What is Enlightenment? Mindfulness in the Moment of Stress

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by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated in loving memory to Barbara Ellen Anderson, 1947-2002. Wish you were here, Mama-san.
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Sanskrit .......................................................................................................... S.
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Mindfulness is a meditation technique that involves attending to the present moment, without reference to past or future, and without judgment. In the “radical acceptance” of the present it prescribes, mindfulness is a practice concerning one’s relation to time that is promoted as a health boon in times of turmoil and tension appropriate for those short on time. A self-help practice legitimized by appeal to Buddhist cultural references and public figures, mindfulness promises do-it-yourself stress relief, performance enhancement, and happiness to the belabored North American petit bourgeois enduring increasingly stressful and diminished working and living arrangements. While scholars have investigated mindfulness as a religious phenomenon, few studies have considered its generalization and use in everyday life as a cultural formation in the context of its historical milieu. The generalization of mindfulness coincides with that of stress as a pathology, and the production of a pressured, volatile, and competitive social environment by the economic liberalizations of the 1980s to the present. This dissertation
offers a discursive history of mindfulness as an artifact of this historical juncture, and probes the social problems and possibilities that are encoded in its applications for spiritual growth and professional development. Here, mindfulness comes into focus as a paradoxical formation: As stress management and as a disciplined elision of history in the present, mindfulness reproduces and retrenches the class relations that generate the stress of this juncture, even as the appeal of mindfulness is grounded in an Enlightenment ethos of freedom by practiced self-knowledge and the explicit anti-capitalist sentiment and desirable social alternatives to the present figured in the Buddhist sources it appropriates, frustrating its realization by generalizing its own opposite.
INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is ubiquitous in contemporary North America, and has been for at least a decade. Mindful anything: eating, working, shopping, teaching, parenting, sex. But to introduce mindfulness analytically is to wade into a morass of competing cultural assumptions, stereotypes, and scholarly claims on what mindfulness is and means. It is a secular program of healing and self-discovery; it is a rationalized spiritual program shorn of outdated residuals, appropriate to the mind of modern man; it is overearnest kitsch; it is a panacea, cheaper than pharmaceuticals and more effective therapeutically for virtually all indications; it is a once-wholesome, now greenwashed lifestyle; it is but one more example of the appropriation and commodification of an Asian religious tradition by a consumer capitalism predicated in white supremacist logics; it is an All-American means to improve health, wellbeing, and prosperity; it is a universal, ancient, and perennial wisdom culture, a perennial philosophy; it is an ill-fitting, saffron-soaked aggregate of implausible affirmations and imperatives, to start where you are and be here now that do not pay the rent; it is the “hegemonic ideology of global capitalism” (Žižek n.p.); it is a workplace perk; it is a cardamom-scented category of advice books, workplace programs, and concomitant media. All this is to say that mindfulness is a mass of contradictions, but is reducible to none of them. Mindfulness is a problem.
Because there is no orderly consensus on what mindfulness as a cultural artifact might be, I begin with what it proposes to do. It is a discourse that directs the compliant practitioner to relate to time unconventionally, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” without reference to past or future (Kabat-Zinn Wherever 4). But appeals to the timeliness and contemporaneity of mindfulness, a practice generalized by self-help and positive psychology discourses beginning in the mid-1970s, is paired with a presumption of an ancient origin in the Buddhist traditions of Asia.¹ Mindfulness discourse positions mindfulness practice as uniquely contemporaneous, appropriate to the present historical moment and of a transcendent and ahistorical present, while legitimizing itself by a cultural origin that is not coeval to the mindfulness practitioner, available in the present and ancient at once: the living bodies of contemporary masters of Buddhist meditation, whose unusually-shaped brain structures are upheld by mindfulness advocates as evidence of this practice’s effectiveness in rewiring one’s central nervous system². This discourse at once mystifies the social experience and relations of power of its historical moment, and appropriates a particular reservoir of cultural associations and presumptions—Buddhist ones, of a certain kind, and for knowable reasons.³

**START WHERE YOU ARE: THE PROBLEM OF MINDFULNESS**

The problem is that mindfulness is ephemeral. It can only be traced through the discourses and media prescribing its practice, and the testimony of its practitioners. Functionally, it is neither an object nor an event, but a practice formulated and promoted by specific people in a particular place and time. The peculiarities of mindfulness and the
conflicting claims made on it by scholars and mindfulness advocates become comprehensible in this historical context.

The crystallization of the social institutions and interpersonal networks by and through which mindfulness would later be generalized was well underway in North America by the mid-1970s, as signaled in the launch of Naropa Institute under the direction of the Tibetan polymath and provocateur, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. A book written by Naropa participants as a kind of collaborative journal, *Loka* (1975), records this event:

In the summer of 1974, after a bare nine months of planning, Naropa Institute ran its first ten-week summer session in Boulder, Colorado. That such a significant event could spring to life in so short a time is a source of wonder. The pages of this book are testimony to the enormous success and scope of this event in which more than two thousand students and one hundred faculty participated. (6)

The authors emphasize what they felt to be the historical importance of the events they describe, and their peculiar temporality—their speed here, their contemporaneity there—and call upon *the book* in which those sentiments are recorded as the *techne* of world-historical development, the repository and metonym of a new and redemptive worldview.

Among the students and faculty were psychologists such as Gregory Bateson and spiritual teachers from a diverse array of traditions—mostly Buddhist ones. This is a moment in which the transmission of Buddhism in North America, Trungpa’s project, intersects with assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists held among psychologists and reproduced in self-help programs such as mindfulness and its antecedents. In probing
this intersection, the cultural work that mindfulness does comes into focus, offering this inquiry its point of departure.

Present at Naropa in 1974 were Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein. All three had practicing a specific form of lay-oriented Theravada Buddhism in Asia. Goldstein and Kornfield taught seated meditation at Naropa at Trungpa’s invitation. All three would go on to found the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, not long after. The meditation practice associated with these leaders and, later, writers, called vipassana or insight meditation, would become a primary discursive and institutional precedent to the discourse of generalized mindfulness; Kornfield and others would train as clinical psychologists by the decade’s end. *Mindfulness comes to name two historically distinct practices that are assumed to be identical:* an ancient Buddhist mode of contemplation connected to remembrance and awareness (P. sati, S. smṛti), and a self-help program of stress-relief emergent in the mid-1970s, advocated by positive psychologists who position the Buddhist as a figure representing effective practice (chapter one). The conflation of these programs is legible in the historical moment commemorated in *Loka*, a moment when the conflation of positive psychology and Buddhist practice and the leaders responsible for articulating what will become the discourse of mindfulness coincide.

The enunciation of this mindfulness discourse positions its promoters atop a privileged historical vista: *Our* present is a moment of reason and a truth that is assumed to be identical to the truth of the Buddha’s moment. And this position legitimizes itself in a circular way, insofar as what mindfulness advocates say about Buddhism becomes
Buddhism, a novel form of Buddhist practice presumed to be modern and rational—by implication, mindfulness itself. Further, this historicism is reproduced again in the assumption held in common among mindfulness promoters and some scholars that insight meditation and mindfulness emerge as if in an evolutionary sense from a Buddhist heritage meeting a new culture, which is assumed to be identical to meeting modernity. This points to a divergence in objective and content between the Buddhist popularizations called upon to legitimize mindfulness practice—a canon of authors including Trungpa, the current Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh—and the advice books of insight meditation authors, who are among the foremost promoters of generalized mindfulness. Set in the temporal flow that is its preoccupation, mindfulness discourse and practice articulate contradictory movements that correspond to the dynamics of its historical moment. These are legible in attempts by scholars to come to grips with the problem of mindfulness.

THREE NARRATIVES OF MINDFULNESS

Scholars of culture typically understand mindfulness through one of three parallel narratives: the commodification of Asianness as a racial category and concomitant appropriation of Asian cultural patrimony by white, Anglophone power and for white, Anglophone consumers; the construction of a modern “Western Buddhism,” with mindfulness emerging as its archetypal or ultimate form; and the production and consumption of self-help products, particularly advice books, as means to cope in trying times. This inquiry involves a critical engagement with all three narratives and their points of contact.
Scholars such as Kimberly Lau and Jane Naomi Iwamura have analyzed the reduction of Asian spiritual traditions to the commodity form and their appropriation within capitalist social dynamics as “alternative” spiritualities. Lau’s concept of New Age capitalism denotes the intersection of appropriated Asian traditions, the accumulation of capital, and the presumption of a progressive, benevolent temporality to the same (7), as though the mere consumption of the commodified forms of yoga, tai chi, or seated meditation in themselves guarantee a world-saving lifestyle (14), a presumption I find in circulation among mindfulness promoters and consumers. Lau also attributes to New Age capitalism a function of traditionalization, whereby the commodified or appropriated form of a given tradition is positioned as the original and pure form in contrast to the indigenous one (12), such that a cultural practice indigenous to the spiritual marketplaces of post-Vietnam North America is legitimized as at once a modern and Westernized, and also pure and authentic, version of an Asian original. In this dynamic, the lived and historical content of Asian cultures and people come under erasure while their simulacrum is lionized, a dynamic I see in the temporal claims of mindfulness advocates (chapters one and three).

The legitimation of mindfulness by claims on Buddhist bodies and public figures relies on a racial category: the Asian after globalization, figured as the contemplative renunciant of the mystical East, the “Oriental Monk.” According to Iwamura, values such as kindness, wisdom, compassion, and calm became associated with images of Asian religious authority through film and television in postwar North America (Virtual 8). I locate the assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists promoted as aspirational images
and maps of consciousness in mindfulness programs since the 1970s in the patterns of representation that, Iwamura claims, open onto “racialized notions of Asianness and Asian religiosity” that go “unchallenged and unseen” because they are promoted as inseparable from desirable, laudable, and socially useful qualities (Virtual 5). These qualities are embodied in the singular figure of the male renunciant-contemplative, and as Iwamura argues, they mark a specifically utopian content: “the Oriental Monk and his apprentice(s) represent future salvation of the dominant culture—they embody a revitalized hope of saving the West from capitalist greed, brute force, totalitarian rule, and spiritless technology” (Virtual 20). I find that the image of the Oriental Monk as the aspirational figure of successful mindfulness practice in self-help discourses, representing an aggregate of such assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists—what I will call “psychological Buddhism”—quickly becomes a literal embodiment. The brain structures of Tibetan masters and their associates as represented in MRI scans are presented as conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of mindfulness practice early and often in this discourse. Together, New Age Capitalism, traditionalization, and the Oriental Monk describe the dynamic by which the Buddhist leaders already made available in North American culture through the books they had written for their convert followers, from among any field of referents, are the ones appropriated as the necessary cultural substrate for mindfulness and the terms by which that appropriation is made.

Second, while historians of religion have offered invaluable accounts of Buddhist communities and institutions in North America, they tend to regard generalized mindfulness as an accommodation of Buddhist meditation to contemporary culture.⁷
Here, two distinct historical processes, the transmission of Buddhist practice through popularizations and institutions such as Naropa to convert Buddhists on one side, and the generalization of self-help and positive psychology programs such as mindfulness, are subsumed to a singular formation, what I call the “Western Buddhist” narrative. Scholars such as Charles Prebish tend to posit a coherent and novel formation typically labeled Western or American Buddhism in order to account for the diverse array of Buddhist institutions, practices, and programs in North America (Prebish 6), assuming all are reducible to a single category, and that anything marketed with the word mindfulness attached must be a Buddhist practice, which I show to be an untenable assumption (chapter one). Almost without exception, historians of religion locate generalized mindfulness within a narrative of Buddhist modernization and rationalization by virtue of its mediation through a presumably advanced Western worldview, such that the traditional Buddhism of Asia (and hence Asians) are positioned as premodern, bound to empty ritual and irrational cultural trappings lacking relevance to the present. Such speculations reach their apogee in claims that mindfulness represents the very summum bonum of this modernization. Jeff Wilson tacitly endorses this position in his groundbreaking cultural history of mindfulness (50); in Stephen Batchelor’s presentation of it, “modernity” and “Asian” are necessarily terms in opposition, and Buddhist practices associated with the latter are reduced to caricature. Here, mindfulness is tacitly assumed by scholars such as Wilson (and, as I show in chapter three, insight meditation authors) to represent a kind of universal truth, a perennial philosophy or culturally invariant truth of the mind relative to which various Buddhisms and other religious
traditions represent variants or deviations (Wilson 82). This matters because the academic imprimatur of the Western Buddhist narrative legitimizes mindfulness as a mode of discipline appropriate to the moment and its worldview, and as a function of the Good represented by the mass-mediated Asian master figured as the progenitor of Western Buddhism.¹²

No adequate evidence has yet been presented to demonstrate the claim that the diverse Buddhist communities and traditions of North America can be reduced to the Western Buddhist narrative, nor that mindfulness is one among them, nor that mindfulness as advocated in the workplace or the clinic is in any way representative of any Buddhist culture. While the identification of generalized mindfulness with Buddhist traditions, figures, and practices positioned as a presumed Buddhist legacy refashioned with a contemporary sensibility has been largely unquestioned among Buddhist Studies scholars writing on mindfulness, the narrative of Buddhist modernization and concomitant category of Western Buddhism mindfulness in are contested. Scholars such as Iwamura, Joseph Cheah, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argue that the Western Buddhist narrative is a presumption of patriarchal, Eurocentric power on the part of those scholars who take it up,¹³ that it marginalizes the religious experience and everyday lives of Asian Buddhists in North America,¹⁴ and that it is an uncritically accepted body of assumptions that has little explanatory value, but is rather a cultural artifact in itself demanding critical scrutiny.¹⁵ For these reasons, I have found it necessary to develop an alternative analytical schema for critically explicating the metabolisms of exchange between mindfulness programs and Buddhist formations in North America, described below. The
tendency among scholars to frame mindfulness as a religious phenomenon only, and specifically a Buddhist phenomenon, is inadequate to account for the social conditions that have summoned generalized mindfulness into being, the “stress” of Mindfulness-Based Stress Relief and the particular ways in which stress is to be managed by the always already pathologized contemporary subject. Nor is this framing capable of accounting for the mediation of mindfulness through contemporary modes of Buddhist discourse, as suggested by the use of Buddhist scriptures in mindfulness advice books, that is legible in certain traces in mindfulness texts that are typically contrary to the objectives of generalized mindfulness.

Third, I situate the present inquiry in recent scholarship on self-help literature and the promotion of happiness and well-being as self-directed practices in the context of the present moment as a historical phenomenon. Micki McGee and William Davies argue that self-help and self-development programs demand that individuals implement upon themselves the means to survive and thrive in the context of political, economic, and environmental problems that are social in origin (McGee 177, Davies 273). McGee situates self-help culture in the context of resource scarcity, “a market-driven capitalism rapidly careening toward the annihilation of the planet,” where it becomes an imperative to “exploit the closest natural resource, in this case, one’s self” (175). The advice book—McGee’s primary example of a means to such self-exploitation—mediates a mutual rearticulation of social imperatives and private, domestic, and of-the-self experiences. According to McGee, this process is increasingly revealing itself to be highly problematic for the “belabored” consumers of self-help programs, those “who find that it is difficult
or impossible to manage mastery of themselves and their life courses in the face of volatile social and economic forces” made recursive by a genre, the advice book, which consistently promises the possibility of such a resolution in the self of its reader (177). Following McGee, I identify the mindfulness discourse, also associated strongly with the advice book genre that is its primary instantiation, as an instance of Enlightenment rationality promising to support and empower a precariously employed petit bourgeois, while at the same time recursively repositioning the belabored one as capable of an individualized resolution to such problems. I use the term belabored to mark this increasingly proletarianized social stratum as representative of the social pressures brought to bear on productive labor generally in the present juncture (chapter one).

I position mindfulness as a self-help program that reproduces the social dynamics of the moment of its consumption in its enactment. In describing the cultivation of happiness and the management of stress as means to the reproduction of capitalist social relations, Davies claims that such techniques as mindfulness, emerging from an agenda traceable to the historical Enlightenment, are best exploited by “those with an interest in social control, very often for private profit” (4-7). My purpose in this dissertation is, in part, to tease apart the components of that mobilization, in order to better understand their function and what makes them possible. Like McGee and Davies, but unlike mindfulness’ advocates, I insist on viewing stress as a political and social problem with concrete historical origins, and I describe these origins in order to contextualize mindfulness as a dialectical response to the social condition of stress posing as a personal problem. In short, a historical inquiry into mindfulness must follow from an examination
of the production of stress as a political and economic project, which I give in chapter one.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

The objective of this dissertation is to promote a more adequate understanding of mindfulness as a cultural artifact, and by extension the historical moment it enacts. Toward that end, this project pursues a threefold research question: How did mindfulness arise and become generalized? Taken as an artifact of the historical juncture that produced it, how can mindfulness inform scholarship on contemporary culture? What social problems and possibilities are encoded in mindfulness, or follow from it?

**EVIDENCE AND ARCHIVE**

This dissertation traces the emergence and reproduction of mindfulness in and through advice books and the contexts and consequences of their consumption; the crystallization of particular repertoires in the same, including the characteristics peculiar to this genre of advice book; and the interchanges and significant differences among programs for Buddhist converts, insight meditators, and the stressed and seeking. While mindfulness is presented in a series of commodities (books and other media, seminars, retreats), and hence qualitatively diverse traditions are swept *gratis* into a quantitatively valued regime (Marx *Capital III* 751), my purpose here is less in analyzing the commodification of Buddhism than in teasing out how mindfulness emerged historically and was generalized for use in everyday life in this juncture, what that program promises, and how mindfulness as an artifact can inform scholarship on contemporary culture.
generally.\textsuperscript{16} I have relied primarily on textual analysis, taking a specific canon of advice books as my archive. I undertook participant observation in mindfulness programs such as leadership conferences to verify the role of the advice book and its conventions in the promotion of mindfulness, and to specify the canon of advice books called upon by mindfulness experts and leaders in that promotion. Here, I give a brief description and rationale for the primary operative categories I use to analyze this archive.

I take the advice book as this inquiry’s primary archive because it is the most authoritative and privileged, and therefore best warranted, means by which this discourse has been generalized. First, the use of the term mindfulness in its contemporary sense, describing a program of mental culture, emerged first in translations of meditation manuals. *Mindfulness* was first used to describe a factor in meditation (P. *sati*, S. *smṛti*) practice by T.W. Rhys Davids in his translations of Theravada Buddhist scriptures and meditation manuals in the late nineteenth century. This usage began with consistency in 1899, and with a specific rationale for it in 1910; Rhys Davids sought to distinguish Buddhist practices from those of other traditions by which the definitions available in the Pali and Sanskrit dictionaries of the nineteenth century were shaded, and hence mindfulness was selected as different enough from memory and close enough to contemplation to suffice (Gethin 247). When used in reference to an intentional cultivation of the mind, the term mindfulness has long been mediated through the *techne* of the book—first in the translation, and subsequently the self-help advice book, the resource called upon by the belabored in need of means to solve immediate, material problems.
Following McGee, I observe that there exists at present a demand for an inexpensive program of stress relief and performance enhancement that is not in itself difficult to accommodate into an already time-crunch routine. The conscription of mindfulness and cognate programs to the self-help genre since the 1970s is evidence of this demand. It also points to a concrete problem faced by mindfulness promoters in mediating this practice and discourse through the advice book form: if mindfulness is indeed a simple practice that emphasizes silence, nonconceptuality, and attention to the present of sensory experience, then using the mind do the time-intensive work of reading, of tracing a narrative in time or following the conceptual steps of expository prose, should be the antithesis of a mindfulness program. Instead, unlike other wellness and stress relief products such as yoga or martial arts, Wilson notes that the ambiguity and opacity of mindfulness make it extraordinarily difficult to merchandize directly. Mindfulness merchants instead commodify the discourse of mindfulness, consisting of prescriptions for practice and affirmations promising to support the cultivation of a mindful lifestyle. Consequently, mindfulness as a commodity “thrives on written text, even as it has exploded in popularity during a visually driven age” (Wilson 153). This factor has inscribed mindfulness into the advice book genre and its contractual logic from the moment of mindfulness’s emergence as a discrete formation.\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, I analytically differentiate mindfulness as meditative practice from concomitant discourses presenting and promoting it, even as mindfulness practice is invisible to the researcher outside that discourse.
Finally, I draw primarily on a particular canon of advice books because other presentations and modalities in which mindfulness is presented, such as interviews, podcasts, conference talks, digital video intended to go viral—are reducible to, prompted by, and legitimized by the content and form of the book genre and the rollout of new books and reissues of canonical texts of previous decades. I observe that a primary means to get consulting work and speaking engagements as an expert in mindfulness is to present oneself as an authority on mindfulness is to author a book with some variation on the word “mindful” in the title.

Because not all advice books in circulation in the mindfulness scene make the same promises, emerge from the same milieu, prescribe the same practices, or share the same assumptions, I find that some means of differentiating among them is necessary for purposes of analysis at the level of discourse. I underscore that while I trace the history of mindfulness as it emerges from and appropriates particular religious formations in North America, the scope of this inquiry is limited only to the cultural function of that discourse and the religious register I identify in contemporary capitalism; I make no claims on anyone’s religious practice or convictions as such, only on the cultural work done or made possible by particular religious discourses. Further, my claims on Pop Buddhism and insight meditation are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, but represent an attempt to account for the tensions in and around mindfulness discourse and practice.

I distinguish the manifold traditions of Buddhism practice in Asia and in some communities in North America, what I call *traditional Buddhism*, from novel formations such as *popularized Buddhism, insight meditation*, and *generalized mindfulness*. 
Traditional Buddhism is largely beyond the scope of this inquiry. The others, by virtue of being advice book phenomena of significance to generalized mindfulness, are indispensable to the discursive history I open to examination here.

Popularized or “pop” Buddhism denotes a category of discourse produced by traditional Buddhists, typically Asian masters, intended for non-Asian consumers, particularly in the medium of the English-language advice book. I situate bestsellers by writers such as Chögyam Trungpa, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the current Dalai Lama in this category. Significantly for this inquiry, an explicitly anti-capitalist body of sentiments and modes of conduct is indispensable to it (chapter two) that is mobilized in mindful projects described in subsequent chapters.

Insight meditation is a form of practice and corresponding discourse that emerged in the mid-1970s among English-speaking practitioners, mostly Americans, who trained in South and Southeast Asia under the direction of lay Theravada Buddhist masters and monks with an orientation toward lay practice, such as Mahasi Sayadaw. Formative figures in insight meditation include Kornfield, Goldstein, Salzberg, and Tara Brach. Scholars tend to treat insight meditation as Buddhism but differentiate it from the Theravada tradition in which its leaders were trained by its emphasis on seated meditation and elision of ritual practice (Braun 163). Perhaps more significant is the affirmative eclecticism that emerges in insight meditation practice where both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist methods, and some Vedantic and especially Jungian objectives, are brought to bear as “instrumental means to the refinement of practice,” as Erik Braun puts it (165). I argue that the innovations of the IMS leaders are less a “refinement” or
adaptation of Buddhist meditation than a novel formation entirely, with objectives shared
in comment with self-help phenomena already in circulation among consumers of advice
books in 1974 but not any Buddhist formation, such as the realization of a meaningful
and purposive life, a “true self.” The novelty of insight meditation is visible against the
background of the Pop Buddhist context represented by Naropa in 1974 and afterward.
After all, Trungpa had intended the summer 1974 session as a kind of negating shock
therapy against the affirmative universalism and perennialism common to both positive
psychology and Anglophone Buddhism at this time. While insight meditation is
conventionally presented as a form of Buddhist practice made appropriate to the Western
mind by appeal to a psychological universalism and emphasis on routinized meditation
practice, I treat it as a novel formation with distinctive objectives (chapter three).

Generalized mindfulness, finally, is a self-help program promoted by positive
psychologists such as Herbert Benson, Ellen Langer, and Jon Kabat-Zinn to treat stress
and pain, and then extrapolated and reproduced as a means to myriad ends, such as
increasing worker productivity and good-faith compliance (chapters four, five, and six).
The discourse of generalized mindfulness emerges from that of insight meditation
(chapter three), which is legitimized by mystifications of capitalist relations of power that
appropriate a Pop Buddhist lexicon.

Following David McMahan, and in contrast to the Western Buddhist narrative, I
use the variance among objectives of each of the four categories outlined above as a
means to generalize the distinctions among all four categories. For instance, the
pedagogy of traditional Buddhism leads the student to find no meaning or purpose in
everyday life as it is conventionally lived, which is posited as a miasma of inevitable bondage and dissatisfaction (P. and S. samsara); here, the objective is to attain liberation from this field of necessity (P. kamma and paṭiccasamuppāda; S. karma and pratītyasamutpāda) or to strive for the liberation of all from it, depending on the Theravada (former) or Mahayana (latter) tradition with which the student may be engaged. These objectives are consistent across Buddhist cultures, even as modes of practice and discursive norms vary widely from context to context. In contrast, the purpose of generalized mindfulness practice and the greater portion of insight meditation discourse is more often and conspicuously to find personal, private purpose, one’s “true self,” in everyday life, “reinforcing,” as Wilson asserts, “rather than challenging the status quo” (128). These are diametrically opposed objectives. It follows that scholars would regard Buddhism and generalized mindfulness as antonyms in the last analysis, but the opposite is true. Wilson, for example, sees this divergence in objectives as part of a historical transformation of Buddhism as such from a “self-denying” tradition to a modern “self-affirming” discipline and mindfulness as evidence of that metamorphosis (113). In contrast, I observe a contemporary contradiction between mindfulness discourse (self-affirming and individualistic) and its Pop Buddhist (self-negating and prosocial) modes of legitimation.

The ability to distinguish among the practices and discourses that are drawn under the umbrella of mindfulness offers the historian the means to locate the historical and cultural provenance of a practice concretely, in specific social and historical contexts and artifacts. These distinctions empower an alternative narrative of the emergence of
mindfulness to the Western Buddhist narrative, which assumes that mindfulness is a privileged Buddhist variant. In contrast, the present inquiry foregrounds the contradictions between mindfulness programs, the Pop Buddhist figures (“Oriental Monks”) and their programs called upon to legitimize mindfulness practice, the religious quality I identify in contemporary culture—what I call the religion of capitalism—and related formations, such as psychological Buddhism and conscious capitalism, at the point of objective.

While I do not assume a common identity among these four categories, I do observe a web of complex interrelationships—appropriations, mediations, and legitimations. I do not argue that Buddhist doctrines, traditions, and institutions are unproblematic (they are not), nor do I defend a hypothetically pure doctrine against a cast of mindful deviators and revisionists. Rather, I limit my archive of Buddhist texts to those published for converts starting in the early 1970s that I have verified remain in circulation among mindfulness practitioners and advocates. I attempt to establish what mindfulness promoters simultaneously distance their programs from while appealing to and appropriating—hence the need for significant detail. And in examining this complex relation, the contradictions in mindfulness as a form of consciousness keyed precisely to the social pressures of the moment come into view against the background of a Pop Buddhism that, not infrequently, carries anti-capitalistic and utopian aspirations. The discourse of generalized mindfulness, an extension of insight meditation discourse, advocates a compensatory set of objectives and thus presents mindfulness practice as a disciplinary means to the earnest reproduction of the status quo, the given, the same, in
every moment. I call these functions the *emancipatory* and *compensatory valences* of mindfulness, respectively.

**METHODOLOGY**

Given that mindfulness is a practice and discourse concerned with claims on time, experiences of time, and the problem of relating to challenging moments and fast-paced, rapidly-changing environments, this inquiry probes the content of this discourse and practice in light of the temporalities of the historical moment that produced it. It follows the methodological imperative Stuart Hall observed to be shared in common among early Cultural Studies projects, to probe “the dialectic between conditions and consciousness” (72) in historical time and in the production of temporality—the framing of the present as a distinctly fast-paced and turbulent time here, the cusp of a New Age of plenitude and peace there, and the foreclosure of some possible futures and the reproduction of others through the disciplines and measures of the present. I begin with the dialectic I observe between mindfulness and its moment in addressing the three facets of the research question specified above. A historical account of the formative aspects of the moment of mindfulness’s emergence (conditions), paired with a detailed analysis of mindfulness’s discursive content (forms of consciousness), the social action it summons, and the specific dialectic that obtains among them, yields historical and functional contributions to emergent scholarship on mindfulness. Specifically, an alternative historical analysis of mindfulness in its moment of arising and generalization reveals the contours of the function and significance of mindfulness as a characteristic form of consciousness of the present juncture, what I call *the moment of stress*: the miasma of the present moment. In
temporal terms, to understand mindfulness is to understand the present as a product of the recent past and the reproduction of present social relations into the future.  

To account for the dialectic of conditions and consciousness in this instance is to account for power and its reproduction in historical time, insofar as the objectives of different class strata are in contradiction with each other, and the realization of this objective as the future stands to negate the aspirations of an other for another future. I address this dynamic in light of Michel Foucault’s observation in his lectures on neoliberalism, emergent from his study of On War, that the capitalist mode of production is “a singular figure in which economic processes and institutional frameworks call on each other, support each other, modify and shape each other in ceaseless reciprocity” (Birth of Biopolitics 164). The specific dialectical logic Foucault claims is at work in capitalist societies is that of reciprocating retrenchment in conflict as Clausewitz describes it (Wechselwirkung), a process of mutual and ongoing determination among opposing forces and the friction of material conditions. This dialectic describes a cultural logic of miasma, not progress or resolution; it describes the reproduction of the present moment, the status quo, by the mobilization of power against the resistance of opposing forces, including those forces that power itself summons and empowers—productive forces, most significantly—to realize its objective of retaining power. Foucault’s lectures on the program of economic liberalism are premised in the understanding that capitalism and conflict are comprehensible through the same dialectic, an insight that draws attention to the characteristically martial lexicon I find in mindfulness and Pop Buddhist programs. Most significantly, this logic of mutual
determination specifies the dialectic of consciousness and conditions Hall posits to account for the metabolism I argue obtains between Enlightenment practices of self-improvement and self-making such as mindfulness and the retrenchment of class power after the 1970s globally, the moment of stress (chapter one), such that both programs—mystified and enacted as the emancipatory and compensatory valences of mindfulness—presume, reproduce, complicate, and undermine each other.

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS? A PARADOX**

Mindfulness is not the book-mediated Buddhism it appropriates. Rather, generalized mindfulness coincides with a repertoire of devotional acts, attitudes, and austerities, an Enlightenment prepared for consumption, as Jeremy Carrette and Richard King argue, in the form of an “assent to a set of beliefs, a matter of the private state of mind or personal orientation of the individual citizen in the terms set out for it by modern (i.e. Enlightenment-inspired) liberalism” (14). Such a mode of assent describes class power articulated as a religious modality, the faith program implied in the promissory temporality of the contract by which the belabored reproduce their own lives each day. To specify Lau’s concept of New Age Capitalism to present purposes, I propose that Marx’s famous attribution of a web of “theological niceties and metaphysical subtleties” to the commodity and the social relations legible in it are a historical phenomenon and not only a literary figure (*Capital I* 163). A specifically religious quality is legible in the obfuscations and expectations in circulation around the commodity and the reproduction of class relations at the level of aspiration. I find the content of what Walter Benjamin
called capitalism as religion in insight meditation and mindfulness discourses.\textsuperscript{32} That is, I find the freedom in the moment that mindfulness promises to be a generalized instance of what Jameson calls a “private religion” promising a personal salvation that serves to reinscribe the determinations of the moment, strengthening “the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation” (\textit{Political Unconscious} 20). Here, Jameson summarizes the religious register of what I call mindfulness’s compensatory valence, its availability and use as a mode of \textit{class discipline}, a means to the reproduction of the status quo in the moment-to-moment routines of everyday life.

In this context, I characterize the way in which the normative routines of everyday life and being toward work and debt connote the devotions and affirmations of religious practice, while the imperatives of the present involve a commitment and self-discipline of a kind conventionally reserved to religious observance, as \textit{capitalism as religion}, or the religion of capital. These coincide with the “millennial dreams” Paul Smith associates with projects such as globalization and economic liberalization in this juncture. A temporality is described in the modes of action summoned by its moment: Because time is accelerating toward given objectives (a foreclosed future) by those whose worldviews are presumed to be developmentally and therefore temporally superior to one’s own, one is called upon to take it on faith that it is in one’s strategic interest to assent to the given, and to comply with it: There Is No Alternative (TINA). As the discursive function of the class discipline of mindfulness, its compensatory valence, the religion of capital here effects the reproduction of class power in microregimes of attention, devotion, and
aspiration, moment to moment—implemented by the disciplined upon themselves on the promise of forthcoming personal development and advantage.

However, I also find in mindfulness discourse and practice, and the structures of feeling they draw upon, a contradictory tendency to that valence, summoned primarily by the means to legitimation that mindfulness advocates primarily rely on—a canon of specific Buddhists and Buddhist books—summoned, as Iwamura predicts, as a salvific imaginary for persons mindful of the crises of postwar North America (a kind of “overproduction” or surplus of mindfulness). This is suggested in the optimism for alternative and novel socialities in Loka, and in the projection of expectations onto the Buddhist leaders of this period by North Americans that Iwamura describes. This explains, in part, why criticisms of mindfulness are so often made in a Buddhist lexicon. More significantly, I find that the objectives of mindfulness discourse as the religion of capitalism and Pop Buddhism as its aspirational image are in contradiction. Here, the compensatory valence of disciplines such as mindfulness invoke and promise an emancipatory valence. The regimes of discipline put into circulation by the religion of capital as an articulation of power function to paradoxically empower the belabored to pursue objectives counter to the reproduction of the extant social relations—that is, counter to the objective of the reproduction of class power moment to moment, the stressful social environment that I argue summoned and generalized mindfulness from the start (chapter one).

I pursue this observation by situating mindfulness, as already suggested, in the Enlightenment ethos Foucault describes, but here explicated at the intersection of the
legacies of the historical Enlightenment and spirituality at present. The parallel logics of
the Enlightenment ethos and the imperatives of alternative spirituality have been
observed by Roy Bhaskar and Peter Sloterdijk, who find continuity to the present in
Hegel’s claim that Enlightenment advances a theological project. That paradigmatic
philosopher of Enlightenment asserts, “what Enlightenment declares to be an error and a
fiction,” that is, the institution of religion as unreason, generalizable as power as such, “is
the very same thing as Enlightenment itself” (334). For the purposes of this inquiry, and
against Hegel’s evangelism, I identify the religion of capitalism as the engine of what
Enlightenment as he describes it has become. One plausible answer to Foucault’s
question “What is Enlightenment?” is **mindfulness in North America in the moment of
stress**. Mindfulness is an absolute instance of the dynamic Foucault describes as “the
acquisition of capabilities and the struggle for freedom,” the “work carried out by
ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (“Enlightenment” 47-48) in a social milieu that
is characterized in the first instance by the temporal controls it applies to persons, and in
the second as means to the capabilities that those controls summon the same persons to
develop. Here, the spiritual practice of realizing one’s freedom against limits and
pressures that are imposed from without but experienced from within articulates the
double meaning of Enlightenment as spiritual attainment and as critical ethos, and further
specifies the dialectic of consciousness and conditions Hall observes. The religion of
capitalism corresponds to an Enlightenment ethos that makes available a specific mode of
empowerment in a mystified register.
I situate the dynamic of power Foucault and Sloterdijk describe as Enlightenment in the context of *capital’s paradoxic tendency to mobilize certain raw materials that directly challenge capitalist relations*, as in its need to for labor to feel empowered enough to be willingly productive at the risk of making workers uncompliant and hence unexploitable (Cooper 60). In Sloterdijk’s terms, mindfulness is a *life practice*—an Enlightenment regime one performs on oneself in every moment in anticipation of a need for an improved repetition of the same in the future\(^3\) that is at once an enactment of power upon itself, but also and paradoxically an act of empowerment, of increased capacity for free and independent action.\(^3\) Here again, but in the daily routines of everyday life, is the reciprocal dialectic of miasma that Foucault, in his reading of Clausewitz, identifies in capitalist social relations. Mindfulness discourse emerges as the mobilization of the religion of capitalism as a means to personal health, success, wellbeing, peace, and personal authenticity; a felt revulsion to class power and the consequences of its enactment are cultivated, what I call an overproduction of mindfulness, and promotes aspirations for an alternative. As mindfulness discourse calls upon its consumer to identify with the One of power as part of a discipline of self-empowerment in a disempowering social milieu, denying the temporal and developmental coevalness of its Other, it simultaneously evokes a felt solidarity with that Other. And as generalized mindfulness discourse is predicated in a lack of mindfulness regarding the historical emergence of the present, the capacity of mindfulness practice and Pop Buddhist discourse to bring the totality of the moment into the view of the meditator undermines mindfulness’s effectiveness as class discipline. The injustices of
globalization and the tendency of mindfulness practice and discourse to encourage an affective, even somatic, revulsion to the One and identification with the Other, in a sense a crisis of overproduction of awareness of the present moment, frustrates mindfulness’s implicit objective of orienting a self made compliant and “true” by the discipline of practice to identify with the objectives of the One as his or her own.37

The objectives of mindfulness practice, the realization of a “true self,” of authenticity and personal meaning, of stress relief and performance enhancement (chapters three, four, five, and six), are at odds with the modes of impersonal action and aspiration advocated by the particular Buddhists that mindfulness discourses and practices position consumers to identify with, and are legitimized by, as legible in the self-help books that had made public figures of them (chapter two). These themes, images, and practices are called upon to legitimize mindfulness texts and teachers. This appropriation, itself, corresponds dialectically to the causes of the dissatisfactions and injustices of the present that mindfulness discourse and practice direct the meditator to observe. The discursive and somatic contents of this body of referents frustrates the objective of mindfulness as stress relief, the reproduction of the present social environment by means of the management of its symptoms in the compliant subject. Martin Hartmann and Axel Honneth argue that certain cultural formations are paradoxical, in that their mobilization tends to diminish the likelihood of its objective becoming realized (47)—that in the way it affirms its objective, the object summons its own negation.38 The Enlightenment discipline of mindfulness is one such paradox.39 It marks a site where capitalist power at once affirms and negates itself. I claim that
mindfulness practice and discourses enact, paradoxically, the same motion of promoting creative and free human life, and delimiting it—a movement that is adequately comprehended only in the context of the objective of capital accumulation and the reproduction of uneven relations of power. Mindfulness reproduces the social contradictions and social aspirations of its moment, and in its means of doing so, resists the realization of its objectives by negating its premises and suggesting desirable alternatives to them.

Functionally, mindfulness is Enlightenment mobilized as a class discipline that paradoxically negates itself and affirms its Other as it is enacted. While a comprehensive demonstration of this claim in North American society in this juncture is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I do trace its movement in its mystifications and its implementations: advice books and seminars. Historically, mindfulness is the summun bonum of the religion of capitalism generalized as a tactical solution to an everyday-life problem, not of a modernizing or “evolving” Buddhism in America.

LIMITATIONS AND THE POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

My own experience as a practitioner of insight meditation and, subsequently, Buddhism—and as an avid consumer of advice books— informs this inquiry. I was introduced to Buddhist thought in a community college philosophy course. A selection of The Questions of King Menander (P. Milindapañha), required reading, convinced me that the Theravada Buddhist canon had much to teach me, and I resolved to learn. Some weeks later, an instructor in psychology once paused mid-lecture to advise the class to get plenty of rest and to learn meditation as a form of self-care against stress. I found this
notion appealing, given that I was holding down a swing-shift job at a produce warehouse while pushing through a full-time course load. Was that not stress? Failing to find a Theravada Buddhist temple at which to learn meditation near me, I joined an insight meditation group and began a daily routine of practice in 1997. At that time, I was given a list of advice books to consider reading, titles that I later found to be generalized to the mindfulness scene but for one exception. I abandoned insight meditation and took up Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist practice in 2000, motivated in large part by the books I was encouraged to read by the leader of the insight meditation group to which I had belonged. I remain a Buddhist practitioner to the present, involved primarily in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism, in which I was ordained as a novice priest (J. doshu) in 2010. I have seen first-hand how Buddhist meditation is mobilized as a religious practice, and how insight meditation was presented in its late-1990s apogee, just prior to the generalization of its lexicon as mindfulness discourse.

I acknowledge that my embeddedness in this history empowers me to decode the peculiarities of these discourses from the perspective of an insider, it also limits this inquiry in ways that I am positioned not to see.

TRAJECTORY OF THIS ARGUMENT

The first three chapters of this inquiry trace the positing and generalization of mindfulness. Chapter one analyzes the material substrate to mindfulness as stress relief: a social environment that is inherently stressful, introduced as a program of retrenching
class relations after the “policed” crises of the 1970s, which I describe through the historical processes of economic liberalization, financialization, and globalization. Next, this chapter identifies the “belabored” consumer summoned by mindfulness discourse, describes the historical emergence of generalized mindfulness practice from among self-help programs of the mid-1970s, and considers its appropriation of a Pop Buddhist imaginary through the positioning of the Buddhist as an exemplar of the Good and the image of a sane, healthy, and desirable life. Here, it is shown that generalized mindfulness is not a Buddhist program in the first instance, and that the narrative of Buddhist modernity mobilized by scholars and advocates functions to legitimize mindfulness by reproducing the assumptions about time, globalization, and the present historical juncture that inhere in mindfulness discourse correspond not to Buddhist practice, but to the religion of capitalism. Chapter two considers the programs of the Pop Buddhist leaders and institutions most frequently relied upon by mindfulness promoters for legitimation. The Pop Buddhist lexicon in circulation in mindfulness programs brings the emancipatory valence of mindfulness to consciousness by promoting desirable alternatives to the present, a sense of revulsion toward the injustices of capitalist sociality, and a practice of negating automatized conditioning by the same. Chapter three outlines the emergence and generalization of mindfulness discourse in the parameters of the insight meditation advice book, by which mindfulness practice is made available as a disciplinary mode oriented to compensatory objectives: the cultivation of a “true self,” a meaningful life-narrative or “soul story” in the patterns of one’s identifications in the spiritual marketplace, what Jameson calls a private religion. The individualism and
universalism of insight meditation discourse crystallize the religion of capitalism and mystify the social contours of the moment of stress.

Next, the inquiry pivots to consider the realization of generalized mindfulness as a program of class discipline in everyday life as a workplace in chapters four, five, and six, where a Pop Buddhist lexicon and a pastiche of New Age and alternative spiritualities are evoked to articulate capitalist means and ends such that class relations are mystified as means to spiritual development through the image of the enlightened CEO advice-writer, and such spiritual development promises a deferred instrumental value to the disciplined. In chapter four, formations such as conscious capitalism are analyzed as modes of discipline relying on mediated and backformed versions of the Pop Buddhist projects analyzed in chapter two are called upon to legitimize the reproduction of class relations moment to moment under the sign of a mindful lifestyle. Chapters five and six describe the articulation of mindfulness as a disciplinary mode, the compensatory valence, first as a program of promised empowerment by coercion (chapter five) and then in the implementation of that program by the disciplined on themselves in model mindful workplaces (chapter six). These summon critical responses that are premised in the very Pop Buddhist lexicon that mindful corporate leaders had generalized. The paradox of mindfulness is traced in this movement as a mystification and breath-by-breath enactment of the miasma of contemporary social life in North America that is Enlightenment.
CHAPTER ONE: THE MOMENT OF STRESS AND THE RELIGION OF CAPITALISM AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION; OR, MINDFULNESS IS NOT A BUDDHIST PRACTICE

This chapter situates mindfulness discourse and practice in the historical juncture that produced it, what I call the moment of stress in North America: the resolution of the economic crises of the 1970s in a series of policies and complex economic transformations that involved the imposition of a social environment on the overwhelming majority that has been, by design, stressful. The compensatory valence of mindfulness is positioned to retrench this environment by making it manageable by the belabored practitioners themselves. Mindfulness practice and discourse emerge as a discipline dialectically summoned by the moment of stress, and reciprocally acting on it.

In contrast to the “Western Buddhist” narrative, here mindfulness is shown to be a therapeutic intervention generalized to all in this historical moment, a universal therapy for a historically contingent experience imagined as a perennial and implacable problem: maladjustment to the temporality of a stressful environment. Mindfulness practice, the disciplined moment-to-moment awareness of the present without judgment or reference to past or future (Kabat-Zinn Wherever 4), was already generalized in self-help books in North America as a means to stress relief and life enhancement years before the program upheld as the first appropriation of Buddhist meditation for the clinic and subsequently the self-help book, Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
program, was. Mindfulness is best contextualized among these self-help programs, the conventions of which it reproduces, and not among the Buddhist practices with which it shares an English-language name and, after MBSR, a body of cultural associations organized around a tacit racial category, the “Oriental Monk.” Even as it calls upon a specific canon of Buddhist thematics and persons for legitimacy, mindfulness was not generalized as a crypto-Buddhism, and does not function as one. Its functions are as historically novel as the objectives to which they are oriented. Some of those functions may appear Buddhistic in that they rely on specific assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists in circulation in this milieu.

