

OHM: a meditative performance lecture & how our mind and body are practically commercialized

by Trine Mee Sook Gleerup

(Text fragments from the performance presented on 21 June 2014)

[...] when you “google” yoga you get more than 139 million hits, when you “google” mindfulness you get 6 million hits, and when you “google” meditation you get around 33 million hits.

In comparison you get 875 million hits when you “google” sex, 149 million hits when you “google” stress, and 324 million suggestions when you “google” performance art.

I don’t know if it is somehow positive that you can find more articles on performance art than on stress. Maybe performance art has a longer history than stress.

Anyway, if you turn to your smartphone and search inside the App-store you will get 661 hits for mindfulness.

One of the Apps suggested is the so-called “GPS for the Soul”, an App launched by The Huffington Post in 2012. This particular App comes with a built-in heart sensor. The sensor supposedly measures your pulse and heart rate, and upon taking the test, the App will tell you whether you are feeling calm or stressed, as well as it will suggest different mindfulness exercises according to how you are feeling. And lots of Apps are eager to tell and alert you about your present state of mind and body.

[...] but how present is it really to have an App tell you how you are feeling? And when you have to do certain things?

Companies like Goldman Sachs, I’ve read, hire mindfulness coaches to teach their employees supposedly mindful techniques: for instance pausing before sending important emails.

And while reading your important email at least twice before hitting the send-button definitely seems like a good idea, I can’t help but wonder: when did common sense become part of the hype, and one could say, regime of mindfulness?

When did “take a deep breath” become such a thing that we no longer know but something that we need others - people from the mindfulness business - to remind us?

[...] speaking of Google: An annual conference, sponsored by Google, called Wisdom 2.0 draws together thousands of spiritually minded technologists from, among others, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, who trade tips on how to stay calm in the digital age.

According to Wisdom 2.0 the conference addresses the great challenge of our age: to not only live connected to one another through technology, but to do so in ways that are beneficial to our own well-being and that will bring more efficiency to our work!

Indeed, Silicon Valley is a hotbed for mindfulness at work.

Thus a panel facilitated by Google on The Wisdom 2.0 conference this year in San Francisco was called nothing less but: “Three Steps to Build Corporate Mindfulness the Google Way”, and more and more companies, not only the pioneers of the digital age, seem to follow the example and offer their employees weekly classes of yoga and mindfulness.

The idea is simple: calmer workers are less stressed, more productive and even better leaders and better team-players - to use another buzzword of recent years - and thereby they are benefiting not only themselves but the entire company!

Some workers at Google though, despite being accustomed to a hard-driving workplace at previous jobs, say that Google pushes them to produce at a pace even faster than they could have ever imagined. And the fact that the company offers them some mindfulness at work has helped some of them coping better with the stressful environment.

“Most of the workshops offer lifestyle and consumer choices that are meant to help people heal from the harm, emptiness and unsustainability associated with living under capitalism, but [they do so]

without offering an analysis of where this disconnection comes from”, a former Google associate says.

So changing the stressful and emotionally harmful culture of the workplace itself is not on the agenda. Instead of looking at the structural reasons as of why we are so stressed, and instead of questioning why stress has become something so normative to modern society that we need mindfulness as a solution to that stress, we continue to push ourselves harder in order to produce and perform more. Instead of liberating ourselves from stress and the reasons why we are stressed to begin with Mindfulness has at some level become a validation of stress.

[...] and Slavoj Žižek talks about how yoga and mindfulness, or what he calls "Western Buddhism", presents itself as the perfect remedy and ideological supplement against the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics.

The "Western Buddhist" meditative stance, he says, is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while at the same time maintaining the appearance of mental sanity.

[...] I must admit that this performance might come off a teeny bit ambiguous since I do in fact teach yoga.

And I am admittedly one of those yoga teachers who go to different companies and institutions to teach the employees how to let yoga and mindfulness into their lives.

And though I never really verbalize how yoga and mindfulness will help them reduce stress – and hence become more productive – I do stress (pun intended) that Asana, pranayama, and meditation will help them to become more grounded – and hence more present!

I do however wonder if I can somehow sneak in some secret propaganda in my teaching – like: you are subject to the pace and competitiveness of capitalist society. How do you feel about that? And could you imagine changing your own position within this neo-liberal world order? And if so – how?