautiful, or rich or important you are.*

David Smail, (1993, p.218)

The materialism at the heart of our lives that David Smail so eloquently conveys throughout his writing is the simple fact of having a body and a mind that can easily get hurt. This apparently simple fact is a revelation because it does seem as if much of the "lack avoidance" industries (including sometimes the Therapeutic Industry?), would like to move us quickly on from our "common humanity" of suffering the disappointment of our frailty. I have added the word "melancholy" to the word "materialism" simply because the opening to this reality can feel sad.

### **A Time for Toast and Tea?**

As for now, I'm running out of steam, and would like to finish and cross the deadline. In fact I've whimsically sat myself back in the library room I started in (now, again aptly, five chairs down from where I started) and perhaps to mock my hope for something poetic and atmospheric to end with... the day is most un-promising in "atmosphere". It is one of those British "summer days" - grey, muggy, flat, afternoon time- even heavy rain would at least give us something to talk about. The buildings through the window are equally flat and

featureless today. Pema Chodron (1997, p. 69) writes: - “*As human beings, not only do we seek resolution, but we also feel that we deserve resolution. However, not only do we not deserve resolution, we suffer from resolution. We don't deserve resolution; we deserve something better than that*”.

That “something” is here right now, like it or not.

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