The conscription of religious formations generally, and a set of assumptions about some (not all) Buddhist traditions and selected Buddhists in particular, is conventional to the genre of the positive psychology self-help book. Consuming one is an act of devotion and piety. The compliant self-help consumer takes on faith that the program offered by the author will bring a tacit or explicit objective to fruition, and disciplines him or herself to observe the author’s program as one would follow the itinerary of a pilgrimage. Mindfulness was generalized at a moment in which a utopian future for the status quo was (and still remains) largely unthinkable for the majority. For the belabored, becoming mindful of the present moment means recognizing the diminishment of one’s life chances; the receding of class-inflected expectations for one’s future behind horizons of debt, diminished pay, and unstable work, and the regimentation of one’s time demanded by the austerities of financialized daily life. The status quo is, from this perspective, a hopeless miasma, even as the work of reproducing one’s life each day reenacts it and
projects it again into the future. It follows that any program promising to the belabored a means to get ahead or to at least feel less discouraged or despairing under the terms of the present is, necessarily, a prosperity gospel, a faith-based program. Mindfulness is one such program that, paradoxically, promises to direct the attention of the compliant to a direct insight into the hurt of the present, while the repertoires of make-believe—of religious sentiment as discipline, of making oneself believe—remain available to promoters of self-help programs in this milieu, and they are strongly in evidence in mindfulness and the self-help substrate it represents.

I call the devotions, pieties, and endlessly deferred promises that enact the reproduction of the present into the future the religion of capitalism. In the context of self-help books generally, it promises a healthful adjustment to the present, imagined as a timeless, universal truth, implemented by the individual upon him or herself as one would undergo the austerities of paying a debt. In the context of mindfulness, the religion of capitalism conscripts certain assumptions about Buddhism that are mobilized by positive psychologists of this period as ancient, comprehensive, and contemporary models of human development, and similarly ancient-contemporary images of health, wellbeing, and the Good. The assumption among some mindfulness advocates that Buddhism is reducible to a psychology and that mindfulness is its paragon is symptomatic of this dynamic. This is one way in which the compensatory valence of mindfulness—mindfulness as a means to reproduce the status quo—involves the Buddhism available to it, the one mediated through English-language books and media, as an image of a desirable alternative to the present for the purposes of reproducing the present.
Mindfulness was generalized as a clinical intervention, a therapy for stress as a disease of maladaptation to the moment, with seemingly universal purchase in everyday life. Clinical applications of mindfulness, such as mindfulness-based pain relief programs offered in North American medical centers, discipline patients to internalize any responsibility for the trauma they have experienced in the workplace (including everyday life as a workplace), attributing any hurt to personal and psychological issues, and not social and economic dynamics. Objectives lauded in mindfulness discourse, such as the realization of a “true self” or a meaningful, purposive life in this milieu (chapter three), are most comprehensible as disciplinary means of self-fashioning toward the ends of everyday life as a labor market, a training space, and work zone—personal development is workforce development. At-work mindfulness programs grounded in therapeutic mindfulness are promoted as low-cost means to a more compliant, happier workforce, such that “the potential return on investment is considerable” (Chaskalson 10).

I argue that the generalization of mindfulness is a social, economic, and cultural phenomenon indigenous to this historical juncture. Mindfulness represents the moment of financialized, globalized capital coming to consciousness of itself on its own terms, incidentally summoning in the exoticized content of its imaginary its own negation (described in chapter two) as appeals to wellbeing, prosperity, and freedom for all.

THE MOMENT OF STRESS

In Full Catastrophe Living (1990), often credited as the first mindfulness advice book, Kabat-Zinn defines stress as the undesirable effects of automatisms that cause one to adjust unskillfully to new and challenging environments, and mindfulness as a most-
appropriate mode of re-adaptation to an environment assumed to be natural, just the way it is. Mindfulness so constructed is incomprehensible without reference to stress as its other, the experience of adapting oneself and one’s objectives to the demands of a stressful social environment. While it has been naturalized as a kind of perennial ambient threat, stress is less a transhistorical pathology than a specific formation with a recent history. Stress—as a distinct category of suffering—had entered English use as a particular kind of pathology late 1970s, and as a constant of everyday life by the mid-1980s. It denotes a pathological response of an organism to environmental conditions (stressors), an experience of being stressed by situations that are taken to be wholly natural and inescapable. Stress, then, is generalized as a problem of maladaptation to one’s present moment, a personal problem—something wrong with the stressed one, not the situation. This is its historical novelty. Adapting to that moment more skillfully emerges as a plausible therapy for stress so defined, such as mindfulness.

The historical juncture I call the moment of stress describes the social dynamics of North America during and especially after the economic crises of the 1970s, mystified into the operative categories of health, and the material substrate of mindfulness discourse and practice. I call the religious register assumed by the moment of stress the religion of capitalism, which functions as a disciplinary mode with the objective of reproducing the class relations reproduced instant by instant as the moment of stress. The same historical period in which stress as a pathology was generalized marked a transition in North American economic life and public institutions toward a social environment that can only be described as increasingly stressful for working people. Accounts of late
capitalism, finance capitalism, network capitalism, flexible accumulation, post-Taylorism, Reaganism, and the postmodern condition have influenced important Cultural Studies work in this juncture. David Harvey’s account of this juncture beginning with *The Condition of Postmodernity* and especially his *Brief History of Neoliberalism* has become paradigmatic for Cultural Studies. Each of these concepts represents an attempt by scholars to account for efforts by capital to police the crisis of the 1970s, and produce a future in which the reproduction of their class privilege can be maintained even as state-level regulation could not address the decline in the rate of profit in evidence at the time, so-called “stagflation.” According to this narrative, the unmooring of capital from the state at this time was undertaken as a means to the reproduction of faltering class power. A program of economic liberalization thus coincides with globalization, intensified flows of capital across states, and exploitation of labor and nature in “developing” nations, such that the discourse of imperialism remains in circulation insofar as first world capital, if not European state power, assumes the role of the agent of the third world’s development. These relations are implemented and regulated through public policy, but also through complex networks of financial instruments such as derivatives and burdensome regimes of indebtedness. Increasingly, working people globally are positioned as others to capital, thrust into a social environment that is made increasingly competitive, disempowering, individualizing—stressful—while, simultaneously, they are also conditioned by the financialization of daily life to think and act as capitalists would, accepting the objectives of capital-owners as their own. The emergence of stress in North America coincides with a new, and nearly universal, doctrine of the modern, liberal, and capitalizing West,
temporally advanced in relation to its others; this unevenness of globalization is unmistakable in the discourse of mindfulness.

The coincidence of increased economic and social volatility with the exposure of the individual to increased risk and a demand for the subject to cope with the same solo accounts for the emergence of stress to name the inner dissonance of everyday life in a generalized habitat of diminishment and distress.\(^6\) While mindfulness crystallizes as a distinct discourse-practice, celebrated as a secular, therapeutic, and universal body of existential knowledge about the nature of mind at its point of contact with reality, stress coincidentally emerges as a generalized diagnostic category, while this uniquely characteristic pathology of the belabored mystifies libertarian doctrines into the operative and aspirational categories of health and wellbeing.

The legitimation and popularization of concepts such as stress and Type A Behavior Pattern (TABP) as the antitheses of wellbeing and personal health were calculated and heavily funded by tobacco interests seeking to deflect responsibility for the public health consequences of consuming their products (Petticrew “Father,” Petticrew “Type A”) starting in the middle of the twentieth century. This involved “promoting the role of psychological stresses in mortality” as a public health concern (Petticrew “Type A” 2021). In so doing, the internal lives of the consumers of these products came under scrutiny as causes of disease in public discourse, and cigarette smoking was promoted as a means of coping with stress for persons who were maladjusted to it—a kind of “retail therapy.” By this logic, self-help products are figured as means to ameliorate a supposed maladaptation of the belabored to a now-naturalized
stressful social environment. Tobacco interests recruited and handsomely paid the recognized inventor of the concept of stress, Hans Selye, to promote just such a position publicly. Tobacco firms also heavily influenced the content of Selye’s scientific publications after 1967 (Petticrew “Father”), only after which stress was generalized as the descriptor *par excellence* of pressurized and accelerating everyday life in North America. Selye’s description of stress penetrates the media produced by tobacco industry groups. For instance, a 1976 film produced by the industry for free distribution claims that all the hurrying the world demands of someone now is the root of the problem, not the putatively anodyne self-care figured in consuming a cigarette (Petticrew “Type A” 2020). The discourse of stress as a problem of personal adaptation to an inscrutable environment that ahistorically, mysteriously, and implacably is what it is, a moment productive of stress and presenting no alternatives to itself, was disseminated as scientific knowledge and crystallized in self-help books by positive psychologists by the end of the 1970s, as was the prescription for self-care.

Selye and other scientists advanced stress management as a health benefit in order to protect the shareholders of tobacco firms (and their annual dividends) from public scrutiny. Selye was asked to speak out against anti-smoking campaigns for this purpose, and did so. In 1992, a Vice President at Philip Morris proposed to advance the notion of generalized stress relief as a superior public health alternative to anti-smoking policies: “‘a great many human lives would be lengthened if the health community would shift its emphasis from discouraging smoking to stress management training’” (Petticrew “Type A” 2021). *The cultural logic of stress management as a self-help health intervention has*
its roots in a segment of capital pursuing its objectives in ideology and public policy, specifically in preventing the falsity of a conspicuously false need (cigarettes as self-care against stress) from crystallizing as a felt consensus in North America and elsewhere. In turn, policies and discourses reproducing this cultural logic were generalized to the human condition. Here, the social causes for the pathologies unique to this juncture, an increasingly hostile environment of everyday life posited as a stressor, and some means of coping with that stressor also given by that environment, such as consumerism (tobacco) and stress management training, are naturalized and projected onto the assumed inadequacies and naturalized needs of the individual, the hurried, harried, and heretofore fictional “Type A” personality. The social environment is unquestioned, and social responses to it are foreclosed—a pattern reproduced in the rationale for practice given by mindfulness advocates such as Kabat-Zinn. Here, the pain of the moment is presumed to be merely in the minds of those who suffer, and to inquire beyond the supposed maladaptation of the suffering one into the production of his or her environment is to miss the essential, perennial, and universal point.

Stress, which now describes the experience of coping with an unhealthful environment of contemporary social life understood to be an omnipresent menace and obstacle to wellbeing, entered general usage as an operative fiction meant to reproduce uneven relations of social power by redirecting responsibility for serious public health problems away from the private agents who stood to profit from their invisibility, and onto individual consumers who are positioned to adopt the objectives of the empowered—deal with your own life problems yourself—as their own. I will argue that
the stressful-environment and stress-relief metabolism reciprocally reaffirm and reify each other in the ongoing reproduction of extant relations of power. Stress demands a lack of mindfulness of its own social origins, its own contingency, its history—reference to past and future—as it directs the attention of the stressed one within her or himself. Put differently, mindfulness practice as stress relief—without reference to past or future, a nonjudgmental mode—implies limitations on mindfulness, unmindfulness.

That said, what stress has come to name is anything but fictional. By the mid-1980s, stress had become, in large part, a euphemism for the distress of engaging with everyday life, an ambient feeling that is recognizable if not concretely defined. For instance, in Full Catastrophe (1990), stress is defined much as pornography was in the Reagan years: “People know exactly what it means, at least to them,” Kabat-Zinn claims (235). By 1990, a self-help author could safely assume that his readers experience in the texture of their lives and the futures they anticipate a frustrating, delimiting sociality. This ambiguity does not prevent Kabat-Zinn from defining stress comprehensively as living in reaction to everyday life in a field of uncertainty, insecurity, and dissatisfaction, “the full catastrophe” (235). Mindfulness is summoned as a subjective solution to this problem, and it is promised to work as a self-help practice—what Selye would call a “diversion,” which is how he described tobacco use (Petticrew “Father” 412). Generally, mindfulness offers two tactics to manage stress: defensively, through self-care; and offensively, through performance enhancement in an increasingly competitive field. Mindfulness-Based Stress Relief (MBSR), as Kabat-Zinn’s program became known, naturalizes the individualist ideology of Selye’s doctrines and
universalizes it as the perennial context of a timeless practice. While MBSR is not the only or the first therapeutic mindfulness practice, it has become the most culturally significant. Mindfulness as stress relief is generalizable insofar as the pathology of stress as maladaptation and an inventory of self-help books promising the means to cope with the same are already generalized in this historical moment.

From engagement with a precarious social environment and the sense of insecurity it summons, stress, emerges a repertoire of strategic acts in the present moment as a competitive field, the totality of which Andrew Ross calls “coping strategies” (5). Mindfulness is a representative one. The discourse of mindfulness is seamlessly integrated with market-salvation discourses (Wilson 184-85), such that the objective of coping as a health benefit and an attainment of the Good through the disciplined application of a consumer product, here the programs inscribed in self-help books, is as unquestioned as Selye’s insistence that a cigarette is a health boon. Self-help books as stress-relief offer a kind of contract: if the consumer complies with the designated program in good faith now, a future benefit is promised.

Generalized mindfulness is presented as a strategic means to cope—to manage stress and improve performance—tied to the specific historical moment of its emergence, the moment of stress. The conceptual structure Selye promoted as a public health intervention to satisfy his funders in the tobacco industry is reproduced as the rationale for mindfulness practice early and often. It is not as though capital began to “hijack” mindfulness in the years 2012-2014, as some commentators have suggested. In its internal logic, mindfulness has been a compensatory formation since well before Full
Catastrophe Living (1990) insofar as it takes as its rationale this ideology of perennial individual maladaptation to a contingent social environment that has become naturalized, and prescribes a therapy for it that is tied to a presumed universal and timeless truth of the nature of the mind and the secret core of all “wisdom traditions” best represented by meditating Buddhists. As I argue in this and subsequent chapters, the compensatory valence of mindfulness discourse affirms the moment of stress, and compliant mindfulness practice reproduces it.

It remains to specify the content of that moment—the generalization of a stressful social environment as an operation of class power. Three intersecting historical processes in North America since the mid-1970s offer significant explanatory power for the production of the environment of stress in the context of an explicitly “fast-paced” and “rapidly-changing” temporality: economic liberalization, financialization, and globalization. A contractual logic articulates all three. The contractualized relations and temporalities enacted in the consumption of self-help books enact the same. Marx’s observation that the relation of capital to productive labor characteristic of the capitalist mode of production is mediated through an uneven contract of exchange between a buyer and a seller (Capital I 276) offers a helpful point of departure.

As the techne of the reproduction of class power in the present toward the future, contracts and their logic lie at the productive heart of capitalist societies, and of the reproduction of class relations, of what classes class society in historical time. Such a contract, tacit or explicit, describes a temporal imbalance of power between the employer and the worker, the creditor and debtor, or the self-help program and its compliant
consumer, and mediates the articulation of power between them. The disempowered are obliged to the terms of the contract in different ways from the empowered; where the latter are positioned to offer the contract on a promise of future benefit to the former, a promise that may or may not be realized, the former must commit in good faith to execute the terms of the contract \textit{now}, in the present moment and before any promised remuneration or reward, obtains. In describing the contemporary juncture, Melinda Cooper argues that capitalism’s historical novelty lies in “its tendency to create both an excess of promise and an excess of waste, or in Marx’s words, \textit{a promissory surplus of life and an actual devastation of life in the present}” (58, emphasis added). That is, capital offers labor, productive forces, the means to life—to survival, and to present and especially future life lived toward a horizon of specific expectations—in order to exploit the living energy and creativity of workers made compliant insofar as they have aligned their objectives to those promised by capital \textit{in the present, without judgment}, as in the imperatives of mindfulness practice. The relation of creditor to debtor functions by the same promissory logic, and describes a cognate temporality: the endless recurrence of the same, of extant relations of power, by the devoted acts of the debtor toward the deferred promises of the creditor. This is the most basic and most relevant class distinction.

Following Stanley Aronowitz and Kathi Weeks, I understand class first as a process in time—a relationship of power constantly in production, being made and remade—and second as a complex formation that is at once a defining feature of a capitalist society and now a capitalist globe, but also not necessarily nor always corresponding only to relations of accumulation (Weeks 7-8). For this reason,
government, management, and “leadership” as such must be differentiated conceptually from shareholders and investors, who exercise power in ways that owners and investors of capital cannot, are allied to different segments of capital in strategic ways, and can (and do) represent capital in contemporary media (Aronowitz 4)—of particular significance for the present inquiry, as CEOs have leveraged their positions to become authors of mindfulness advice books. The uneven temporality of the contracts by which the reproduction of class power is articulated and the routines and repertoires it demands obtain in economic liberalization, financialization, and globalization. All three are mystified in mindfulness discourse and routines of practice; the environment of stress nad the dialectical response to restructure the self toward a “radical acceptance” of the moment through discipline have their material basis here.

I locate the historical novelty of stress as a North American experience first in the economic liberalizations initiated in the early 1980s, most often described in Cultural Studies discourses through the concept of neoliberalism. This political program emerged first as a body of doctrine with universalist pretentions, involved the imposition of privatized, “market-based” solutions to social problems, and introduced a general diminishment of the economic and political power of working people. Economic liberalization is best understood as a project of rearticulating class power after the policed crises of the 1970s. Here, the “belabored” worker and petit bourgeois is called on to manage not only the reproduction of his or her life in a material sense, but also to find personal meaning in the act of doing so, to find one’s authentic self in living on these terms—to naturalize and in a sense revere the same while enacting its reproduction into
the future. Enlightenment, self-making against the friction of social constraints, is a name for this disciplinary mode, and generalized mindfulness is an example.

The totality of everyday life assumes the function of a workplace in this context—a precarious one. The belabored one is called upon to refashion his or her time into routines of preparing to work, adapting to new work tasks and technologies, seeking new work, becoming ready for periods of unemployment at unexpected intervals and unpredictable durations, and managing irregular schedules and hours of work: building oneself and one’s relations with others toward a horizon of uncertainty. Thus, the “entrepreneurial self” Foucault claims is summoned by the stressful social environment that economic liberalization produces coincides with the calls I identify in mindfulness discourses for the realization of a “true self” in moment-to-moment awareness in the experience of a workforce increasingly stressed and crunched for time. As Maurizio Lazzarato argues, doing productive work under these circumstances is a singular act producing both value and a subjectivity—self-making and remaking toward the tacit objective of remaining employable, which is the same as remaining exploitable. Selves made willing and able to cope with an explicitly and increasingly competitive and hostile environment through self-discipline emerge: internalizing and naturalizing the pathology of stress as a perennial problem, and not an economic and political program.

The objective of mindfulness as a jobsite intervention, indistinguishable from a generalized practice at the point of application, can already be inferred from this social and economic juncture. Here, mindfulness is a mode of class discipline, by which I mean a means to the reproduction of extant class relations, of “radical acceptance” of the
present as the production of worker compliance—of really believing that enacting the coping routines of everyday life as a workplace adds up to something meaningful now for the one doing the coping, and the objectives of the marketplace coincide with that one’s own ultimate, even spiritual, purpose. In the moment of stress, the generalized “spiritual practice” of insight meditation and authenticity-oriented management protocols become functionally indistinguishable at the point of consumption. Here, the self-help book as the necessary supplement in the moment of stress articulates a process of individualized self-improvement by the parameters of a consumer good, as a practical means to cope appropriate to the moment of stress. This practice is subsumed into the everyday-life project of the precariously employed of training to develop marketable skills, seek new work, and cultivate the means to it through social networking, reconstituted as a mode of development for the most meaningful aspects of one’s life, realizing one’s true self, purpose, and meaning through routines of austerity made archetypal.57

Further aspects of mindfulness come into focus in the context of simultaneous developments, specifically the retrenchment of debt as a promised means to development, and the financialization of everyday life, most importantly in the temporalities of the moment of stress in evidence in the consumption of mindfulness. Financialization describes the transformations of contemporary sociality brought about by the rise of finance capitalism subsequent to the economic and political crises of the late 1970s, and intensifying in the last decade. It involves, according to Randy Martin, the movement of persons “through the measured paces of finance” (Financialization 9). Elaborate contracts or “financial instruments” give the measure and the paces, demanding particular
regimes of austerity and restructuring, and faithful, regular payments and allocations in the present on the promise of future benefit. The worker is summoned to invest his or her labor time in given regimens of self-development as a capitalist would invest a sum of money in a commodity on the expectation of realizing a profit upon selling it (Marx Capital I 247-57). In this sense, Martin refers to the practice of financial planning and living toward the horizons of financial objectives, whereby people without capital are called upon to act and “to think and act like capitalists,” enacting class relations within themselves and on their life trajectories, on the promise of realizing an objective of self-actualization (Financialization 12). For the belabored, financialization involves a class aspiration, the desire to attain or maintain a bourgeois life pattern, that inheres in the consumption of mindfulness. Here, the realization of the entrepreneurial self, the self-as-enterprise, in the routines of living toward a contractualized future is shown to coincide with promises of strategic self-development.

Compliance to a given program takes on a spiritual quality and implies a promise of economic benefit in the same movement. I specify Martin’s concept of the financialization of daily life to encompass the increasingly extensive and intensive positioning of the belabored as debtors in relation to capital as a creditor in everyday life, especially visible since the financial crisis and subsequent economic disaster of 2008, and the universalism and transcendent present figured in the singular financial instrument of the moment, the derivative. The debt relation describes a co-production of a compliant subjectivity with production as such that enacts the reproduction of class relations, a predictable (for capital) reproduction of the same as the future in the routines it summons
on the promise of privileged (marketable) kinds of personal growth, enrichment, or development by means of self-imposed austerities and restructurings. The everyday life routines summoned by the debt relation are enacted in the daily practices of the mindful.

Of equal significance for mindfulness, the derivative describes the temporality of a hegemonic present, an evacuation of history and deferral of the future that seems to project present social relations into the future, while suggesting a material basis for the specific universalisms in evidence in the gospel of economic liberalization and in mindfulness and insight meditation advice books. Each derivative contract enacts a temporary universalism that makes specified international currency values fungible into each other, smoothing the endless variabilities of national denominations into a singular and temporarily universal meta-capital. The peculiar characteristics of mindfulness discourse, such as the ecology of quotations through which it is articulated—as though the author of each mindfulness advice book has determined upon the fungibility of a folio of inspirational and transcultural quotations through a universal and transcendent mode of valuation to which he or she has unique access—mystifies the derivative logic of finance capital into a hero-with-a-thousand-faces universalism (chapter three). The foreclosure of the future by the self-imposed restructurings and austerities of financialization effect an elision of history that coincides with what Jameson calls a reduction to the microexperiences of the body in the present without reference to past or future, recalling the mode of attention prescribed in mindfulness practice. The compliant meditator is to attend not to the emergence of the present in historical time, but to the local, sensory, and nondiscursive experience of it.
Globalization simultaneously describes the articulation of the power relations characteristic of financialization and economic liberalization, and articulates another temporal mode integral to the discourse of mindfulness: a denial of coevalness between an enlightened and rational West, and a mystical, retrograde East already in evidence in the narrative of Western Buddhism and elsewhere. A parallel obtains. The derivative mediates the fungibility of the world’s financial values into each other, temporarily freezing the moment-to-moment flux of variations in exchange rates. Similarly, mindfulness texts describe a kind of pop-archetypal universalism, presenting mindfulness as a universal spirituality tied to a transcendent present by which the world’s “wisdom traditions,” the spiritual knowledge of the Other, are made fungible into each other and valued in terms of an explicitly “modern” present. The relation of creditor to debtor as a context for an endlessly deferred realization of development by means of self-imposed structural adjustments and austerity programs obtains in globalization also, such that the recurrent reproduction of the present characteristic of financialization, the stasis of a transcendent present, becomes its own future. The One of Euro-American power, coinciding with institutions of financial administration (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and private capital) understands its own hegemony as a temporal advance over its Other, a global periphery: the debtor nation, always “developing,” and the site of exploited productive labor after globalization. Here, the One and especially the worldviews it attributes to itself in the idealist, “evolutionary” historicism peculiar to it are positioned necessarily and always as developmentally ahead of the Other, who is granted the opportunity to develop on the terms of the One, and this reinscribes the
uneven relation of the One to the Other.\(^6\) These relations are mystified as principles of personal and cosmic development in the mindfulness milieu (chapters three and four).

Further, the positioning of mindfulness by its advocates as simultaneously timeless and modern, an advance on the “premodern views” of the Buddhist traditions and practices it legitimizes itself by, is a mystified form of the relation of One to Other in the moment of globalization coincident to mindfulness’s emergence and generalization. The compliant consumer of mindfulness advice books is hailed to identify with the enlightened One of capital and its objectives, while the Other is offered as an aspirational image, the “Oriental Monk” revealed in MRI scans to have singularly-developed brain structures and (typically) Tibetan cultural affiliation are called upon to legitimize mindfulness practice as prescribed not by Buddhists, but psychologists operating on historically contingent assumptions about Buddhists and Buddhism indigenous to North American culture. The significance of economic liberalization and financialization as processes hailing mindfulness as a discourse and as a practice is legible in the relations of power articulated in globalization, including its appropriation of particular Buddhist images, themes, and practices among its ecology of quotations. These assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists, and the participation of some Buddhist leaders and hangers-on in the promotion of mindfulness programs, suggests that mindfulness is less an adaptation of Buddhism to psychology than a demand made upon them (or a professional opportunity presented to them) by the moment of stress. Meanwhile, the mindfulness advice book consumer is hailed to aspire to the project of the One and the advanced worldview it assumes while positioned, like the other, as \textit{not yet there} and hence in tacit
affiliation with the Pop Buddhist referents mindfulness texts are peppered with and
against which mindfulness is defined. The temporalities of globalized class relations are
refracted through the content and consumption of the mindfulness advice book, the
primary and representative site of mindfulness’s generalization.

In sum, the moment of stress summons the practice of mindfulness and is
mystified in the peculiarities of its discourse. The stressful social environment
implemented as a means to reproduce class relations elicits a demand for means to cope
with the same through self-discipline and by the same contractual logic that underlies
class relations, the self-help program. I mark that, by this logic, mindfulness in its
compensatory valence is one means to reproduce that reproduction of class power. The
temporal routines and devotions toward a covenant promising a future benefit for present
austerity and self-restructuring figured in the debt relation are enacted in mindfulness as a
mode of daily practice and virtuous renunciation or “voluntary simplicity,” while the
construction and veneration of a transcendent present by the erasure of past and future as
figured in the derivative articulates the meditative posture of the mindfulness practitioner
as much as the derivative’s function as a fungibility-contract suggests a material substrate
to the ecology of quotations characteristic of insight meditation and mindfulness texts
(chapter three). Finally, the other temporality of mindfulness discourse, this one denying
the coevalness of the mindful one to the global other he or she is positioned to emulate,
mystifies the articulation of power over labor planet-wide called globalization. Insofar as
mindfulness represents an enlightenment discipline, enlightenment marks the nominally
secular mysticism of the religion of capital, globalization its missionary impulse, the
denial of coevalness and presumptions to modernity its Providence, the routines and
transcendences of financialization its devotion and endlessly deferred redemption, and
the advice book, at once, its liturgy and inspirational kitsch.

Generalized mindfulness practice effects the smooth reproduction of the
environment of stress, an affirmation of the status quo. In this way, it coincides with the
objective of the reproduction of extant class relations moment by moment. The moment
of stress as a political program and mindfulness as its radical acceptance—a class
discipline—mutually and reciprocally retrench each other. That is the compensatory
valence of mindfulness.66 The emancipatory valence that mindfulness summons is legible
in the Pop Buddhist lexicon it draws upon.67

WHO IS THE NORMATIVE CONSUMER OF MINDFULNESS?

I have already suggested that mindfulness is offered as a self-help tool for a
belabored and increasingly proletarianized workforce, a claim I substantiate in this
chapter, and that the aspirational and temporal structures of this discourse assume the
racial category of the “Oriental Monk” as the other to the normative consumer of
mindfulness products. This is possible because the normative consumer of mindfulness is
white and aspiring to upward mobility.

The whiteness of mindfulness is conspicuous in the promotion of mindfulness68
and in the consumption of it, where practice groups and retreats exclusively for people of
color have emerged, which, as Wilson observes, “make sense only in a framework of
American white supremacist culture” (70). Wilson’s recognition of the whiteness of
mindfulness does not diminish the significance of this practice for those people of color
who are involved with it. Rather, the point is that the consumption and use of mindfulness practice is embedded in a framework of tacit white supremacy, which corresponds to the assumptions of the Western Buddhism narrative. This is articulated temporally, in a distinction of “modern” from “premodern” worldviews and corresponding forms of Buddhist practice (chapter three).

The class position of the consumer summoned by mindfulness is indicated by the assumptions written into mindful advice books, and in the mediation of mindfulness through the techne of the book, which presupposes a middlebrow consumer. Wilson observes that “the texts always assume readers have ready access to food; can afford therapy; are able to eat out; and primarily experience personal, self-critical, middle-class suffering rather than social suffering caused by poverty, discrimination, or disability” (114). However, I mark that insofar as mindfulness offers a promise of empowerment and contentment, the fact of buying a mindful advice book itself suggests a consumer in a position of relative or sensed disempowerment—of being caught between the aspiration to attain or maintain a bourgeois lifestyle, and a felt risk of either losing it or failing to attain it at all. The mindful subject may be bourgeois in fact or in aspiration, but is neither class secure nor necessarily in a material or strategic position to persist in a bourgeois lifestyle. Mindfulness’s instrumental function as a promised means to stress relief, performance enhancement, and the Good suggests a remarkable coincidence. In the moment of stress, the appeal of a self-help program promising relief from the characteristic pathology of the moment and a competitive advantage in the job market in a time of scarcity and precariousness of employment is articulated through the contents
and purpose of the Buddhist practice called mindfulness haunts the former through its reliance on Buddhist thematics and persons as means to legitimation and as figures of class-inflected aspiration—the Good life.\(^{71}\)

Mindfulness interpellates its practitioners as white relative to an exotic other that the compliant one must wish to emulate and whose Buddhist training guarantees the effectiveness of the practice, while also and always maintaining a temporal distance as modern from the premodern—a denial of coevalness in the present moment indispensable to mindfulness discourse’s rationale for itself. The consumer’s life aspirations in the moment of stress are inflected through these racial categories in mindfulness discourse.

**THE BACKFORMATION OF MINDFULNESS AS WESTERN BUDDHISM**

Decades after mindfulness was first generalized as a self-help program, advocates such as Kabat-Zinn and Daniel Goleman describe it as a strategically mobilized and secular body of psychological knowledge and practice that bears within it a religious content that should open onto a fully-formed Buddhist culture in North America: the paragon of a presumed Western Buddhism. Of primary significance here are the body of assumptions held about religious doctrines generally in regard to mental health, and particular aspects of Buddhist culture as representative of sanity and wellbeing, promoted by psychologists in mass-market advice books in this period. These assumptions coincide with Iwamura’s figure of the “Oriental Monk” as a necessary and operative category to the formation of mindfulness discourse in the moment of stress. The motion writers such as Goleman and Kabat-Zinn enact of at once pushing away from and drawing near to
selected Buddhist institutions and traditions has the effect of mediating their therapeutic interventions through a Buddhism they traditionalize to their own ends. The narrative of integrating Buddhism as a whole into the frame of North American sociality through the aperture of a Buddhism reinscribed as a psychology long preserved if presumably occluded behind centuries of Asiatic superstition papers over the historical production of Buddhism as a psychology through a formation I call “psychological Buddhism,” and the mobilization of the same in the clinic and the self-help book as an image of wellbeing and happiness.

When writing to psychologists, Goleman and Kabat-Zinn recount this narrative in similar terms.

Goleman, in his foreword to an anthology of Trungpa’s remarks on psychology, writes: In 1975, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, “Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche had invited me out to dinner to tell me about his plans for a new educational institution he was founding, Naropa Institute” (“Foreword” vii). To put this into context, by 1975 Trungpa was already the most conspicuous advocate for Buddhism of Asian descent in the US and Naropa’s summer session of 1974 had come and gone, but at the time of Goleman’s writing (2000), Trungpa was typically cast as a foundational mastermind of Western Buddhism, or demonized for his controversial conduct and that of his designated successor; the recuperation of Trungpa as a mindfulness expert by his heirs had not yet begun. During this meal, Goleman recalls, Trungpa “leaned across the table toward me with a conspiratorial air, looked me straight in the eye, and said emphatically, ‘Buddhism will come to the West as a psychology’” (“Foreword” vii). Goleman, writing with 25
years of hindsight, is suggesting that the contemporary rise of mindfulness and the science of meditation—in part due to Goleman’s books and other programs—had proven Trungpa prophetic, and that Buddhism in North America should be a psychology, and hence necessarily a form of Buddhism at once novel and authentic—authentic because universal, universal because true to the mind of man regardless of context or culture, novel because true to the mind of modern man, and because modern, without culture or history. Goleman further implicates Trungpa in this narrative of mindfulness as Buddhism made Western, enlightened in its exposure to reason, by calling on his legacy for legitimacy.

Similarly, Kabat-Zinn, usually credited with introducing mindfulness as a practice to clinical psychology, ties mindfulness directly to a Buddhist narrative in writing for and to psychologists. In his “Foreword” to the Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness (2009), Kabat-Zinn cites Pop Buddhist exemplars such as the current Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh as representative of the tradition with which he identifies mindfulness. This document is saturated with Pop Buddhist themes and images, such as the Buddha as the healer of the world, and the teaching and training (P. Dhamma, S. Dharma) as a mode of relief from illness. Kabat-Zinn claims that, rather than reducing an aspect of Buddhism to the instrumental logic of the clinic and beyond, his objective in mobilizing mindfulness in psychology had been to make Buddhist contemporary mental health practice and “our understanding of the nature of mind itself in a Western mainstream medical and scientific setting” (xxix). And his strategy, he asserts, had been to introduce mindfulness alone into the discourse of psychology, “even if [...] it was glossing over important elements of
Buddhist psychology (as outlined in the Abhidharma, and in Zen and Vajrayana teachings) that I felt could be differentiated and clarified later” (xxix). In this assertion, Kabat-Zinn assumes the multitude of Buddhist views of the nature of mind and correspondingly diverse and integral bodies of practice within traditions such as Zen and Vajrayana are reducible by a contemporary psychologist to the modes and means of the discipline of psychology, and even further, that a PhD in psychology legitimizes someone as holding sufficient mastery in each and all of these traditions to propose and enact such a reduction. He also assumes, in hindsight, that his own project has a coherently Buddhist core—that the mindfulness of MBSR corresponds to the Buddhist practice called mindfulness. This is one way in which mindfulness promoters themselves advance a narrative of Western Buddhism.

The closeness and the contrast of the claims Goleman, ventriloquizing Trungpa, and Kabat-Zinn, invoking the Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh, make prove significant to this inquiry. Goleman explains that he had promoted Buddhist doctrine as a map of the mind, a psychological universalism, as a strategy to introduce Buddhism as such—the meaning of that category is also contested—into North American cultural life. In contrast, Kabat-Zinn claims to have recast Buddhism recast as a psychology palatable and eventually integral to clinical psychology by introducing one specific practice, seated meditation, into the clinic. Both tie their projects to a narrative of transmission marked by a specific canon of Buddhist authorities and by an assumption of inadequacy, of a need for innovation in the psychological programs of the present: A novel pathology has emerged,
Kabat-Zinn asserts, and hence mindfulness is proposed as an appropriately timely therapy to the moment.

I argue that there is little reason to assume that the psychological interventions associated with attending to the present moment subsequently generalized as mindfulness are inherently Buddhist, or that they necessarily correspond in any way to Buddhist practices usually translated in English as “mindfulness” except as a consequence of back formations and recuperations such as those Goleman and Kabat-Zinn have pronounced. Further, there is significant evidence to suggest that mindfulness is instead a product of its historical and social moment, inclusive of its devotional mode and religious register—the moment of stress and the religion of capitalism.

Further, there is reason to be skeptical of this hypothesis’s correlates, that Buddhism is reducible to a psychology, and that Buddhism’s transmission in North America has been made through such a reduction. Anglophone Americans had already been introduced to Buddhist practice long before 1975, on terms very different from the imperatives of clinical psychology, and by Buddhist figures mindfulness advocates hold dear. For example, Thich Nhat Hanh first toured the United States in 1968 to speak in churches on behalf of Vietnamese peasants, intentionally seeking out the God-and-country set—his Buddhism taking the form of an appeal to end an intractable war, paying the aggressor a peaceful visit at home (Forest 103). As I show in chapter two, such mobilizations of Buddhist thought and leadership toward anti-war and, elsewhere, anti-capitalist objectives directly contradicts the narrative of Buddhism as a psychology, and mindfulness as its paragon—and they inhere directly in the discourse of mindfulness.
The *post hoc* psychologizations of Buddhism as Goleman and Kabat-Zinn elaborate take a characteristic form that is repeated in self-help books by positive psychologists starting in the 1970s: an ahistorical universalism of the mind attributed to a kind of Buddhist sensibility. Following Mu Soeng (2000), I call this sensibility, the aggregate of assumptions that psychologists such as Kabat-Zinn, Goleman, and Jack Kornfield articulate about Buddhism and then enact, “psychological Buddhism.” Mu, a Zen teacher and scholar with a long affiliation with IMS, describes the selection and interpretation of traditional Buddhist texts and routines of practice to which the advocates of mindfulness, Goleman and Kabat-Zinn among them, most frequently appeal:

The use of the term ‘Psychological Buddhism’ acknowledges the tremendous revolution Siddharta Gautama brought about in the religious climate of his time, moving the debate from metaphysical speculations to the working of individual consciousness. It does not come as a surprise then that the contemporary Western intellectual and psychological tradition should discover great nuggets in Pali texts dealing with the Buddha’s teachings on mind and its role in shaping of bondage or awakening. (14)

Mu’s Buddha-is-relevant-to-us figure, with the descriptor “revolutionary,” is itself characteristic of the insight meditation discourse Mu has observed while in residence at IMS, as I show in chapter three. His characterization of “psychological Buddhism,” and its anachronistic assumption that the past is somehow the present—that the Buddha is the doctor best suited to heal the hurts of the present, that Shakyamuni is *Our* contemporary—is a fundamental assumption of the insight meditation advice book by the
early 1990s, where the Pali texts Mu speaks of are taken to offer a kind of universal grammar for personal development and wellbeing as such.

A second aspect of psychological Buddhism of significance to this inquiry concerns the presentation of certain contemporary cultures, Tibetans most explicitly and prominently, as ancient repositories of the means to happiness, wellbeing, and sanity—and as exotic images of contemporary psychological aspiration. As I describe in detail in chapter two, the Dalai Lama has himself presented his people in these terms as early as 1985: “‘Tibetans are naturally a happy and well-adjusted people […] These qualities are praised and regarded as worthy of emulation by sensible people the world over’” (My Tibet 48). This image of Tibetanness as a species of happiness that sensible non-Tibetans should aspire to is reproduced in the inscription of cognitive science into mindfulness discourse, much of which is predicated in fMRI scans of meditating Tibetan and Tibetan-trained masters. Here, Tibetanness is marshalled through the bodies of representative Tibetans as a baseline for successful mindfulness practice, even as none of the yogins examined in Richard Davidson’s laboratory (to cite a conspicuous example) had prior training in mindfulness as prescribed by psychologists or generalized in advice books such as those authored by Kornfield or Kabat-Zinn.75

Significantly, Goleman participates in both these aspects of psychological Buddhism: He celebrates the Pali-language literature as a universal map of the mind, and co-authors books and symposia with the Dalai Lama and others celebrating Tibetanness through this aperture. Through psychological Buddhism, the Pop Buddhism produced by or on behalf of Tibetan masters is invoked as their culture and images of their brains are
called upon to legitimize mindfulness and its cognates. That is, psychological Buddhism gives seekers of wellbeing and happiness material incentives to read the books attributed to Trungpa, the Dalai Lama, and Nhat Hanh, among others, and to identify with their projects, because these figures are positioned as aspirational images in themselves, and as authors of programs with world-transformational potential. This is one way that MBSR is initially mediated through certain nominally Buddhist discourses, and contradicted by others, including those it calls on for legitimation.

Psychological Buddhism, imagined as simultaneously religious and scientific, ancient and “modern,” is articulated in complex and contradictory ways in this moment. To give an example, Kabat-Zinn (1990) endorses the IMS and Kornfield’s center in California (later called Spirit Rock) insofar as they “have a slightly Buddhist orientation but they do not proselytize” (*Full Catastrophe* 436). *Slightly Buddhist orientation* is a convenient way to describe the positioning of generalized mindfulness to the Buddhism its advocates empower themselves to speak on behalf of. Here, Buddhism—unlike any other religious tradition—is promoted as a secular form of knowledge regarding the mind, not as a religious tradition integral to specific world cultures. This is how a mediated Buddhism as such becomes necessary to mindfulness as a means of legitimation.

However, I argue that mindfulness is *not* a new version or iteration or evolution of Buddha Dharma analogous to the social and doctrinal changes from India to China to which it is often compared by US-based Buddhist writers. Generalized mindfulness is a novel practice with novel goals in a historically-specific context. In contrast to the
provisional and ultimate objectives of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist practice, mindfulness is intended to assist its practitioners in managing the emergent pathology of stress as maladaptation—to cope with an increasingly hostile social and economic environment, or even thrive in it by realizing a personally-meaningful vision for oneself on its terms. This is unambiguous in the remarks of mindfulness advocates to persons who are not psychologists. For example, in his foreword to Rep. Paul Ryan’s *A Mindful Nation*, Kabat-Zinn claims that his work on MBSR was initiated in 1979, in response to the surgeon general’s report *Healthy People*, which called on citizens to take more control of their own health—including managing stress. Here, Kabat-Zinn contradicts the Western Buddhist narrative he offers to audiences of psychologists, observing instead that MBSR was prompted by a historical contingency, a felt social need, and not an imperative to participate in any hypothetical Buddhist psychologization. Even so, the narrative of psychological Buddhism remains a primary frame of reference for both advocates and scholars of mindfulness, and is determinative upon its historical emergence as an image of wellbeing and ancient wisdom of the mind.

A survey of early mindfulness interventions reveals continuities from positive psychology self-help books and the imperatives of contemporary sociality, and disjunctures from synchronous Buddhist activity in North America, that contradict the assumption of a Buddhist provenance attributed to mindfulness by scholars and mindfulness advocates. These continuities persist in contemporary self-help guides by psychologists. As therapeutic mindfulness is generalized to anyone who is stressed, especially in everyday life as a theater of entrepreneurship, this repertoire of
psychological Buddhism—the image of Buddhist practice of particular kinds offering a desirable alternative to the pressured textures of the present—are also generalized. This is one way in which the figure of the “Oriental Monk” is imagined to embody the salvation of the capitalist West from itself (Iwamura Virtual 20).

PREHISTORY: MINDFULNESS AS THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

Artifacts documenting the emergence of mindfulness as generalized in self-help begins in the mid-1970s undermine and recontextualize the Western Buddhist narrative that Goleman and Kabat-Zinn offer to psychologists. Even so, that narrative remains culturally significant in itself and remains an important determination upon the form and content of generalized mindfulness. First, I examine the early history of the generalization of mindfulness in the writings of Goleman and Kabat-Zinn. I find that even as it reproduces the view of selected Buddhisms as well-documented psychologies and the image of some Buddhists as contemporary images of an ancient mode of wellbeing, generalized mindfulness is, legibly, this historical moment coming to consciousness of itself through the lens of its own mysteries, inclusive of the management of stress as maladaptation to the moment in order to discipline itself toward realizing objectives internal to itself—the reproduction of the status quo. Next, I challenge Wilson’s assertion that no mindfulness advice books existed prior to 1990 except by Buddhists (Wilson 37) by reviewing three self-help programs of the years 1975-1990 that advocate what mindfulness practice by another name or from another source.77
These artifacts show that mindfulness is a therapeutic strategy mobilized toward historically-contingent objectives that are generalized to everyone suffering with the curse of the contemporary—not a Buddhist formation at all—and suggest why Buddhism, and not another religious or cultural tradition, is drawn upon by mindfulness advocates. The latter survey describes the history of this formation, while the former accounts for the assumptions around mindfulness that are in no small part determinative of its function. This is largely how generalized mindfulness draws a particular appeal to Buddhism into itself: mindfulness has to appear to be a practice of and for class-inflected aspirations for wellbeing, and those psychologists for whom individual wellbeing is a mandate have invoked the assumption of psychological Buddhism to guarantee mindfulness as a means to the same. The intersection of mindfulness and Pop Buddhism is not evidence of a synergy of Buddhist doctrine and practice and clinical psychology that is generalized to North American culture. Rather, this intersection shows how self-help books of this period appropriate certain religious repertoires, Buddhist ones in particular, toward novel objectives.

As it realizes psychological Buddhism, mindfulness constructed as a therapeutic intervention is legibly of this historical moment, not of the Buddhist, even as it calls on Buddhist repertoires for legitimation and positions itself as able to define what Buddhism is and ought to be. This is in evidence in the early writings of Goleman and Kabat-Zinn, where novel objectives for meditation practice, distinct from Buddhist ones, are promoted, including stress relief and the realization of a purposive life. Goleman’s *The Meditative Mind* (1989, first published in 1977) attempts to tie the effects of different
kinds of meditation to observed changes in brain structure, and in doing so, promotes the Pali-language Abhidhamma of the Theravada school as the most comprehensive map of human psychology available. Both of these positions (especially the latter) are taken up in the discourse and practice of insight meditation, which is the practical basis for Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990), usually credited as first popular text to mobilize mindfulness as a means to relieve stress—which is to say that mindfulness emerges here as a subjective means to address the everyday life conditions imposed by policies of economic liberalization and the financialization of everyday life, as Insight Meditation writer Sharon Salzberg observes in so many words (*Real 8*). Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and subsequent programs are now understood as mindfulness as such, and are assumed by many to be a kind of natural progression of Buddhist history into “modernity,” a sentiment common to advice books (*Goldstein ONEDharma*) and repeated in scholarly treatments.

The significance of Goleman’s contributions to the generalization of mindfulness, particularly in the interlinking of leadership, wellbeing, mindfulness, and happiness in the substrate of the central nervous system, and in his establishment of “psychological Buddhism” as a baseline for human development as such, where it is taken as an ancient map that coincides comprehensively with the terrain of contemporary consciousness, far exceed his advocacy of programs such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (*Emotional 328*). After Goleman, mindfulness advocates assume there to be an aspect of Buddhism that is a universal psychology, posited as both original to the historical Buddha’s teaching and most relevant to the present. This Buddhism-as-universalism becomes a recurring
theme in mindfulness and insight meditation and mindfulness books, as I describe in chapter three.

Goleman’s *The Meditative Mind* represents an early attempt to scientifically distinguish different forms of meditation practice from each other by reference to a physical substrate in the brain, establishing the commonplace of mindfulness discourse that one changes one’s brain through particular kinds of committed practice, introducing model of mutual, reciprocal determination between a productive material base and an active superstructure into Enlightenment discourses of self-rationalization and self-knowledge. For instance, Goleman claims that practitioners of Gurdjieffian meditation developed a specific feature of the brain, “cortical specificity,” that is also present in some martial artists, but absent in the brains of Transcendental Meditation practitioners (*Meditative* 166-68). Goleman proposes, in short, a reciprocating dialectical relation between selected superstructural disciplines of meditation, and the material base of the central nervous system, productive of improved capacity, capability, and stability in uneasy circumstances, that (Goleman claims) can be scientifically verified. While all spiritual traditions are held to articulate the same truth in the last analysis, like different fingers pointing to the same moon, some practices and traditions are evidently more effective than others in this milieu. All these themes later coincide in mindfulness as wellbeing and performance enhancement, crystallized in the idea of *neural plasticity*; the preliminary findings of neuroscientists such as Davidson on the brain-states of Tibetan masters are repeated as articles of faith in this context. Goleman’s *Destructive Emotions* (2003), presented as “A scientific dialogue with the Dalai Lama,” attempts to
demonstrate through fMRI imagery of experienced practitioners that “the brain is plastic, and our quota of happiness can be enhanced through mental training” (*Destructive* 25), a position Goleman attributes to *The Art of Happiness*, a 1998 bestselling book by the Dalai Lama and psychologist Howard Cutler. I mark in passing that the Dalai Lama is consistent in his refusal to conflate the mind and the mental with the neurological, as Goleman and those following his lead tend to do.⁸⁰

Making a happy and successful life out of a pressured, impoverished, and unsatisfying one becomes, by Goleman’s logic, a matter of *rewiring the individual brain* as the increasingly rewired brain, in turn, becomes increasingly capable of happiness and success through meditation, and not, as Pop Buddhism holds, through working through the residuals of one’s past actions (*P. kamma*, *S. karma*) by abandoning evil actions, cultivating good ones, and purifying the mind,⁸¹ which are largely sociable and interactional practices. And since so much of Buddhist doctrine is predicated in karma and related theories of determination such as dependent origination or “interbeing” (*P. paṭiccasamuppāda*, *S. pratītyasamutpāda*), this line of reasoning drives a wedge into contemporary Buddhist discourse that is itself visible as a contradiction in the genre of the insight meditation advice book, shown below. After Goleman, psychological Buddhism offers a novel lexicon for a discourse of individual self-regulation and rationalization for health and wellbeing legitimized by but distinct from Buddhist practice and protocols.

Of equal significance, in *The Meditative Mind* all contemplative paths are posited as one (*Meditative* xxiv)—inviting a kind of syncretism or an ecumenical approach—but
one path is understood to be more One, more complete and more integral, than the others. Here, Goleman again favors the texts of the tradition of Buddhism with which the IMS writers are identified, the Theravada school; the texts Mu describes as psychological Buddhism are upheld as the most universal of all. Meanwhile, psychological Buddhism as a universalism of brainstuff is tied to an archetypal treatment of spiritual cultures: “The classical Buddhist Abhidhamma is probably the most detailed traditional psychology of states of consciousness,” Goleman claims (Meditative Mind 1). Throughout the text, Goleman uses the Visuddhimagga, an ancient guide to systematic cultivation of concentrative absorption (P. jhana) and mindfulness, as a kind of standard from which the world’s other traditions of spiritual discipline seem to deviate, as Wilson observes (82). Not coincidentally, later writers such as Kornfield, from whom Kabat-Zinn took inspiration, posit their paths as expressive of all other paths, and as the logic by which the world’s spirituality may be made fungible into each other.

This assumption that practices and doctrines of the Theravada school, specifically those concerning the mind and mental cultivation, represent a universalism by appeal to the discipline of psychology, crystallizes in the writings of Theravada-trained psychologists such as Kornfield in the discourse of insight meditation starting in the 1980s, described in chapter three. That is, the characteristics of insight meditation emerge less from any Buddhist tradition than from the assumptions psychologists in North American share about Buddhism and religious practice generally, the modes of devotion summoned by the self-help genre and the discipline of positive psychology. This is legible in Goleman’s early writings and reproduced throughout his career. Goleman’s
psychological-Buddhist popular texts on the science of consciousness and its applications in relationships and the workplace advance a universalist project that, in its claims to demonstrable effects on brain structures, gives a rationale for mindfulness in everyday life that many find convincing, especially workplace and “leadership” contexts. It also informs the Enlightenment program of emotional self-regulation presented in Goleman’s other bestselling books, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) among them, that are mobilized as self-help and management guides in the workplace. Again, while the objectives to which the practices Goleman advocates are put in these contexts diverge widely from those of any Buddhist tradition, as I will describe in chapter four, psychological Buddhism as crystallized in Goleman’s books is a significant aspect of the generalization of mindfulness.

Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990) is often credited with the introduction of mindfulness meditation as a therapeutic intervention into the main North American culture, and is for this reason something of a watershed. After *Full Catastrophe*, to have attended a retreat with Kabat-Zinn and practiced for an unspecified interval of time, to an unspecified degree of competence, gives someone adequate authority to teach mindfulness in business environments or to write advice books on mindfulness in public policy (chapter four). Among other things, this makes Kabat-Zinn’s project, at least in the abstract, easily reproducible—both its practice, and the discourses attendant thereupon. Elsewhere, Kabat-Zinn describes Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), the program outlined in *Full Catastrophe*, to be “mostly vipassana practice (in the Theravada sense as taught by people like Joseph [Goldstein]
and Jack [Kornfield] etc.) with a Zen attitude’’ (quoted in Braun 166-7). Given that
Goldstein and Kornfield are central figures to insight meditation, variably a nominally
Buddhist, psychological-Buddhist, Buddhist-oriented, or wholly secular practice
according to its advocates, it seems that Kabat-Zinn presents his own work as Buddhistic
in origin and application here (“Zen attitude”)—but as I will show in chapter three, the
discursive relation that obtains between Kabat-Zinn and insight writers such as Kornfield
is complex. Most significantly here, Kabat-Zinn shares with them a strong universalist
orientation (the “psychological Buddhism” Mu diagnoses is indistinguishable here from
Jungianism), and a heavy emphasis on personal practice, on practice as personal and of
the person. This is mobilized to address the problem of stress and stress relief, which
amounts to accommodating contemporary imperatives to self-entrepreneurship and
authenticity, a novel objective appropriate to a specific historical moment, divergent from
Zen or Theravada Buddhist objectives for practice. Kabat-Zinn proposes a Do-It-Yourself
(DIY) set of routines to use in everyday life to ease the pain of this situation from which
There Is No Alternative given except to change from within, as an individual.

As already described, the historical emergence of mindfulness coincides with a
complex matrix of economic and political transformations—economic liberalization,
globalization, financialization—and a cultural celebration of individual, entrepreneurial
means to police the crisis this social environment is meant to tamp down. This is the
moment of stress defined as a disease of personal maladaptation to a naturally hostile
environment. As popularized by Hans Selye, stress describes an irreducible feature of
contemporary social life; we inhabit a stressful world, stress inheres in our world, there is
no alternative to it—and hence stress demands to be engaged with and addressed on its own terms. In a sense, stress demands to be taken personally, individually. Mindfulness, when prescribed as a therapeutic practice, involves precisely such an engagement of attending only to the present with “bare attention,” of consciousness as such, attending only to the microintensities of bodily experiences in the moment without judgement or critical inquiry into the causes of their emergence. Thus, mindfulness and stress fall together in such a precise logical symmetry, in appearance not unlike a solution in search of a problem and a problem in search of a solution, that it is easy to overlook that stress in its contemporary individualistic sense arose as a historical contingency, a convenient fiction mobilized to a particular end by specific parties, and does not name a universal or absolute feature of the human organism. I also mark here that there is no consensus to date among psychologists that adequate evidence exists to claim that mindfulness helps people manage the subjective consequences of stress more effectively than any other therapy, or at all (Wilson 95), while anecdotal evidence suggests that mindfulness practice as generalized in workplace programs, led by persons who have small experience and less training, may induce a more intensively and extensively stressful day-to-day experience. The dialectic of stress and mindfulness described in Full Catastrophe, of this lifeworld’s consequences and one means of coping with it, describes a significant aspect of the internal logic of everyday life at present. Insofar as this tactic also involves bringing awareness to the reality of one’s situation and the limits to one’s freedom, mindfulness practice involves this historical moment coming to self-consciousness of itself through the discipline of its own reproduction, with Buddhism mediated through the
assumptions of psychologists and the genre of the advice book called upon for legitimization of that discipline—the compensatory valence of mindfulness. Nowhere is this more visible than in Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living*.

This book summarizes ten years of research and clinical practice at the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program at the UMass Medical Center. As spirituality and self-help writers had long been making appeals to science as a body of knowledge and as a means of knowing, Kabat-Zinn’s status as a working scientist gives him a kind of legitimacy among self-help readers. *Full Catastrophe* outlines a program that involves “Developing skill in facing and effectively handling the various ‘weather conditions’ in your life” (3). Kabat-Zinn mobilizes mindfulness from the start as a self-directed, personal means to ameliorate deficiencies in a stressful environment that demands self-directed, personal solutions to itself, and constant improvement in these. In terms of practice, this means “learning how to make time for yourself, learning how to observe what your own mind is up to from moment to moment, how to watch your thoughts and how to let go of them without getting so caught up and driven by them” (20)—here, Kabat-Zinn is promising the compliant practitioner the means to revise one’s automatisms as an Enlightenment means to cope with a specific social environment.

Kabat-Zinn acknowledges that his program for MBSR naturalizes and reproduces the very logic of stress as a disease of maladjustment to the moment that Selye had popularized as it sets relief from stress as its objective. Here, a stressor is defined as a pressure or demand, and stress as an organism’s response to that (236). Stressors are not taken as problematic in themselves; they are merely assumed, naturalized. The point of
intervention, for Selye and for Kabat-Zinn, concerns automatisms as “diseases of adaptation” or bad mental habits: “our actual attempts to respond to change and to pressure, no matter what their particular source, might in themselves lead to breakdown and disease if they are inadequate or disregulated” (237). Kabat-Zinn refers to the aggregated mass of one’s automatisms as “auto-pilot mode” (26). Here, mindfulness is warranted as a therapy for stress and maladjustment, per Selye’s definitions, insofar as it claims to bring the automatized patterns of response to the stressors of practitioners to consciousness, and gives practitioners some subjective space and means to choose among alternatives (237-240). In this sense, mindfulness is understood as a defensive posture: “you can be more resistant to stress if you build up your resources and enhance your physical and psychological wellbeing in general (via exercise and meditation, for example) during times when you are not particularly taxed or overwhelmed” (240). Here, an Enlightenment mode of self-care is prescribed to ameliorate an extrinsic problem that has become intrinsic, of oneself, and the means of remaking oneself around the problematic of a newly hostile environment.

True to its moment in another way, Full Catastrophe describes embodiment and temporality in an explicitly ahistorical fashion, such that in the several chapters devoted to pain management, pain is understood as a kind of mental issue, resolvable largely in mental terms and by mental work, and not as a social problem of everyday life conditions, such as the workplace. Similarly, Kabat-Zinn’s promotion of a shift from “doing” mode to “being” mode (3) implies an unreality to everyday life that does not correspond to the textures of historical experience.84 This is foregrounded in Kabat-
Zinn’s advice for MBSR participants stressed by “time crunch” to enjoy the present without reference to past or future to in order to cut down on anxiety, to be “out of the flow of time” by meditation and renunciation: “consciously choosing to give certain things up” (359)—assuming an outside to history is real and available, and that renunciation of productive and recreative activity can be possible for those whose time crunch is tied to the extraordinary difficulty living without a reliable social safety net, and with chronic unemployment or low-wage work characterized by “flexible” (unpredictable and highly variable) schedules and split shifts, and a rising cost of living and inadequate housing that requires one to commute long distances on unpredictable transit. Such is the stressful social environment that, in the years of the generalization of mindfulness, has given the belabored less and less control over their lives and their time, and gives a qualitatively different experience of everyday life time-crunch from that of the put-upon, high-maintenance bourgeois world that Kabat-Zinn assumes his readers share and that belabored workers are positioned to aspire to. Twenty-five years after its publication, such sentiments in Full Catastrophe as “the antidote to time stress is intentional non-doing” because “Inner peace exists outside of time” (349), and “if you are pressed for time, being in the present gives you more time by giving you back the fullness of each moment that you have” (350) seem, at best, bromides. For those struggling to just get along or to realize a set of promised social expectations once promised, Kabat-Zinn’s assertion that temporal stress is tied to being a “type A” personality (352-353) can most plausibly be taken as victim-blaming, and should be taken in the context of the
mobilization of the “Type A” diagnosis by corporate interests in the twentieth century to deflect blame from the social causes of poor health and suffering and onto the individual.

Stress as a disease of maladjustment and the “type-A personality” are articles of faith of the religion of capitalism. Mindfulness too: MBSR is a personal practice intended to help readers cope with whatever situation on its own terms as given, and with no extrinsic alternatives imaginable. Recalling Selye, Kabat-Zinn claims: “it is not so much the stressors in our lives but how we see them and what we do with them that determines how much we are at their mercy” (241). Kabat-Zinn asserts to his readers: it is up to you to deal with your response to “postindustrial life” (355) naturalized, and not up to us to address the problem of the same.

Consequently, Kabat-Zinn’s description of Full Catastrophe as a “self-directed training program” (1) is entirely accurate. The volume is explicitly structured as a kind of self-help guide for people who are suffering—intended to help people help themselves—and supplemental materials such as guided meditation tapes are also marketed within, to be consumed at home, in one’s free time. This mindfulness is unambiguously learnable, and to be learned, as a consumer good, through books and supplemented by audiotapes. It begins with straightforward and undemanding practices, as subsequent mindfulness books inevitably do. For instance, the practice of formal meditation is introduced with seated breath meditation for three minutes per session; one settles one’s awareness in the sensation of breathing, actively, and relinquishes attachment and judgment to any thought or feeling. Once a routine is established, the duration lengthens and lengthens, and more complex meditations such as body scans are introduced—requiring more undisturbed and
schedule-able blocks of time in one’s life. These regular intervals of practice take on a devotional quality, like restructuring one’s life to honor a commitment or undertaking a regime of personal austerity to repay a debt in good faith. As the chapters go on, the program introduces certain demands that can prove logistically challenging or impossible for those facing time crunch or housing insecurity. For instance, the committed meditator is expected not only to make time for practice, but also a specific place in one’s home for it, which assumes that everyone has a home in which creating such a space is possible.

Psychological Buddhism is legible in the universal applicability Kabat-Zinn ascribes to MBSR as he simultaneously attributes its origins to Buddhist practice, and distances it from the same: “Although at this time mindfulness meditation is most commonly taught and practiced within the context of Buddhism, its essence is universal” insofar as anyone can pay attention, Kabat-Zinn claims (12). Kabat-Zinn’s universalism, like Goleman’s, seems doctrinal and material (everyone has a central nervous system) rather than functional (all beings have the capacity to awaken), a distinction of significance in later chapters. This universalism can be located first in the perennialism and syncretism of spiritual and New Age writing for which Kabat-Zinn has a demonstrable affinity, in Full Catastrophe and more explicitly in subsequent books. For instance, the influence of the American Hindu-syncretist Ram Dass is named and in evidence; significantly for corporate mindfulness (chapter four), the New Age writer and entrepreneur Ken Wilber also appears in the “Acknowledgements” (xx) and is, in my reading, an under-acknowledged influence on Kabat-Zinn and insight meditation overall. The diction of Kabat-Zinn’s universalism is explicitly Jungian, but insofar as
mindfulness is understood as a method to realize a personal vision for oneself in the context of a capitalist social environment imagined as natural, perennial, and inevitable (Wherever 75-78), the source of its universalism is more plausibly located in the religion of capitalism.

Significantly, the objective characteristic of the meditation guides of Kabat-Zinn and Kornfield, to realize personal meaning and its correlate, a meaningful person or “true self” (described in chapter three) mark a significant departure from the Buddhism of popular advice books, which heavily emphasizes explicitly selfless and self-reflexive motivations for practice (chapter two); some of the latter imperative saturates the discourse of mindfulness, as in the reiterations of such formulae as “for all sentient beings” after Full Catastrophe. If a personal purpose is assumed, then a certain kind of subjectivity is also assumed, one corresponding to a person, here someone subjected to the impositions of everyday life in a stressful environment. Put differently, the transcendent position of the consumer’s decisions as an a priori “vision” gives this practice its objective: my vision, the brand preferences and automatisms I bring ready-made to the practice, determine my outcomes. In generalized mindfulness but not in Pop Buddhism, one does not take a self-reflective attitude toward one’s automatized impulses, but instead builds one’s practice upon them (chapter three).

Such a universalism of the personal is a common feature of mindfulness after Full Catastrophe, but it is not the only one. Kabat-Zinn’s formation of mindfulness as of-Buddhism-but-also-universal realizes assumptions about Buddhism itself that follow from Goleman’s Meditative Mind, where the most universal map of consciousness is
presumed to be the *abhidhamma* of the Pali Canon. Where Goleman’s mediation of *abhidhamma* through the Enlightenment media of reason and science, and its temporality of progress through the same, come to represent a kind of integral deep structure to the world’s fragmented spiritual utterances, Kabat-Zinn (and Kornfield with him) come to describe meditative life by a universalist logic animating a syncretic ecology of quotations, much as a financial derivative functions to make local currencies fungible into each other in a universal space of transaction. *Full Catastrophe* presents a precise response to the forms of consciousness that characterize stressful and fast-changing social life, and it does so by a logic consonant with sociality in the years of economic liberalization in North America (another meaning for “full catastrophe”). As a self-directed practice, this mindfulness is mediated through consumer goods, primarily books; as a personal practice, it reifies a presumption of the consumer’s transcendence in its elevation of “personal vision” as a motivation for practice—one articulates one’s vision, after all, through the books one chooses within what the insight meditation writers call the “spiritual marketplace” (Kornfield *Path* 160). MBSR also brings with it an identification with Buddhism as redefined by psychologists and mediated through the institution of the clinic, the parameters of clinical psychology, and the genre of the self-help book.

Thus mindfulness, a program devised for particular clinical indications (stress and chronic pain) became, on paper, generalizable for anyone, a perennial practice pointing to a timeless truth: if for *us*, then for everyone, and if for *our* time, then for *all* time. No mediation of Buddhism as such through the protocols of clinical psychology is in
evidence in therapies such as MBSR that are later generalized as mindfulness. Rather, in this context mindfulness comes into focus as a product of its milieu with distinct objectives—stress relief, personal mastery, meaning/purpose, success) and doctrines (universalism, assumptions about Buddhism as distinct from what Buddhists have to say about Buddhism)—emergent from its historical moment. As I will show, prominent Buddhists of that moment, such as Trungpa, also mark this divergence.

First, however, I turn to evidence in self-help and psychology advice books in the years 1975-1990 that further complicate any claim that generalized mindfulness is an adapted Buddhist practice, much less an instance of Buddhist cultural transmission analogous to the emergence of Chinese, Tibetan, or Japanese Buddhisms (Wilson 37). The popularization of techniques such as the Relaxation Response in the mid-1970s through self-help books shows that mindfulness generalized, if by another name, was already in circulation before MBSR was—meaning that a Buddhist substrate is not a necessary condition to the emergence or generalization of mindfulness.87 Further, Ellen Langer’s *Mindfulness* (1990) shows that the practice of mindfulness emerges historically as a response to the psychological problem of automatism, of inadequate means to cope with the present and with novelty in this his historical moment. Langer’s study of human subjects in the moment of stress indicates that mindfulness as generalized from a therapeutic intervention for stress was already present in North American culture absent any material contribution from Buddhists or Buddhism apart from the desires and assumptions about Buddhism upheld among some psychologists at that juncture, well before Kabat-Zinn put pen to paper. Those desires and assumptions have become
conventional to the self-help and positive psychology genre, and are not unique to generalized mindfulness.

Three characteristics of Benson’s 1975 bestseller *The Relaxation Response* and the practices it describes anticipate mindfulness per Kabat-Zinn. In therapeutic application, the relaxation response (RR) practice is indistinguishable from MBSR; the two are used as functional equivalents to the present in the clinic, as I will show below. Second, the RR is positioned as a therapy one can learn at home from an advice book for the pathology of stress understood as an omnipresent, generalized malaise of the present. Benson also assumes that stress as a problem of maladaptation is at the root of the problem of everyday life hurt and dysfunction: “the daily commute, or the rising cost of living, or the noise and fumes of the city, or unemployment, or random violence—we find it difficult to reach a satisfactory equilibrium, and as a result we become the victims of stress” (Relaxation Response 17). One’s struggle to manage this hypothetical equilibrium is one’s own problem. The social environment is unquestioned as a site of intervention. Third, like MBSR, the RR is framed in a universalism premised in a synthesis of “recent scientific data with age-old Eastern and Western writings that establish the existence of an innate human capability: the Relaxation Response” (Relaxation Response 9). *The Relaxation Response* is a clear historical precedent for the positioning of the advice-book author and psychologist as arbitrator of the world’s spiritual heritage who denies the coevalness of the exotic wisdom traditions on which he relies from “recent” science and reason that characterizes insight meditation and mindfulness books, including *Full Catastrophe*, and parallel developments in positive
psychology germane to mindfulness described below. In contrast to claims of mindfulness advocates and scholars (Wilson 37), mindfulness as it is generalized in hospitals and workplaces, but distinct from mindfulness as practiced by Buddhists, was in circulation well before 1990 among mass-market advice books such as *The Relaxation Response*, but by a different name.

Further, the insertion of “psychological Buddhism” into this mindfulness-by-another-name was already underway in the 1985 sequel, *Beyond the Relaxation Response*, published after the first edition of *The Meditative Mind* (1977) but before *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990). Here, Benson invokes “the faith factor,” religious belief as a means toward health objectives, to claim that “our personal powers and potential for wellbeing are shaped by the negative or positive ways we think” (*Beyond 4*). Benson mobilizes the cultivation of personal belief systems as a kind of scaffold for the RR, much as the realization of a personal self or a personal vision becomes the objective and frame for the practice of mindfulness in insight meditation advice books such as Kabat-Zinn’s *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (1995). In the self-help genre, the practice of meditation becomes a tactic for realizing whatever beliefs one has adopted before the practice was undertaken, inclusive of those that motivated the purchase of the advice book to begin with. Here, the Relaxation Response books share a fundamental characteristic in common with insight meditation and mindfulness discourses that distinguishes them from Pop Buddhist protocols for meditation practice. Where the self-help texts by Benson or Kabat-Zinn lead the meditator to realize what he or she had
already assumed—to reify and reproduce the same—the reader of Pop Buddhist manuals is instructed in an analytic negation of the given, as I show in chapter two.

Further, the assumption that all religious traditions articulate an ancient truth traceable by contemporary psychologists characteristic of mindfulness discourse since *The Meditative Mind* is in evidence in *Beyond*. And as in Goleman’s oeuvre, it is assumed that particular aspects of Buddhist culture are most truthful—most complete, integral, or precise—and that Tibetanness represents this. Benson claims that “the Tibetan Buddhists are known for their meditative techniques perhaps more than other practitioners of mysticism” (*Beyond* 30)—assuming that there is such a thing as a universal “mysticism” that mystic X is pursuing the same ends by comparable means as mystic Y to legitimize his conscription of religious and devotional modes into the discipline of adapting to the moment stresslessly. In *Beyond the Relaxation Response*, Benson’s positive psychology shares distinctive features in common with mindfulness and insight meditation—appeals to universalism, personal meaning, and psychological Buddhism in support of an in-the-moment meditation program, made secular and religious at once—that are not in evidence in Buddhist cultures. In sum, there is a much stronger continuity of purpose, form, and content from *The Relaxation Response* to *Full Catastrophe* than from the writings of Trungpa or Thich Nhat Hanh to *Full Catastrophe*. In practice, the Relaxation Response and generalized mindfulness per *Full Catastrophe* are functionally interchangeable (Goleman *Emotional* 183).

*The Relaxation Response* and its sequels are not alone among non-Buddhist mindfulness programs prior to the introduction of MBSR in circulation among self-help
readers. Joan Borysenko’s bestselling 1988 advice book *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* describes the prescription of the RR practice in the Mind/Body Clinic of New England Deaconess Hospital, which was influenced in its implementation by Kabat-Zinn’s program at UMass. Here, Borysenko prescribes the same Enlightenment program of the practitioner’s disciplined self-deconditioning as outlined later in *Full Catastrophe*: “The work of healing is peeling away the layers of fear and past conditioning that keep us unaware of our true nature of wholeness and love” (4). It is assumed that this is work one can do from instructions in a book, at home, on one’s own time. It is implausible to attribute Borysenko’s program to a Buddhist origin, given that she presents it as an outgrowth of her tantric yoga practice (Muktananda lineage) and her experience working under Benson’s supervision in graduate school. *Minding the Body*, another artifact of the generalization of mindfulness by a non-Buddhist without the word “mindfulness” in the title, points to an origin for mindfulness in the work of a specific social milieu—Boston-area psychologists and academics in the 1970s and 1980s, inclusive of Benson, Goleman, Kabat-Zinn, Borysenko, and Langer—attending to current problems by engaging with human subjects in historical time.

Langer’s 1990 advice book *Mindfulness*, published months prior to *Full Catastrophe*, confirms that generalized mindfulness describes a problematic of the present historical moment, and not the paragon of a hypothetical Western Buddhism. Langer developed the concept and practice of mindfulness independently, by studying its antonym, automatism or mindlessness, in human subjects. No reference is made in *Mindfulness* to Buddhism apart from a footnote marking Langer’s admitted ignorance of
it and advising interested readers to consider reading Trungpa’s *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, then a popular introduction to Buddhist thought in North America that I observe is still in circulation among mindfulness consumers and critics. Langer’s mindfulness is conceptually indistinguishable from than later, psychological-Buddhistic treatments; for this reason, her writings have since become anthologized and canonized among them in volumes such as *The Mindfulness Revolution* (2008). However, *Mindfulness* lacks many of the features that characterize the insight meditation manuals, such as appeals to a wholesome, green lifestyle, and extensive quotations from such sources as Rilke, Thoreau, unreliable translations Sufi poetry (Bly *Kabir*), and Pop Buddhist figures.

Even though *Mindfulness* lacks some of the specific discursive features one may now expect of a generic mindfulness text, it shares in common with MBSR and the RR a practice generalizable through the advice book for a universal and timely problem. Langer defines mindlessness temporally, as a subjective failure to become aware of novelty in historical time. Hence, for Langer, mindfulness means the capacity to attend to the present moment in such a way as to notice novelty as it emerges—to cope with changing times, attending in the moment to the changing content of sensory data. Langer’s description of mindfulness is a close cognate to Kabat-Zinn’s at the point of practice, in that it concerns attention to the creation of new categories, to new information, and new contexts through an intentional practice of situational self-awareness to address a problem of automatized individual maladaptation to a rapidly-changing and inherently stressful environment. *Mindfulness* is significant because it
shows that a psychologist working in the mid-1980s was able to arrive at a concept of mindfulness with a strong relation of resemblance to that of those with some familiarity with the practice of mindfulness posited by those claiming a Buddhist provenance, independently of any formative or substantive Buddhist influence and more or less simultaneously as Kabat-Zinn’s program, simply by observing the forms of consciousness prevalent in North America at the moment of economic liberalization and restructuring—the “environmental intervention” productive of the entrepreneurial subject. While Langer is a well-regarded and extensively cited Harvard-based psychologist, with popular books on topics such as mindful aging and mindful learning, her ideas are not as frequently referenced among mindfulness practice groups or at conferences on mindfulness as those of Goleman, Kabat-Zinn, or certain Buddhist masters such as Thich Nhat Hanh. Her outsider’s position to Buddhist-oriented social circles and such infrastructures as networked meditation centers (an organizational structure Trungpa invented) may help explain that disjuncture: unlike Goleman, for instance, Langer’s credentials do not include collaborations with the current Dalai Lama.

Benson, Borysenko, and Langer show that what is now recognizable as mindfulness was already available in North American culture before the introduction of slightly-Buddhist-oriented mindfulness programs to the self-help marketplace, observable in people at this historical juncture in their everyday lives, and has no necessary relation to Buddhism at all. In this context, the interpretation of generalized mindfulness as a paragon or an epigone of Buddhist cultural transmission is untenable. Generalized mindfulness is not a crypto-Buddhism, nor is it “western Buddhism,” if such a thing
exists. It is a western self-help program of a particular moment that mobilizes certain assumptions about particular Buddhisms and particular Buddhists to achieve a specific end, and in doing so invokes the book-mediated Buddhism of its moment in its modes of articulation and legitimation (these objectives are described in chapters four and five). In this context, the Western Buddhist narrative Kabat-Zinn and Goleman offer when writing to psychologists seems most plausibly a means to promote this practice by the cache of certain Buddhisms as an image of health, wellbeing, and sanity.

I mark here, anticipating my argument, that the features of the insight meditation advice book are already legible in the articulation of the religion of capitalism in these early mindfulness programs. The denial of coevalness between an ancient, peripheral Other and an enlightened, modern One that characterizes the power relations of globalization is in evidence here, along with a historical universalism that, like a financial derivative, promises to make disparate value systems fungible into each other to establish a specific relationship of exchange in the present moment, which is naturalized as immutable and the stuff of the mind, transhistorical.

**POP BUDDHIST MEDITATION IS NOT THERAPY**

I observe that not all the Buddhists invoked by those who advocate forms of meditation such as MBSR for therapeutic ends, particularly the master Goleman called upon to legitimized the notion of Buddhism coming to America as a psychology, accept the premise that Buddhism is reducible to a psychology or Buddhist meditation to a therapy. Trungpa anticipates the backformation of Buddhism as a psychotherapeutic
intervention that Goleman and Kabat-Zinn advance, of pain relief and better adjustment to circumstances as the goal of meditation practice, and categorically dismisses it. This rupture is significant because it marks the continuities and discontinuities between mindfulness per Kabat-Zinn and Pop Buddhism that mindfulness advocates such as Goleman and Kabat-Zinn draw upon. Trungpa, the Tibetan master who initiated Naropa and, according to Goleman, inaugurated the theme of Buddhism as a psychology, had argued vehemently and publicly against the equation of meditation with therapy in the early 1980s because meditation and therapy serve different objectives. Where therapy serves to discipline the patient to a better-adjusted acceptance of the present, Trungpa argues that Buddhist meditation demands not an acceptance of the terms of engagement that the moment offers, but an intimate and critical confrontation with it. In this context, psychological Buddhism emerges as an oxymoron, and the pieties and devotions of self-help programs such as the RR and MBSR come into focus as the religion of capitalism. This does not prevent some Buddhist institutions and teachers from participating in it after the generalization of mindfulness, however.

According to Trungpa, the work of meditation is “facing reality.” Seeking a technique either for improved and enhanced performance or against pain and stress is contrary to this purpose; in such instances, “we are still concerned with collecting gadgets [rather] than experiencing reality” (“Therapy?” 182-83). As implied in Trungpa’s diction, facing reality antithetical to shopping, consuming, or devising an appealing belief structure for oneself to inhabit or identify with. That is, meditation cannot be commodified or undertaken uncritically without becoming something other than
meditation in this context. Instead, Trungpa asserts, “we are not trying to get anything out of this life at all” (“Therapy?” 184). Hence, unlike MBSR, which advocates giving up certain habits of mind in favor of more profitable ones, meditation involves certain renunciations that are undertaken without any expectation of reward, which is to say that they are formally purposeless. Trungpa calls for the sacrifice of habits, familiar coping mechanisms, anything to which one may identify, everything:

Ordinarily we might sacrifice something on behalf of or for the sake of developing goodness, or because we are willing to suffer on behalf of humanity. But those sacrifices are—pardon the expression—bullshit. The sacrifice which has been recommended, prescribed in the Buddhist tradition, is to sacrifice something without any purpose. (“Therapy?” 183)

If so, then cultivating mindfulness to realize a personal vision is anticipated and foreclosed by Trungpa’s logic: both vision and personal are objects of sacrifice, as are any desire to avoid pain and the discomforts of stress, any effort toward fulfilling the tacit contract of entrepreneurial sociality, to be offered up without expectation of future benefit. Far from enacting them or seeking a better adjustment to them, Trungpa demands the meditator renounce both the devotions and the promises of the religion of capitalism, a theme explored in some detail in chapter two.

Similarly, Trungpa attacks the mobilization of meditation practice to the objective of stress relief, of a temporal binding to horizons experienced as necessary, natural, and determining. Here, in opposition to the determinism implicit in the concept of stress, meditation is posited as an open field for inquiry and possibility, and here Trungpa
introduces the concept of freedom as such, as distinct from freedom from something undesirable or desirable, which implies at minimum a binding to a measure of desirability: “Freedom cannot be bought or bartered for. Freedom doesn’t come cheap or expensive. It just happens. It is only without any reference point that freedom can evolve. That is why it is known as freedom—because it is unconditional” (“Therapy?” 184). As distinct from advocates for mindfulness as stress relief or a means to a purposive lifestyle determined a priori, Trungpa posits not TINA, there is no alternative to adjusting to the moment, but TAIA, there are infinite alternatives in the present moment, at least in potential (“Therapy?” 185). According to Trungpa, in place of relative frames of reference, meditation offers an absolute one, oriented around a project he asserts is emancipatory (“Therapy?” 186). Here, meditation is posited as a total life practice, meaning that all of everyday life, action in time, is of value in itself as meditation; by the same token, meditation is not presented as something that offers an “outside” to time, but as a means to investigate one’s moment in history.

In his jeremiad to psychologists, Trungpa does not claim that therapy is not of value, nor that meditators must suffer to be free or imagine their own despair as a condition of the freedom and openness he champions. In fact, there are many instances in which Trungpa advocated different kinds of therapeutic interventions for his disciples to use, and asked some of them to train as psychiatrists and psychologists; Naropa University’s distinctive training programs for psychotherapists reflect Trungpa’s influence. That said, Trungpa does insist that therapy is not, in itself, emancipatory, while Buddhist meditation is, and therefore Buddhist meditation must not be equated with
therapy or to any other compensatory activity. Trungpa’s insistence on an emancipatory orientation for Buddhist meditation offers another marker by which the distance from Pop Buddhism to generalized mindfulness may be measured: mindfulness is less an adaptation of a Buddhist practice to a new cultural context than its antithesis at the level of practice and objectives for practice. When contrasted against Buddhist criticisms such as Trungpa’s, the reproduction not of the Buddhist religion but instead the religion of capitalism in generalized mindfulness becomes legible: a disciplined adaptation of oneself, as though one is absolving a guilt or retiring a debt, to an implacable and transcendent present moment, in a register of religious devotion. That mindfulness calls upon Buddhist repertoires and figures for legitimation and as desirable images of wholesome wellbeing is evidence of its paradox.

None of this has prevented Buddhist leaders from promoting their programs as means to health and wellbeing after the generalization of mindfulness—as “mindfulness.” This is novel.\(^9\) Nhat Hanh has lectured on the health benefits of Buddhist meditation, in one instance on the Google campus in 2011. US-based Zen leaders such as Jan Chozen Bays Roshi and Joan Halifax Roshi have done the same in writing and in public talks. This tendency among some contemporary Buddhist leaders active in Anglophone North America to capitalize on the emphasis on the word “mindfulness” and its Buddhistic patina in health interventions is crystallized in the 2015 promotional materials distributed by direct mail for Lion’s Roar magazine, a rebranding of the venerable Shambhala Sun that promises “Buddhist Wisdom for Your Life.” Lion’s Roar is offered “FOR THE HEALTH ENTHUSIAST IN YOU,” who will “discover how using basic Buddhist
meditation techniques can strengthen your mind-body connection and support a healthier lifestyle” (n.p.). This advertising copy is paired with an image of a woman, her back to the viewer, running up a trail, a cloudy sky visible beneath her right foot as it strides in advance—an image of solitary capability and endurance in a challenging environment. Anticipating subsequent chapters, I mark that the obverse image to this one, on the opposite side of the same sheet of glossy paper, is the claim that Lion’s Roar is “FOR THE ACTIVIST IN YOU,” who will “find out how to grapple with challenging, heart-breaking issues and discover what you can do to help fight back with loving-kindness” (n.p.). Here, a smiling, youthful white woman holds a sign reading “compassion is revolution.” The assumption that Buddhism functions as a health intervention, here, carries its obverse—that Buddhist touchstones such as compassion and loving-kindness can and do summon a desire for an alternative to the present, including objections to the use of nominally Buddhist techniques such as mindfulness as generalized therapies that reproduce and retrench the status quo.

**SELF-HELP, POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE RELIGION OF CAPITALISM**

Recent positive psychology advice books on the mindfulness touchstone of happiness further undermine the hypothesis of mindfulness as an exemplar of Buddhism’s plasticity in transmitting itself from culture to culture. Rather, an activation of particular assumptions about religious feelings and attitudes generally, and some about Buddhist ones, toward objectives specific to the therapeutic context and the needs of advice-book consumers is in evidence. Trungpa’s objections notwithstanding, book-
mediated fragments of Buddhist themes and practices are consistently conscripted toward compensatory objectives by the confident universalist rationale shared in common among Benson, Goleman, and Kabat-Zinn. Psychological Buddhism, the decontextualized flotsam of Buddhist thematics made available to self-help consumers by positive psychologists writing in this genre, is oriented toward adjustment to and reproduction of the same.

I argue that mindfulness and positive psychology discourses converge around the objective of happiness because both formations do the same cultural work: they offer DIY means to assuage the hurts particular to a social space that demands DIY solutions to all problems, in a register of faith and devotion that privileges that register. Both discourses are artifacts of the same moment, addressing the same reader—the belabored one seeking advice. And both discourses emerged historically from the same cultural repertoire, the conventions of the self-help book. As do other positive psychology programs, mindfulness books draw on a cultural archive of images suggesting happiness, wellbeing, and the Good. These images and structures of feeling are typically religious here. This is because the objective of the present, the reproduction of extant social relations within, among, and by those suffering under them, can only be accomplished through make-believe, and not what Trungpa calls “facing reality.” Literally, make-believe: the religion of capitalism demands that one discipline oneself to believe there is hope for the status quo, that a future benefit will obtain to the one who honors it now in good faith. Life is not getting better for advice-book consumers overall by attending only to the present without reference to past or future, as evidenced in the act of seeking out
self-help programs and following them. That is, advice book consumers know their present to be at least inadequate and trending badly, and put some measure of faith in an off-the-rack program promising to help them right the course. In Trungpa’s terms, the consumer of self-help mindfulness products is collecting gadgets of hope, commodities of conviction, rather than allowing him or herself to become mindful of the hopelessness of the constant affirmation and reproduction of the status quo. While the religious appeals of these programs may have tacit or explicit Buddhistic inflections, it is not safe to assume that seeking happiness in a self-help book is the same as seeking a Buddhist experience or finding one in it, as scholars of mindfulness tend to do (Wilson 114).

These dynamics are legible in the positive psychology books most conspicuous at conferences on mindfulness and related topics and through omnipresent TED talks that have made internet celebrities of positive psychologists as Shawn Achor, Brene Brown, and Sonja Lyubomirsky. Here, I survey significant self-help books on happiness by Jonathan Haidt and Lyubomirsky to probe the continuities among mindfulness and positive psychology discourses, and anticipate the disjuncture that separates both of them on one side from the Pop Buddhism they summon. I analyze Gretchen Rubin’s bestselling *Happiness Project* as a representative narration of a consumer of happiness advice books. Here, a transposition of psychological Buddhism into an explicit religious practice, a specifically book-mediated bricolage of Buddhist methods as health and wellbeing interventions, is in evidence.

Just as Benson had invoked “the faith factor”—religious devotion as a means to wellbeing—so does Haidt claim in *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006) that there is a
universal truth that “devoutly religious” people of all cultures understand, but the nonreligious tend not to (184). Haidt asserts that the apprehension of this unspecified truth is tied to a mode of inner development that is vertical rather than historical, whereby the more religious are generally made happier than others through intimations of a higher context in privileged moments. In Haidt’s formulation, a universal spirituality is posited as a means to a more-adequate relation of the contemporary subject to contemporary social conditions, one that is at once ancient in origin but necessarily recuperated through an engagement with contemporary science. Haidt claims: “Happiness comes from within, and happiness comes from without. We need the guidance of both ancient wisdom and modern science to get the balance right” (xii). Here, as in Full Catastrophe Living, the psychologist is positioned to diagnose what We need while assuming who We are, and as in The Relaxation Response, what “balance” of worldviews will best effect Our development. The assumptions of self-help writers such as Haidt about religion, here positioned as a mode of being toward a beneficent, timeless, and universal truth, incentivizes the belabored reader to take an attitude of faith toward the pieties of the moment, such as the bromides of The Happiness Hypothesis. It is not coincidental that Haidt’s book is promoted by CEOs such as Tony Hsieh, who implemented a workplace happiness initiative around this text which prioritizes the experience of “wow moments” as an explicit business objective (described in chapter four). The CEO as advice-giver and the positive-psychologist writer of self-help volumes are curiously allied. The power relations that obtain between the figure of leadership and the aspiring follower, and the positive psychologist is situated as the master to a subordinate subjectivity, Ours, which
is assumed to be universal, are parallel. Like the CEO, by 2006 the advice-book
psychologist had become a figure of nominally religious authority on the how-to of
happiness and wellbeing, the sunny antonyms of stress and pain—a dynamic probed in
subsequent chapters.

Among the most popular positive psychology books on happiness presents itself
as A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want. In The How of Happiness (2008),
Lyubomirsky emphasizes a transactional approach to the moment, seeking to get what
one wants out of it by adopting particular practices and attitudes toward it, many of them
explicitly devotional, without questioning the content of one’s desires or felt needs.
According to Lyubomirsky, factors that increase personal happiness include optimism,
gratitude, exercise, the effort to “live in the present moment,” and the ability to respond
well to stressors (22-23). All of these factors had been previously attributed to MBSR,
but because both interventions share the same objectives, therapeutic contexts, and
cultural substrates (the repertoire of the advice book), it is a mistake to assume that The
How of Happiness is cribbing generalized mindfulness. Rather, positive psychology and
mindfulness converge in the advice book and concomitant lecture circuit because they do
the same work socially and culturally, both are artifacts of the same historical juncture,
and both have emerged from the same cultural repertoires and social networks.

The naturalization of mindfulness as a means to happiness among psychological
interventions is clearly legible The How of Happiness. Lyubomirsky’s book is organized
around a series of activities that someone may undertake to become happier; in this
discourse, subjective problems are only imagined as resolvable on the terrain of the
subject’s will, and as in the speculations of Daniel Pink, work is assumed to be a singular act of meaning-making. The *material* reproduction of one’s life is taken for granted.

Happiness Activity #11 is “Practicing Religion and Spirituality;” Lyubomirsky locates mindfulness in Activity #9, “Savoring Life’s Joys” (198-99). Lyubomirsky does not specify which religion or spiritual tradition one is best advised to practice; unlike Benson and Goleman, neither Haidt nor Lyubomirsky privilege one tradition over another as more adequate to the needs of the present. Like Haidt, Benson, and many insight meditation writers, Lyubomirsky assumes that all traditions share the same means and ends, and that those ends coincide with the objectives of the belabored consumer of advice books. In this context, mindfulness practice is not recognizable as a religious program to a psychologist, but as a psychological one. This is because, as I have argued, mindfulness practice is a psychological intervention that has been recuperated as a Buddhist one *post hoc*—and positive psychologists, long familiar with the writings of Benson, Goleman, Langer, and Kabat-Zinn, take this for granted. I will argue that the objective served by the universalist doctrine shared by generalized mindfulness and positive psychology self-help discourses is indistinguishable from the religion of capitalism (chapters four and five).

Rubin’s *The Happiness Project* (2009) is less an exposition of positive psychology than a first-person account of the author’s attempts to live by the precepts of its advice books on happiness for several years. While Rubin’s book is primarily influenced by positive psychology, it also reflects the choices and distinctions of a representative consumer of this discourse. From the position of such a consumer, there
may no longer be a meaningful distinction between positive psychology and the book-mediated Buddhism evoked by insight meditation, since both represent a kind of universal spirituality prescribed by psychologists as a means to happiness, as evidenced by Rubin’s chapters on mindfulness and keeping “a Contented Heart.” Points of contact between happiness discourses of Pop Buddhism and positive psychology and of managing petit-bourgeois anxiety around “the significance of money to individuals” in terms of their identities and values (168), and tacitly but not explicitly their material needs, are clearly legible here.

Psychological Buddhism, the mobilization of certain ideas about Buddhism by psychologists crystallized in the metonym of the “Oriental Monk,” translates into the practice of what may be characterized as an assemblage of Buddhist thematics in Rubin’s narrative of an advice-book consumer no more organized than the contents of a shopping cart in a retail shop. Rubin frames her mindfulness chapter as a study in Buddhism as such, which becomes warranted by her attempts to become a happier person; I mark that there is a kind of irony here, in that contemporaneous insight meditation books such as Sharon Salzberg’s Real Happiness (2011) had largely become Buddhism-less by this time. Rubin presents mindfulness in part as a faithful reader of Pop Buddhist writers such as Trungpa or Thich Nhat Hanh would, as an aspect of a contemplative life, and not only as a meditative practice; she also advocates for book-mediated pieces of traditional Buddhist practices such as the contemplation of koans that one might find in print toward the objective of her own happiness and wellbeing (238-9). In sum, Rubin models an attempt by a faithful self-help consumer to achieve the “balance” of East (“ancient
Benson and Haidt advocate, and to find through religious practice—Buddhism figures here as a universal spirituality as in insight meditation—a reserve of inner truth appropriate to this moment, by herself. The balancing of the East and West is done here by the consumer, who is directing both her own religious practice and mental health intervention simultaneously through self-help books, having become convinced (another religion-of-capital article of faith) that she is capable of doing so. In practice, the contemplative East—and whatever content that loaded category may hold—falls under the aegis of the sovereign consumer in pursuit of self-rationalization as enlightenment.

The celebration of religion and endorsement of practices of affirmation, devotion, and acceptance in self-help and mindfulness texts has a concrete purpose in this juncture. Barbara Ehrenreich, in *Bright Sided* (2008), characterizes it as a kind of make-believe: “If the generic ‘positive thought’ is correct and things really are getting better, if the arc of the universe tends toward happiness and abundance, then why bother with the mental effort of positive thinking? Obviously, because we do not fully believe that things will get better on their own” (5). For the majority, horizons of expectation have diminished and everyday life has become more difficult and more predictable with economic liberalization and the financialization of everyday life. There is little reason to think a change for the better is imminent; becoming mindful of the present implies coming to consciousness of its inadequacy and contingency, not its timelessness (what I refer to as a surplus or overproduction or mindfulness). Where historical consciousness and critical thought fail as coping mechanisms, belief remains available as a mode of aspiration—
here, a mode of make-believe that “requires deliberate self-deception” regarding one’s material conditions and life chances in Ehrenreich’s terms (5). This is, *prima facie*, the *opposite* of mindfulness, but as I will show, it is also an accurate precis of guided meditation as it is prescribed for stress and pain management. In such practice, therapeutic mindfulness affirms its own opposite, as Trungpa argued it would (“Therapy?”). Further, Ehrenreich observes the coincidence of affirmative psychology and inspirational, primal leadership, and presents the latter in a figure of economic liberalization, faith-based certitude, and dismal failure: She positions George W. Bush as the *inspiring* leader in precisely the inspiring, primal sense of instilling in others an optimistic belief in lieu of recognizing painful realities, like a cheerleader would (9). This is a form of religious devotion that serves to reproduce the social relations of the present moment—the religion of capitalism. It is shared in common among mindfulness and positive psychology self-help programs and articulates the compensatory valence of mindfulness.

**FROM THERAPY TO WORKPLACE SUPPORT: GENERALIZING MINDFULNESS**

The experience of a participant in a representative mindfulness-based mind/body health program at a US-based HMO in 2012 for a work-related Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) shows how health outcomes promised by mindfulness and relevant to employment can be and are shifted onto personal health and self care—onto the worker. Here, mindfulness practice functions largely as a self-help program, and reproduces many of the formal and tacit features of mindfulness and positive psychology advice books and
ancillary products. This is an example of how mindfulness as therapy is generalized to all aspects of everyday life, with a constant eye on the anxieties and aggravations of the entrepreneurial workplace imagined as a zone of personal authenticity, where one’s inner beliefs and aspirations may be realized.

In early June of 2012, the patient (male) had an appointment with a therapist in pain management. In their conversation, the therapist put little emphasis on the material causes of the patient’s injury and consequent neurological problems, but focused instead on whatever family trauma he may have absorbed in his childhood. While hooked up to a small heart monitor, he was led through a guided meditation to use when feeling stressed: to visualize a specific place in the world that signifies tranquility and calm, and go there, *be there*, to “go to your happy place.” I mark that this biofeedback-derived practice diverges from MBSR protocols but not from mindfulness discourses. A monitor indicated that patient’s heart had rate slowed; he was told that this indicates successful meditation. The therapist encouraged him to continue practicing meditation at home on a regular basis and to be mindful during the day, and gave him a stack of material to read and audio files to use in support of these activities.

The materials that the therapist gave the patient offer a selection of what a mindfulness-based pain-management program in a major US HMO offers a body that has been stressed by the contemporary work environment, and what assumptions such a program makes about pain, stress, and mindfulness. The first assumption is that mindfulness is a book-mediated, DIY practice, reliant on a high degree of practitioner autonomy. The patient was given a copy of Margaret Caudill’s *Managing Pain Before it
Manages You (Third Edition), an audio CD of guided meditations produced by the HMO itself, links to podcasts of guided meditations to use, a largely illegible printout of a PowerPoint presentation that (according to one of the captions) included a snapshot of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s face and images of fMRI scans of meditating brains, and a 2006 New York Times feature article printed from the internet and photocopied. Taken together, this material seems to present the patient with two options: either to face the moment as it emerges in time through body scans and breath meditation, and thereby diminish its capacity to overwhelm; or to evade this moment and create a new one through guided imagery, as in the instruction to “go to your happy place.” Both these options are present in the media he was given, sometimes in the same paragraph, as they also are in insight meditation books such as Kabat-Zinn’s Wherever You Go, There You Are, where the instruction to face one’s moment without judgment is juxtaposed against the instruction to posit and realize a personal vision through “soul stories” and one’s meditation practice.

In brief, clinical mindfulness realizes a broad repertoire of cultural imperatives and not only mindfulness or psychological Buddhism in the most limited sense in a clinical environment, a repertoire I examine in subsequent chapters as it is generalized as the discourse of mindfulness.

Caudill’s Managing Pain Before it Manages You (2009) shares much in common thematically and practically with Full Catastrophe Living. Like Benson and Kabat-Zinn, Caudill locates the source of chronic pain in stress. Stressors are not made explicit, but social factors such as the workplace are assumed. As Selye, Benson, and Kabat-Zinn do, Caudill defines stress as a problem of maladaptation, “the perception of a threat and the
perception that you are not well prepared to cope with it” (45)—a perception that may or may not correspond to an actual threat, or may correspond to a felt sense of being overwhelmed by a rapidly-shifting and increasingly delimited everyday life. As I have already argued, this concept of stress encodes the competitiveness of the entrepreneurial work environment, of subjects posited as autonomous enterprises in competition with each other for limited resources. In such an environment, work is inherently stressful insofar as it is framed as a field of threats to one’s means to a livelihood or security. If the means to living are stressful, then life itself, the work of carrying on, is also. Not coincidentally, Caudill offers her patients an exercise called “Creating a Safe Place” to give a sense of inner defense against a hostile social world (58-59). Caudill also defines chronic pain, itself, as a stressor—trauma as its own cause—insofar as hurt can trigger an automatized fight-or-flight response in structures of the brain called amygdalae, and thus introduce a host of health problems that are painful (46). To address this, Caudill advocates the RR technique popularized by Benson and Borysenko. Significantly, the RR and mindfulness are functionally indistinguishable in this therapeutic application.

Further, Caudill marshalls the changes in brain structures documented in the brain imagery that Goleman champions to legitimize the RR. In contrast to stress, the RR is promoted as a means to override the brain’s fight-or-flight response that is, itself, neither automatic nor autonomic, but must be cultivated (47)—a rationale also legible in discourses such as mindful leadership and the mindful workplace. Caudill promotes the RR as an enlightenment project, a means of becoming conscious of one’s automatisms
and thereby becoming free of them in the same way psychological Buddhism does. In terms of practice, Caudill summarizes two elements of RR:

“1. Focusing one’s mind on a repetitive phrase, word, breath, or action.

2. Adopting a passive attitude toward the thoughts that go through one’s head” (47)

Caudill recommends mindfulness practice as an example of such a “passive attitude,” claiming that MBSR “can have dramatic results” insofar as it “encourages you to let the mind stay passively focused on the pain”—aware of it but not acting on it (54). To this end, Caudill encourages her patients to begin RR practice with breath meditation (48-51).

In practice, again, the RR is mindfulness by another name. In the “Resources” section at the end of Managing Pain, the first listing is Kabat-Zinn’s website, mindfulness tapes.org (236); elsewhere, Caudill recommends Nhat Hanh’s Miracle of Mindfulness, and Kabat-Zinn’s Full Catastrophe and Arriving at your Own Door (2007), as equally useful to an RR practitioner as Borysenko’s Minding the Body, Mending the Mind (67). Mindfulness and Pop Buddhist texts are canonized as positive psychology touchstones here.

With that said, perhaps the most striking intervention Caudill prescribes involves a full-page sign reading “Please Do Not Disturb / I’m relaxing per my doctor’s orders” (226) to be photocopied and pinned to one’s door (assuming one has a door or a divider)—a direct reclamation of one’s time and attention away from work tasks if not necessarily work logics. Caudill assumes that a pivotal theater of stress is the work site. Managing Pain mobilizes mindfulness as a means to heal a body stressed by the perception of threats such as a potential layoff, to recognize that one’s objectives for “life
practice” may not coincide with one’s employer’s objections, and finally by preparing for seemingly inevitable social stressors, to reproduce their imprint within oneself.

If mindfulness is about facing the full truth of one’s situation “nonjudgmentally” (Wherever 4), then the guided imagery practice Belleruth Naparstek offers in the podcast series “How to Relieve Stress” and related affirmations is, in contrast, an attempt to implement a new truth by imagining and affirming it as real—to realize a personal vision. Naparstek introduces the guided imagery practice with claims to its effectiveness in unspecified clinical trials, and defines it as “deliberate, directed daydreaming.” As Naparstek gives a series of prompts or cues against a slow, legato, major-key melody, she instructs the meditator to “edit” any image or suggestion that is not meaningful to him or her, and claims: “all you have to do is settle in, relax, and let yourself listen.” Further, before introducing any of the meditations, Naparstek asserts that this practice “promotes a sense of safety and protection, and introduces you to a more compassionate perspective on yourself. This helps counter the psychological toll that stress can take on your self-esteem and your general emotional resiliency.” This juxtaposition of compassion with a felt need for security and protection, seemingly non sequitur, is also legible in some of the Pop Buddhist texts and institutions that mindfulness writers seize upon, such as Trungpa’s Shambhala books, described in chapter two. Before the guided imagery practice begins, the meditator is prompted to assume an attitude of acceptance and affirmation, and cued to affirm the effectiveness of the practice and its suitability for his or her own needs before testing the practice for effectiveness or suitability. This is a therapy that demands to be taken on faith, and thus to function as a religious practice
would. Which religious practice is suggested in Naparstek’s instruction to disregard or modify any prompt that may challenge the listener’s pregiven convictions. The religious universalism of the positive psychology advice book, wherein the religious know something that the skeptical do not, coupled with the imperative to realize a personal vision, remain sacrosanct here.

Formally, Naparstek’s method of stress relief by guided imagery and affirmation closely resembles an aspect of the RR as Benson and Caudill present it: the meditator is instructed to focus on a single phrase to consciously override or “reprogram” the brain’s habitual patterns. The guided imagery also includes a body scan meditation pace MBSR of roughly eight minutes, in which one is directed to “look at your experience with a kind of detached intelligence,” mentally examining the body to seek out places of hurt and tension, a “gentle, curious inventory of your insides, with no ax to grind.” Here, the meditator is to reflect on the qualities of anxiety around pain—to understand anxiety as having certain qualities, perhaps a color or a sound, and to allow those qualities to change of their own, with a “detached but curious” feeling and “full, deep, steady breaths.” The meditator is invited to choose: use this to investigate the source of this anxiety, or not—as though the source of one’s trauma (any trauma) can be knowable without reference to anything outside one’s mindspace. As in Pop Buddhist and insight meditation advice books, the meditator is given specific instructions in posture and bodily alignment, and cues for walking meditation. Naparstek’s affirmations show a further continuity from insight meditation books in their frequent recurrence of the words “peace” and “well” and their cognates. The first affirmation Naparstek gives involves an imperative to a radical
acceptance of the moment that is un-editable: “I know there are times when I become worried, pressured, angry, or sad, and I accept what I feel as my inner truth of the moment.” Like mindfulness and insight meditation advice books (chapter three), Naparstek’s affirmations and guided imagery offer little inquiry into the historical causes of the worrying, pressurized, anger-inducing, or saddening characteristics of the present as they promise a means to cope with its consequences. That Naparstek’s audio recordings posit the possibility of an alternative to the moment, a “happy place to go” if only in the field of individual make-believe, marks a significant departure from the mindful workplace described in chapters four and five. This mobilization of a personal vision, as in insight meditation, recalls Jameson’s caution that such private refuges may only reaffirm and reproduce necessity and not the means to freedom.

The New York Times article the patient was given, a 2006 piece by feature writer Melanie Thernstrom, synthesizes the optimism of neural self-fashioning in mindfulness with its promise to enable the practitioner to realize a personal vision, a “happy place” to which one may go. Thernstrom, who suffers from chronic pain herself, positions the expectations of a pain-management patient exposed to these discourses within a utopian question: “Would we one day become completely transparent to ourselves, and—fully conscious of consciousness—consciously create ourselves as we like?” (n.p.). And the patient, prescribed to read this article by a pain management therapist, is interpellated to share in this aspiration, worded in the first person plural but intended individually and without access to a personal fMRI lab. My pain, my brain.
Thernstrom claims that “chronic pain is now thought to be a disease of the central nervous system that may or may not correlate with any tissue damage but involves an errant reprogramming in the brain and spinal cord” (n.p.). The brain generates these experiences, it is claimed, as it does in cases of phantom limb pain in amputees. This suggests to the reader that one’s own difficulties literally all in one’s head, and are therefore revisable through a disciplined self-rationalization. Thernstrom travels to the Neuroimaging and Pain Lab at Stanford University to explore a technique, “neuroimaging therapy,” that involves teaching patients to modulate the “dials” controlling the pain-regulating centers of the brain through fMRI technology: the patient observes her own brain in pain, and simply by observing it, dials back the pain. The brain scan extends the observational logic of mindfulness meditation well beyond the image Trungpa gives of a scientist peering through a microscope into the bacterial culture of the mindstream (described in chapter two). In neuroimaging therapy, “The scan would thus be more than a research tool: the scan itself would be the treatment, and the subject his or her own researcher” (n.p.). Here, the materialism of Goleman’s The Meditative Mind, the brain-base, consciousness-superstructure model, and the therapeutic qualities assigned to brain imagery as the rationale for mindfulness practice, together reach their apogee. To revolutionize the base (the brain), the practitioner begins in the superstructure of intention and practice: such is the logic shared in common with the RR, MBSR, and neuroimaging therapy, and the legitimation of the same pioneered in Goleman’s writings on early brain scans. All reproduce the assumption or implication that the hurt is in one’s head and not
shared in common with others, or rooted in a historical or social nexus of causes and implications. This is, in Benjamin’s terms, a religion of blame (260-61).

Finally, the in-house guided meditation CD the patient was given covers body scans and “basic breath meditation.” In content, this recording, uneven in sound quality, presents anapassati as a Theravada-trained meditation instructor or disciple of Nhat Hanh might teach it, but without reference to its source. As in The Meditative Mind, a particular selection of Buddhist praxis is mobilized by psychologists as a fundamental operation of the mind. Here, Pop Buddhism as re-performed by therapists is one among several options for enacting mindfulness that are assumed to begin from the same premises and serve the same objective. In this patient’s experience, it was included as something of a pro forma afterthought. It seems as if psychological Buddhism is simply what one does in a mindfulness-based health intervention, whether it is functional or not.

In prescriptions for mindfulness as self-care, chronic pain is equated to chronic stress, and understood as a work-related injury for a working-class person or increasingly proletarianized professional—work-related in the broadest sense of having a job and hence risking the loss of that job, of not having enough hours or adequate compensation or consistent scheduling, or of not having any work at all, and the stressful impacts on families and communities of this stress. Mindfulness as a self-care intervention demands the practitioner rewire his or her brain to feel better about this moment, in this moment, in order to engage with it on its terms, while identifying with the tacit promises and pieties of the moment as his or her own objectives. Mindfulness thus generalized reproduces a specific repertoire of cultural imperatives that at once enact the religion of capitalism and
summon an aspiration for an alternative to the same. Mindfulness as discipline, then, paradoxically conscripts a force that frustrates its own objectives, as I show in chapter two.

CONCLUSION

Generalized mindfulness does not have a Buddhist origin, but a therapeutic one concerning the problem of the individual adapting him or herself to a specific historical juncture by the means offered in that juncture, what I call the moment of stress. Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness program has proven itself generalizable because it is oriented to an objective that corresponds precisely to the logic of its historical moment. As Benson and Langer did, Kabat-Zinn names a putatively universal problem and offers a DIY, consumer-friendly method to address it through guided meditation. MBSR requires personal endeavor and a willingness to compliantly consume certain books and tapes (or, later, CDs, audio files, and streaming media), buttressed by a scientific discourse that reproduces the imperatives of the corporate interests that legitimized it and has been overhastily and uncritically embraced by advocates of mindfulness from the start. If Trungpa’s comments are representative, the vision of mindfulness as therapy has a contradictory relationship to the image of Buddhism these writers so frequently appeal to, while at once distancing themselves from it. Rather, mindfulness comes into view here as if dialectically summoned by its historical moment—in a sense, as that moment coming to consciousness of itself and on its own terms. It is generalized as a universal therapy for a perennial pathology, stress, and not by any logic of a Buddhist cultural transmission, as
it positions the Buddhist as the exemplar of healthful adjustment to the moment, of sanity and equanimity. Only after MBSR is mediated through the advice books of Pop Buddhist and insight meditation authors, Trungpa and Kabat-Zinn himself among them, does mindfulness’ standing as Buddhism’s “western” or “modern” adaptation seem inevitable, and Buddhist responses to it emerge. Further, *The Relaxation Response* shows that mindfulness as generalized now was already in circulation as a self-help program prior to MBSR without any Buddhist contribution to it, and Langer’s *Mindfulness* indicates that mindfulness describes a dynamic observable in human subjects in this historical juncture, not an ancient Buddhist practice recuperated by the rationality of the contemporary.

In the context of the generalization of mindfulness as therapy, concerned as it is with ensuring a sense of safety and security for the belabored, Ernst Bloch’s questions seem neither hyperbole nor rhetorical: “what is the life of most people, for which the doctor makes him ‘fit for work’ again? What is health which merely makes people ripe to be damaged, abused, and shot at again?” (470). The routines of self-care prescribed by the pain management therapist, and in mindfulness and positive psychology advice books, do make space for the material needs of workers, but in making them fit to produce and consume again—and to literally get shot at again in the case of soldiers, sailors, and marines in workplace mindfulness programs for the military—they also affirm the order of a present structured as a competitive and conflictive social environment. Insofar as it refuses a means to critique the moment—recall that the practitioner is to face the moment nonjudgmentally, without reference to past or future, with an attitude of radical acceptance—mindfulness falls into the same cycle of
affirmation, the grip of necessity. Mindfulness disciplines its practitioners to find hope for themselves in the status quo, which is an article of faith for the belabored.

The contemporary workplace demands that workers spend their free time recovering from the traumas of work, preparing oneself for work, preparing to seek work, networking, working, or seeking work—hustling to manage debt, to carry on. In this context, mindfulness as a self-help strategy is made available to the economically stressed outside the workplace, but in ways determined by the work environment. This is the compensatory valence of mindfulness. First, attempts to meet a worker’s material needs for health subsequent to workplace harm, such as RSI or chronic pain, are addressed in a set of self-care routines prescribed for workers. While performance enhancement is situated in and of the mindful workplace, as I describe in chapter six, recovery from the workplace injuries that diminish productivity and increase labor cost to employers is made the personal life practice of the worker, a mode of being toward oneself and the workplace. The worker’s disciplined “reprogramming” of his or her own brain is a function of continued or enhanced employability and thus survival now.

Second, a number of Buddhist-affiliated mindfulness writers, Michael Carroll and Sharon Salzberg among them, weigh in with advice books for workers to use at work as self-care or self-promotion. Finally, I will show that the happiness discourse of positive psychology, enjoined by conscious capitalists such and endorsed in workplace programs such as Search Inside Yourself, is presented as akin to, or even functioning as, mindfulness. Here, the universalism of psychological Buddhism is reproduced such that it is cast as a kind of universal spirituality, and the subject is situated in a transactional
relation with the moment so that practice is undertaken in order to get from the world what the practitioner desires of it, be it the realization of a well-appointed bourgeois lifestyle, a sense of self-empowerment, or merely less pain. Before describing these dynamics, I turn first to the history of the mediation of mindfulness through the repertoires of Pop Buddhism and insight meditation in order to draw out the contradictory cultural aspirations and forms of consciousness that mindful interventions in everyday life summon. These constitute the emancipatory valence of mindfulness, summoned by the content and form of mindful discipline.
I call the medium of instruction in English for Buddhist converts and sympathizers in North America in this period Pop Buddhism. In it, the figure of the “Oriental monk” as the guide to the salvation of the capitalist West from itself converges with the expectation of self-help readers that happiness is attainable through disciplined compliance to a book-mediated regiment of practice, a happiness represented in self-help books by the (usually Tibetan) Buddhist master, who tend not to decline the role.

The happiness promised by positive psychologists involves a kind of personal contentment and equilibrium in a historical moment that is imagined to be at once rapidly changing and perennially difficult, the moment of stress; the objective of practice, then, is to become better adjusted to the moment in a posture of acceptance, in order to enjoy a happy, purposive life (chapter one). But the living Buddhist masters interpellated as “Oriental Monks” in this historical moment typically dismiss such objectives out of hand. This is legible in Jared Rhoton’s extemporaneous translation of the U.S.-based Tibetan scholar-yogin Deshung Rinpoche’s meditation instructions to American practitioners in the 1980s:

You simply cannot attain enlightenment without being willing to sacrifice your happiness in order to remove the sufferings of others. The alternative is to cling to your own well-being, in effect wishing for your own happiness and permitting the
prospect of suffering for others. With this kind of self-centeredness, you will not attain happiness on the samsaric level, let alone an exalted state like perfect enlightenment. (Three Levels 304-305).

Here is an insoluble contradiction: the picture of a well-adjusted Tibetan master asserts that even everyday-life (“samsaric”) happiness, the objective of self-help practice legitimized by the image of well-adjusted Tibetan masters, is made impossible by pursuing happiness as a self-help project. This chapter probes this anticipatory negation of mindfulness as a self-help program among the Pop Buddhist figures it most regularly calls on for legitimation and sets up as models of attainment.98

The negation and the refusal of the present Pop Buddhism summons among practitioners represent functions of the emancipatory valence of mindfulness. It takes the form of an overproduction of mindfulness. Here, the meditator is guided to become mindful of the totality of lived relations—of the specific historically-contingent hurts of the moment and their causes, regarding the sufferings of others as at least equally urgent and significant to oneself as one’s own experience of hardship. This mindfulness, in turn, involves first a negation of the pieties of the moment that occlude an awareness of the reciprocal cycles of suffering these texts describe, including much of what is associated with insight meditation and generalized mindfulness (chapter three), and second a politics of recognition that demands the means to happiness, freedom, and the Good “for all beings,” not only for oneself or for those with whom one identifies. The latter takes the form of calls for an alternative social order that is, at minimum, less socially and environmentally harmful to the totality than contemporary capitalism. In this context,
mindfulness carries a critical anti-class, anti-exploitation, pro-social set of imperatives. It is not accidental that when objections are made to the generalization of mindfulness to capitalist objectives, they typically emerge in a Pop Buddhist lexicon (chapter six).

To understand what it means when the therapeutic mindfulness programs considered in the previous chapter draw on Buddhist themes and images for legitimation and as models of attainment, and what cultural work that dynamic does, I survey the objectives and modes of meditation practice in the public writings of the three Buddhist masters most relevant to generalized mindfulness: the current Dalai Lama, the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and the late Tibetan polymath, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Nhat Hanh is, by most accounts, the most frequently cited and most visible Buddhist master in and around mindfulness programs (Wilson 35). The Dalai Lama is omnipresent as a collaborator among cognitive psychologists in demonstrating the value of Buddhist meditation generally, and Tibetan culture specifically, outside of China; these collaborations, in turn, are mobilized by mindfulness advocates in order to buttress popular-scientific claims on the effectiveness of mindfulness as a “change your brain” program. And mindfulness advocates frequently ground their own claims in the authority Nhat Hanh or the Dalai Lama through the synecdoche of a segment of text—a quotation or an account of a casual encounter standing in for the legacy of the public figure overall. Trungpa’s relevance here is less obvious, particularly given that he died some twenty years before mindfulness became a buzzword. I maintain that Trungpa’s programs and writings may have more relevance and explanatory power for the contours of mindfulness and its consequences than that of either the Dalai Lama or Nhat Hanh, even without the
persistent recuperation of Trungpa’s literary estate as a canon of mindfulness texts by his heirs. Mindfulness as a cultural phenomenon is a direct consequence of Trungpa’s persistent advocacy of Buddhist meditation as an entirely reasonable, sociable, and normal activity for North Americans to participate in—it was the primary practice he mandated for his students on this continent (Gimian “Introduction” xxvi)—his rapid development of durable institutional structures for its transmission and practice, and for the training of lay teachers and leaders. Many of these institutions, such as Shambhala Sun magazine (rebranded in late 2015 as Lion’s Roar), were later remade as promotional vehicles for generalized mindfulness, much as Trungpa’s voluminous writings and transcripts of public teachings have been marketed since 2008. Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR was generalized on the same franchise model Trungpa had instituted with his organization of Buddhist centers, Vajradhatu (now Shambhala International) (Wilson 39). Trungpa has been posthumously refashioned as a legitimizer of mindfulness discourse and many of its advocates, who are authorized to write and speak on mindfulness programs by virtue of having been trained by Trungpa or within the institutions he once led. Finally, while Trungpa’s controversial reputation as a hard-partying rakehell became a foil against which the Tibetanness that the Dalai Lama embodies would, in part, be defined among mindfulness advocates as psychological Buddhism, the distinctive lexicon and protocols that Trungpa established are silently reproduced throughout the discourse of mindfulness.

I emphasize the advice books attributed to all three Buddhist leaders on methodological grounds—like self-help programs, meditation instruction and inspiration is primarily consumed through the book, a techne that supports and mediates the
production of public personae (such as the “Oriental Monk” as a figure of salvation) and the promotion of public events and retreats.

I argue that the critical, anti-capitalistic, and anti-individualistic imperatives legible in the writings of Buddhist writers such as Trungpa, the Dalai Lama, and Nhat Hanh are intended to lead the committed meditator to particular somatic experiences and to develop aptitudes that contradict the imperatives of stress relief, performance enhancement, and personal authenticity to which therapeutic mindfulness has been put since before the term “mindfulness” was applied to it. Regardless of its overall content, at the point of objectives, Pop Buddhism is the antonym to mindfulness that mindfulness cannot do without, and in consistently affirming it, mindfulness negates its own purpose.

YIELDING TO A SYSTEM OF DISCIPLINE

Before his eighteen years in the US and Canada, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche had already proven himself a savant. Living in the United Kingdom, Trungpa simultaneously and rapidly mastered spoken and written English to a precise Oxfordian accent ornamented with French endpieces (“ça va?”), and earned a certificate in the art of Japanese flower arrangement (ikebana). An uncomfortable and in some instances hostile attitude obtains among contemporary Buddhist teachers, many of them involved now in the mindfulness scene or affiliated with insight meditation, in respect to Trungpa’s legacy. If given, praise is always qualified, as in this 1997 comment by New York-born Lama Surya Das (Jeffrey Miller): “Trungpa was a Buddhist pioneer in the West. Although many have criticized him for his sometimes outrageous behavior and
heavy drinking, no one can question his brilliance and his real achievements” (34), such as normalizing the exotic routine of Buddhist meditation for non-Asians in North America. That these leaders must negotiate Trungpa’s complex legacy to the present indicates its durability and ubiquity even now.

Integral to Trungpa’s advocacy for meditation is a mobilization of Buddhist dialectics to the experience of everyday life at present, and an aspiration for a specific alternative to the same, both representative of the particular Buddhist traditions he represented. Trungpa was clearly of the moment of economic liberalization in North America, but critical of it. The alternative that he championed, the vision of Shambhala, ought not to be overhastily dismissed as anachronistic Orientalism or irrelevant affectation. It represents an attempt to remake the present as an alternative temporal, social, and subjective mode to the sociality prevalent under contemporary capitalism. Here, meditation is tied to a practice of negation and a pessimistic historicism—this is no private religion or commodified transcendence—from which an actionable if idiosyncratic demand for an anti-capitalist social alternative emerges. The objective of meditation practice here is to negate the formations of the present and the production of personal authenticity, not to better adapt to a pathological moment or to find one’s true purpose in it. Here, mindfulness directs the practitioner to the emergence of specific determinations brought to bear one one’s life experience, and in the process, undermines the logic of self-help culture, in one instance from within a series of self-help books. Mindfulness is a critical and historical form of consciousness here. In Trungpa, one finds a figure of anti-capitalist aspiration that is later reintroduced as an exemplar of excellent
leadership in corporate management guides, and hence as an aspirational image in
generalized mindfulness.

At once probing and puckish, the texts attributed to Trungpa resist analysis. More
specifically, even with dozens of books published under his name, Trungpa seems to
have made himself allergic to the role of the author as a repository of truth.\textsuperscript{100} Perhaps for
this reason, Trungpa put his ideas across through \textit{implication}, recontextualizing familiar
turns of phrase, repeating them as a jazz musician might perform variations on a theme,
and relying on figurative language, jokes, provocations, surprising contrasts and
reversals, and an arsenal of sometimes absurd vulgarisms, consistently demonstrating an
extraordinary facility with the English language and the details of North American
culture, down to its detritus.\textsuperscript{101} Because it is never easy to spell out what Trungpa is really
up to, and it is against the spirit of his project to attempt such a thing\textsuperscript{102}, I qualify this
discussion of Trungpa’s project as representative of one convert Buddhist’s attempt to
come to grips with it—to describe after years of swimming in these waters to describe the
patterns of its waves.\textsuperscript{103}

As in his agitation against the equation of meditation and psychotherapy
described in chapter one, Trungpa promotes meditation as part of a project of liberation—
as emancipatory from rather than compensatory to \textit{something}.\textsuperscript{104} He articulates this
through various analogies, some of them grotesque: sacrifice, hopelessness, doing
nothing and expecting nothing, peering through a microscope at the germs of the mind,
becoming a skinless warrior-monarch. What is the \textit{something} that Trungpa seeks to
liberate the subject from? Trungpa’s traditionally-Buddhist answer is “samsara, the
continuous vicious cycle of confirmation of existence. One confirmation needs another
needs another” (Myth 20). This involves a pessimistic historicism—of temporality and
experience as a miasma delimited by endless and mutually-reinforcing determinations,
indicated in his characteristic descriptor of the present historical juncture as a “dark
age.”

Trungpa’s presentation of necessity as taking the form of an endless cycle of
reciprocal confirmations suggests an affiliation of meditation with negation of the given,
and renunciation of the life patterns he describes as samsaric, as its point of intervention.
These patterns of affirmation are equated to the emergence of the present in historical
time in different ways—what Trungpa calls “styles of imprisonment,” tied directly to the
concepts of karma and rebirth descriptive of the experience of temporality in an un
free condition—in The Myth of Freedom. In his early writings, Trungpa formulates meditation
as concerning these cycles of afflictive and binding affirmations in terms of the “ego,”
meaning the mass of habit-patterns naturalized and automatized to oneself—put
differently, identity as a mode of affliction both extrinsic and personal, familiar—and
meditation as an alternative to engaging with the present on its own terms. According to
Trungpa, meditation is “the creation of a space in which we are able to expose and undo
our neurotic games, our self-deceptions, our fears and hopes” (2), and the imperative is to
be present, doing nothing, while observing the arising and falling away of the
affirmations by which one’s sense of self is constructed, seeing their contingency. In
contrast to MBSR, meditation emerges under Trungpa’s hand as a means to negate any
presumption of necessity to the historically contingent forms of consciousness,
automatisms, that may limit the meditator, thereby making him or her more free to act
according to a consciously-chosen program rather than unconsciously or mechanically reacting, or remaining passively devoted to the given.

In this context, Trungpa describes meditation primarily as seeing one’s situation clearly for what it is, not for what it seems to be, in terms that anticipate mindfulness’ appeal to scientific methods and technologies: “Mindfulness is like a microscope; it is neither an offensive nor a defensive weapon in relation to the germs we observe through it. The function of the microscope is just to clearly present what is there” (*Myth 49*). While Trungpa’s characteristically militarized diction—consistent with his engagement with the competitive, strategic aspects of everyday life as an entrepreneurial workplace in the U.S.—is in evidence, more significant here is the analogy he posits between the contents of one’s consciousness and *germs*, living bodies that are taken to be *extrinsic* to and *other than* the host organism. The meditator is told: Your habits of mind and heart are no more a part of you than the microorganisms on a microscope slide are a part of the scientist observing them—and, implicitly, that meditation practice is analogous to a scientific experiment, suggesting a point of contact in Trungpa’s archive to the neuroscientific project of identifying transformations in the brains of meditators through imaging technology popularized by Daniel Goleman.

However, Trungpa positions the meditator to refuse the objectives to which psychologists such as Goleman orient meditation practice. In Trungpa’s terms, meditation involves “simply, without any object or ambition, trying to see what is here and now” in all things (*Action 61*), which is understood to help liberate the meditator from compulsive activity, from the endless, affirmative reproduction of the same (*S. samsara*). Invoking an
entirely different figure to make a related point, Trungpa claims that the meditator will “wear out the shoe of samsara by walking on it through the practice of meditation” (*Myth* 50). Here, the thinning of the shoe leather describes increasingly diminished mediation between the body and the environment—less comfort and safety, and increased intimacy and directness, in the dialectic of consciousness (body) and conditions (earth) is described. Meanwhile, Trungpa also underscores mindfulness’ *uselessness* for purposes of self-improvement or economic advantage, distancing it from such pop-psychological narratives as the “hero’s journey” or the mobilization of its routines in the contract of everyday life: “In mindfulness practice, there is no goal, no journey; you are just mindful of what is happening there” (*Myth* 53). Here, the practitioner is explicitly instructed to refuse the promissory logic of the religion of capital—the expectation of a deferred gain for every renunciation in the present.

While Trungpa understands meditation as an intentionally purposeless activity, without an objective, he consistently presents it as part of an overall project with its own objectives and as functional within that context, not as a practice to itself (*Journey* 4). The objective of that project is to realize the view of emptiness (S. śūnyatā), a central Buddhist doctrine. Through study and practice, Trungpa writes, “we begin to see that there is no permanence or solidity to our thought process, and at some point, we begin to realize that there is no permanence or solidity to us” (*Journey* 4). Here and elsewhere, Trungpa’s writings on the practice of meditation are representative of Buddhist doctrine in content if not always in form. For instance, the insistence that anyone’s personal aims are hopeless reflects the Buddhist teaching of emptiness of self and other (S. śūnyatā),
whereby whatever one may cling to or identify as one’s own or one’s self is shown to be extrinsic and samsaric—of the field of suffering, samsara. Any identity, by Buddhist logic, is always extrinsic, compounded, without an essence, and not intrinsic or essential—like a culture of germs. This doctrine is the logic behind Trungpa’s analogies for practice, including hopelessness and total sacrifice, but for one exception: while Buddha-nature, a concept Trungpa glosses as “basic goodness” or “basic sanity,” is intrinsic, it is not personal and cannot be acquired. The meditator’s objective, per Trungpa, is negative. It is not the realization of a personal vision or a stable sense of identity or salvation—what Trungpa would call “ego.” And here, in explaining what Buddhist meditation is not, Trungpa repurposes the psychoanalytic concepts current among members of his audience—ego, neurosis, paranoia—to describe repetitive automatisms that may distort meditation practice. For instance, Trungpa observes that in the openness and “clarity” of meditation, there is a kind of inertia to the mind that limits or inhabits it, for the purpose of “maintaining ego’s existence” (Chaos 39). Further, the ego simultaneously “validates its existence out of falsity” (Chaos 40) and closes in the horizons the mind to prevent the possibility of freedom from itself from coming to consciousness. In this sense, Trungpa’s cryptic definition of ego as a “paranoid insurance policy” (Glimpses 100) indicates a mechanism that perpetuates the repetition of the same in the face of any threat to itself, and of reinforcing itself like a fortress against a hostile environment, and here the contract logic of contemporary capitalism, here figured as an insurance policy, is again explicitly negated. Trungpa’s advice, anticipating and foreclosing the self-defensive logic of Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR described in chapter one, is to
tell the anxious meditator: You are better fortified “if you are not defending yourself” (*Glimpses* 100). Meditation, for Trungpa, is not a compensatory practice for realizing a personal vision (ego) by cultivating superior responses (paranoia insurance) against a stress-inducing environment. Its purpose, when Trungpa admits it has one, is in *problematizing* the present—“dealing with purpose. It is not as though meditation is for something, but it is dealing with the aim” (*Action* 71). Insofar as its purpose is in realizing the emptiness of given purposes, for Trungpa, meditation is not instrumentalizable. If it is instrumentalized for personal aims, it ceases functioning as meditation but instead becomes “materialism,” Trungpa’s term for anything instrumentalized or commodified, and an adequate descriptor for the religion of capitalism, as I will show.

Further, Trungpa does not permit the notion of meditation as a consumer good. Insisting he is no hopelessness vendor, Trungpa claims, “If I manufactured something, it would be just a trick, unrealistic. Rather, it’s your hopelessness, it’s your world, your family heirloom, your inheritance” (*Crazy* 93) that are at issue in meditation, not the labels and metaphors he concocts to describe the practices he prescribes (and in this metaphor, “hopelessness” glosses Buddha-nature [S. *Tathagātagarbha*]). Neither is meditation a form of entertainment or dispersion for Trungpa. Because suffering is a fact of samsaric life, Trungpa compares misguided forms of practice to the “stupor” of distraction caused by contemporary “entertainment,” and claims “the hope for a cure is one big lie” (*Heart* 181), a theme which other significant contemporary Buddhist writers also emphasize—Nhat Hanh, as I will show, describes the spectacle of television as a
colonialist project, an invasion. Further, Trungpa asserts that learning meditation can never be a do-it-yourself project—it is necessarily sociable, requires the expertise of a well-trained and experienced teacher (Action 75), and cannot be undertaken from books alone (Action 90, 92), also in stark contrast to generalized mindfulness. Finally, as he distinguishes meditation from cognate practices of self-making, Trungpa invites an intervention into the forms of consciousness of his historical moment in the language of that moment: “if we could open our mind to something slightly more than what we have already been told, then we could step beyond the level where everything is purely based on the idea of a business transaction and a profit-making process” (Chaos 134-135). In describing the enlightenment project of meditation in opposition to modes of sociality familiar to his North American readers, in particular financialized social relations and consumerism, Trungpa already inscribes an anti-capitalist sentiment to meditation. If one aspires to meditation practice in this context, one is already seeking an alternative to the present that is, in its discursive content, explicitly enabled by the historical moment Trungpa defines it against.

Because Trungpa’s Buddhism is inseparable from his prescriptions for meditation practice, and to trace the emergence of the Buddhist diction and structures of feeling mindfulness appropriates, it is necessary to survey the ways in which Trungpa explicitly introduces Buddhist doctrine to his North American audience. Overall, he presents Buddhism, posited as the antidote to self-affirmative samsara, in the first instance, as a negative philosophy (Marcuse Reason). This is the context in which the most prominent Anglophone Buddhist of his time presented mindfulness to late-capitalist North America.
And like meditation specifically, Trungpa advances Buddhist practice generally into the granular stuff of everyday life, with mindfulness integral to it. A contemporary seeker of mindfulness will find that it is indistinguishable from a particular mobilization of critical thought and active inquiry in Trungpa’s Buddhism, which articulated a lexicon adequate to a description of the historical moment—not as outside of or beyond temporality and embodiment—in a discourse that had theretofore been heavily suspicious of reason and analysis, and remains so. But absent a “defined and critical background for what we are doing to ourselves and what the teaching is doing to us,” Trungpa argues, “we cannot develop even the slightest notion or flavor of enlightenment” (Journey 49). In this context, such a background involves a detailed analysis of determination and necessity—in Buddhist terms, of samsara and karma, a reciprocating dialectic of struggle and determination in historical time.

The specific analytic Trungpa emphasizes in his most well-known books is, explicitly, “a classical Buddhist” one (Cutting Through 4), in which subjectivity and the production thereof are exposed to a relentless dialectical logic by which any position one may affirm and hence identify with as one’s own is shown to be inadequate, any means to negation is itself inevitably negated, and nothing is transcended, transcending, subsumed, or subsuming (Cutting Through 195). Trungpa, in other words, found a way to present the elaborate and detailed logic of Buddhist dialectics (S. Madhyamaka) in a form that would be distributed and consumed as a series of bestselling, large-typeface, easily-consumed self-help guides. He managed this by directing Madhyamaka’s internal logic to the everyday-life situation of the spiritual aspirants he addressed, and by using their
language. Madhyamaka first undermines any conventional or received assumptions about anything—that a claim is either true or false, is both true and false, or is neither true nor false—by demonstrating the limits and contingency of those assumptions, and undermining any ontological claim one may make on their behalf, reducing them to nothingness. By 1970, when Trungpa was most actively pursuing this intervention, such imperatives to question the authority of received knowledge were old hat to the generation of the Great Refusal, but the subsequent move in Trungpa’s presentation of Madhyamaka was not: this negative philosophy next negates itself, since nothingness as a concept or descriptor is also contingent, in fact fabricated by the very process of analysis that led one to recognize the nothingness of what had previously seemed like a something (Cutting Through 195-96). It is at this point that critical thought passes into meditation: “situations emerge clearly, as they are. There is no one to watch, no one to know anything. Reality just is, and this is what is meant by the term ‘shunyata’” (Cutting Through 196), the term usually glossed in English as “emptiness,” but also and significantly as interconnection or “interbeing” among Nhat Hanh’s followers.

Such is the context, the “background,” into which Trungpa deploys mindfulness, “being awake to the whole situation,” which is the experiential aspect of realizing the view of emptiness of self and other summarized above (Cutting Through 179). According to Trungpa, a specific kind of view is required to practice meditation toward a beneficial and necessarily emancipatory objective, and that view is brought about by rigorous critique at a granular level. As before, the function of meditation is to realize an objective. In Trungpa’s terms, that objective can be uncritical and inevitably
compensatory, or critical, awake, and liberatory—as he posits the realization of emptiness. One realizes it by means of an integral body of knowledge that, Trungpa argues, has a necessary and integral logic to it: “We cannot afford to jumble the vajrayana into a spiritual or philosophical stew” (Journey 20), Trungpa argues, meaning that the “critical background” essential to mindfulness practice that he insists on must be taken on its own terms, and not through the lens of one’s personal vision or syncretically mixed with other material, as in The Happiness Project, for it to function. Put differently, it is not a univeralism to which other cultural forms may be reduced, nor is another “spiritual path” fungible into it without violence done to both. It is, instead, a specific methodology distinguished with care from any other body of mode of discipline by the objectives it serves (Cutting Through 187-206).

Trungpa’s constantly-repeated imperative to think critically is one way in which the unity of Buddhist thought as he posits it can be indicated. For instance, it arises in Trungpa’s earliest comments on meditation instruction (Meditation 62), his comments to psychiatrists some twenty years later (“Meeting”), and in his seemingly-syncretic invective against “idiot compassion,” which he opposes to “absolute compassion.” There are few, if any, concepts more central to Buddhist thought and practice than compassion. Trungpa’s instructions in compassion are also instructions in self-criticism. He borrows the term “idiot compassion” from G.I. Gurdjieff to indicate “compassion with neurosis, a slimy way of trying to fulfill your desire secretly” in which “you give the appearance of being generous and impersonal” (Game 29). In contrast, Trungpa ties absolute compassion to the Mahayana ideal of working for the liberation of all beings who suffer
in totality, and defines it as “seeing the situation as it is, directly and thoroughly. If you have to be tough, you just do it” (Game 30). The concept of absolute compassion becomes increasingly relevant in the utopian aspects of Trungpa’s work, particularly with regard to its emphasis on justice for all, as opposed to the fulfillment of a personal or exclusive desire, and a call for a generalized imposition of discipline by persons capable of wise leadership—ultimately promising to displace the class relations of capital with a hierarchy of beneficence rather than exploitation, an “enlightened society.”

Trungpa situates Buddhism tout court, not only meditation, at the site of everyday life, which involves an immanent critique of the present moment and a utopian project. His remarks on Buddhism in everyday life direct practitioners to come to consciousness of the historical moment as constitutive of subjectivity in historical time, and hence as samsaric. These imperatives are also predicated in Trungpa’s insistence on critical thinking in all domains. For instance, Trungpa insisted that one must not be satisfied with “glib and easy ways of pointing out the negative situations”; rather, he asserts that negation must be mediated through analysis and contemplation (Chaos 51). Trungpa introduces the many technical terms and elaborate categories of Buddhist philosophy to encourage his students to come to grips with their moment critically in everyday life, starting with the immediate dynamic of the teacher-student relationship in Buddhism: “We should not become so gullible that if we are asked to lick our teacher’s bottom we are willing to do so” (Journey 119). Trungpa’s high valuation of reason against passive belief and acceptance is here tied to an anti-authoritarian and antinomian streak at odds with what will emerge as a latent authoritarianism in his own Shambhala writings and the
Vajradhatu organization. To give another example, Trungpa glosses the concept of wisdom (S. prajñā) as “critical insight,” and the language he explains it signals his concern with everyday life as experienced in his moment, and not in a timeless sense: “It is prajña which enables us not to merely consume whatever is put in front of us, but to see it with critical insight” for what it is (*Meditation in Action* 87). That is, mindfulness together with critical insight are described as an anti-consumerist project in Trungpa’s writings, and critical insight as the predicate to a refusal of consumerism. Hence, Buddhist thought mobilized as contemporary social critique is implied in Trungpa’s presentation of mindfulness. Further, if mindfulness is posited as an antidote to consumerism, then it necessarily assumes a diagnosis of a specific problem (passive reactions or compensatory tactics to the historical moment) and a critical response to it (the happy renunciation he calls “hopelessness”). Buddhism and mindfulness with it, as Trungpa presents them, develop a critical analysis of present formations as constitutive of consciousness, and open onto what may be described as a dialectical historicism.

Shopping for and consuming “spiritual teachings,” self-help programs, and other forms of self-improvement is one such compensatory tactic that Trungpa takes particular issue with, starting with the popular notion that the seeker must find his or her “true self,” now an objective integral to mindfulness practice in insight meditation and in workplace authenticity programs. Trungpa does not even admit the existence of such a thing as a true self: “when you talk about true self [...] that in itself is trying to insert some positive attitude, something to the effect that you are okay. That doesn’t exist” (*Crazy* 91). Instead of finding something, which at this juncture amounts to shopping for something
and identifying with it, Trungpa will insist the seeker instead pause to think about it first. Because a further significance of the “true self” theme and Trungpa’s negation of it will emerge in subsequent chapters, I only mark here that Trungpa is pushing back against a characteristic of Buddhist discourse then current in European languages. No such concept is endorsed in Indic Buddhist texts, but it has become a prevalent concern in some translations and in the writings of foremost teachers of mindfulness, particularly those influenced by Kornfield and Stephen Levine, for reasons I describe in chapter three. This is an example of an anticipatory mindfulness of I find in Pop Buddhism that negates generalized mindfulness before its historical emergence.

Finally, for Trungpa, the work of critique is tied to an insistence on imagining concrete alternatives to the object of criticism:

it is easy to criticize the materialistic approach, both psychological and spiritual, and to destroy it logically. But the real problem we have to face is putting ourselves in the same boat as those we are criticizing, as if we had to take responsibility for running the whole world economically, spiritually, and politically. How would we do it? (Chaos 57)

Here, critical insight opens directly onto a visionary mode in Trungpa’s project; the transition from negative philosophy to a full-throated utopian aspiration and emancipatory conduct is explicit and follows the logic of Buddhist pedagogy Trungpa held fast to. And from this mediation of Buddhist dialectics into the critique of the present and the utopian mode emerges the two best-known themes of Trungpa’s published writings: his invectives against “spiritual materialism,” which detail an analysis
of the forms of consciousness in North America at the emergence of finance capitalism, and his visionary Shambhala books and trainings, which posit an earnest, material alternative to the same.

*Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* and subsequent texts present a specific critique of the contemporary. It was something of a watershed upon its publication in 1970, representing a critical intervention into the universalist conventions of the established self-help and spirituality scene of North America, represented by figures such as the American syncretist guru Ram Dass, himself a significant influence on insight meditation writers such as Levine, Salzberg, and Kabat-Zinn. As I will show, such doctrines are reproduced, significantly, in the insight meditation advice book, and in subsequent mindfulness materials. Trungpa systematically attacks these positions, deflating doctrines of self-improvement and promises of personal salvation that seem in any way oriented toward compensatory objectives—which, to Trungpa’s mind, means every last one of them. In this way, the book offers convert Buddhists a means to represent their own practice as tied to, and integral with, a rational and unmystified mode of thought, indeed a mode some find to be effective in pointing out the mystifications in the world’s other spiritual traditions as received in North America. This attitude persists to the present among many convert Buddhists and fellow travelers, for whom referring to a concept or a text attributed to a Buddhist as “New Age” is typically intended and taken as a pejorative—unfairly to New Age practitioners and doctrines.¹¹¹

Most significantly, *Cutting Through* presents a critique of contemporary North American sociality as a concrete historical formation from the point of view of subjective
experience—the characteristic forms of seeing and experiencing, the reproduction of those forms, and their contingency. As Trungpa compares psychotherapy to the media spectacle, so does he present what mindfulness writers such as Kornfield would later call the “spiritual marketplace” as nothing but a shell game, a snake-oil industry. For a “spiritual” figure such as Trungpa in 1970 in North America, this is entirely novel and arguably brazen, but it corresponds precisely to the Trungpa’s logic of absolute compassion,\(^{112}\) of which more to follow.

A discomfort with the coincidence of the religion of capitalism and Asian spiritualities, what Lau calls New Age Capitalism, obtains in the most-often reproduced definition of spiritual materialism: “There are numerous sidetracks which lead to a distorted, ego-centered version of spirituality; we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are developing spiritually when instead we are strengthening our egocentricity through spiritual techniques” (Cutting Through 3). While it may be tempting to read spiritual materialism as only a subjective or “spiritual” problem from this, given Trungpa’s insistence on the extrinsic formation and maintenance of “ego,” it is best understood as a problem at the point of contact of consciousness and conditions in consumer capitalism.

In Trungpa’s thinking on spiritual materialism, the work of seeing through the phantasmagoria of the archetypal self-help commodity, the advice book, becomes a synecdoche for the role of a “critical attitude” into the everyday lives of Buddhist practitioners in late-capitalist North America. The critique of spiritual materialism is presented as an aspect of coming to critical consciousness of the contingencies and determinations of this moment, and in that sense a critical function of mindfulness is
described which is legible throughout many of the books attributed to Trungpa, not only in its sequel, *The Myth of Freedom*.

Through this concept, Trungpa directs the attention of consumers of advice books from premade consolations and what would later be called “personal belief systems,” consumer goods, toward what he calls “the body situation”—the gestalt of embodiment in historical time, in the textures of everyday life. Here, spiritual materialism is understood more broadly to mean “relating to experiences in terms of their possible benefit to ego,” a tactic that tends “to associate anything to do with spirituality with a dream world or heaven, with something that has nothing to do with the body situation, with something that altogether bypasses the kitchen sink” (*Glimpses* 20). Even though all historical formations are “shunya” or empty, and hence history lacks any teleology of development by this logic, Trungpa asserts that temporality and historical action are significant, have meaning, and must be attended to with care at the granular level of who is expected to wash the dishes. Further, Trungpa rejects instrumentalized belief systems out of hand that shift attention away from the specificity of embodiment into a homogenized ideal, inclusive of “any approach—such as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, or Christian—that provides us with techniques to try to associate with the good, the better, the best—or the ultimately good, the divine” (*Crazy* 6). This refusal extends to any belief in the possibility of personal security and comfort (*Glimpses* 6), or of a happy, pain-free or stress-free lifestyle: “The problem seems to be the attitude that the pain should go, then we will be happy. That is our mistaken belief. The pain never goes, and we will never be happy” (*Game* 60). Trungpa’s premise that the self-improvement programs of spirituality
as marketed in North America are absolutely hopeless amounts to a renunciation of the
tactic of shopping for any pregiven mode of authenticity or solution to the hurt—formally
equivalent of the negation of the means to negation that characterizes Trungpa’s
Madhyamaka—and an imperative, instead, to actively attend to the qualitative
variabilities of the microbial cultures one already has in consciousness, and one’s
material situation in relation to the totality of others. This is the significance of Trungpa’s
insistence that “we cannot afford to make our own studies into supermarket merchandise”
(Journey 19). The figure of going shopping for groceries, a leitmotif among these books,
describes the problem of addressing “the body situation” in this historical juncture.

From here, Trungpa mobilizes the spiritual materialism concept as a lever with
which the practitioner may push him or herself away from the commodity world entire.
In contrast to the hero-with-a-thousand-faces universalisms characteristic of North
American spirituality at the moment of this intervention and after, for Trungpa the only
characteristic the great myths of the past have in common now, as they are presented in
the “spiritual marketplace,” is their delimiting and mystifying qualities, their use to
reproduce the same forms of self-imposed inhibition and restriction while promising
emancipation from the same, what I have described elsewhere as the religion of
capitalism. Trungpa compares the appeals of contemporary gurus and missionaries in the
spiritual marketplace to the contractualized exchanges of presumably dishonest vacuum
and used car salesmen, making promises predicated in false hope and false need: “So
much hope is planted in your heart. This is playing on your weakness. It creates further
confusion with regard to pain” (Game 61). Put differently, Trungpa is grappling with the
ways in which aspirations for freedom from hurt—in specifically Buddhist diction, promised refuges from suffering—are mobilized instead to diminish human freedom and reproduce the hurt again and again. Further, Trungpa attempts to think through the consequences of cutting through and renouncing this vicious cycle. In doing so, he resolves that freedom becomes increasingly possible to the extent that one’s actions and consciousness are less and less determined by internalized extrinsic factors, such as the affirmation of objectives given by the logic of the present environment.

With hope for any off-the-shelf alternative renounced, one becomes free not to shop for premade authenticities and programs of self-improvement, and instead to work practically in the moment toward creating what might be imagined as an authentically-authentic alternative to the moment. The practice of hopelessness becomes a Great Refusal:

The minute you discover your hesitations, confusions, insanity, and so on, you want to get rid of them. You look for all kinds of remedies. You shop around and find that fundamentally none of them work [...] the only and best remedy is hopelessness—which is your own product. It doesn’t cost any money or energy. You don’t have to go to the supermarket and it’s cheap and good. It’s organic.

*(Game 63)*

The recurring supermarket *leitmotif* in Trungpa’s writings is not incidental. It describes the experience of attempting to address one’s felt needs and discomforts through the mediation of consumer capitalism, the forms given thereby, which are designed to reproduce those same felt needs—hence the hopelessness of the consuming subject and
the seeker of happiness in self-help books. Further, in Trungpa’s supermarket figure, hopelessness is presented both as the antonym to spiritual materialism, and as constant inquiry forward (Crazy 11), which he articulates elsewhere as a kind of alienated persistence with the experience of consuming advice book after advice book for tactics and answers: “hopelessness is very intelligent. You keep looking. You flip page after page, saying, ‘That’s hopeless, that’s hopeless’” but not keeping or collecting any of it (Game 62). Put differently, renunciation in the form of letting go of all of it is taken as a superior approach to any path of accumulation throughout Trungpa’s public writings. Mindfulness understood as an active everyday-life practice of hopelessness, by Trungpa’s logic, marks the qualitative transformation of the consumer into the meditator: “You develop a sense of humor, and you don’t become completely lazy and stupid” (Game 62). And as with meditation, Trungpa insists that “in transcending spiritual materialism, there is no goal” (Crazy 15)—which is to say that, here again, the principle of negating the means to negation is in evidence, and the refusal of the moment is made not at the point of practice, but in objectives.

Where the writings on spiritual materialism are built around a logic of active negation, of hopelessness—of not waiting for an alternative to the causes of one’s suffering to descend providentially—Trungpa’s utopianism is of an earthier, build-it-ourselves bent. It is less psychological or philosophical than cultural and sociable. The popular book Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior, published in 1983, begins with a chapter called “Creating an Enlightened Society;” Trungpa had initiated a series of trainings in Shambhala culture and practice in 1977, seven years after Cutting Through.
In this volume and its sequels, Trungpa’s vision of emptiness and absolute compassion open onto a vision for enlightened society in North America after economic liberalization. A shift from the critique of spiritual materialism that saturates *Cutting Through* and *Myth of Freedom* to an affirmation of a specific alternative is in evidence. “The goal of the Shambhala teachings is to uplift human conditions,” Trungpa declares, which he ties to leadership and vision (*Great* 130). Significantly, Trungpa’s goal is not to enhance one’s personal capacity to deal with hostile conditions that are tacitly naturalized and assumed to be inevitable, as in MBSR. In *The Myth of Freedom*, mindfulness had been presented as the “vanguard of awareness” (50); here, *mindful people*, in the plural, are posited as a *social* vanguard. Trungpa’s cynicism toward the subject in the singular yields to a sunny optimism with regard to the prospects for collaborative, social subjectivity.

This vanguard has its center of gravity in an explicitly secular structure of feeling\(^ {115} \) that is intended to resist the consumerist logic of the transcendent consumer Trungpa diagnoses—again, articulated primarily through advice books. These teachings, Trungpa claims, “use the image of the Shambhala kingdom to represent the ideal of secular enlightenment, that is, the possibility of uplifting our personal existence and that of others without any religious outlook” (*Shambhala* 27). To this end, Trungpa mobilizes Central and East Asian cultural themes around warriorship and royalty, as in the redeployment of the Samurai practice of kyudo and the Tibetan myth of Shambhala and King Gesar as he understood them from Tibetan texts, as distinct from Orientalist topoi as Shangri-La. Among these themes and practices, as in Trungpa’s Buddhist programs for
North America, foremost is seated meditation, presented here as a secular “discipline for developing both gentleness towards ourselves and appreciation for our world” (Shambhala 36). The specific meditation prescribed in Shambhala is the same straightforward breath meditation later presented in therapeutic applications of anapassati meditation (MBSR), but with a stronger emphasis on keeping an upright and dignified physical posture (Shambhala 36-41). In contrast to MBSR and other secular iterations of mindfulness, social and collaborative practices are foregrounded here. Trungpa reiterates his longstanding position with regard to meditation: “if you want to fully understand this practice, you need direct, personal instruction” (Shambhala 36). The development of competent leaders, teachers, and institutions capable of supporting collaboration in learning among student-meditators becomes a priority; as it happens, many contemporary mindfulness advocates have been trained and authorized as meditation teachers through Shambhala International.

In the Shambhala books, Trungpa extends the martial diction of his earlier books into equally-militarized discourses of leadership and fearlessness. This introduces a degree of conceptual richness into Trungpa’s project not in evidence in the mindfulness scene. For instance, if the principle of “creating an enlightened society” is that one’s nature is fundamentally good, then it follows one’s practice begins when one ceases “being afraid of who you are” (Shambhala 28)—that the “path of the warrior” involves vanquishing fear, not affirming or reproducing conflict. Further, explicit advocacy of peace and nonviolence through meditation are in evidence in the path of the warrior-meditator: “meditation is regarded as a good and in fact excellent way to overcome
warfare in the world: our own warfare as well as greater warfare” (Shambhala 41). While it is anticipated in Trungpa’s previous comments on absolute compassion, as presented so far, the warrior-for-peace is prima facie a contradictory figure. Trungpa’s attempted resolution to this contradiction in the Shambhala vision begins with his thinking on leadership.

Here, one’s capacity to lead is “based on your own development, how confident you feel in yourself, and how much training you have” (Great 166), a theme that re-emerges in the corporate-leadership advice books of the present decade, and especially in the discourse of mindful leadership, which, I will argue, honors a different objective from realizing a just society. Trungpa presents the Shambhala warrior as a leader, a “universal monarch,” a king or queen who is “willing to open his or her heart to others [...] so that others can see your heart beating, see your red flesh, and see the blood pulsating through your veins and arteries” (Shambhala 157)—a macabre image of embodied transparency and sincerity that, Trungpa claims, marks “the fruition of developing what is called the warrior’s ‘authentic presence’” (Shambhala 159), a concept that later becomes conflated with mindfulness.117 The image of the transparent monarch also describes the confidence of a meditator who has overcome fear to the point she is no longer “embarrassed” by herself (Heart 184)—she can make herself vulnerable and exposed in the most absolute sense and on her own terms; further, because she is unarmed and unprotected, she is in no position to fight, and hence she must be gracious and kind to survive.

However, another contradiction emerges here. While the warrior is dubbed a “universal monarch,” the Shambhala books describe the training and conduct of warriors,
foot soldiers who are capable of leadership, but not leaders of warriors, not kings or queens. While the contents of Shambhala training materials are inaccessible to me—due to financial and logistical constraints, I have never attended a Shambhala training, and hence my reading is limited to publicly-available materials only—I propose that the egalitarian logic of Trungpa’s teachings on tantra may offer the contradictory warrior who would be king a way out: “There is no tantric finishing school, designed to train people for the tantric aristocracy or to develop a deceptive but well-mannered king” (Journey 36). The grotesque metaphor of the monarch opening her literal heart for all may also function as an earthy, embodied opposite to the hypothetical image-oriented monarch Trungpa anticipates and dismisses.

If not as a “tantric aristocracy” led by a public-relations-driven familial dynasty or in relation to one, then how do warriors, all of them leaders and none of them vassals, relate to each other? Here, the egalitarian logic of the warrior-in-plural abuts the doctrine of “natural hierarchy” in Trungpa’s Shambhala teachings, and from this contradiction emerges a radical vision for social justice, in which the warrior-for-peace figure finds its significance. Here, Trungpa emphasizes the need to work with material circumstances, intervening into causes and conditions (Myth 97), into history as samsara. The injunction is not to evade “the closed and poverty-stricken world” (Shambhala 172) or imagine that everyday life, the field of temporal action, though empty, is nothing or insignificant—a propos of the “body situation,” Trungpa insists that “you don’t leave dirty dishes in the sink” (Great 88). In this context, the practice of meditation and concomitant states of openness and freedom produce an appreciation for what Trungpa
calls “natural heirarchy” (*Shambhala* 172). Trungpa’s thinking on natural hierarchy opens onto a radical appeal for authentic social justice, which, Trungpa emphasizes, is a feature of enlightened society. This move resolves the contradiction in the figure of the warrior-for-peace through its egalitarian logic (but not all of *Shambhala*’s contradictions), and shows how Shambhala proposes a radical alternative to the economic liberalization and corresponding socialities emergent in the historical moment of its debut. This argument is elaborated primarily *Great Eastern Sun* (2001), the first sequel to *Shambhala*, published posthumously and edited from talks Trungpa gave at Shambhala trainings in North America in the years 1980-1983, with photographs and poems.

According to Trungpa, natural hierarchy, characterized as inevitable as the changing seasons, is in evidence in the teacher-student relationship (*Great 65*). Depending on the context, some are teachers, some are taught; some are leaders, and others are led. This banal and seemingly coercive line of thought soon takes an unexpected turn: “The hierarchy of natural order is that human beings should enjoy what they have and be given what they deserve. At the same time, you are encouraged to grow up [...] So natural hierarchy is also connected with renunciation, in that one has to *yield* to some system of discipline” (*Great 67*). When Trungpa indicates that this imperative is to be contrasted against a libertarian or, in his own patois, “nouveau riche” doctrine (*Great 67*), here he marks a transition in the objective of his project from subjective emancipation to social justice, implausible as this may seem. Like other twentieth century writers engaged with the utopian mode, such as Ernst Bloch and Peter Sloterdijk, Trungpa articulates his position in part by reference to the historical experience of the
early Soviet period. In brief, natural hierarchy presents an alternative mode of social organization, a presumably beneficent one, intended to displace and supercede capitalist social relations.

If the Shambhala vision and its approach to hierarchy and discipline were generalized and realized—and Trungpa certainly thought it could and should be\textsuperscript{119}—it would necessarily involve bringing the capitalist class to “yield” to an alternative system of discipline by which certain exclusive rights would be renounced for the benefit of the totality. Among these is the power to accumulate wealth at the expense of labor, which characterizes class relations under capitalism and ensures that the belabored, numerically the vast majority, are never given what they deserve: the whole of what their labor-power produces. A “tough” intervention such as this, generalized from the absolute compassion Trungpa advocates, would require a literal vanguard of warriors capable of total war, which is well beyond the capability and mandate of the military units he initiated, the Dorje Kasung—hence its implausibility. That said, an explicit anti-capitalist sentiment is encoded in the Shambhala cycle of advice books. The radical undercurrent to his own work is not lost on Trungpa, who, while criticizing the leadership of the USSR for its lack of vision, praises the communist imperative to end class society for the sake of justice for all—the ambition to ensure that all and not only a few get what they deserve. Trungpa does not criticize the Soviet system for its system of discipline or vision of justice, the “natural hierarchy” of leader and led, but for the practice of its leaders to simply “copy capitalism” in ways that contradicted what Trungpa had praised in Marx and Engels’ call, “‘Workers of the world unite!’” (Great 98). Trungpa’s criticism of the USSR is not that
of the conventional cold-war era religious leader based in the US and Canada. He does not insist the Soviets practiced the wrong ideology, but that in failing to realize their own vision of justice, they fell into practicing an imitation of the “materialism” of the capitalist West. The USSR of the Brezhnev era is blamed here for having become too much like us, unfree the way we are, unfree because unjust, and not simply too unfree. Trungpa does not call for anything like a revolutionary party in his published work, but when he proposes that “a study of Western historical figures who tried to achieve the Shambhala vision of enlightened society” (Great 134-35) would be of value, a canon that may include names such as Marx and Lenin is implied. Overall, the objective of “natural hierarchy” in the Shambhala books is not to advance a theological system that naturalizes the structure of present injustices, as spiritual and self-help writings in the vein of New Age Capitalism years tends to do, but to promote a just distribution of the means to freedom, which is positioned as a desirable alternative to the status quo. Hence Trungpa’s claim: “hierarchy has been mismanaged and misused. The ambition of the Shambhala vision is to rectify that situation, not to make the situation more autocratic or dictatorial” (Great 102).

The aspiration of the practice of renunciation here ties a subjective Enlightenment practice to a social one that shares a strange affinity to early communist utopianism in that the Shambhala books articulate a historically specific mode of collaborative renunciation. Shambhala overall is a secular project in the same way that “intelligent design” is, as Forrest and Gross argue, a nominally secular cipher for the religious doctrine of creationism. By that I mean, Shambhala is clearly of and about Pop
Buddhism, and not only because it co-existed institutionally and physically under the umbrella of Trungpa’s organization of Buddhist centers, Vajradhatu. I also mark here that Trungpa staged a Buddhist intervention into North American culture in the form of a sociality, not a psychology (chapter one). At the point of participation and consumption, the distinction between secular Shambhala and religious Buddhism as represented by Vajradhatu is elusive at best. Vajradhatu was formally dissolved into Shambhala International and rebranded as “Shambhala Buddhism” after Trungpa’s demise, so that Shambhala has been consumed as a secularized, modernized, and mindful Buddhism since at least 2000. Further, Shambhala’s utopian premises and its insistence on realizing an enlightened society in the present are visible in his writings on spiritual materialism, as in Trungpa’s claim that “People who reject the materialism of American society and set themselves apart from it are unwilling to face themselves […] they are unwilling to work with the world as it is. We cannot expect to be helped by divine beings” (Myth 97).

Significantly, Trungpa’s claims here and elsewhere assume a dialectic of conditions and consciousness whereby what may seem intrinsic is an articulation of extrinsic forces, and hence the critical insight (S. prajñā) of the meditator opens on to the material and social world, not into the mystification of a transcendent subject.

In terms of personal conduct, the logical transition from critical insight to renunciation, a Great Refusal of the promises of the present, also obtains in the Shambhala cycle: not rejecting anything a priori, but acting with discrimination, “clear seeing or clear thinking” (Great 27-28), is prioritized over observing certain precepts, but for one precept. The most obvious instruction regarding renunciation in the Shambhala
materials concerns what Trungpa calls “the Big No,” originally directed at his designated successor, Thomas Rich, but then generalized for his entire organization: “You cannot by any means, for any religious, spiritual, or metaphysical reasons, step on an ant or kill your mosquitos—at all. That is Buddhism. That is Shambhala” (Great 141). Again here, as the conduct of the Shambhala warrior is predicated in absolute compassion and mediated through analysis and contemplation, so are Trungpa’s Buddhism and his Shambhala project equated. Insofar as it is a precise heir to Trungpa’s presentation of Buddhism, the Shambhala cycle represents a vision by consumers may wish for North American sociality to be transformed, not into the People’s Republic of Shambhala, but the Kingdom of Shambhala, and without any specified tactics corresponding to the strategy of bringing class-divided North America to yield to a system of discipline implemented by well-trained and nonviolent warriors-for-peace toward the end of realizing an enlightened, otherwise-organized society. While Shambhala is not unproblematic, it is the opposite of the reproduction of contemporary class relations that figures in generalized mindfulness, even as it is called upon to legitimize many mindful programs (chapters four, five, and six).

There remain in and of the Shambhala cycle a number of irresolvable contradictions. Among them is the institutional tension between Trungpa’s cautions against authoritarianism, and the dictatorial style of leadership he employed. The earthiness of his discourse abuts his preference for the affectations of royalty, styling his wife a “Lady,” his designated successor a “Regent,” and his home a “court.” The optimism for the project of creating an enlightened society as mediated through and the
Eastern Spirituality aisle of major bookstores and promoted thereby avoids the glance of the insistence on the *hopelessness* of the promises of a better life from spiritual masters and spirituality-shopping from the books attributed to Trungpa that already line those shelves. Trungpa’s repeated claims to secularism bely the demonstrably religious nature of Trungpa’s thought and *its* “background.”

Similarly, the logic of reversals Trungpa engineered in his students’ lives are at once striking and baffling, and present a kind of elitism in tension with the egalitarianism of Trungpa’s tantric thinking and his vision for social justice. For instance, the youth who came of age in opposition to the Vietnam War pictured in *Loka* (1974) train to become Shambhala warriors by 1977; a segment of the anti-establishment scene quickly acclimates itself to the business-suit culture Trungpa instituted, in which one earns the right to wear differentiated lapel pins on one’s suit jacket upon successfully completing graduated levels of Shambhala Training. In practice, Shambhala Training is necessarily about cultivating an enlightened leadership, a cadre of leaders limited in number, because the training programs themselves are more expensive in time, money, and logistics than comparable programs—bracketing the question of its exoticism and complexity, which present a challenging learning curve for persons lacking a liberal-arts degree, and hence many working-class and people of color—to be generalized. Many current Shambhala Training members must crowdsource funding for their ongoing trainings through a website called *The Offering Bowl*. So it does not seem accidental that the most significant impact the Shambhala cycle specifically has had on mindfulness, apart from its institutional role in training many meditation teachers and spirituality writers, is in the
genre of business and leadership advice books, where the diction of “authentic presence” and “fearlessness” is omnipresent. That is: *business advice books now call on explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-advice-book structures of feeling after Trungpa.* Such is the paradox of generalized mindfulness: when mobilized in corporations and everyday life as a workplace, mindfulness seems to reproduce and affirm the status quo, but in doing so, it sets up as an image of aspiration—a tacit objective for practice—an explicitly anti-capitalist imperative. Generalized mindfulness consistently evokes aspirations for objectives counter to its own, typically in its evocation of Buddhisms such as Trungpa’s as a picture of wellbeing, peace, and happiness.

Because Trungpa was the first Buddhist master to reach a mass audience in North America, and certainly the first Tibetan Buddhist to do so, the organizational forms and the discourses he developed became normative for North American convert Buddhists, including those instrumental in the construction of mindfulness—which is to say that Trungpa, cast in the role of the “Oriental Monk,” had a significant hand in inventing the spatial and narrative experience of mindfulness instruction and practice. Institutionally, this included a set of protocols for training and professionalizing lay meditation teachers alongside and in the same room as a Buddhist organization (Shambhala and Vajradhatu, respectively), each cross-legitimizing the other. This organizational model of a network of local Dharma centers in cities, with rural training centers for retreats and intensives, under one administrative umbrella—not unlike a franchise system—was imitated by many others following after. As an author, Trungpa established the pattern of starting with a memoir (*Born in Tibet*), and then giving many public lectures that were
transcribed and revised into books bearing his name, a pattern followed by the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist masters, but rarely as effectively or productively. Trungpa’s prodigious intellect allowed him to improvise explanations of closely-argued and densely-conceptualized philosophy fluently in the language of Chee-Tohs and Pop Art, freeing him from the need to rely on translators or interpreters, and allowing him to experiment with different modes of address. Even with the fetter of alcoholism and against the public and private objections made against his openly polyamorous and high-flying lifestyle, Trungpa’s creativity and audaciousness have not been matched in Anglophone Buddhist letters since his decease in 1987. Most importantly, *Mindfulness as a mainstream phenomenon was made possible by Trungpa’s early and authoritative generalization of Buddhist meditation practice as a secular, rational, and not-mystical thing to do in the context of everyday life in North America,* which carried along with it an aspiration for alternatives to the present in and of historical time. While much of the mindfulness scene runs on trackwork laid by Trungpa and his followers thirty and more years ago, there is much in Trungpa’s written work that exceeds the scope of the mindfulness scene or stands in direct contrast to it, especially at the point of objectives for practice. Nowhere does Trungpa advocate for a better adjustment of the meditator to stressful situations, for him or her to find hope in conventional routines; rather, *he calls for a critical engagement with the historical, social, and psychological production of what is now naturalized as stress through seated meditation, to become mindful of this.* Everyday life practice as Trungpa prescribed it and in some ways as carried forward by his followers, represents a kind of surplus consciousness: a response to the moment that
produces something extra. In this instance, the impulse to reach for the sedatives of the self-help industry (by Trungpa’s logic), the books and other media that “seekers” shop for and Trungpa produced in abundance, are redeployed to become a position of critique of the moment in history that produced the same. Here, Trungpa’s projects taken as a whole anticipate the paradox of mindfulness, a formation of its moment that challenges its moment.

By the mid-1980s, it had become obvious that the critical function Trungpa advocated to his students was not applied to the Vajradhatu organization’s own direction and procedures, as evidenced in the authoritarian, catastrophic, and indeed fatal leadership of Trungpa’s designated “regent” from 1987-1990, when he also died.122 Today, while the heir organization to the institutional structure Trungpa founded persists, and while the editors responsible for his spoken and written archive remarket him as a “mindfulness” teacher, Trungpa’s most explicit contemporary influence seen in popular advice books by the nun Pema Chödrön; the current leader of Shambhala International, Sakyong Mipham; and in those of business authors Michael Carroll and Lodro Rinzler, among many others.

THE IMPULSE TO HAPPINESS

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, especially after Trungpa’s passing in 1987 and having been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1989, has become the foremost figure of Tibetanness and contemporary Buddhist authority, and hence frequently referenced and cited in and of mindfulness. While he does represent a figure of
peace and wellbeing as such, his Buddhism also puts an equally strong emphasis on critical thought and doctrinal study, and involves a full-throated engagement with contemporary science. Where Trungpa had parried with the positive psychologists of the 1970s, the Dalai Lama pivots to a concern for cognitive science and cosmology in which important scientists and institutions, and the Dalai Lama and Pop Buddhism, mutually legitimate each other. The Dalai Lama also shares Trungpa’s willingness to mobilize seated meditation as a secular path, as something like a Buddhism for people who are not Buddhists and do not want to be that is put forward by a foremost Buddhist leader, authorized by his Buddhism to give secular advice on living a happy and well-balanced life. Even though the word “secular” requires much qualification in this context, happiness thus understood becomes an important theme in mindfulness. Happiness contrasts sharply with Trungpa’s ultimately unmarketable vision of hopelessness, even as both gloss the same Buddhist doctrine, Buddha-nature (S. Tathagātagarbha) in the context of the same negative philosophy (S. Madhyamaka). The Dalai Lama’s promotion of social justice, predicated like Trungpa’s “absolute compassion” in the Mahayana Buddhism they share in common, is generalized to a concern for environmentalism as alleviation of suffering for the totality of all sentient life. Finally, The Dalai Lama’s public figure becomes available for use media spectacle and alternative-spirituality bookshelf in ways that Trungpa’s was not in the 1990s, perhaps because his appeals to happiness, science, and the good life are immediately recognizable as valuable and virtuous to dissatisfied and time-crunched consumers, and because Vajradhatu and Trungpa’s reputation had imploded within three years of Trungpa’s demise. In the
celibate, tee-totaling Dalai Lama’s books, the Tibetan Buddhism that Trungpa had popularized and generalized as appropriate to everyday life in contemporary North America is redeployed around an image of peace and gentleness—values conventionally associated with the “Oriental Monk” in North America—not of hide-your-daughters danger, suggestions of social revolution, or improvisatory puzzlement. Finally, happiness is advanced in the writings of the Dalai Lama as a kind of nonviolent defensive posture easily allied to the mindfulness practice familiar to readers of Kabat-Zinn and the insight meditation writers.\textsuperscript{124}

In terms of his writing practice, the Dalai Lama follows Trungpa’s example, beginning with a memoir and then proceeding to publish numerous volumes under his own name with the assistance of editors and collaborators. \textit{My Land, My People} (1977) follows the pattern Trungpa had established with \textit{Born in Tibet}—offering his life story as a way to introduce himself to the Anglophone sphere. \textit{My Land, My People} presents then-recently displaced Tibetan refugees as \textit{a cause appropriate for good people everywhere}, and Tibetan culture itself as a good life, as a way of peace worth preserving and emulating. Here, the Tibetans are plucky and admirable: not materially well-off, but healthy, happy, and rich with a reserve of inner peace in the face of adversity. The appeal of \textit{Tibetanness} thus defined corresponds to the felt needs of the belabored subject, to live well under diminished and increasingly limited circumstances, as it is mobilized in the self-help books of this period (chapter one). In these books, the image of the Dalai Lama is that of the supreme leader among the “Oriental Monks” Iwamura identifies as promising to enable capitalist societies to save themselves from themselves. The Dalai
Lama is presented here as a sober political leader and humble representative of an oppressed minority, and more significantly, his persona becomes indistinguishable rhetorically and institutionally from the Tibetan cause, as in Richard Gere’s forward to *The Meaning of Life* (1992): “His Holiness has worked tirelessly to free his people from a brutal and systematic genocide” (vii). Obviously, the Dalai Lama is involved in an entirely different context for calls for peace and happiness from ordinary persons seeking relief from stress at work for themselves through MBSR, but appeals to peace and happiness certainly *resonate* (to use the mindfulness patois) with those who experience everyday life as conflicted and unhappy, and who may wish to identify with a cause that is at once good and unthreatening. Similarly, after the crises at Vajradhatu after Trungpa’s passing, The Dalai Lama’s emergence as an altogether different kind of Tibetan Buddhist leader from Trungpa gave convert Buddhists and fellow travelers a safe, comforting image with which to identify and insight meditation writers a form of Tibetanness on which they could lean for legitimacy that would be neither completely necessary nor take the form it did had the Trungpa phenomenon never been. The Tibetanness that the Dalai Lama represents is simultaneously enabled by Trungpa’s blazing of the trail, and defined by a particular distancing from that trail.

While it is not clear that the Dalai Lama explicitly framed his public persona to distinguish it from Trungpa’s, he had little alternative but to work in the considerable wake Trungpa left behind him in North America and in the Anglophone world generally. That said, the contrast between the two is significant. Where Trungpa disavowed anything like “the good life,” openly leading what can only be described as a hedonistic
lifestyle by conventional standards as he explored the limits of non-monastic, non-celibate tantric practice as “crazy wisdom,” the Dalai Lama came to embody a renunciatory version of the good life, of Tibetanness as a via contemplativa and as a wholesome mode of resistance to injustice and violence (here in contrast to a rising, belligerent, and anxiety-provoking China) in his role as the leader of a post-genocide Tibet in diaspora. Pico Iyer contrasts the Dalai Lama’s pedagogy from “‘crazy wisdom,’ ideas and acts so far beyond the norm that most of the rest of us don’t know what to make of them” (120), while observing that the Dalai Lama does recognize the legitimacy of “crazy wisdom” as a traditional and effective form of practice. This recognition matters because the Dalai Lama’s 1993 statements at the Western Buddhist Teachers Conference indicate a skepticism regarding Trungpa’s formulation of crazy wisdom as a method of teaching and practice and position him as a counterpoint to Trungpa’s total commitment thereto in his own life and in his teachings significant to the insight meditation and mindfulness scene. In 1998, I observed an insight meditation teacher claim that, in regard to Trungpa, that there is no such thing as “crazy wisdom” in Tibetan Buddhism, on the authority of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. This is less significant in its misrepresentation of the Dalai Lama’s position than as a snapshot of the period in which insight meditation was positioning itself relative to Buddhist norms and protocols, a positioning described in chapter three. In contrast to Trungpa’s celebratory call for the creation of a new culture, the apocalyptic-toned Shambhala Kingdom, through the intervention of the sacred warrior and imposition of “natural hierarchy,” the Dalai Lama becomes a singular figure of peace and nonviolence, as in the Tibetan Freedom Concerts (1996 and onward), the
Kalachakra (S. Kālacakra) initiations for world peace, and Nobel Prize for Peace in 1989 for his efforts in preserving and nurturing an oppressed community in exile.

Paradoxically, the Dalai Lama arguably is more significant to mindfulness as a public figure of nonviolence and happiness than he is in the content of his teachings, but at the same time, little contributes more to his public persona than the discourses in and around the books attributed to him.

The Dalai Lama’s public comments on happiness, often pitched as secular in origin and nature, emerge directly from his attempts to articulate Buddhist thought to English speakers. For instance, in *Dzogchen* (2000), a collection of transcribed and edited teachings the Dalai Lama gave in North America and Europe in the 1980s, happiness emerges as a central concept and thus a longstanding theme for the Dalai Lama. Here, happiness is understood a state of freedom from determination and conditioning by causes and conditions, and as is the basis of equality, insofar as an instinct to happiness is something all have in common—a gloss of Buddhanature analogous to Trungpa’s “basic goodness” and “hopelessness”: “All of us have a natural instinct to desire happiness and avoid suffering” (99). *The Art of Happiness* (1998), a bestseller, crystallizes happiness thus understood as a secular path of fearlessness and fulfilment as mediated through the speculations, assumptions, and selective editing of a positive psychologist. This is a familiar repertoire after Trungpa, but also a fundamental contradiction given the Dalai Lama’s status as a globally-recognized religious leader. Howard Cutler, the book’s co-author, proposes to glean and collate secular life advice from a man regarded by his followers as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion—a divine
being. Cutler, a psychiatrist, organized this book to include public comments and heavily excerpted interviews with the Dalai Lama. Noticing that the Dalai Lama seems happy and fulfilled, Cutler “began to wonder if one could identify a set of his beliefs or practices that could be utilized by non-Buddhists as well—practices that could be directly applied to our lives to simply help us become happier, stronger, perhaps less afraid” (Art 4). Cutler actively and explicitly omits the obviously Buddhist content of the Dalai Lama’s comments. Twenty years prior, Cutler’s description of a secular path to strength and fearlessness in a frenzied world could have been a description of then-emerging Shambhala Training; by the late 1990s, it ties the Dalai Lama tightly to the intensifying discourse of happiness and wellbeing, especially as Cutler presents him as the foremost authority on happiness, as the embodiment of the good and well-lived life—precisely the image that is drawn into the discourse of mindfulness generally and in its appeals to the science of wellbeing in particular through the writings of Goleman and self-help guides of positive psychologists such as Sonja Lyubomirsky.

In this context, the Dalai Lama asserts: “I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness” (Art 13). This is to be accomplished by the practice of identifying, in oneself, “those factors which lead to happiness, and those factors which lead to suffering,” and acting upon this knowledge (Art 15). An active, analytic process is prescribed: the practitioner applies antidotes to the poisons of the mind (hatred, greed, ignorance) when appropriate, addressing negativity with positivity (Art 239-243). In this volume, happiness is thus negatively defined as the absence of the causes of suffering, and positively defined in terms of inner contentment, feelings of self-worth and purpose,
and capacity to care for others. At the point of practice at the contemporary moment, happiness amounts to a renunciation of causes of dissatisfaction, which the Dalai Lama-via-Cutler regularly locates in consumerism and media spectacle. This stands in contrast to Cutler’s claim that “happiness is determined more by one’s state of mind than by external events” (Art 20). Cutler’s underscored claim assumes the same logic of stress as maladaptation that Selye and Kabat-Zinn promote, and it is in tension with the dialectical engagement between consciousness and conditions that Cutler attributes to the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama’s emphasis on analysis and dialectical thought in evidence here is integral to his public teaching overall, starting with some of his earliest books. A pattern is visible: one is asked to think critically first, and only after that to practice meditation. In some instances, as in The Art of Happiness, analytical thought works as a kind of meditation practice in itself. Thought and meditation are by no means terms in opposition here.127 For example, The Dalai Lama at Harvard (1988) was edited from a series of lectures given in 1981, introducing the Buddhist path. He leads with an explanation on critical analysis as his point of departure: logic, reasoning, dialectics. Only after this does he move on to the conventional starting point for Buddhist discourse, which is the pessimistic historicism of the miasma that is samsara, the suffering of conditioned, determined existence. The Dalai Lama’s insistence on the practice of a negative philosophy and of mediating evidence through systematic analysis is at odds with his reception and use by mindfulness leaders. For instance, only the second half of this frequently-cited passage is quoted in mindfulness books:128 “My confidence in venturing
into science lies in my basic belief that as in science so in Buddhism, understanding the nature of reality is pursued by means of critical investigation: if scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon those claims” (Universe 3). I quote this in full because it appears to be less a full-throated endorsement of the certainty attributed to science, as it is often taken among mindfulness advocates, than of critical inquiry. While the Dalai Lama suggests that Buddhists may have something to learn from scientists, he qualifies his statement in such a way as to render uncertain just which Buddhist claims may need to be reconsidered, and what kinds of reasoning, not evidence, would prove conclusive. Specifically here, the Dalai Lama demands “scientific analysis” and not evidence of science—and that scientific claims must be evaluated on Buddhist terms, not the reverse, as implied in mindfulness books such as Search Inside Yourself (47) and the assumptions of psychological Buddhism as reproduced in mindfulness discourses.

In his public engagements, the Dalai Lama, among Buddhist leaders, may be the most engaged with science, scientists, and scientific institutions. His interest is less in psychology than in cosmology and cognitive science, in which he is accepted by some scientists as an authority. This interest characterizes many of the books attributed to him, and hence his public persona. MindScience (1991) is a record of a symposium held at Harvard University in March 1991, in which “eastern” and “western” approaches to mind are set in dialogue; the Dalai Lama and Goleman are among the participants. The Dalai Lama is an authority here—one among many—and is discursively granted a place at the table among neuroscientists and Ivy League academics. Claims on behalf of mindfulness
by MDs remain tentative and preliminary (Mindscience 47) in this text, a close contemporary to the comparatively certain and prescriptive Full Catastrophe. Overall, books like The Dalai Lama at Harvard and The Dalai Lama at MIT (2008) rhetorically tie the Dalai Lama to elite US institutions, by presenting him as an authority in modes of knowledge that are valued in such institutions. Whatever the Dalai Lama may embody, it is Ivy League material now. In North America, this serves the rhetorical function of universalizing the Dalai Lama as a mainstream public authority and not only as a Buddhist, and by the Dalai Lama’s aegis legitimizing the scientists who collaborate with him, such as Goleman and Arthur Zajonc, as authorities on meditation and via contemplativa. Here also, the Dalai Lama has participated in the positioning of the Buddhist as the image of mindful wellbeing, by asking particular Tibetan Buddhist masters to participate in brain-scan studies led by Richard Davidson.

The Dalai Lama’s interest in science is not limited to the sciences of the mind, but extends into a critical appraisal of the environment taken for granted by those who assume stress is a problem of maladaptation to an indifferent, immutable habitat. This opens onto an appeal to environmental activism on behalf of all sentient beings as an objective for Buddhist practice. Gentle Bridges (1992) records a 1987 meeting of scientists with him and his circle in Dharamsala—one of a series meetings called “Mind and Life.” This material is explicitly about cognitive science, but the Dalai Lama shows a persistent interest in widening the discussion to include cosmology; he proposes points of contact between the Kalachakra Tantra and contemporary physics as points of departure (Gentle 77-78). The Dalai Lama’s purpose with science here anticipates the utopian
themes elaborated elsewhere: “to speak always for the importance of compassion and kindness in order to help build a better, happier human society, and a bright future” (*Gentle* 1). Such utopianism is in evidence in *Universe in a Single Atom* (2006), where the speculations on cosmology are integral to a concern for environmental justice and for the conditions for life. In a long quotation reproduced with some frequency in books and on social media, the Dalai Lama asserts:

> The earth is our only home. As far as current scientific knowledge is concerned, this may be the only planet that can support life. One of the most powerful visions I have experienced was the first photograph of the earth from outer space. The image of a blue planet floating in deep space, glowing like the full moon on a clear night, brought home powerfully to me the recognition that we are indeed all members of a single family sharing one little house. I was flooded with the feeling of how ridiculous are the various disagreements and squabbles within the human family. I saw how futile it is to cling so tenaciously to the differences that divide us. From this perspective one feels the fragility, the vulnerability of our planet and its limited occupation of a small orbit sandwiched between Venus and Mars in the vast infinity of space. If we do not look after this home, what else are we charged to do on this earth? (*Universe* 201)

Pop Buddhist texts such as this one are a source of the environmental appeals characteristic of mindfulness discourse, which does not mention the anti-capitalist and anti-class implications of its context.
The Dalai Lama addresses his concern for the environment, social justice, and peace, made inseparable from his interest in science, explicitly in his 1991 autobiography, *Freedom in Exile*. As with Trungpa, the Dalai Lama’s attempts to articulate a more-Buddhist social alternative to capitalist social relations involve reflections on socialist aspiration and historical experience. Here, he considers his longstanding and controversial self-identification as “half-Buddhist, half-Marxist” in regard to contemporary problems of social welfare and governance: “ultimately I am in favour of a humanitarian government, one which aims to serve the whole community: the young, the old and the disabled, as much as those who can be directly productive members of society” (*Freedom* 268). Such a government must also serve the living environment, the Dalai Lama argues (*Freedom* 269). He describes communism as “one of the greatest human experiments of all time” in an autobiography published very shortly after the collapse of the USSR, at the apex of capitalist triumphalism and proclamations of the end of history,¹²⁹ the moment of TINA—and claims that the problems communist states had encountered were not consequences of their doctrines or ideologies, but arose from applications that departed from them, and further that the “excesses” of communist states resulted in part from the “hostility” of the West (*Freedom* 268). The apparent victory of the capitalist West, the Dalai Lama implies, lies in its recourse to violence, not to the inherent goodness of the modernity it may attribute to itself. Also, here the Dalai Lama endorses the calls for social justice and welfare he had heard among communist leaders in his youth, and concludes that Marxism’s “assertion that man is ultimately responsible for his own destiny [...] reflects Buddhist thought exactly” (*Freedom* 268).
The Dalai Lama carefully situates these remarks, here somewhat qualified, as integral to his Buddhist commitments and his concern for the environment: “insofar as I have any political allegiance, I suppose I am still half-Marxist [...] my religious beliefs dispose me far more to Socialism and Internationalism, which are more in line with Buddhist principles” than capitalism, even when it might be hypothetically “practiced in a humanitarian fashion” (*Freedom* 268), as conscious capitalism and mindful leadership propose to do (chapters four and five). Significantly, the Dalai Lama’s endorsement of communism is less qualified than his supposed endorsement of a scientific revision of Buddhist doctrine, of which much is made by later mindfulness proponents such as Chade-Meng Tan. Like Trungpa, the Dalai Lama is willing to repudiate capitalism from Buddhist premises, dialectically confronting it with the specter of its opposite, while addressing the capitalist West and tacitly recognizing the bureaucracy of a China that is itself liberalizing economically as it parses his every utterance and undermines his initiatives. The Dalai Lama’s evocation of communist aspirations is also utopian in nature, a wish for an alternative to the present that is explicitly premised in his Buddhist convictions. Significantly for mindfulness as a business-school buzzword, the Dalai Lama’s Buddhism, which regards greed as a poison of the mind and antithetical to happiness and freedom, is no ally to capitalist power. Rather, *the uneven distribution to the means of happiness and freedom* across classes, locales, and even *species* the Dalai Lama sees on contemporary planet earth is a problem, not a solution, posited in his writings.
Most importantly for the content of mindfulness, as distinct from the themes around it and associated with it, is the wedding in the Dalai Lama’s persona of a secularized vision of happiness and an appeal to scientific rationality in the figure of an authoritative Buddhist leader, and hence (by the logic of mindfulness) a meditation teacher. That said, the Dalai Lama’s science may be intended as a means to make Tibetan knowledge, castigated as premodern and backward by the PRC, appear as a kind of cutting-edge technology by association with cognitive science to a Chinese audience, and his appeals to communist doctrine may also be read as an attempt to calculate some room for negotiation with the still communist-in-name PRC. However, in North America, this wedding has been consecrated by writers such as Goleman with a logic of the universalism of the human organism—brains are brains, and claimed evidence from fMRI scans of meditators trumps doctrine and analysis—and less the mediated materialism (evidence mediated through dialectical analysis) the Dalai Lama has promoted among scientists. Further, with the context of the happiness discourse, the Dalai Lama’s engagement with science is distinguished from psychoanalytic doctrines that Trungpa had been engaging with ten years prior, and that the insight meditators, in whose footsteps Kabat-Zinn explicitly walked, were incorporating into their own work. The Dalai Lama’s figure is folded into a unique universalism: that of the ahistorical subject whose brain has a right to be happy, to be made happy, not unlike the rational actor that the gospel of economic liberalization posits as the transcendent consuming subject summoned to engage with the stressful environment it imposes.
After Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness realizes a synthesis of these: confident appeals to clinical practice (and Jungian doctrine) legitimated by capital-s Science merge with an uncritical universalism of the human condition, bringing along with it certain cultural contents that stand in contradiction to its own premises, such as the Dalai Lama’s conspicuous anti-capitalism and its correlate, a radical ecology. As with Trungpa, the image of this “Oriental monk” is interpellated in mindfulness discourses as a figure of attainment of wellbeing and happiness in a capitalist milieu, while simultaneously embodying the objective of ending the injustices and sufferings of capitalist social relations.

INTERBEING: MINDFULNESS AS A MEANS TO PEACE

There is likely no contemporary Buddhist master more visible in generalized mindfulness contexts than the Vietnamese Thien (Zen) monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. He was first introduced to North American readers as a Zen master—with Zen having been re-imagined in a pan-Asian fashion by previous Anglophone Zen leaders such as Nhat Hanh’s US-based countryman, Thich Thien-An, to include Chinese, Korean, and especially Japanese traditions under the umbrella term “Zen.” Zen teachers of American birth such as Phillip Kapleau and Richard Baker wrote frontmatter to Nhat Hanh’s books and were involved in his initial travels through the US. His pedigree of nonviolent activism had already been established in the US during his 1968 tour of the United States to advocate for an end to the Vietnam War, however—well before his writings had found print in English. Hence, Nhat Hanh’s books involve and his person represents an appeal
to an alternative to the present order: to violence, to injustice, and to unkindness. He posits a practice that, in comparison to that of Trungpa, who is not unfairly accused of being prone to “jargön” by the Sarlo’s Guru Ratings website (such a thing exists), is comparatively straightforward. Buddhism’s doctrinal complexity presents a steep learning curve for many beginners unaccustomed to thinking dialectically, or lacking the time to work through the layered and context-dependent metaphors and recontextualizations of a performance like Trungpa’s. Nhat Hanh’s meditation practice is not only simple in itself but characterized by its celebration of simplicity. And in sharp contrast to Trungpa but very much like the Dalai Lama, Nhat Hanh is absolutely uncontroversial in his public persona, even in his pacifism. The timing of Nhat Hanh’s introduction into the North American Buddhist scene is also significant. His *Zen Keys* was first published in the US in 1974, around the time Kornfield, Goldstein, Salzberg, and others who would become insight meditation and mindfulness leaders were gathered at Naropa Institute. Nhat Hanh’s influence on mindfulness is clearly visible in the environmentalism of insight meditation teacher Joanna Macy, and in the practice of contemplative pedagogy (the Mindfulness in Education Network is led by his students). In sum, much of the discourse of mindfulness draws upon and is legitimized by the discourse and the pacific “Oriental monk” image of Thich Nhat Hanh, which contradict the compensatory valence of mindfulness discourse and practice.

I emphasize Nhat Hanh’s earlier books (in the 1970s-1990s) to trace their role in the history of mindfulness, which is significant, and in the formation of the mindfulness advice book that follows. Like many books in the genre, these retain a certain currency
by being reissued and repackaged anew. Nhat Hanh’s books are characteristically short, illustrated, and written in straightforward language; his prose has a gauzy, evocative quality to it, even the ones translated into English. Like Trungpa, Nhat Hanh is an extraordinarily consistent thinker; certain themes are often reiterated and sometimes repeated verbatim from book to book as in *Peace is Every Step*, in which sentences and whole paragraphs had already been published in earlier volumes. I do not mean to imply that Nhat Hanh is incapable of sophisticated and creative philosophical and literary analysis; the opposite is true. Rather, the primary purpose of Nhat Hanh’s writing practice seems to address the details of Buddhist practice in everyday life at this moment in history, with mindfulness (S. *smṛti*). In addition to Nhat Hanh’s own words, I rely on the introductions to these texts, usually written by his disciples, in order to understand how his doctrines are contextualized and mobilized in English. I find that Nhat Hanh’s meditations and the precepts he advocates draw the attention of the meditator to the totality of global suffering, its causes, and the location of the meditator in that dynamic, promoting a politic of solidarity in the somatic and affective experience of the practitioner—a refusal of the denial of coevalness characteristic of globalized and financialized capital. As these meditations are mobilized with and as mindfulness, they exemplify its emancipatory valence.

Nhat Hanh describes mindfulness as a means to bring the present conjuncture to consciousness—its arising in historical time as a process of mutuality, interconnection, or “interbeing”—with an eye toward intervening in that moment in totality with the objective of transforming it. Nhat Hanh’s presentation of mindfulness is straightforward
and distinctive, undemanding on the page but not in practice. Here, mindfulness is
defined positively as “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality” (Miracle
11), and negatively as automatism’s antonym: “Machine thinking is the opposite of
mindfulness” (Miracle 12). Because the “present reality” to which one must attend is
omnipresent, mindfulness must also be—and here, Nhat Hanh’s seemingly-simple and
aphoristic guidance proves absolute in application. The meditator is told to “keep your
attention focused on the work, be alert and ready to handle ably and intelligently any
situation which may arise—this is mindfulness” (Miracle 14). Here again, mindfulness
emerges as life practice, “the life of awareness” (Miracle 15), and so far, Nhat Hanh’s
mindfulness closely resembles self-help practices such as the Relaxation Response and
MBSR. However, particular subrepertoires and terms of art mark Nhat Hanh’s disciples
and his style of practice as distinctively Buddhist, and distinctive among Buddhists. For
instance, when a meditation leader steadfastly refuses to hit, strike, or even ring a bell,
but instead insists on nonviolently “inviting” it to sound (Peace 45), that person is
instantly recognizable as an heir to Nhat Hanh’s influence (or is an imitator). The use of
terms such as “interbeing” and “being peace” are other such markers.

Mindfulness is a Buddhist practice for Nhat Hanh, not a secular one. A Buddhist
doctrinal logic is at work in his protocols for specific forms of mindfulness practice—a
day of mindfulness, for instance, is given as a kind of intensive training involving slow
and deliberate movements (Miracle 27-31) and breath work, which emerge directly from
the Sattipathana Sutta, a Buddhist scripture alluded to with some frequency in insight
meditation circles. And as I will show, there is a doctrinal and cultural logic behind
this presentation of mindfulness, a structure of feeling easily recognizable to someone familiar with East Asian Buddhist communities. Nhat Hanh frames mindfulness in the context of emptiness, which he describes as the interconnection or interbeing of all things and all beings; the point of becoming mindful of emptiness, per Nhat Hanh, is to “consider the problem of liberation in the world” (Miracle 55). Appeals to freedom are made, often in the plural—and here, as with Trungpa, the discourse of freedom opens onto that of social justice from the substrate of mindfulness. This is seen in his meditations on contemplating interdependence (Miracle 88) and emptiness of the five “aggregates” or coordinated processes that, when coinciding, constitute a human subject (Miracle 92), and in Nhat Hanh’s understanding of time and history generally. His most frequently-cited books among mindfulness authors, such as Being Peace and The Miracle of Mindfulness, are among the most explicitly Buddhist in orientation of all the many books attributed to him. The objective of mindfulness per Nhat Hanh is to realize emptiness and interconnection, and thereby become capable of working meaningfully for social justice.

For Nhat Hanh, mindfulness oriented to a Buddhist objective summons a critical inquiry into the present in historical time, the social and environmental injustice of the present as an ongoing historical formation with knowable and malleable causes, and the location of the meditating subject in the “interbeing” of those causes. If mindfulness involves attending to the present in its totality, as Nhat Hanh insists it does, then it follows that “We have to perceive our political and economic systems correctly in order to see what is going on” (Being Peace 42). For Nhat Hanh, a limited or personal
perspective, an unmediated or uncritical one, is inadequate to the work of mindfulness. What, then, does it mean to perceive correctly? To be “free from illusions” is Nhat Hanh’s answer (*Being* 42). The meditator is then led to ask, what does it mean, in practice, to be free from illusions? Here, the meditator is instructed to penetrate like water to the causes of problems and real relations at work in them (*Being* 43), not with the subjective effects of those causes, such as the experience of stress or the articulation of a personal authenticity or purpose, a personal vision. The social origins of the specific kinds of suffering Nhat Hanh is concerned to counter are visible in the content of the guided meditations he prescribes; I describe some of them below. By this logic, mindfulness is posited as integral to Buddhist practice as a critical intervention into the present, to what Peter Hershock describes in *Liberating Intimacy* as “enlightening conduct,” a structure of feeling characteristic of the tradition that Nhat Hanh promotes. It proposes that Enlightenment is not an individual attainment, but a social and collaborative process.

The utopian aspirations at work in Nhat Hanh’s mindfulness books are so ubiquitous as to be assumed by the author as already understood by the reader, but because enlightening conduct is a structure of feeling without which his intervention seems slight, and one that is at odds with the assumptions of sociality at the back of economic liberalization and financialization, I underscore it here as the antonym to the objectives of generalized mindfulness. For instance, in addressing the contemporary problem of time crunch, Nhat Hanh poses this hypothetical question: “If you spend all day practicing mindfulness, how will there ever be enough time to do all the work that
needs to be done to change and to build an alternative society?” *Miracle* 8). Nhat Hanh’s overall answer, against the TINA logic of economic liberalization, is to persist in doing all the work needed to realize an alternative to the present juncture, and to do all those things mindfully, not limiting mindfulness to periods of formal meditation (*Miracle* 12). Second, the meditator as agent of social transformation is instructed to reorganize his or her conduct so as to be more productive *qualitatively*, but to exert less effort, to work less overall, even if one produces less than before the introduction of mindfulness by quantitative measures (*Miracle* 8). In short, mindfulness here is the opposite of a productivity booster or performance enhancer in a competitive social space; it is, rather, formally allied with resistance to work and ending social hostility.

Further, the role of enlightening conduct in Nhat Hanh’s mindfulness is also apparent in the “ripple effect” attributed to the meditator, already posited as someone capable of meaningful social intervention, and in the precepts of the Order of Interbeing. According to the ripple effect principle, lauded in texts such as *Peace is Every Step*, one mindful person’s conduct has the capacity, by the logic of interconnection, to inspire and effect resonant and complimentary transformations in others to such an extent that “Our entire society can be changed by one person’s peaceful presence” (*The Sun* 41). This doctrine is optimistically carried forward into the discourse of “leadership excellence”—the use of mindfulness to alchemically transmute ordinary managers into inspiring agents of transformation, as the rhetoric goes (described in chapter four). More significantly for present purposes, the precepts of the Order of Interbeing are integral to Nhat Hanh’s approach to mindfulness in that they are given as *observances of one’s relation to one’s*
situation, the ways in which the forms of one’s consciousness and one’s everyday life interpenetrate and reciprocally determine each other. Interbeing (1987) describes these precepts. They are a call for what may fairly be described as an enlightened society, and certainly an anti-capitalist one. Such is the context for Nhat Hanh’s assertion that “Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?” (Peace 91). Mindfulness here involves an imperative to specifically prosocial kinds of action, first a renunciation of that which causes the suffering of injustice, pollution, and violence, and second the cooperative summoning of alternatives.

Given that mindfulness demands bringing the emergence of the present moment to consciousness, it is significant that Nhat Hanh’s description of the present and the organism’s relation to it differs radically from that of Selye, Benson, or Kabat-Zinn, and invites comparison to the utopianism of Shambhala and the “half-Marxist” eco-internationalism the Dalai Lama outlines. Here, the present is described without ambiguity as unjust, polluted and polluting, and violent; the causes behind the stressors of this environment are located in historically-contingent patterns of human conduct and social organization, not in individual maladaptation to the moment; and therefore the injustice, pollution, and violence of the present are posited as reversible, or rather, a future that is just, sustainable, and peaceful is imputed as possible and attainable through mindfulness as enlightening conduct. It is only in this context that Nhat Hanh suggests that his readers undertake specific practices “to remain as free as possible from the destructive momentum of the social and economic machine, to avoid modern diseases
such as life stress” (Interbeing 37). And in this context, Nhat Hanh’s meditation on “Compassion for the person you hate or despise the most” is exemplary as a description of the economic machine he finds so problematic: “See that the situation is possible because of the clinging to ideologies and to an unjust world economic system which is upheld by every person through ignorance or through lack of resolve to change it” (Miracle 93-95). In bringing the totality of social relations of globalization to consciousness through meditation, Nhat Hanh suggests, one finds objective causes for suffering that are not personal but social, and cannot be resolved through subjective re-adaptation to the field of suffering as though it is a natural, perennial problem.

Through this lens, reflections on the interconnection of all beings (a cipher for emptiness or śūnyatā) become contemplations on the injustices of globalization in Nhat Hanh’s books. “The affluent society and the deprived society inter-are,” he asserts: “The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of the other” (Peace 98). Such is the truth of the present moment that mindfulness is intended to bring to consciousness, according to Nhat Hanh—the consequences of globalization as a class relation. These are not isolated or throwaway comments; Nhat Hanh’s radical concern for social justice penetrates throughout his oeuvre and is reproduced in the thinking of his disciples and interpreters. For instance, Fred Eppsteiner’s introduction to Interbeing suggests the radical possibilities of the Order of Interbeing precepts that underscore Nhat Hanh’s framing of Buddhism as indistinguishable from social justice activism: “the inner practice of the social activist is no different from that of a hermit” (7). Further, Eppsteiner glosses the concept of interbeing through an example illustrative of the injustices of globalized
capital, the obverse of Trungpa’s supermarket analogy: “does not the thirteenth precept on non-stealing imply that the well-stocked shelves of one country relate directly to the empty shelves of another? Or that profit-making at the expense of human suffering is an immoral activity?” (7). Here, the wage relation and that of the creditor and debtor are indicted not as a means to development or as the best milieu for mindfulness, but as wrongs to be set right by mindful people. The fifth precept of the Order of Interbeing exhorts: “Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not make the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy and material resources with those in need” (Interbeing 37). This call for economic justice summons a political solution to the problem of capital accumulation, and on the authority of a Buddhist rationale in the commentary to the precepts: “Developing ways to prevent others from enriching themselves on human suffering is the primary duty of legislators, politicians and revolutionary leaders” (Interbeing 56). This utopian-revolutionary position relative to the present obtains throughout Nhat Hanh’s writings, and recalls the imposition of absolute compassion in the building of an enlightened society in the Shambhala books. These meditations are intended to produce in the committed North American practitioner a somatic and affective sense of revulsion toward social structures of the present productive of injustice, and a shift in identification away from the rational One of modernity and liberalization toward the other of globalization.

From this somatic position follows, first, an imperative to a specific kind of renunciation, as the diction of the fifth precept would suggest. “This may be a solution to our society’s problems,” Nhat Hanh proposes: “reducing the production of useless goods,
sharing work with those who have none, and living simply and happily. Some individuals and communities have already proved that it is possible” (*The Sun* 19). Here, the logic of renunciation or what some mindfulness advocates, including Kabat-Zinn, will subsequently call “voluntary simplicity” approaches a call for a classless and ecologically-sustainable society. For Nhat Hanh and his followers, renunciation of the causes of social suffering follows from mindfulness—a clear seeing of the totality. Mindfulness here marks a mode of sociality having as its objective the task of saving the world from itself.

Similarly, Nhat Hanh posits the present conjuncture as polluted and polluting. This pollution is understood and simultaneously ecological and subjective. He interprets environmental degradation as a species of violence such that environmental awareness amounts to an awareness of violence (*Peace* 114), and the present juncture as a global site of violence *tout court*. Nhat Hanh’s green activism is tied to a renunciation of violence, a renunciation of manufactured needs: “When we eat a piece of meat or drink alcohol, we can produce awareness that 40,000 children die *each day* in the third world from hunger and that in order to produce a piece of meat or a bottle of liquor, we have to use a lot of grain” (*Being* 65)—grain that is, Nhat Hanh reminds the meditator, grown with toxic chemicals that pollute rivers, poisoning those without the means to avoid the pollution. The renunciations, refusals, and negations attendant upon mindfulness, such as refraining from over consumption of food or liquor in order to avoid poisoning poor people whose lives are here asserted to matter to the meditator as much as his or her own
life does, disciplines the mindful one as a quiet kind of activist, and mindfulness as a Great Refusal of the present.

Such a logic of renunciation extends beyond the field of consumerism and into the space of media spectacle. “Ecology should be a deep ecology,” Nhat Hanh asserts: “Not only deep but universal, because there is pollution in our consciousness” (*Peace* 114). He argues that the passive consumption of television programming exemplifies such a subjective pollution: “We are too undemanding, too ready to watch whatever is on the screen, too lonely, lazy, or bored to create our own lives. We turn the TV on and leave it on, allowing someone else to guide us, shape us, and destroy us” (*The Sun* 36).133

Significantly for a postcolonial writer—the Order of Interbeing, recall, was developed in response to conditions of warfare in colonized Vietnam—Nhat Hanh equates life with media to the violence of colonization (*The Sun* 41-42) and orders his followers: “Don’t become a colony” (*The Sun* 41). The imperative to renounce the spectacle is presented as an act of resistance, a reclamation of subjective autonomy and freedom. Similarly, Nhat Hanh exhorts his followers against succumbing to the false needs generated by consumer capitalism (*Peace* 132). Here, mindfulness is presented as a means to the renunciation of a polluted and polluting lifeworld, with the impact of that pollution unjustly distributed. This, with the Dalai Lama’s longstanding championing of environmental causes, ties generalized mindfulness strongly to a kind of eco-consciousness, represented in such texts as *Mindfully Green* (2008) different in quality from that later articulated by Kabat-Zinn (described in chapter three), through its putative connection to a specific Buddhist practice.
Insofar as the present global environment is predicated in injustices such as the power imbalance of colonizer to colonized, One to other, Nhat Hanh reflects, it is productive of warfare: “Poverty and oppression bring war. In our times, every war involves all countries. The fate of every country is linked to the fate of all others” (Peace 119). Therefore, for mindfulness per Nhat Hanh, peace means ending poverty and oppression by hegemonic powers—the seemingly soft incantation of “being peace” invokes a desire for the end of injustice in the context of globalization. He articulates his view of the universality of violence within and without contemporary consciousness through cryptic, koan-like statements such as this one: “to see the true nature of nuclear weapons is to see our own true nature” (Interbeing 35). The rhetorical purpose of such statements is to provoke inquiry into the present and one’s position in it. Like his concern for injustice and ecology, Nhat Hanh’s reminders to his followers of the violence of the world tie mindfulness generally to anti-war sentiment and an objection to or renunciation of the means to war. It carries an aspiration for a just, sustainable, and peaceful world. And it represents the obverse response to the ambient violence of everyday life in the moment of stress to Trungpa’s becoming-warrior program—rather than deterritorializing the war machine’s apparatus of capture from the inside out, here the practitioner attempts a refusal of the logic of battle entirely, a refusal of the terms of engagement.

In Nhat Hanh’s hands, mindfulness practice is mobilized as a utopian aspiration for an alternative to the present moment seen as an isolating field of hostility and injustice. He deploys mindfulness precisely as a means to an alternative to the same in terms of the fundamental objective of Mahayana Buddhism: “We need to find an inner
peace which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer, and to do
something to help” (*The Sun* 127). Here, meditation opens onto solidarity with the
impoverished and oppressed, which then opens onto emancipatory conduct—such is the
logic at work in Nhat Hanh’s intersubsumption of activism and Buddhist enlightening
conduct already discussed, but here an affirmative or positive program also obtains.

In contrast to the homogenizing, quantifiable, and colonizing nature of the
spectacle he decries, Nhat Hanh presents mindfulness as a means to produce experiences
for oneself and others that are of qualitative value, making routines into aesthetic
experiences—“Everything we do is an act of poetry or a painting if we do it mindfully,”
Nhat Hanh declares (*Peace* 40)—much as Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem present art
as an alternative to the spectacle. The problem of imagining a socially just alternative to
the present through voluntary simplicity and a renunciation of the practices and logics of
capitalist social relations is more than just a recurring theme in Nhat Hanh’s books. It is
integral to mindfulness as a contemporary project if not conspicuous in it, as concerning
this moment, insofar as Nhat Hanh is upheld as a canonical “mindfulness” writer and his
image and ideas are reproduced in mindfulness contexts.

Further, Nhat Hanh’s advice for the practitioner is consistently positioned as
antidotes to the cultural logic of economic liberalization and the production of the same
in the present. While this is most explicit in his opposition of the term *peace* to the profit
motive, as in his question “How can we bring elements of peace to a society that is very
used to making a profit?” (*Peace* 39-40), Nhat Hanh’s writings show an abiding concern
for the ways in which capitalist logics can penetrate into everyday life interactions and
determine their content. He finds it necessary to remind his readers that the instrumentalization of friendship is to be avoided, asserting, “Of course we can profit from a friend, but a friend is more than a source of profit” (*Peace* 39), and in the process he marks the moment in which it has become necessary for a Buddhist teacher to give such advice to his disciples—when the strange routine of seeking to strategically leverage or monetize all relationships characteristic of everyday life as a zone of entrepreneurship, of working and networking, has become normative.

Perhaps more strikingly, Nhat Hanh takes pains to differentiate mindfulness from any practice of self-improvement, or any concept of a *personal* practice (that is, of practice as the realization of the personal). Instead, he defines meditation as a *sociable* activity, practiced with others, oriented toward the totality of social relations, and carrying with it the traditionally-Buddhist suspicion regarding the category of the “self.” When going on retreat, the meditator is told, “you bring society with you. You bring all of us with you. When you meditate, it is not just for yourself, you do it for the whole society. You seek solutions to your problems not only for yourself, but for all of us” (*Being* 47). Mindfulness thus understood does not allow for escapism; meditators are directed instead to face the reality of the suffering of the social order that makes them who and what they are (*Being* 50-51). In contrast to the culture of the singular and transcendent consumer that Trungpa ridicules, Nhat Hanh posits a social order organized as “communities of mindful living, where we can visit a network of ‘aunts, uncles, and cousins,’” (*Peace* 89). Again here, Nhat Hanh is reproducing a structure of feeling traditional to East Asian Buddhist cultures—of enlightenment as social, not individual,
and an activity rather than a state, often articulated through the metaphor of a happy and just family (Hershock, “Family”).

Similarly, Nhat Hanh presents “being peace” as an explicitly Buddhist antidote to the violence of globalized capital and a mode of anti-war activism. To “be peace,” he asserts, one must activate one’s “capacity of waking up” from the dream-phantasmagoria of samsara to the reality of the present, which enables one to be peace; this capacity is called Buddha-nature (Being 9), the same concept Trungpa glosses as “basic goodness” or “hopelessness” and the Dalai Lama as the “instinct to happiness” (S. Tathagātagarbhā). Its activation is effected through the practice of mindfulness, Nhat Hanh claims. The objective of mindfulness, in this context, is the realization of a peaceful world with consequences for the antiwar activism in which Nhat Hanh has participated since his youth—“If we are not peaceful, then we cannot contribute to the peace movement” (Being 80), he claims. In this context, the present moment and the field of history take on another function than as a theater of violence. Nhat Hanh asserts that “The peace we desire is not in the distant future, but something to be realized in the present” (Interbeing 14), a proposition appealing to many in the wake of stalled and frustrated social movements and dreams deferred in post-Vietnam North America. This position is articulated through the forms of what may be the most devotional-oriented and explicitly religious mode of Buddhist practice, the Pure Land tradition. The Pure Land (S. Sukhāvatī) of the Buddha Amitabha is traditionally presented as a space accessible only to those with faith upon their death; in it, there is no impurity or violence, and only enlightening activities can take place. Therefore, Pure Land practice involves cultivating
faith in and an aspiration for rebirth in Sukhāvatī (Pure Land Sutras). However, in his commentary on the Pure Land cycle, Finding our True Home, Nhat Hanh reinscribes the present as a site of immanent realization of Buddha-nature in the plural—as in Trungpa’s writings, in contrast to There Are No Alternatives, There Are Infinite Alternatives, at least in potential, is posited. The utopian urgency of Nhat Hanh’s Buddhism is made explicit in Annabel Laity’s introduction to this volume, in which she describes the purpose of Pure Land practice as to “build a Pure Land on this earth for ourselves and for the future generations” (11). In brief, Nhat Hanh regards mindfulness itself as resistance to the present and as an opening onto a social alternative to the same (Opening 190). And this is a very different, explicitly religious, vision for mindfulness from the promotion of stress relief for business leaders, or as the recuperation of a rational core of Buddhist practice from degenerate and premodern Asian cultures by mindfulness promoters such as Stephen Batchelor.

Nhat Hanh consistently articulates mindfulness within and as Buddhist doctrine, and in the context of a series of explicitly religious claims. As the Dalai Lama does, Nhat Hanh also emphasizes the role of analysis in Buddhist practice, and posits an analogy between Buddhism and scientific inquiry. In introducing some of the seemingly endless sets of categories the Buddhist tradition has produced—here, the four jhanas [levels of meditative absorption] and four formless state samadhis [levels of concentration]—Nhat Hanh clarifies a specific point of doctrine that may seem relatively insignificant, but will mark an important point of departure of mindfulness after the mid-1990s from the Pop Buddhism he represents:
Some people think that to meditate is to separate ourselves from the world of thoughts and feelings and return to a kind of pure state where the mind contemplates itself and becomes ‘true mind.’ It is a lovely idea, but it is basically misleading. Since mind is not separate from the world of thoughts and feelings, how can it leave and retire into itself? (*The Sun* 62)

This passage locates his rejection of the environment-indifferent model of suffering Selye advanced as stress in favor of a dialectical one from within the framework of Buddhist thought. Similarly, the logic of Nhat Hanh’s utopianism is unambiguously religious, grounded in the devotions of Pure Land Buddhism: “If you practice mindfulness, concentration, and insight you can open your heart and the Pure Land will manifest and you can enter it in the present moment” (*Finding* 50). While this passage may recall Trungpa, who taught mindfulness and *prajñā* (“critical insight”) as transformative of self and other that is available as a secular path, Nhat Hanh here articulates an article of faith regarding the immanence of Buddhahood. Mindfulness is not presented as a secular path of meditation, nor is the Buddhist orientation slight, in these books.

While Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist, he is also a uniquely innovative and ecumenical one. In *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, his commitment to an affirmative ecumenicalism differs significantly from the universalism promoted by Goleman and reproduced by Kabat-Zinn and others. Here, as Nhat Hanh declares himself a disciple of both Shakyamuni Buddha and Jesus of Nazareth, he does not claim that Buddhism and Christianity represent different manifestations of the same truth—a specifically religious claim grounded in his experiences in his native Vietnam and abroad. His thinking on
mindfulness emerges directly from his Buddhism, not from a universalism, nor from Christianity, even as his Buddhism is often indistinguishable from his remarks on mindfulness, social justice, or violence. That Nhat Hanh presents certain novel, and in some instances highly creative, reinterpretations of Buddhist doctrine reflects his active engagement with contemporary concerns such as social justice and globalization, and his longstanding imperative to present the teachings in a language and form appropriate to his readers, even if that means introducing innovations into his presentation. Hence, a materialist hermeneutic penetrates Nhat Hanh’s explication of Buddhist thought. To give one example, he interprets the baldly metaphysical aspects of the popular Buddhist scripture *The Lotus Sutra* materially; when in one chapter Buddha Shakyamuni magically emanates countless replicas of himself in all directions, Nhat Hanh describes this as representing the impact of the teaching on others through such means as books, so a volume like *The Miracle of Mindfulness* is an emanation body of the Buddha (*Opening 94-95*)—an interpretation that recalls both the “ripple effect” metaphor for mindfulness and the role of the book as the *techne* of mindfulness.

As with the writings of Trungpa and the Dalai Lama, and in contrast to the refusal of history and reduction to the body characteristic of financialized everyday life, Nhat Hanh’s Buddhism insists on a mediating role for analytic thought. The meditations he prescribes, and the scriptures he recommends to his readers, mediate the direct encounter of reality, awareness of one’s immediate lifeworld, through an analytical process and a recontextualization of the familiar—analogous to the Dalai Lama’s insistence on taking analysis as the point of departure in coming to grips with Buddhist doctrine. This is in
evidence in the selection of Buddhist scriptures anthologized in *Miracle of Mindfulness*. The purpose of actively examining all aspects of bodily sensation in terms of a specific and exhaustive set of categories such as the five aggregates (P. *khandha*, S. *skandha*), for instance, is not arbitrary; it is to realize the emptiness of the body comprehensively (P. *suññatā* or *anattā*, S. *śūnyatā*), and without remainder or room for doubt, and precisely not to effect a shift into “being mode,” as in *Full Catastrophe Living*. Nor is it a passive process of relaxation or decompression. Nhat Hanh compares meditation for the sake of inner stillness to the impulse of a scared rabbit to climb into a hole to take a nap (*Nothing* 134). Here, he demands that the meditator become self-reflexively mindful—that is, mindful of the contents and purpose of his or her mindfulness practice. In *Zen Keys*, Nhat Hanh describes Buddhist thought as a set of methods and modes of critical analysis: “The notions of impermanence, not-self, interbeing, and emptiness are means aimed at realizing the errors of knowledge rather than at giving a description of the objects of knowledge. These notions must be considered as methods and not as information” (*Zen Keys* 110). His attention to knowledge and thought here, in a book about Zen, is highly significant, because Zen had been received and reproduced in the US as a mode of practice largely antithetical to thought.136 Here, Nhat Hanh is orienting critical thought around a negation of the given, of present assumptions whatever they may be, inclusive of the assumptions motivating practitioners in 1974, *Zen Keys*’ year of publication in English. However, affirmative truth claims are to be found in Buddhist categories—and claims about truth claims. One of these is a pessimistic historicism, the endless miasma of conditioned existence (S. *samsara*) and the determination of the subject by history (S.
karma), in the absence of which “methods” such as dependent origination collapse into incoherence, as happens in the discourse of insight meditation (chapter three). And like Trungpa, Nhat Hanh comes out against the problem of spirituality as a venue for and mode of exploitation.\textsuperscript{137} “We have two eyes,” he reminds his followers, and exhorts them to inquire critically, to see clearly (Nothing to Do\textsuperscript{136-137}). The metaphors of clear seeing that are mobilized to explain both mindfulness and a dialectical engagement with the present coincide. Here, mindfulness is the opposite of non-thinking or ahistoricism.

Significantly for his relation to mindfulness discourses, Nhat Hanh attempts a rapprochement of Buddhist thought and contemporary science, as the Dalai Lama does. However, rather than collaborating dialogically with scientists, he contributes to a genre that may be described as speculative spiritualism. His The Sun My Heart (1988) recalls texts such as The Tao of Physics (1975), which it cites (The Sun 70); Time, Space, and Knowledge (1976), credited to the US-based Tibetan master Tarthang Tulku; and The Dancing Wu Li Masters (1979), more than it invites comparisons to MindScience.\textsuperscript{138} While mindfulness is presented here as a means to become conscious of the reality of one’s situation, and hence loosely analogous to science in method, certain Orientalist associations slip through in The Sun My Heart, of the mystic-spiritual East and the rational-scientific West: “If we can survive our times, the gap that separates science and spirituality will close, and East and West will meet one another on the path to discover true mind” (The Sun vii). By the end of the 1980s, it had become de rigeur for Buddhist masters such as Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama to speculate on and make appeal to science, as Trungpa had done with regard to psychotherapy in the previous decade—a
trend that intensifies for some as mindfulness crystallizes into a hardened and predictable repertoire. That is, by 1990, Nhat Hanh is addressing Anglophone readers by discursive parameters established by advocates of psychological Buddhism and therapeutic mindfulness. It is not accidental that Nhat Hanh is summoned as an “Oriental monk” best exemplifying the virtues of mindfulness; he has not hesitated to fulfill this role.

Nhat Hanh, while putting less emphasis on a specific proposal for the realization of enlightened society than Trungpa, brings globalized productive relations of capital and its concomitant violence to the consciousness of his North American followers most explicitly. Both intervene in history in part by attempting to bring the consequences of capitalist social relations to consciousness and thereby make space for alternatives. The contradiction of Nhat Hanh’s reception in North America involves his public image as a representative of a kind of timeless peace, while presenting meditations with radical and timely content. While Nhat Hanh observes that “[t]hroughout history, people who’ve had revolutionary ideas and dared to speak the truth have not been trusted and have been sent away. It’s better to be shooed away than to always be believed. If you are always believed, you’re only saying what people want to hear, not what they need to hear” (Nothing 137), it should be observed that Nhat Hanh himself has been anything but shooed away. Rather, he has been consistently promoted but half-quoted, much as the Dalai Lama has been; his remarks in full on globalization and profit would hardly be welcome among business leaders looking for “payoffs” to mindfulness, of which more in chapter four. Nhat Hanh, like the Dalai Lama, is roped into the mindfulness discourse by a capitalist logic anticipated, and actively criticized, by Nhat Hanh himself in his public
writings. Nhat Hanh, like the Dalai Lama, is conscripted into the mindfulness discourse by a capitalist logic anticipated, and actively criticized, by Nhat Hanh himself in his public writings—which is to say that a means to the production of anti-capitalist sentiment, Nhat Hanh’s meditations, are put into circulation by advocates of mindfulness toward capitalist objectives. Nhat Hanh’s mindfulness puts a somatic critique of globalized capitalism into circulation in this way, emphasizing the present’s capacity to cause suffering in oneself and others. As an aspirational image of peace and wellbeing, Nhat Hanh embodies a gentle but immovable alternative to the objectives of financialization, globalization, and economic liberalization.

This is significant because Nhat Hanh’s books, like the Dalai Lama’s, circulate in the context of a wholly compensatory mindfulness, where he is called upon as an authority to such a mode of practice and an exemplar of its realization. The imperative for “appropriateness” in the rationale for the Order of Interbeing precepts and reiterated throughout his writings is not unproblematic in this regard: “If a teaching is not in accord with the needs of the people and the realities of society, it is not truly Buddhist” (Interbeing17). Because it cannot be assumed that the person determining which realities, which needs, and which teachings will have an adequate understanding of these three—especially given the unclear demarcations of mastery and competence to instruct others among mindfulness teachers—then this precept can invite contradictions in application, and elisions of significant portions of the teaching. Hence, Nhat Hanh is summoned as a figure emphasizing happiness, wellbeing, and the “ripple effect” for peace and effectiveness while his very meditations and precepts, his way of presenting mindfulness
at the level of practice, which involve a radical critique of capitalist social relations, of
globalized capital, and in the emphasis on interdependence, of the assumption of a
transcendent individual as the subject of a “personal practice,” are simultaneously
summoned and unnoticed. Nhat Hanh’s anti-capitalism is at once conspicuous and
unremarkable.

CONCLUSION

This account of Pop Buddhism, while incomplete, describes significant
continuities among the representative Buddhist books presented to North American
readers in the period in which mindfulness was posited, and which remain in circulation
among mindfulness consumers and as means by which mindfulness promoters legitimate
themselves. Trungpa’s writings bring the impulses and identities of consumer capital to
consciousness—and insist on proposing a concrete alternative while recasting the liberal
discourse of freedom in utopian, and plural, terms. The Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh, both
invoked by mindfulness advocates as images of mindful living—persons to be emulated,
and whose words are to be followed assiduously by the compliant mindfulness
practitioner—at once engage with the discursive parameters and situations of
mindfulness, and unhesitatingly offer anti-capitalist sentiments as representative of
Buddhism as they understand it. Here, the lexicon of the emancipatory valence of the
paradox of mindfulness emerges: as this practice is called upon in corporations and in
everyday life as a zone of entrepreneurship, it also recalls these figures and suggests they
may represent desirable alternatives to the reproduction of the same through disciplined
adaptation to it by self-help programs such as generalized mindfulness. Even so,
mindfulness evokes this nexus of anti-capitalist sentiments, critique, and somatic experiences as it promises personal stress relief, performance enhancement, and a purposive, meaningful life on the terms of the status quo.
CHAPTER THREE: INSIGHT MEDITATION, THE RELIGION OF CAPITALISM AS A MODE OF DISCIPLINE

Insight meditation is the site where a specific cast of public figures are made prominent as mindfulness advocates (and hence productivity experts and health authorities) by a specific kind of Buddhist affiliation—Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Tara Brach among them. As insight meditation’s particular discursive properties are generalized as a discourse of mindfulness, the contradictions of insight meditation become those of mindfulness, which is to say that the paradox of mindfulness already legible in chapters one and two is realized here at the level of discourse and made available for use as a mode of discipline in the moment of stress that mystifies the social relations of this juncture in its doctrines and discursive forms.

Typically presented to the consumer as at once a Western form of lay Buddhism and a universal “spiritual practice,” insight meditation emerged as a book-mediated contemplative mode at the same cultural moment and through the same medium, the self-help book, as biofeedback, the Relaxation Response, and MBSR. However, insight meditation books are normally shelved in the same aisle of the bookstore as Buddhist books, with Goldstein, Kornfield, and Salzberg falling alphabetically between Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Fourteenth and Trungpa, Chögyam. The Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh have written approving forwards to insight meditation books,140 insight meditation teachers have written books positing and explaining their practice as a Buddhism of a
certain kind\textsuperscript{141} and participated in meetings and committees for Buddhist leaders, most conspicuously in the 1993 Western Buddhist Teachers Conference that the Dalai Lama led. For many convert Buddhists interested in practicing Buddhism in the Theravada tradition, the insight meditation scene has been the only venue available absent a Thai, Lao, or Cambodian temple where English may or may not be adequate for instruction. In everyday terms and from the perspective of a consumer of advice books, insight meditation equals Buddhism, especially in the historical moment when mindfulness began to be mediated through its discourse.\textsuperscript{142}

However, I argue that insight meditation is less a lay Buddhism than a novel formation, distinct in fundamental ways from the Buddhism that North Americans had become familiar with in the 1970s through the books of Trungpa, Nhat Hanh, and others, while simultaneously calling on that Buddhism for legitimation, as though at once reaching out for it while pushing away from it. That is, the specifically religious content of insight meditation differs in quality, kind, and objective from comparable Buddhist discourses, even as insight meditation retains the legible contours of particular forms of lay Buddhist practice that remain visible. Like the practice of mindfulness, insight meditation emerges from the historical moment of stress as economic liberalization, and not from a Buddhist transmission, even as those are among those involved in mobilizing it were trained as meditation teachers in a lay Buddhist tradition.\textsuperscript{143} Second, I submit that the novelties in insight meditation that mark its difference from Pop Buddhism are among the most salient characteristics in and of mindfulness as a discourse, including its tacit orientation toward such figures as Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama and the image of peace,
wellbeing, and happiness they are positioned to embody by the logic of psychological Buddhism. The paradox of mindfulness, then, is located in its mobilization of psychological Buddhism, insofar as insight meditation and Pop Buddhism posit opposed attitudes toward and prescriptions for responding intelligently to present conditions. The theology peculiar to insight meditation, and generalized as the discourse of mindfulness, involves a devaluation of the very forms of thought and action advocated by the contemporary Buddhist advice books already considered (chapter two), while simultaneously claiming and redefining for itself the parameters of Buddhist practice and necessarily summoning the image of the well-adjusted Buddhist as the figure of aspiration, and lay Buddhist institutions as means to legitimacy.

This chapter describes the history of insight meditation’s formation and its eventual reproduction of the religion of capitalism as a mode of discipline with an eye toward tracing its mobilization in everyday life as a workplace in subsequent chapters. Through this mediation, mindfulness is transformed from a specific prescription for a newly generalized pathology, now a world-historical one (stress), to a universal life-path of personal realization. Its discursive contours bend the lens through which the belabored subject is instructed to see his or her moment. From here forward, mindfulness is increasingly mobilized by an ahistorical, universalized, and theistic rationale toward compensatory objectives of personal authenticity and stress management—precisely the religion of capitalism.

The theology of insight meditation orients “spiritual practice” toward specifically compensatory objectives and reproduces in its form and content the cultural imperatives
of the moment of globalization and economic liberalization, the moment of stress. The meditator identifies with and takes refuge in the status quo, in personal meaning, and in a narrative that positions the worldview of the well-adjusted meditator ahead of the premodern and superstitious Other. The pessimistic historicism of causes, conditions, and purposelessness that characterizes Pop Buddhism is displaced by an idealist historicism celebrating the present as the emergence of a plenary and beneficent future. The insight meditation book comes to take the form of a financial derivative—the contract-logic of financial capitalism—in which textual segments of selected religious teachings, values, are made fungible into each other by a transcendent logic of the present moment. Here, insight meditation instructors are positioned with capital and with power, to the reproduction of class relations in the moment, as ministers to its radical acceptance, a dynamic realized in advice books by mindful corporate leaders and conscious capitalists. Most significant is insight meditation’s simultaneous emphasis on mindfulness as a promised means to self-empowerment by self-realization and self-making, and its capacity to promote a delimited scope of awareness in and of the moment: one is aware of the moment at the microexperiential level of sensation, but not too aware—not aware of what may challenge the continuity of the moment and prevailing relations of power, such as its contingent emergence in historical time from a field of causes and conditions, some of them knowable. The doctrinal imperatives of insight meditation introduce novel kinds of problems, those regarding race most visibly, that not only remain largely unaddressed, but unrecognizable from within the parameters of mindfulness’ frames of reference. The theology of insight meditation generalized as mindfulness discourse
enables its mobilization as a mode of discipline in everyday life, a disciplined moment-by-moment reproduction of extant relations of power. This, and the paradox it summons, is fully realized in conscious capitalism, mindful leadership, and workplace mindfulness programs considered in subsequent chapters.

THREE PHASES OF INSIGHT MEDITATION

The generalization of seated meditation for middle-class Buddhist-identifying laypersons in Asia began a century before Trungpa’s programs had normalized it in North America, among the Theravada Buddhists of Burma. This is the lay Buddhist tradition in which popularizers such as S.N. Goenka and US-based insight meditation instructors such as Goldstein and Salzberg were trained, and with which they are identified. Erik Braun describes the formation of the institution of the lay meditation teacher to groups of laypersons—and hence the formation of meditation as a generalized Buddhist practice, not a niche specialty of a few yogins and monastics—as a phenomenon with a short history. According to Braun, “mass meditation, by both monks and laypeople, was born in Burma only in the early years of the twentieth century and at a scale never seen before in Buddhist history” (3)—at least Theravada Buddhist history (123). Here, meditation generalized, specifically lay meditation, tied here as in Pop Buddhism in North America to a rigorous program of study and analysis, is a relative novelty, not a timeless tradition. It was initiated by the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923), who popularized it throughout Burma and beyond. He did so by evoking a kind of national-popular sentiment, seeking to preserve abhidammic culture by introducing laypersons to its study; in doing so, he “made it harder for the British to
destroy it” and Burmese culture generally (Braun 5). Hence, Ledi fashioned an integral lay Buddhist practice emphasizing seated meditation and knowledge of classical maps and stages of development—closely corresponding to the normative Buddhism assumed by positive psychologists in North America in the 1970s.

But in colonized Burma, this was no self-help program, but instead a project of national identity and resistance against colonial occupation. Like Nhat Hanh’s disciples a century later, Ledi’s are exhorted to choose meditation over the colonization of mind and society by European power, and the material effects of Western colonization on Burmese culture—which is to say that in this recent tradition anapassati or vipassana meditations, for laypeople, even when articulated to an English-speaking but nationalist stratum of Burmese society in the 19th century, is less a “Western Buddhism” than a Buddhism in opposition to colonial power, Eurocentrism, or the “West” as such. In no small part an insistence on the coevalness of Burmese culture and Buddhist practice to the colonizing English, this program of lay meditation attempted to demonstrate the relevance of a specifically ancient practice and culture to its historical moment. That said, Ledi’s pivot to mass lay practice simultaneously initiated a significant break in authority from traditional monastic and temple sites, and a temporal rupture within Theravada Buddhism from the perspective of sympathetic Europeans: On one side are primitive, premodern Buddhists attending to village temple rituals, and on the other side is an authentic Buddhism relevant to the minds of a middle-class present and lacking the cultural accretions and mysteries of monastic life. Ledi represented the latter. After Ledi, the figure of the lay meditation teacher emerged as an authoritative role, competent to lead
others on a Buddhist path now figured as specifically modern. Subsequently, lay authors were responsible for three of the earliest known meditation advice books in English, published in Burma starting in 1877 (Braun 124). Ledi himself wrote a *Manual for Insight Meditation* explicitly for a European audience in 1915. The political content of Ledi’s program is not obvious in his English-language writings. For readers of English, authentic Buddhism here appears to be a lay-oriented discipline of the mind—a self-rationalization comparable to a middle-brow self-help program—and temple Buddhism a degeneration. This set of assumptions crystallizes in the psychological Buddhism of the 1970s, which is consequently reproduced to the present in insight meditation. That is, Ledi’s Burmese-nationalist Buddhism is a substrate for the denial of coevalness later upheld by middle-class seekers of enlightenment from North America as characteristic of authentic Buddhism.

Ledi’s novel articulation of Buddhist practice gave the IMS leaders and Kabat-Zinn part of their rationale for the contemporaneity and universality they claim for meditation as they define it (Braun 6), and as the by-then normative experience of the Asian Buddhism which many of them trained in, primarily under the direction of masters in Ledi’s tradition such as S.N. Goenka, A. Munindra, and Mahasi Sayadaw. Many current mindfulness and convert Buddhist leaders describe attending Goenka’s ten-day retreats in the early 1970s as formative, both experientially and socially; according to one participant, lifelong friendships and professional networks were built in this context. However, insight meditation programs in North America are not consistently Buddhist in their objectives; as of this writing, the majority do not seem to be. All of them are
characterized in some way by an affiliation to a Buddhist tradition, typically as a mode of legitimization, and a tendency to rely on a specific canon of Buddhist texts and protocols, what I call psychological Buddhism, in articulating protocols for practice.

Insight meditation emerged into North American culture in three phases. First, an attempt to transmit in English a program of lay Buddhist meditation, informed by abhidhamma and other classical Pali-language canons, is made through retreats, public events, and most importantly, advice books. As in Goleman’s The Meditative Mind (1977), texts of this vintage tend to assume that the specific mode of Buddhism they articulate describes a universal map of personal development. The assumption here is that an essential core of Buddhist psychology leavened with the universalism of positive psychology can function as a kind of key to all quotations, where any bit of inspiration the advice-author may choose ultimately describes a truth of the compliant meditator’s mind, the gradual illumination of which being the objective of practice (the “insight” of insight meditation, P. vipassana).

Almost simultaneously, a second tendency emerges among insight leaders to subordinate the practice of meditation as they understand it and enlarging the lexicon of quotations they have accumulated to the positive psychology of self-help programs. Here, the entirety of “spiritual practice,” itself an ungainly and ambiguous category, is reduced to the practice of seated meditation. As Braun argues, “In affinity with the affective pull toward meditation as a kind of this-worldly self-help, the justification of meditation in terms of psychological benefits makes sense, too, in a context with little doctrinal teaching” (165). That said, while there is actually no shortage of ideas in the insight
meditation books of this phase, there is little and progressively less and less of the rigorous analytics or dialectics characteristic of the writings of Ledi, Trungpa, or the Dalai Lama available in them as the genre crystallizes. As meditation is increasingly mobilized toward ends indistinguishable from those of positive psychology and self-help programs, the critical-historical mode advocated by the Pop Buddhists of this moment gives way to a devotional posture, ultimately an attitude of reverence with a corresponding theology venerating the status quo. An amalgam of themes organized around a universal, archetypal logic—precisely what Trungpa would dismiss as hopeless, as a kind of homemade “stew”—emerges as its rationale. This phase is characterized by an ecology of quotations appropriated from the world’s cultural heritage (as translated, unevenly, into English). Its elements are fungible into each other as a financial derivative does with local currencies in a transcendent present.

In the third phase, mindfulness is generalized and insight meditation discourse becomes indistinguishable from it. By 2011, insight meditation writers such as Salzberg are clearly and explicitly taking their cues from mindfulness so defined. Here, insight meditation has emerged as a novel formation, entirely distinct from lay Buddhism mediated through the conventions of the self-help book in phase one in its objectives and content, if not in its form; it upholds a specific theology that corresponds to the religion of capitalism. Here, the centrality of lay Buddhist figures and fellow-travelers such as Kornfield, Salzberg, and Brach to mindfulness and their legitimation comes into focus: while the theology of insight meditation negates Buddhism, the legitimacy of its nominal Buddhist affiliation is indispensable to it. Finally, while mindfulness is generalized in
part on the appeals of cognitive science, the Jungian ethos of previous generations persists in it. And while psychologists develop less delimited and more historically grounded understandings of Buddhism and the role of mindfulness in it, the same assumptions mobilized decades prior as psychological Buddhism persist in insight meditation’s third phase as eternal verities, tenets of its particular doctrine, even as psychology as a discipline has moved on.\textsuperscript{148} For this reason, I describe it not as a psychology, but as a belief system.

I observe that these phases emerge sequentially, but do not entirely supercede each other; there are participants in insight meditation programs to the present who understand their practice as lay Theravada Buddhism, for instance (phase one), and not as a generalized “spiritual practice.” Relevant to the present inquiry, however, is the emergence of the third phase as normative for mindfulness discourse; that is, I generalize about the content and function of insight meditation texts as they relate to the history of mindfulness, not the practice of insight meditation for its own sake. Further, I grant that some of the characteristics I identify as novel in the insight meditation discourse—novel relative to previous Buddhist popularizations in English such as the writings of Chögyam Trungpa—may have antecedents in the specific Theravada Buddhist lineages in which the first generation of insight meditation leaders trained. In terms of doctrinal history, the Theravadin objective to attain the state of the Arhat, one who has become wholly liberated of all afflictive automatisms (P. \textit{sankhara}), rather than the bodhisattva who practices for all beings and ultimately aspires to Buddhahood, may inform the insight meditation formulation of meditation practice as a personal endeavor.\textsuperscript{149} However, the
reluctance of the insight meditation writers to negate the present moment, and instead to present it as simultaneously real and transcendent, has no precedent in the classical Theravadin tradition celebrated as a psychology in this milieu. That is the discursive basis for its novelty. A specific accounting of the divergences in doctrine among the “Theravada spectrum” (Seager 59) is beyond the scope of this chapter, which is concerned with the significance of differences among mindfulness discourses and practices consumed from the same bookstore shelf or conference table in contemporary North America, and points to the generalization of the psychological Buddhism described in chapter one in this milieu.

In sum, the lay Buddhist tradition from which insight meditation seems to depart in doctrine while simultaneously reproducing in its practices and institutional forms is itself a novelty, a response to colonialism and English cultural and political hegemony in Burma in the late nineteenth century. Like the self-discipline of the compliant self-help consumer, generalized meditation by Buddhist laypersons is a “cultural trapping,” a historically contingent formation. Further, this lay Buddhism is the substrate to the assumptions mobilized about Buddhism to promote specific self-help interventions, the canon of which I call psychological Buddhism. The persistent claim among mindfulness advocates that this practice represents a timeless, universal, or original teaching of Shakyamuni in this form is as implausible as it is integral to the political work that generalized mindfulness does when it is positioned as an ancient practice of particular relevance to reasonable, modern minds. Simultaneously, a consequence of its imperative to attend to the present without thought, in a posture of devotion and acceptance, obtains
in the inability of this discourse’s advocates to recognize the sexism and racism reproduced in its doctrines, practices, and institutions.

**LAY BUDDHISM MEDIATED THROUGH THE ADVICE BOOK**

Insight meditation had begun to emerge as a discrete formation—the first phase—by the mid-1960s, following the formation of a specifically Anglophone and middle-class Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia. The Buddhist milieu of this period generally does not correspond to the expectations of North American psychologists, insofar as Buddhist leaders in traditional temples and monastic contexts participated in specifically modern exchanges. For instance, many monks in Sri Lanka and Thailand, public figures, openly advocated for dialectical materialism as a philosophical and political position at this time. The prominent Thai monk Buddhadasa (1906-1993) publicly taught *anapāsati* in the context of appeals for socialist governance. Lay meditation was not disengaged from social action and social problems in this period, nor was it necessarily tied to cultural conservatism or the individualism of economic liberalization. At the same time, systematic, authoritative, and meditation-oriented translations of ancient Buddhist texts had begun find print, such as those produced by the German-born, Sri Lankan-trained Nyanaponika Thera, whose *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (first published in 1962) is a handbook for anapāsati meditation with relevant translations from Pali and Sanskrit. This was the standard Theravada-school meditation manual in English for many years. The aspiring North American practitioner in this period was almost always isolated from direct contact with Asian Buddhists who practice along the lines described in these translations, and therefore tended to rely on the available texts for guidance in practice,
and not by contemporary commentary or direct instruction. Put differently, the only way
in which this manual is seemingly “made modern” is in having been rendered into a
modern language, and published for wide distribution. Given the paucity of qualified
instructors and lay practitioners in this tradition at this time in the U.S. and Canada, the
aspiring meditator could choose to practice alone with the guidance of books such as this
one, or travel to Burma, Sri Lanka, or Thailand and hope to find a teacher both willing to
take an outsider on as a student, and able to communicate the basics of meditation
practice (which is much easier to articulate with a limited English vocabulary than
Buddhist doctrine, ritual practice, or the fundamentals of temple etiquette and procedure)
to him or her.152 While the often improvised meditation instructions given in English by
Asian masters could not be as comprehensive, nuanced, or consistent as they had been in
their indigenous tongues, the presence of even incomplete instruction in English made it
possible for non-Asians lacking years of preparation in language study to begin with the
basics—even as those basics gave a sense of being a complete and integral whole to those
whose prior reading had suggested that Buddhism was about meditation guided by
classical abhidammic descriptions of consciousness, precisely the assumptions
reproduced in Goleman’s The Meditative Mind and, in aggregate, I call psychological
Buddhism. The positioning of the exotic other as a figure of salvation to modern man by
the logic of globalization informed the impulse to travel into the periphery to learn the
means to self-knowledge and self-mastery—to Enlightenment—among a fraction of the
Great Refusal generation. Both the routinization of Buddhist practice through the
mediating techne of the book and the contingencies of learning from indigenous masters
in Asia are carried into the next decade, when US-based writers systematize in different ways the discourse by which lay-oriented, meditation-centered forms of Buddhism could be presented in the absence of a detailed Buddhist philosophical intervention of the kind Trungpa insisted on for his disciples and was uniquely able to present in colloquial English. Here, the formative assumptions of therapeutic mindfulness programs such as MBSR, psychological Buddhism, are legible, and specific contradictions emerge that open insight meditation to be mobilized toward ambivalent objectives.

Eric Lerner’s 1977 *Journey of Insight Meditation* attempts a description of this trajectory in a first-person account of his training in Buddhist meditation in South Asia in the early 1970s, and represents a significant artifact of the impulse of the middle-class North American to seek meaning and purpose at the geographic and temporal edges of a Eurocentric order. Lerner began meditation practice under the direction of a Goenka-trained teacher, Robert Hover, in Massachusetts in 1972 (from whom Kabat-Zinn also took instruction). Inspired by this introduction, Lerner travels first to India to practice with Goenka himself, and then on to Burma, where “The meditation teachers who we were introduced to looked mostly like middle-class, well-fed civil servants, which in fact, they were” (76)—the Anglophone petit bourgeoisie in which Ledi’s lay-oriented, secularized form of meditation had taken hold decades prior. After a brief stay in Burma and inspired by his study of Nyanaponika’s translations, Lerner moves on to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) with the intention of finding a teacher to lead him through a thirty-day solo retreat, and a space to do it in, even though he speaks not a word of Sinhalese. Significantly, the temporal membrane separating lay-led Buddhism for modern
individuals from village-based temple life is highly permeable for this practitioner; the
former opens directly onto the latter, even as Lerner remains a layperson throughout.
Lerner finds such an opportunity in a monastery led by one Nyayaka MahaThera, and
although it is never clear how he supports the monastery that feeds, houses, and instructs
him, or how he contributes to it, the material sacrifices made by the pious and
impoverished Sri Lankan villagers in making donations to the temples is implied:
“Ceylon might be scrounging for food but the monks in this forest monastery would be
the last to know about it” (106-7). During a stay in Sri Lanka that would last six months,
Lerner has an unspecified enlightenment experience which he seems to lack the labels to
describe, meets the then-elderly Nyanaponika, and after a six-day visit to Burma, returns

Lerner’s narrative illuminates the numerous opportunities for mistranslation and
failure in communication in the instruction and guidance of this generation of insight
meditators in Asia, and the texture and assumptions of seeking in Asia in this period—the
material conditions by which this activity is made possible, and for whom, and where.
Lerner could afford to disappear from work for an indefinite period to inquire within in
what would be taken as a geographically ancient and backward context, and trust that if
he marched past enough monastery gates surely a wise “Oriental Monk” would recognize
his potential and take him in. The trajectory of his tale, ending back at home with
Goldstein as if reaching the end of an exhaustive global search where it began, a narrative
arc Northrop Frye would approve, indicates some of the expectations laid on the first
substantial generation of American-born Buddhist teachers by the first broad-based
generation of American-born meditators, and perhaps offers some insight into the conditions of their training as well. The task of seeking ends with the recuperation and rationalization of the Other to the modern One. With regard to the genre of the insight meditation advice book, however, Lerner’s narrative is something of an outlier in the narrative form it takes and in Lerner’s position as a representative disciple, not a teacher or leader.

Goldstein’s *The Experience of Insight* (first published in 1976) is discursively most representative of this phase and more widely read, as it was the first advice-book popularization of insight meditation as a lay practice by a North American author. At the level of objective, and in its lexicon of practice, it anticipates generalized mindfulness more than contemporaneous Buddhist advice books (chapter two). Many of the now-familiar formulae for mindfulness are present here—the meditator is told, “notice carefully all your movements” from “moment to moment” (*Experience* 3), because “The essential thing is to be mindful, to be aware of what’s happening” (*Experience* 5). The reduction to the body that Jameson diagnoses as a function of the evacuation of history in this juncture is in full evidence here. Goldstein's description of meditation practice as the work of “Being grounded in the present, cultivating awareness of the moment, and trusting our vision of freedom” (*Experience* 14) evokes a liberal discourse of freedom typical of the North American Buddhist scene in the language of a vision that is the meditator’s own, as distinct from mastering the rococo negations of Buddhist dialectics as a necessary context to meditation—a theme elaborated in later insight meditation guides. While Goldstein initially defines mindfulness as a kind of opening into the
cultivation of the Buddhist concept of insight (P. vipassana) (Experience 3), he puts a stronger emphasis on describing mindfulness as bare attention, which presents mindfulness as “the basis and foundation of spiritual discovery” (Experience 20) generally, not exclusively in a Buddhist context. According to Goldstein, “Bare attention means observing things as they are, without choosing, without comparing, without evaluating, without laying our projections and expectations on to what is happening; cultivating instead a choiceless and non-interfering awareness” (Experience 20)—again, a catalogue of themes now in circulation in mindfulness texts, particularly those of Kabat-Zinn. Importantly here, a kind of intentional passivity in conduct is described such that the present moment is mystified, made inscrutable and nonnegotiable, and not to be questioned; choiceless awareness does not posit alternatives to its objects or question their necessity. Further, Goldstein presents mindfulness thus defined as a total life practice, to be cultivated “on all objects, on all states of mind, in all situations” (Experience 21), by anyone, as a means to a less problematic everyday life: “As bare attention is cultivated more and more we learn to experience our thoughts and feelings, situations and other people, without the tension of attachment or aversion” (Experience 21). Many of the themes of Full Catastrophe Living are anticipated here: mindfulness as a universal means to a happy, tension-free life articulated in a nominally Buddhist context, a means to personal freedom regardless of the environment. In this objective, insight meditation is entirely at odds with the Pop Buddhist canon (chapter two).

However, like Trungpa and Nhat Hanh, Goldstein defines mindfulness as the opposite of automatism, and meditation practice as a kind of antidote to ego understood
as an aggregation of automatisms—an enlightenment practice. In this context, Goldstein posits meditation as an active function tending to creativity and spontaneity (Experience 25). The potential content of that creativity and spontaneity Goldstein leaves unspecified; it is raised as a capacity available to serve any given objective. Further, that content is not personal according to Goldstein, for whom the self is a kind of operative fiction, “imaginary” (Experience 32). In explaining the Theravada Buddhist concept of the emptiness of self or selflessness (P. suññatā or anattā), Goldstein introduces a sense of history into his presentation of meditation, claiming that “understanding that there is not one knower, one observer, but rather an ongoing process at every moment, exposes the illusion of a permanent self” (Experience 34)—a view temporally at odds with his description of the contents of consciousness, the material and social world, as the stuff of a “choiceless” awareness, as nonnegotiable. While the self for Goldstein is a centerless mass of factors extrinsic to itself, an operative fiction, the present moment—the extrinsic as such, the site of the objectives to which the capacities developed in meditation may be put—is not necessarily posited as equally contingent or “empty,” as it is in the writings of Trungpa and Nhat Hanh. This marks another significant doctrinal position that will prove consequential to generalized mindfulness: the present moment is not to be negated, but instead remains available to be identified with. Meditation is thus understood as an ambivalent practice on principle, available to serve any purpose at hand.

Other significant conceptual differences from Goldstein’s Buddhist contemporaries are legible in The Experience of Insight (recalling here that at this time insight meditation is presented as a convert-friendly way to practice Theravada
Buddhism). These differences involve universalism, temporality, and the role of concepts and critical thought in Buddhist practice overall. Goldstein’s universalism is visible at the level of doctrine in his use of quotations by authors such as Spinoza and Rene Daumal (a Gurdjieffian) alternating with traditional Buddhist sources, as though they articulate the same universal truth—an ecology of quotations that later blossoms into an intertextual lattice-work in subsequent writings by Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn, and Tara Brach. At the level of practice, Goldstein equates mindfulness to the Gurdjieffian practice of self-remembering (*Experience* 36). Like Trungpa, Goldstein is willing to mobilize themes at hand as with Trungpa’s appropriation of the Gurdjieffian term “idiot compassion”; unlike Trungpa, however, Goldstein does not assiduously distinguish the practice and thinking he advocates as distinct from other cultural or philosophical “backgrounds,” but instead tends to present his Buddhism as a universal logic of all, as Goleman does.

As suggested already, Goldstein’s ontology of the present distinguishes his insight meditation from the mindfulness practices of, for instance, Nhat Hanh. Goldstein posits temporality and hence the miasma of *samsara* as a kind of personal problem. Goldstein argues that past and future are both categories of thoughts that only exist in the mind of the practitioner in the present moment, and that the cause of limitation and struggle lies in mistaking these thoughts for reality (*Experience* 30). As self-help authors such as Benson do, Goldstein seems to claim here that samsara is resolvable by the internal work of recognizing the contingency of the emergent future from past causes, while simultaneously positing past and future, the field of history, as mere mindstuff, and not as social or material, in a present moment now imagined as transcendent and transhistorical.
It will follow from this ontology of the present that the only appropriate field of intervention is the mind of the individual—the field of historical time is dismissed as unreal, and irrelevant or irresolvable. This contrast sharply against the consciousness of history and the mode of conduct consequent to it in the Pop Buddhist material described in chapter two, but corresponds to logic of stress Selye and Kabat-Zinn describe.

Further, Goldstein defines thinking as the opposite of mindfulness. For instance, he uses the word “concept” to translate the Pali term kilesa (S. kleśa) (Experience 31), which is more typically translated as an affliction or emotional knot, an internal binding (Trungpa often translated it as a “neurosis” or a “hang-up”—the stuff of “ego”). In describing meditation as the opposite of conceptual thinking, concepts as such are devalued, as though meditation and the abstraction of valid concepts by observation and reason are irreconcilable. In this context, the problem is not limited to the endless internal automatized jibber-jabber of the mind, what insight meditators sometimes call internal monologue, personal narrative, or “story self”; the problem, as Goldstein presents it in this text and as subsequently taken up in generalized mindfulness, is with conceptual thinking tout court, inclusive of critical thinking. The contingencies of everyday life, such as the injustices around race, class, or gender, are also presented not as realities that must be contended with, but as irrelevant mindstuff (Experience 31), indicating a distinction in practice from the Pop Buddhist regard of critical thought as a method of practice (chapter two), the content and difficult consequences of which I describe below.

The Experience of Insight, in its presentation of Buddhist meditation in the Ledi tradition, shares more in common with the psychological Buddhism of self-help writers
(chapter one) than the Pop Buddhism with which it is often classified in bookstores and mindfulness-book reading lists (chapter two). Paradoxically, this is most explicit in Goldstein’s attempts to describe specifically Buddhist concepts in English. Here, meditation is presented as a means to increased capacity for productivity and happiness. The serious meditator is said to require less sleep, even going days without rest while on retreat (Experience 46). The now-familiar self-help discourse of happiness enters the discourse of insight meditation in this 1976 text. In the context of a discussion of Buddhist cosmology, in which different realms are described as outcomes of different mindstates, Goldstein claims that while even the best possible worldly happiness is “of a very high kind,” it is still contrived, limited, and unfree (Experience 108), and therefore, Goldstein asserts, the happiness of the insight meditator is “far superior to the others because in that clarity of vision there is a taste of freedom” (Experience 109), which is to say that the best happiness is only available here, and tied to a discourse of freedom from conditioning. I speculate that the Dalai Lama’s use of the formulation *instinct to happiness* to indicate Buddha-nature in English may have its origins in this milieu. There are other continuities to more traditional Buddhist forms here that are less visible in subsequent insight meditation books. For example, in what later becomes a kind of litmus test of one’s Buddhist affiliation, a commitment to the doctrine of rebirth, Goldstein takes a traditional position (Experience 117-123); the text also advocates renunciation with regard to “the greed factor” of contemporary social life (Experience 52).

Even with its innovations, *The Experience of Insight* may show the clearest continuity from any form of Asian Buddhism among those authored by the IMS
writers—a continuity that, in its articulation, opens onto its own negation. Put differently, the generalization of a specifically “Western” lay Buddhism around the practice of meditation that dominates Goldstein’s public writings and public discourse sets the terms “Western” as modern, Us, against Buddhism, traditional and other. Here, the Western Buddhist narrative scholars assume is mobilized in a mass-market advice book.

This dynamic is most legible in Goldstein’s 2002 manifesto for a meditation-oriented Western Buddhism, ONEdharma. Here, the contemporaneity of the North American lay convert to the historical Shakyamuni is posited on pragmatic grounds, newly born in contrast to extant Buddhist communities: “A genuine Western Buddhism is now taking birth. Its defining characteristic is neither an elaborate philosophical system nor an attachment to any particular secular viewpoint. Rather, it is a simple pragmatism that harkens back to the Buddha himself” (ONEdharma 1). Here, the detailed dialectics and elaborate ritual practices of a Trungpa or a Dalai Lama represent a departure from an imagined ur-Dharma, our practice, to which insight meditation promises something of a return. Goldstein reproduces here the view of insight meditation as a kind of “Western Buddhism,” one evolved through adaptation to our times and climes, especially in the pragmatism he attributes to it oriented to the question of “What works to awaken?” (ONEdharma 2). Bracketing the question of what “awakening” means here, I mark that through all the examples Goldstein gives, the answer to “what works” is consistent: uncompromised, persistent, and systematic study, contemplation, and meditative practice under the direction of a competent teacher, uniformly in traditional contexts. Hence, the pragmatic content of “Western Buddhism” as Goldstein posits it differs significantly.
from the program of practice outlined in many insight meditation and self-help books—but recalls instead the training model of Pop Buddhist writers such as Trungpa. Even the question of personal awakening, as opposed to the question of how to relieve stress or to realize a personal vision, marks a significant distinction from mindfulness per Kabat-Zinn. Goldstein simultaneously reifies the temporality of insight meditation’s understanding of itself as appropriate to the present moment of the Western mind, and posits it as the true, practical core of the Buddha’s intervention in contrast to Buddhist modes of practice—while summoning that very Buddhist practice and its leaders as its pragmatic content. This historicism is reproduced in the untenable assumption that mindfulness represents a kind of continuity of the Buddhist past to the North American present, and most problematically in the mass-market provocations of Stephen Batchelor—of which more below.

Salzberg’s advice books *Lovingkindness* (1995) and *Heart as Wide as the World* (1997) continue the program of articulating a lay convert Buddhism appropriate to the “Western” mind, on the same temporality as *The Experience of Insight*. Specifically, Salzberg marshals prosocial Buddhist contemplations through the mediation of advice-book consumption. On this basis, themes such as happiness, lovingkindness, and compassion become indispensable to a psychological Buddhist and, later, generalized mindfulness program, insofar as they are central to insight meditation.

*Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* marks the entrance of lovingkindness (*P. mettā, S. maitrī*) into the main of North American discourse, as integral to the insight meditation path, and by extension to mindfulness—and as a virtue
in its own right. Metta’s profile as a generalized North American cultural motif was marked in 2013, when the professional basketball player Ron Artest legally changed his name to Metta World Peace. Metta means unconditional benevolence and goodwill toward oneself and others; the practice of meditation Salzberg outlines systematically directs the practitioner to widen the scope of his or her goodwill to include all beings in totality without exception, in continuity with Nhat Hanh’s meditations on global poverty and Trungpa’s absolute compassion, and in contradiction to the individualism that dominates insight meditation discourse. Among the early promoters of insight meditation such as Goldstein and Salzberg, an assumption of passivity in action is at times assumed to be necessary consequences of contemplative practices of the kind Salzberg promotes, and legible in an episode she describes in which her teacher, Munindra, finds it necessary to remind her that, when necessary, the compassionate soul may need to beat away a malicious attacker with her umbrella, “‘with all the lovingkindness in your heart’” (Lovingkindness 103). “Compassion is not all weak,” Salzberg concludes; “It is the strength that arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world” (Lovingkindness 103). Here again, Salzberg arrives at a position analogous to Nhat Hanh’s: the practice of compassion demands active engagement with the field of history at the point of suffering’s causes. This position coincides with the Dalai Lama’s self-help collaboration The Art of Happiness, but contradicts Goldstein’s indifference to temporality and the elision of embodiment and history implicit in the universalism of Stephen Levine, both reproduced in Kornfield’s books (of which more below).
The “revolutionary” descriptor in the subtitle of *Lovingkindness* is intended to signal the specifically social-transformative quality of the practices Salzberg promotes. This theme is elaborated in the sequel to *Lovingkindness*. A reduction of lay Buddhist to meditation posited as a life practice, whole and complete in itself, is explicit in Salzberg’s 1997 *Heart as Wide as the World*. Mindfulness appears here as part of a triad in an overall practice of “meditation as a way of life”; wisdom as knowledge of interconnection, and compassion as the recognition of the suffering of others and forming helpful intentions complete it (*Heart* 2). Salzberg attributes this position to the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, and in doing so reiterates a temporality peculiar to insight meditation that mystifies the power relations of globalization. Salzberg describes Buddha Shakyamuni as a revolutionary against “a rigid philosophical system” and its realization in caste-stratified ancient India. By emphasizing interconnection, impermanence, and intention, Shakyamuni’s intervention “declared the entire social structure of India—considered sacrosanct by many—to be of no spiritual significance at all” (*Heart* 137-38). Shakyamuni was right to revolutionize Vedantic doctrine and sociality, and exhort his followers to do the same in founding a casteless sangha (Buddhist community), Salzberg asserts. In this text, insight meditation is at once presented as a Buddhism of a certain kind and for a certain time, and as “meditation as a way of life,” a “revolutionary” and “radical” practice in the time of Shakyamuni and in the present—“radical then, and radical today” (*Heart* 137). The reader is tacitly invited to ask which contemporary rigid philosophical system, realized as an unjust and stratified social order that Shakyamuni, our contemporary, with all the lovingkindness in his heart, might revolutionize. Even
though Salzberg, unlike Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, leave this question unanswered, this remains an example in which the Good is mobilized as an appeal for an alternative to contemporary sociality and its pieties, and the Buddhism that is here positioned as relevant to the present is identified precisely with that Good.

However, the insight meditation writers generally assume a kind of transhistorical capitalism—as though the imbalanced relations of power that characterize this moment are fungible into those of ancient India or China, as a kind of “spiritual marketplace” (Path 160). The characteristically-Buddhist evocations of the transformative quality of for-all-beings discipline in promoting an inherent capacity in the subject to free and helpful conduct are consistently individualized, mentalized, and made inactive in this context. The mind of one, and not the shared situation of all, is ultimately posited as the site of freedom and the point of intervention here (Heart 139) and in insight meditation generally.

Insight meditation’s first phase, the articulation of a lay Buddhism oriented around the practice of seated meditation, introduces a contradiction that intensifies in force in its subsequent phases: the contemporary Western meditator’s practice is simultaneously and necessarily other to the Buddhist, while it is legitimized by the Buddhist as an image of accomplishment and promoted as a mediated form of certain Buddhist methods. The formative assumptions of self-help and mindfulness programs such as MBSR or the Relaxation Response about Buddhism have their origin in this milieu—the temporal rupture in Buddhism legible in Ledi’s resistance to colonial occupation. In contrast, insight meditation’s tendency to mobilize seated meditation
toward the objectives of the social environment, rather than a consciously-made and critical program, has its origin in the self-help culture of North America in the 1970s.

A SOUL STORY: INSIGHT MEDITATION AS A UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY

In the second phase of the insight meditation discourse’s crystallization in the advice book, the practice of seated meditation is increasingly assumed to be the whole of Buddhist practice, or the vital heart of it, largely on the basis of psychological Buddhism as introduced by Goleman and Kabat-Zinn (chapter one). Christopher Titmuss’ *Light on Enlightenment* (1998) is representative of this transition, giving an accurate précis of Theravada Buddhist doctrine, now advocated as “the most comprehensive message of awakening available to humanity” by an author who insists he is “not a Buddhist” (3). Here, the psychological Buddhism of 1970s self-help and inspirational books is mobilized in the context of what had heretofore been understood as a program of lay Buddhist transmission. This phase is characterized by its subordination of that transmission—and a growing aggregation of other cultural material—to a universalist project of “spiritual practice” with objectives held in common with self-help programs such as MBSR and the RR. The goal of insight meditation in this phase is to realize a personal vision of one’s own device, one’s “true self” in the contingencies of one’s mindstuff, and a more-compliant adjustment to the present juncture—this in contrast to the “revolutionary” implications of Salzberg’s books of the 1990s and Goldstein’s emphasis on the emptiness of self. This section traces the emergence of this dynamic in the public writings of Stephen Levine, Kornfield, and Kabat-Zinn.
Levine’s *A Gradual Awakening* (first published in 1979) is a significant artifact insofar as it shows the convergence of insight meditation as a discipline emergent from and subordinated to “psychological Buddhism,” inclusive of the universalism of figures such as Joseph Campbell and Goleman, who characteristically understood the Pali-language *abhidhamma* a privileged and universal map of the mind. Levine’s own interest in Vedanta generally and the teachings of his occasional co-author Ram Dass specifically, with the concomitant introduction of theistic language into a discourse that not infrequently relies on its Buddhistic, and hence non-theistic, affiliation as a mode of legitimation; and the limited Buddhist doctrinal background with which the newly-minted US-based insight meditation teachers had available to them, are all in evidence here. Intermixed with the guided meditations Levine offers are references to Native American spirituality, Hinduism, and Christianity, as if filling any gaps with at-hand material, specifically the New Age and archetypal thought in circulation at the time: “There’s nothing that is absent from our being which a Buddha or a Christ or a Mohammed possesses; it is the same wellspring, the same original nature, a shared essence” (39). Levine’s description of the personal in this passage, on one’s “true nature,” is refracted in complex and contradictory ways in the writings of concurrent and subsequent insight meditation teachers; his universalism and his quotation-heavy prose style would be adopted by Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn, and Brach most explicitly, in ways that Goldstein’s more straightforward presentation was not. Levine’s collaboration with Ram Dass in particular is representative of this discourse; Dass’s name is often mentioned in the acknowledgements of insight meditation books, including *Full Catastrophe Living*. 
The patterns of consumption of A Gradual Awakening describe the use of insight meditation in therapeutic contexts in this period, some of them urgent. Subsequent editions of the text indicate with tenderness that it was used as a practice guide for support groups that practiced meditation together to cope with the pain of death and grief, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. This confirms that insight meditation in this period is typically a book-mediated, present-oriented coping mechanism for those who are struggling. A Gradual Awakening marks an alternative formulation of insight practice to Goldstein’s—this is to be a universal spirituality with therapeutic qualities, not a lay Buddhism with the assumption of a universal appeal.

Insight meditation is presented as a generalized “spiritual practice,” in the 1987 Goldstein-Kornfield collaboration, Discovering the Heart of Meditation. Here, spiritual practice means insight meditation, and one achieves the objectives of spiritual practice through meditation alone—because the truth of the mind is universal, the authors argue, and because insight meditation offers clear insight into this truth, there is no need for the forms of study, analysis, and debate so characteristic of Buddhist tradition heretofore in concert with meditation practice (3-72). A different mode of study, the self-driven consumption of and compliance to the self-help book, tacitly displaces it. In claiming that “Dharma practice is coming to an awareness of the completeness of experience in each moment” (191), the authors put some distance between their work and that of Buddhist writers such as Trungpa and Nhat Hanh, who assert instead that the objective of Dharma practice overall is to end samsara for the totality of sentient beings, while coming to an awareness of the emergence of experience in the moment as emptiness is a function of
mindfulness. Put differently, in positing “Dharma practice” as a functional equivalent to insight meditation, Goldstein and Kornfield open a discursive space in which insight meditation and by extension mindfulness as such can be readily taken as a whole, integral spiritual path to itself to which Buddhism and all other cultural and spiritual traditions, is assumed to be reducible, as though recovering a rational core from a globalized and irrational body of customs and folkways. This space is delineated by a mobile army of quotations from and in a sense as authorities in various religious and cultural traditions, and contemporary writers such as Joseph Campbell (101); Ken Wilber’s *Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977) is invoked to describe meditation practice as the progressive resolution of dualisms within the subject (187-190). Further, here, as in *The Experience of Insight* and self-help programs, samsara is put across as a kind of mental or cognitive problem, not an existential miasma. But unlike its predecessor, *Discovering the Heart* is presented less as a new way to articulate a presumably old tradition than as a novel redemption of the truth of the old by the rational and modern, for the rational and modern. That it demands a posture of belief in the authority of decontextualized segments of text and a program of self-liberation by the book, in contrast to the negation of the same as so much “spiritual materialism” as in the Pop Buddhism of the previous decade (chapter two), indicates that an attribution of pure rationality to this phase of insight meditation is misplaced. Like *A Gradual Awakening*, this text marks the emergence of a novel belief system that is elaborated in the writings of Kornfield and Kabat-Zinn.

in the genre, such as Kabat-Zinn’s *Wherever you Go, There You Are* (1994), straightforwardly reproduce *A Path’s* repertoire. In this text, Kornfield universalizes psychological Buddhism into a generalized spirituality, positing the spiritual life as transhistorically and archetypally one and generalizable to all of humanity. All this is articulated in an explicitly psychotherapeutic, and specifically Jungian, lexicon; for instance, problems between students and teachers that may emerge in spiritual disciplines are named as transference and projection (*Path* 260) and not as gullibility or authoritarianism, as Trungpa had done. Where Pop Buddhist writers such as Trungpa had used psychoanalytic diction against the grain of psychotherapeutic objectives, Kornfield definitively displaces Buddhist objectives with psychotherapeutic ones generalizable to all persons—with all persons diagnosed with the same modality of suffering, as in *The Relaxation Response* and *Full Catastrophe Living*. Further, in the program Kornfield advocates, distinctions among psychoanalytic, theistic, and Buddhist practices fall away. Psychotherapy is explicitly prescribed as an element of spiritual practice (still a cipher for meditation, which is itself a reduction of lay Buddhist practice) for Westerners who suffer from a malady Kornfield claims that Mahasi Sayadaw had diagnosed as “‘psycho-logical suffering’” (*Path* 245): Here, a Ledi-tradition Buddhist master’s words are made to legitimize psychotherapy and by extension the objectives of psychotherapeutic self-help programs as integral to a contemporary and rational spiritual discipline. Kornfield recasts Asiatic cultural and religious traditions as psychologies, as one among many brand alternatives available on the spiritual marketplace: “Jungian therapy, Reichian therapy, psychosynthesis,” among others, offer insights into the self comparable to those of “the
traditional spiritual disciplines,” Kornfield claims (*Path* 251). With *A Path with Heart* and subsequent texts, Mu Soeng’s description correlation of insight meditation with “psychological Buddhism” takes on another meaning: spiritual practice is here understood as “personal practice,” the DIY meditations of self-help books generalized to a life practice, at the point of contact between psychotherapy and meditation (*Path* 252). In the ecology of quotations and mosaic of psychotherapeutic bromides Kornfield assembles, the religion of capitalism is clearly legible as the final objective of insight meditation practice.

In proclaiming a spirituality without the cultural trappings of Asia, Kornfield effectively positions himself as the expositor of a universal spiritual truth of human history and human culture, and the form *A Path* takes reflects this universalism, much as Goleman had done two decades prior with “psychological Buddhism” in *The Meditative Mind* and Goldstein had done with vipassana in *The Experience of Insight*. The title *A Path with Heart* is a reference to Carlos Castaneda’s influential 1968 novel *The Teachings of Don Juan* (*Path* 12). Kornfield quotes extensively and not unproblematically from world literature, including Zen poets, Sufi poets (often in unreliable translations), his own Buddhist teachers, Hindu gurus, the Christian Desert Fathers, and literary figures, among others. I discuss some of the problems around *A Path*’s reliance on quotations, psychologization, and universalism and their seemingly endless and sometimes careless reproduction in the mindfulness repertoire below. To suggest the significance of Kornfield’s articulation of this discourse through a patchwork of textual fragments to generalized mindfulness, by the end of 2013 I had found twelve
separate instances in mindfulness-related books and other media in which the following quotation was reproduced from *A Path with Heart*: “‘Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body’” (*Path* 43), which approximates a passage in the James Joyce story “A Painful Case.” Because Kornfield’s quotation differs from the language Joyce used in the story, it can be plausibly inferred that mindfulness writers quote Joyce in this way because that is what mindfulness writers do, as evidenced by Kornfield’s having done it. A *Path with Heart* crystallizes a body of text, particular turns of phrase and bits of decontextualized cultural flotsam, that circulate in and around mindfulness as an account drawn upon again and again in varying contexts.

One of insight meditation’s characteristics, apart from its Jung-inflected syncretism, is the genre’s Buddhist orientation, however apparently “slight,” as Kabat-Zinn put it. For instance, in spite of his universalist presentation, Kornfield himself claims that his capacity to practice meditation in late-capitalist USA comes “as a result of committed systematic training” for years as a Buddhist monk in the forest of Thailand (*Path* 5), committing to a specific tradition with a particular and rigorous regimen of practice and study. By his own account, Kornfield the meditator is a product of a traditional Buddhism; the discipline that made Kornfield successful in meditation (and hence “spiritual practice”), according to Kornfield himself, is something different from the psychologized program he advocates in his books, even as that *something different* legitimizes him to promote his program. Kornfield does explicitly present Buddhist thinking in this text, but subordinates it to a universalist logic. For example, the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth is rearticulated through the lens of the Christian theme of the dark
night of the soul (Path 148-49). On this point, Kornfield had clearly become aware of one of the contradictions in his position as a “Western Buddhist” teacher and the universalism espoused in his books. In the audiotape “Karma and the Power of Intention,” recorded in a talk given at Spirit Rock Meditation Center on March 24, 1997, not long after the publication of A Path with Heart, Kornfield emphasizes the omnipresence of karma in the Buddhist tradition as descriptive of samsara, and paraphrases Trungpa in explaining its meaning: “What’s rebirth? Your bad habits.” Kornfield’s detailed description of topics such as the four karmas of the death moment in this recording show a nuanced understanding of Buddhist doctrine. That said, Kornfield broaches the topic of rebirth to this audience with a kind of knowing caveat, as a notion “which you may or may not believe!” and signaling with his tone a boundary against which insight meditators may reasonably orient themselves toward Buddhist thought. I mark here that attitudes toward the doctrine of rebirth represent definitive markers of affiliation among insight meditation and Pop Buddhistic discourses for historical reasons, as evidenced in the writings of Stephen Batchelor (discussed below).

In other instances, Kornfield’s explanations of Buddhism in A Path with Heart mark significant and unmarked innovations, and in one instance, the notion of a “true self,” the religion of capitalism becomes legible under the sign of Buddhist thought. Kornfield locates the site of freedom and awakening precisely in that mass of contingency that traditional Buddhists characterize as that which produces limitation and suffering and Trungpa called “ego”—the kilesas, or afflictions born of karma—which Kornfield, in contrast to Pop Buddhist leaders (chapter two), conflates with the concept
of Buddha-nature, which is precisely ego’s antonym in the Pop Buddhism described in chapter two: Where Trungpa had described the contents of one’s consciousness as “germs,” extrinsic to the identity of the meditator (*Myth 49*), Kornfield instructs the compliant practitioner to identify with the aggregate of those contents as one’s true self. According to Kornfield, the criterion of the truth of one’s true self is healthy *sense of self* (*Path 206*), precisely the unstable formation that, according to traditional Theravadin practice seems convincing but, through systematic meditation, is found to be a dynamic set of synchronous processes with no center of gravity, as in Nyanaponika’s mid-century meditation manual and Goldstein’s writings of the mid-1970s.

One of the contradictions in “true self” involves Kornfield’s assertions regarding historically-contingent phenomena, for example: “the positive qualities of character we work so hard to cultivate are already present as our true nature” (*Path 207*); here, a self that is cultivated in a particular environment is naturalized as always already present, true, and in this context eternal. A *contrived* authenticity is proclaimed transcendent and perennial. Kornfield explicitly defines true self as synonymous with Buddha nature (*Path 211*), but again with a universalist slant: “The peace and perfection of our true nature is one of the great mystical reflections of consciousness described beautifully in a hundred traditions, by Zen and Taoism, by Native American and Western mystics” (*Path 211*). Here, Kornfield’s perennial philosophy, the hero-Buddha with a thousand faces, is novel; traditionally, Buddha-nature is explicitly and exhaustively spelled out as not a self (*S. ātman*), and Buddha is neither the soul of each, nor God of all, nor both at once. Further, character traits are not equated to Buddha-nature, nor are they equated to anything eternal.
or posited as something that is part of something else that is.¹⁵⁹ In claiming that even though “we cannot know our karmic past, we can recognize the deep patterns and archetypes that make up our individuality” (Path 212), Kornfield describes the traits of “our individuality” simultaneously as karmic (historical) and archetypal (transhistorical). If they are karmic, then they are the products of specific histories, and are locally contingent—but if so, they cannot be archetypal, insofar as archetypes are held to be transhistorical and universal. Doctrinally, the psychological Buddhism of A Path with Heart is a contradictory formation. While Kornfield’s specifically theistic diction, refracted through the idea of a “true self,” is disputed among insight meditation writers—Kabat-Zinn declares such thinking a “New Age distortion” (Wherever 238)—its internal logic is now commonplace to insight meditation and generalized mindfulness discourses,¹⁶⁰ as evidenced in the writings of Tara Brach, of which more below.

A Path with Heart crystallizes the formal and doctrinal characteristics of this phase of the insight meditation book, which are articulated in its ecology of quotations and referents, universalist doctrines, and uneasy orientation to the Buddhism it claims to represent while simultaneously to promoting itself a kind of universal spirituality. All these are reproduced in mindfulness media. Further, the perennialism and temporality that Kornfield shares with Goldstein, Salzberg and Batchelor merges with the economic liberalism of Kornfield’s description of both the ancient Buddhistic past and the present as a “spiritual marketplace” (Path 160), a theme Trungpa had anticipated in his parody of spiritual shopping as if at an organic grocery—assuming that the dynamics of the present moment are natural and strangely eternal, that our present is also that of the real and
essential Buddha, and eternal, like the present moment of choiceless awareness—
involving consequential assumptions about who we are and what our truth means in our
moment. These assumptions, including the implication of the self as the cause of all
problems and the basis of all solutions, the elision of history, the position of piety toward
an inevitable present that the compliant practitioner is instructed to take, and the position
of the advice-giver as one capable of healing the worldviews of the present through the
correct equilibrium of East and West, are features of the religion of capitalism. All of
them are reproduced in the insight meditation discourse afterward, where it is mobilized
as the discourse of mindfulness.

Kabat-Zinn’s second book, Wherever You Go, There You Are (first published in
1995), shows the mediation of mindfulness as a stand-alone practice through insight
meditation, and marks Kabat-Zinn’s now considerable influence in that milieu. If
mindfulness as Kabat-Zinn presents it in Full Catastrophe Living represents the cultural
moment of economic liberalization (stress) coming to consciousness of itself through a
form of consciousness it itself summoned (mindfulness as stress relief), then the insight
meditation advice book gives the form through which that self-consciousness is refracted
in Wherever You Go and subsequent volumes. Where Full Catastrophe had been self-
consciously presented as a scientifically-sound and detailed guide to pain and stress
management, while remaining “very readable,” as Nhat Hanh wrote in its preface,
Wherever You Go generalizes the stress-relief model of MBSR as a generalized spiritual
path suitable for all. In contrast to Full Catastrophe, Kabat-Zinn writes, “This book is
[…] offered particularly for those who resist structured programs and for people who
don’t like to be told what to do but are curious enough about mindfulness and its relevance to try to piece things together for themselves” (Wherever xix). Kabat-Zinn appeals here to a hypothetical style of learning for people who resist the disciplines involved in learning, or the challenge of learning a body of thought that may contradict one’s assumptions and convictions. Instead, Kabat-Zinn explicitly presents the consumer with an opportunity to be affirmed and confirmed in self-affirmation and self-confirmation, rather than confronted and challenged from without and subsequently within, precisely the pattern of consumption Gretchen Rubin enacts with regard to happiness-oriented self-help books in The Happiness Project (chapter one). Kabat-Zinn describes his program here as an exercise in disciplined self-affirmation toward a sense of felt authenticity and purpose. Such is the objective of the practice Wherever You Go outlines.

Wherever You Go describes more of an ethos than a doctrine—a practice of personal piety that is as contradictory as its moment of emergence. Kabat-Zinn affirms that “Meditation is the only intentional, systematic human activity which at bottom is about not trying to improve yourself” (Wherever 14), and that it is “really about human development” (Wherever 81). He defines mindfulness as “an ancient Buddhist practice” (Wherever 3) that “has little to do with religion” (Wherever 6). It is in this context that Kabat-Zinn gives the often-quoted definition—“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Wherever 4)—which implies an active engagement, a purposive activity, that chafes against his emphasis on “non-doing” (Wherever 35-39), in which context the claim “meditation is
about letting the mind be as it is” (*Wherever* 33) is made. Kabat-Zinn transposes the rationale for meditation in *Full Catastrophe*, that of coming to consciousness of one’s maladaptation to a stressful environment, into the discourse of automatism common to Buddhist writers of this period, such that “we fall into a robotlike way of seeing and thinking and doing” (*Wherever* xiii), analogous to a dream: “The work of waking up from these dreams is the work of meditation, the systematic cultivation of wakefulness, of present-moment awareness,” Kabat-Zinn asserts (*Wherever* xv). Mindfulness as the work that is non-doing, the purposive activity with no purpose, is finally defined negatively as “the very opposite of routine” (*Wherever* 181), while much of the text is devoted to describing mindfulness as *a way to be* in which it is important to establish a regular time each day for seated practice, to get on the floor once daily, to get up early each morning—mindfulness emerges here as a heavily routinized life-practice that is, somehow, antithetical to routine, a delimiting means to freedom. *Wherever You Go* is less a coherent program than a description of a reverent mode of being toward a transcendent present, and a discipline for conforming to that mode.

Consequently, the position of thought relative to mindfulness practice in *Wherever You Go* is made uncertain. While Kabat-Zinn takes the position already established in insight meditation that “the biggest potential obstacle at points along your journey will undoubtedly be your thinking mind” (*Wherever* 260), and not any material or temporal constraint, he also advocates mindfulness as a mode of inquiry: “Questioning, questioning, continually questioning” (*Wherever* 234), persisting in a state of “not knowing” (*Wherever* 113) as a mode of coming to grips with the emergence of
one’s situation in time.\textsuperscript{161} Hence, thinking mind is at once an obstacle to mindfulness, and a mode of mindfulness, in \textit{Wherever You Go}. In this text, mindfulness is less a clearly-defined practice than an ambivalent motif, made available for whatever meaning the reader may choose to project onto it, in a moment mystified by the unknowability attributed to it.

Similarly, Kabat-Zinn presents mindfulness as an ambivalent means to realize whatever the practitioner may choose to realize by it. Kabat-Zinn instructs the meditator: “If you hope to bring meditation into your life in any kind of long-term, committed way, you will need a vision that is truly your own—one that is deep and tenacious and that lies close to the core of who you believe yourself to be, what you value in your life, and where you see yourself going” (\textit{Wherever} 75-76). And this vision must be personal, because “Our vision has to do with our values, and with our personal blueprint for what is most important in life” (\textit{Wherever} 78). Kabat-Zinn proposes a reversed order of operation from that described above by the Dalai Lama, Nhat Hanh, and Trungpa. Here, the meditation \textit{is} the point, and the reader is invited to “piece” together a vision for it alone; the vision serves the meditation; and the vision is predetermined by the practitioner, reflective of one’s personal values as convictions, not values mediated through a rigorous analytical process. Meaning: the consumer-meditator realizes \textit{whatever she had set out to realize}, whatever she had contrived, through mindfulness, leaving no space to learn anything new. Mindfulness thus understood functions as a self-help or workplace authenticity program and not a Pop Buddhist one. Here, tactics such as “going to one’s happy place” or engaging in the affirmations of positive psychology (chapter one)
become ends in themselves, and are recast as “spiritual practice” as Goldstein and Kornfield present it in *Seeking the Heart*.

Further, where in Pop Buddhist practice the vision or view of the emptiness of self would be contemplated and analyzed from a specified canon of texts and teachings with a teacher and fellow practitioners, and methods would be given to pursue the view (seated meditation, perhaps, one among them), instead Kabat-Zinn posits *any* view as an *impediment* to meditation practice (*Wherever* 265-67). Even so, Kabat-Zinn does advocate a specific set of views for the meditator, and not only that of the consumer-friendly “personal vision.” Deep into the book, Kabat-Zinn introduces the concept of “interconnectedness” as a way to describe emptiness and dependent origination (and hence karma), much as Nhat Hanh does: “Nothing is isolated. Each event connects with others” (*Wherever* 208). In doing so, he posits mindfulness as the realization of this view, “the ongoing discovery of the thread of interconnectedness” (*Wherever* 215). However, in the context of the book’s scope, this bit of Buddhist thought is subordinated to the universalist doctrine Kabat-Zinn foregrounds, which he shares with Kornfield—a universalism of the moment informed by the writings of Jung, Campbell, and Robert Bly (*Wherever* 81-86).

Like Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn presents not the Westernized Buddhism claimed by scholars of mindfulness, but the appropriation of Buddhist themes and practices such as *anapasati* meditation into a universalist self-help program (*Wherever* 83), and not the reverse. Mindfulness emerges as a round-the-campfire jingoism of personal journeys, archetypal images, and mythopoeic speculations regarding ancient cultures as renarrated
by contemporary advice authors: “Soul stories” (Wherever 268). In this context, Kabat-Zinn articulates notions that seem to have more in common with New Age cultures than Buddhist ones. For instance, Kabat-Zinn’s claim that in meditation “you are making yourself available to higher insights, priming a willingness in yourself to resonate with energies we usually think of as elevated, divine, celestial, cosmic, universal, of a higher order and wisdom” (Wherever 113-114) is one such notion. Mindfulness and insight meditation are hardly culture-free, as their advocates claim; this universalism is the form and content of its characteristic cultural trappings.

Such innovations in form and content in Wherever You Go relative to the lay Buddhism that Goldstein and Salzberg trained in coincide with an ecology of quotations much like that of A Path with Heart and its successors. Here, Kabat-Zinn relies on Peace is Every Step to explain walking meditation (Wherever 145), and, silently, the diction of Trungpa. Even as much of Kabat-Zinn’s diction has a precedent in Trungpa’s oeuvre—for instance, his use of the word “dignity” as a descriptor for the meditator’s posture is an arrow from Trungpa’s quiver (Wherever 107)—the controversial author of Crazy Wisdom is not nameable here. Kabat-Zinn’s extensive reliance on canonical nature writers signals the solo-contemplative environmental mode his practice summons (of which more to follow). Conspicuous are the extensive quotations from nature writings such as Gary Snyder’s The Practice of the Wild and most extensively from Walden, which vies with Robert Bly’s The Kabir Book for the position of Kabat-Zinn’s most frequently referenced text, paired with Kabat-Zinn’s first-person accounts of exploring the wilderness and observing wildlife in the North American West and a series of meditations involving
literal identification with mountains, lakes, and trees. As I will suggest, this affective, discursive, and individualistic environmentalism differs in kind and quality from calls for a radically different relation to the totality of life in a material sense that obtain in the writings of the Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh. Rather, Kabat-Zinn’s position is that of Levine and Kornfield, concerned with a world-transcending perennial philosophy that appropriates intensive, if selective, quotations from the world’s spiritual writings and makes them fungible into each other in order to summon an ethos of personal devotion associated with the Good, in this instance a Green Good.

In the discussion of everyday life in Wherever You Go, many of the themes and fundamental assumptions of Full Catastrophe are reproduced, starting with the transposition of the contemporary discourse of stress into a pathology “intrinsic to the human condition itself” by equating it with the Buddhist concept of dukkha, or suffering (Wherever 30). The rationale for mindfulness, and the ahistoricism of its milieu, remain the same. So does the meditator: as in Full Catastrophe, Kabat-Zinn assumes a comfortably bourgeois reader and writes these assumptions into the meditations given in Wherever You Go. For instance, prescribing the routine walk to the clothes dryer or refrigerator as a meditation assumes one’s home is equipped with such appliances. Similarly, with regard to food and mindful eating, the reader is assumed to be inattentive to the quality and volume of food he or she consumes (Wherever 203), and not to face food insecurity, or to live in a food desert where no meaningful choices are available.

At the same time, Kabat-Zinn’s mediation of MBSR through the insight meditation discourse leads Kabat-Zinn partway to the positions articulated by Buddhist
writers such as the Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh, especially in his description of electronic
media as a “soporific” antithetical to personal freedom (Wherever 174) and to
environmental consciousness, where the affective environmentalism Kabat-Zinn
professes—which, as I have shown, he articulates through insight meditation’s ecology of
quotations—leads him to a reflection on the consequences of disrupting the “harmony” of
nature through human intervention, for instance logging in the global south:
the full consequences of logging the rain forests covering the high ground in the
South Philippines were not apparent until the typhoon of late 1991 struck, when
the denuded earth, no longer able to hold water, let it rush unchecked to the
lowlands at four times the usual volume and drowned thousands of poor
inhabitants of the region. As the popular bumper sticker says, ‘Shit happens.’ The
trouble is, too often we are unwilling to see our role in it. (Wherever 177)
The injustice of the global context of this specific economic activity, under which the
poor are made vulnerable and literally crushed in this example, goes unremarked—as
though the drowned Filipinos should have known better than to meddle with the harmony
of nature in their attempts to feed themselves by the means made available to them by
economic relations they did not choose.164 Put differently, while Kabat-Zinn’s meditator
is able to recognize the sufferings of the world in a material sense, unlike Nhat Hanh’s,
he or she is not directed to become mindful of the totality of lived relations, or to reflect
on the global social and economic causes at work in local instances of suffering—why
the well-stocked shelves here correlate to intensive poverty there. Instead, individual
actors are held to account in situ, as in the victim-blaming logic of MBSR. The Filipino
villagers crushed in the landslide Kabat-Zinn describes are chastised for not seeing their role in creating the disaster. Similarly, the green activism Kabat-Zinn proposes is refracted into the needs and experiences of the individual consumer-meditator, through the discipline of voluntary simplicity. For Kabat-Zinn, “Voluntary simplicity means going fewer places in one day rather than more, seeing less so I can see more, doing less so I can do more, acquiring less so I can have more” (Wherever 69). Here, Kabat-Zinn reinscribes the logic of renunciation in the Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh as a greenwashed logic of accumulation—a set of personal lifestyle choices, and not a politics of recognition “for all beings.” Where Kabat-Zinn asks his solo meditator to visualize him or herself as a tree or a lake, Nhat Hanh encourages his readers to avoid poisoning poor people or impoverishing the global South because others matter as much to the reader as the reader matters to the reader, and further to understand how the poor became poor and the rich, rich. The imperative of MBSR—individuals must find the means to adapt to a hostile, unquestioned, and mystified environment—thus mediated through the discourse of insight meditation shares certain themes in common with the Buddhist advice book, but with an entirely different itinerary of practice, intention, and objective.

The compensatory practice of mindfulness inaugurated in Full Catastrophe is thus mediated through the universalisms and slightly-Buddhist-orientations of insight meditation, such that critical thought is devalued in favor of an affective, personal, felt sense of communion and nourishment, which constitute the basis for personal conduct (sociality is not discussed in Wherever You Go—one fancies oneself as a lake or as a tree, not one’s community as an ocean or a forest). Even as it shares some characteristics
of the lay Buddhism that had been presented to North Americans in the preceding decade, even appropriating some of its practices, themes, and diction, its distinctions from that discourse seem more numerous and fundamental. After Wherever You Go, the anxious masculinity inscribed in its outdoorsy “soul stories” pace Bly is carried into the equally macho corporate world, even as a latent desire for a more free mode of existence, if not a more just one, is also visible.

In this way the religion of capitalism made legible in A Path with Heart becomes inseparable from mindfulness as MBSR, generalized mindfulness, insight meditation leaders are made available as mindfulness teachers, and insight meditation discourse is generalizable as mindfulness discourse.

THE GENERALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS AS THE HAPPY ACCEPTANCE OF THE STATUS QUO

I describe the third phase of insight meditation’s crystallization in terms of three facets. First, this phase is marked an explicit and distinctive theology that at once summons and negates the lay Buddhism it is legitimimized by. The function that had been served by Buddhist conventions in the formation of “spiritual practice” in the writings of Kornfield are fully evacuated, and their places filled in with a universalist content, but with the contour of the vacated still visible, as in a palimpsest. This theology invokes the disciplined acceptance of the status quo; it is the indispensable substrate to this phase’s second facet, its availability as a mode of discipline accommodating the status quo. Here, insight meditation becomes indistinguishable from self-help guides to a tranquil compliance in a stressful environment such as The Relaxation Response. Third, as
mindfulness practice has been mediated through the discourse of insight meditation, in
texts such as *A Path with Heart* and *Wherever You Go*, and as mindfulness is generalized
as a self-help tool by appeal to cognitive science, so are insight meditation leaders
legitimized as mindfulness experts—Kornfield, for example, is empowered in this way to
lecture before Google’s employees and at the annual Wisdom 2.0 conference, which he
had a hand in inventing—while some Buddhist leaders and institutions volunteer to
participate, and others are conscripted. This third facet is another way in which
contemporary Buddhism has become indispensable to generalized mindfulness.

In the writings of Tara Brach, a rearticulation of insight meditation as a
psychological Buddhist program in the sense of self-help texts such as *The Relaxation
Response* is realized. In *Radical Acceptance* (2004) and *True Refuge* (2012), the self-help
logics of *A Path with Heart* and *Wherever You Go* overwrite the Buddhist functions
legible in the first phase of insight meditation discourse and tacit in the second. Brach’s
books also show the novelty of insight meditation relative to Buddhism per Trungpa or
Nhat Hanh, and the disjuncture of insight meditation as the discursive substrate of
mindfulness from Buddhism as such; as I claimed in chapter two, Pop Buddhist texts
such as *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* indicate an anticipatory mindfulness of
insight meditation as formulated in *True Refuge*. For Brach, psychotherapy is no longer
merely an indispensable adjunct to meditation, as in *A Path with Heart*; meditation *is*
therapy, as in MBSR (*Radical Acceptance* 303), and meditation is “spiritual practice”
entire, which can be undertaken through the compliant consumption of the right books.
As indicated in its title, *Radical Acceptance*, this advice book advocates an appropriate adjustment to the contemporary juncture as the work of spiritual practice. The characteristic ecology of quotations in insight meditation books, oriented around an explicitly Jungian universalism, intensifies here. Brach’s books are quilts of quotations from diverse but still predictable authors such as Rilke, Rumi, and Robert Bly’s *Kabir Book (Radical Acceptance 256)—even Trungpa (True Refuge 85)*, unnameable twenty years before. And this ecology is mobilized in such a way as to reimagine the present moment and the future emergent from it as a transcendent, even Providential, zone of spiritual plenitude. One radically accepts the moment and what it reproduces moment-to-moment, the status quo, in an attitude of devotion and piety. Here, the theology of insight meditation makes available a mode of discipline, the self-discipline of the compliant self-help consumer, is mobilized in everyday life in the workplace to reproduce the social relations of the present.

These dynamics are visible in Brach’s treatment of the therapeutic discourse of acceptance, the Buddhist practice of refuge, and the New Age (and conscious capitalist) doctrine of the evolution of consciousness. Brach defines “radical acceptance” as “Not taking our suffering personally” (*Radical 302*). This recognizably Buddhist premise—nothing is to be taken personally, because the thing and the person are ultimately empty—is understood in the context of insight meditation and its doctrine of a true self as a kind of passivity, of wholly accepting one’s lot as immutable, a posture of resignation toward the present situation and indifference to the causes in it of what Brach calls “our shared suffering” (*Radical 303*). Radical acceptance in this sense is of a piece with
Kabat-Zinn’s notion of switching from “doing” to “being” mode, and the intentional passivity in conduct legible in *The Experience of Insight*. The attitude one takes toward the transcendent present posited in insight meditation is one of radical, from the root, acceptance—moment-to-moment awareness, without judgement. The compliant meditator disciplines him or herself to accept the status quo and its terms.

The present thus understood takes on a theological quality. In formulating the objective of “waking up” as “a universal process,” *(True 17)*, Brach makes absolute—cosmic, theological—the cultural universalism behind the psychological Buddhism in Kornfield and Kabat-Zinn, such that the etymological sense of the word *Buddha* (one who has awakened) is universalized to the cosmos coming to consciousness of itself. Specifically, Brach presents insight meditation practice as effecting a collective evolutionary transition from “egoic” consciousness (buttressed by quotations from the writing of the Hindu master Nisargadatta, also quoted significantly in Levine’s books after *A Gradual Awakening*) to a kind of collective belonging-consciousness, which is formless and timeless, “a presence that knows, a space of awareness that perceives” *(True 254-5)—an idealist historicism by which the inadequate worldview characteristic of the present is to be superseded by a more-Divine one. This inscribes the evolutionary temporality of the religion of capitalism—of progressive worldviews, the next more adequate than the last—into insight meditation’s rationale for itself, as representing a developmental advance over less-modern, less-complete worldviews. Like Brach’s advocacy for meditation on a “loving universal spirit” *(True 85)*, this belief is wholly novel relative to any Buddhist culture, including Pop Buddhism (chapter two).*166* In
posing the providential historicism of a transition of the subject from egoic state, posited in “evolutionary” terms, to a spiritualized one, Brach’s position is closest to that of the New Age writer Ken Wilber (Sex 40-85), a significant influence on Kabat-Zinn and Kornfield, and as I will show in chapter four, the discourses of conscious capitalism and mindful leadership. Self-help programs promoting an adaptation to the present and finding meaning in that are here further mystified into a novel religious formulation that crystallizes the imperatives of the present juncture for the belabored: to identify with the reproduction of the moment as the emergence of the Good, or in the Buddhist patois, to take refuge in the status quo.

Brach’s treatment of refuge is the logical terminus of the evolutionism she posits and posture of acceptance she advocates. For Buddhists such as Nhat Hanh, refuge-taking is at once a kind of meditation, and a ritual in which one explicitly commits to the Buddhist path by taking refuge from samsara in the Buddha, the Dharma (body of teachings), and the Sangha (assembly of ordained and lay followers)—together, the Three Treasures. Refuge-taking marks a conversion at the point of objective, of the purposes to which one orients one’s life.\(^{167}\) Nhat Hanh, hardly a conservative or fundamentalist Buddhist, defines refuge-taking as involving all three jewels within and without oneself (Being 21-28); refuge indicates both the sense of what one trusts, and the practical distinction of those who choose to belong to the Buddhist community from those who do not. In that sense, Trungpa’s writings on spiritual materialism amount to invectives against seeking refuge in the metaphysical subtleties of the commodity relation\(^{168}\) and by extension the self-help routines of the labor market. In contrast, Brach reinvents refuge-
taking as a universal act (*True xvi*), not as a context-dependent cultural marker, commitment to a specific tradition, or conversion to particular objectives.

In this context, Brach claims that there are “three archetypal gateways that appear again and again on the universal path of awakening” (*True 45*). These three, Brach claims, are tied to the Hindu formulation of Sat-Chit-Ananda (truth-bliss-consciousness) and the Christian trinity (*True 46*), and summarized as follows: Truth (Dharma), Love (Sangha), Awareness (Buddha, and other “inspirational spiritual figures”) (*True 47*). In contrast to Buddhist refuge, but in keeping with the perennialism of insight meditation, Truth, Love, and Awareness are subjective states, not social acts.\(^{169}\)

Meditation is posited as the practice of awakening to these three, which means that meditation is now taken to be the singular act of refuge that brings to consciousness the universal truth represented by Brach’s formula, nominally a Buddhism made true in the enlightened West as distinct from the residual rituals of Buddhist Asia, as indicated in the title *True Refuge* (*True xvii*). Brach’s meditator takes refuge on a wholly personal, even DIY basis, in whatever brand-choice might “resonate” with the consumer, a brand choice that is universalized as the inner logic of the universe’s unfolding. The contours of the Buddhist form remain, but the function and content are entirely novel. In Trungpa’s terms, Brach advocates taking refuge on ego’s terms: “we can choose the way most meaningful to our temperament” (*Radical 175*), Brach claims, and those ways are elaborated systematically in *True Refuge*.\(^{170}\) Brach’s reimagination of the act of refuge-taking follows directly from Kornfield’s syncretist revision of the doctrine of Buddha-
nature (anticipated by Levine), one’s contingent personality traits as one’s “true self,” and from Kabat-Zinn’s imperative to realize a personal vision on under one’s own direction.

In what can the contemporary seeker-consumer take refuge, according to the insight meditation writers, in this phase? If one commits to a path of trusting one’s consumer choices, then a kind of go-it-alone freedom is promised, a different freedom entirely from that described in Pop Buddhist practice, which is by definition sociable and requires a concrete (and challenging) teaching situation. Brach’s prescription for refuge models the behavior of someone who finds hope in shopping for solutions, working through the pages of the Eastern Spirituality and Metaphysics section of a bookstore as in *The Happiness Project* (chapter one)—coming up with a syncretist mass of material that, perhaps, the author found personally meaningful and pieced together, as a reader of *Wherever You Go* would do—rather than the systematic exhaustion of such consumerist impulses Trungpa advocated. It is the contract of a financialized daily life, living toward the horizon of an internalized, stereotyped authenticity.¹⁷¹

In the third phase of insight meditation, two aspects of the religion of capitalism are in evidence. The temporality of globalization implicit in the travel narratives and advice books of seekers in the 1970s-1990s, where the exotic Other is positioned in the present as a site of ancient wisdom to be recuperated by an enlightened mind able to penetrate the cultural trappings of the more recent past to see the inner archetypal logic of the mind and hence the world’s cultural produce. This takes the form of positioning the real meaning of a nominally Buddhist practice, seated meditation, as ancient, and its recuperation as temporally advanced over the views and lifeways of those Buddhists who
fail to recognize its significance. Insight meditation and mindfulness advocates consistently deny the coevalness of the Buddhist authorities they persistently quote and legitimize themselves with, a trend most legible in the writings of Stephen Batchelor (of whom more below). Far from an evolution of Buddhism to a new milieu, this discourse enacts a stable repertoire of practices, themes, and logics that at once claim a Buddhist affiliation and, simultaneously, position Buddhism as Buddhists may understand it as less adequate to the mind of modern man than generalized mindfulness is. Second, the discourse of insight meditation is unambiguously that of the self-help book, taking as its objective a psychological-Buddhist adaptation to the present, the reproduction of the present as its austerity and discipline, and devotion to the present as anticipation of a (deferred) redemption. Far from pointing out its hopelessness, this discourse posits the status quo as the ground of hope and fountain of authentic Good.

Simultaneously, in this third phase, insight meditation becomes formally and practically indistinguishable from self-help programs such as MBSR and the Relaxation Response. For example, Salzberg’s 2011 Real Happiness, promoted by Oprah Winfrey, is an extraordinarily light book in comparison to The Dalai Lama’s The Art of Happiness, Lyubomirsky’s The How of Happiness, or Salzberg’s prior book on the topic, Lovingkindness. Here, a transition from middle-brow or “mid-cult” armchair philosophy such as A Path with Heart to mass-market paperbacks is effected, in prose characterized by short sentences, bullet-pointed lists where a reader familiar with A Heart as Wide as the World would expect full paragraphs, and an audio CD included for guided meditation. The book’s form hails its reader as a passive consumer. Further, any reference to the
world-revolutionary character of the practice that Salzberg espouses in her earlier books is jettisoned in favor of a wholly compensatory logic, as in True Refuge. For instance, anticipating that mindfulness may not be particularly valued in itself in contemporary everyday life, Salzberg makes a pitch on its behalf, pointing out certain “payoffs” of better health and happiness that are buttressed by appeals to the science of mind as evidence pace Goleman. No longer aspiring to revolutionize the conventional subjectivity of the present, by 2011 Salzberg has transformed her presentation of meditation practice to serve the same and assumed that her current readers are less prepared to begin practice than the beginners of twenty years before who had started with Lovingkindness. Salzberg here claims that mindfulness as a means to personal happiness is better suited to the needs of the belabored subject than the distractions offered through the media or in consumerism: “Conventional happiness—the consolation of momentary distraction—is not only transitory, it can be isolating, shot through with an undercurrent of fear. Even when things are going well, we have the nagging feeling—in the midst of our pleasure—that our well-being is fragile, unstable, in need of protection” (Real 198). Where Trungpa would advocate giving up on happiness so posited as hopeless, Salzberg instead posits “real” happiness and wellbeing in terms recalling Selye, as a healthy pattern of adaptations to the given in preparation for constantly-changing circumstances (Real 198). Here, mindfulness as the convergence of the discourses of happiness, wellbeing, and timely response to stressors and insecurities is crystallized in the words of a contemporary insight meditation and heretofore “Western Buddhist” teacher.
Real Happiness describes the availability of mindfulness as a mode of discipline in the sense that it enacts the reproduction of the relations of power of the present into the future in the granular routines of everyday life as the means to the Good. The meditator is told that all problems one experiences can be, and ought to be, resolvable in one’s head, while the contours of the historical juncture from which those problems emerge—the struggle of everyday life at present—is largely ignored. That the sequel to Real Happiness situates this version of mindfulness in the workplace indicates its function as a means to compliance, a mode of discipline—and the curious position of a meditation instructor legitimised to describe a workplace self-help program by virtue of having trained as a lay Buddhist practitioner.

Mindfulness discourse as a religious formation and as a self-help program is generalized by appeals to cognitive science. The meditator is told one can change one’s life less by changing one’s mind than by changing one’s brain through disciplined practice, as Goleman had been claiming since the 1970s, on the claim that scientists have demonstrated, by their imaging of Buddhist (typically Tibetan) brains, that the promises of mindfulness discourse may be fulfilled in the disciplined application of mindfulness practice. Because the recent discursive history of mindfulness is well known thanks to Jeff Wilson’s groundbreaking survey, a summary of it will suffice here.

One consequence of mindfulness’ mediation through positive psychology and cognitive science is a strong emphasis on the convergence between the discourses of science and of nominally Buddhist meditation, as underscored by the Dalai Lama’s initiatives in the 1990s and before. Donald Lopez points out that the notion that
Buddhism is itself a kind of science is an orientalist fantasy of the late nineteenth century upheld now as a symptom of the recuperation of Shakyamuni as Our contemporary. As I have shown, Buddhist leaders addressing North American audiences present meditation and science as at least cognate forms of inquiry regardless, and certain aspects of Buddhist accomplishment as science-verified health outcomes (chapter one). Meditation marked as science, as a practice either to cultivate a spirituality or to improve one's life, often with an appeal to the Dalai Lama and Kabat-Zinn, thus emerges in the advice-book genre as a consequence. Significantly for both workplace meditation programs such as Google’s Search Inside Yourself and mindfulness popularizations, meditation is more and more often described in terms of the manipulation of the structure of one’s brain, specifically the size and shape of one’s amygdala, than the structure of one’s intentions, view, or conduct. By 2009, the biomechanical language Goleman had been proposing for decades and the universalism of insight meditation had crystallized into a kind of commonsense view of “contemplative practices” and happiness, as presented in the promotional material for Rick Hanson’s Buddha’s Brain (2009): “Great teachers like the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and Gandhi were all born with brains built essentially like anyone else’s—and they changed their brains in ways that changed the world,” reproducing with some precision the diction Levine had used in A Gradual Awakening, but where Levine had presented an idealist universalism appropriate to an interfaith support group, here the perennialism is predicated in the brain-scan imagery of cognitive science. “Contemplative practice” generally in Buddha’s Brain is mindfulness in specific, and the baseline brain is a Buddha-brain, as Goleman had posited; baseline spirituality is
a nominally Buddhist-oriented one, per Kornfield and Kabat-Zinn. As in insight meditation, the objective of *Buddha’s Brain* is not to change one’s life, or the social relations in which one is embedded, but to change the material substrate of one’s biochemistry. This base-superstructure model is reproduced especially in the workplace, where the imperative for improved productivity is refracted through such buzzwords as *optimization* and *performance*.

Meanwhile, mindfulness as redefined after clinical psychology and insight meditation is inscribed into contemporary Buddhist advice books, topic by topic. The most culturally significant example is work, the analysis of which dominates the next three chapters. Mindful eating is an instructive and representative example of how Buddhist institutions and leaders can be summoned, some of them voluntarily, to serve as mindfulness authorities by the topic—and how assumptions about Buddhism at work in this milieu reconfigure the role of a religious leader into a wellness and success authority. The topic of mindful eating had been broached in an advice book by a psychologist, Susan Albers, in 2003 (*Eating Mindfully*). Mindful eating in this context is traceable to self-help practices for personal health longstanding in North America; while Buddhists do train to eat with attention, which is how Nhat Hanh presents it in his 2004 book *How to Eat*, there is nothing inherently Buddhist about “mindful eating” as a health and wellbeing intervention. However, Jan Chozen Bays, a US-based Zen teacher, has subsequently written extensively on mindful eating simultaneously as a health and wellbeing intervention, and as a Buddhist practice (*Mindful Eating*, 2009); by 2010, Nhat Hanh followed suit in *Savor*. These texts mark a tendency among some contemporary
Buddhist writers to follow in the tracks of cognitive scientists and positive psychologists after the generalization of mindfulness. They also mark the entrenchment of the Buddhist leader’s role as a public health authority and legitimator of generalized mindfulness at the site of consumption, reproduced in “mindful” books on this and other topics. The introduction of mindfulness to Buddhism has consequences for the parameters of contemporary Buddhist teaching and Buddhist practice, particularly when the enthusiasm for apparent certainty these writers attribute to scientific discourse is brought to bear on Buddhist traditions. Alan Wallace’s *Contemplative Science* (2009) and *Meditations of a Buddhist Skeptic* (2012), and Sam Harris’s *Waking Up* (2014), are representative of this movement and share some of the sentiments in *Buddhism Without Beliefs* and its sequels—which is to say that the qualified equation of Buddhism to science through mindfulness that Wallace posits reifies the problematic position Batchelor represents in, of, and now as contemporary Buddhism. And returning to the Eastern Spirituality aisle, an anticipated demand for mindfulness books by readers of Buddhist books is indicated in the decision of Wisdom Publications, which publishes well-regarded translations and commentaries of traditional Buddhist texts, to begin including a page on “Mindful Living” in their annual catalogue as of 2012.

In its third phase, the practice of insight meditation is generalized as a science-endorsed mode of discipline, mindfulness, with a distinctive theological content that mystifies the power relations of the present and a contradictory relation of mutual legitimation with the Buddhist institutions and leaders in which it is now embedded.

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AFTER THE END OF HISTORY IN INSIGHT MEDITATION

So far, I have implied that the doctrinal and practical features of insight meditation are problematic in different ways from Buddhist discourses, but it remains to indicate how this is so. In bracketing culture and the “body situation,” in disregarding history and critical thought, and in assuming “our” position, that of a reified present moment, as a universal and advanced one, insight meditation and mindfulness leaders reproduce the characteristic cultural imperatives of contemporary capitalism, while disallowing themselves the means to recognize and address them. Further, an alternative to this way of understanding mindfulness, for instance on the terms Buddhists promote it, is dismissed out of hand by promoters such as Janice Marturano, as a “new age method involving chanting and incense” (45). As I will show, Marturano is not the only or the first to make such an assertion: the methods of the test subjects of the science of mindfulness are irrelevant to us now, we whose agendas matter (to us). Most significantly, the critical and utopian elements in writers such as Trungpa and Nhat Hanh that understand the practice of mindfulness in dialectical relation to the present moment, positing forms of intervention into it, are displaced in the insight meditation books in favor of a universalism of the present and the personal—the mystification of the derivative into the realm of spiritual aspiration, demanding a position of devotion and acceptance, and a strong tendency to transpose social and historical problems into personal ones. In its ahistoricism, this formation resists bringing differences in power relations to consciousness; no means to an alternative to the present is posited, and as I will suggest here and in subsequent chapters, none is allowed even as alternatives are
necessarily summoned by mindfulness discourse. The racial positioning of Asianness, the other on which generalized mindfulness is predicated in the figure of the “Oriental Monk,” is the most relevant example.

Insight meditation cannot allow its practitioners to become mindful of this discourse’s positioning of itself relative to the Buddhisms and Buddhists it defines as other to itself. The “Oriental Monk” serves as a positive and negative mode of self-legitimation for mindfulness—in this context the nominally Buddhist practice that is also secular, universal, not Buddhist—that asserts a tacit racism toward Buddhist Asians. This is first legible in the dismissal of Buddhism’s “cultural trappings” that has been in circulation among North American advocates for Buddhist practice since well before Trungpa or Nhat Hanh, and are involved with their reception. For instance, in his introduction to *Zen Keys*, Philip Kapleau claims: “If Zen is to find a permanent home in the West and become a living force in the lives of Europeans and Americans, it is obvious it will have to shed its Eastern cultural accretions and develop new forms” (17).

Kapleau had directed these remarks at male monasticism when he wrote this in 1974, but as this idea continued to circulate out of context, particularly among those insight meditation leaders and self-help authors, it became tied to particular doctrines that seemed superstitious, irrational, and unscientific to many in and around the insight meditation scene. As I have already suggested, the “cultural trapping” *par excellence* among insight meditators is a doctrinal position common to all schools of Buddhism, that of the determinations of samsara as endless rebirth from lifetime to lifetime, a miasma,
and not as a field for the realization of a “true self” or the advent of a more-adequate worldview as promoted in insight meditation writings and the religion of capitalism.

It is not accidental that rebirth among the many concepts elaborated in Buddhist doctrine would be singled out as an ancient superstition, while the anachronistic romantic hero-worship and mythopoetic speculations in evidence in the second phase of insight meditation discourse would be upheld as appropriate to the moment. The religion of capitalism is explicitly ahistorical, and celebrates the transcendence of the present and its reproduction through a dutiful mode of identification and self-fashioning. Rebirth represents the pessimistic historicism of miasma legible in Pop Buddhism (chapter two) pursued to its logical conclusion: the analysis of karma (causation), the emergence of present formations from the inertia of extant causes and conditions, indicates not only the contingency of the present but also that the workings of its production are knowable in the present—that a historical consciousness has practical value to an Enlightenment project. Further, it suggests that attention merely to the present is inadequate to an Enlightenment project, given the unimaginably long time frame of birth, death, and rebirth—over and over again—posited in Buddhist accounts of karma. This historicism is incompatible with the temporality of a transcendent present that Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn, and Brach espouse which, in contrast, summons an attitude of devotion to the present and identification with the patterns of its reproduction.

The position that the teaching of rebirth is a cultural accretion irrelevant to modern man among insight meditation and mindfulness advocates is to be found in the oxymoronically-titled *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1997). Here, Batchelor argues that
agnosticism (as Batchelor defines it) is closer to the spirit of the teachings of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha than traditional Buddhist presentations of karma and the spatiotemporal endlessness of samsara—the miasma of rebirth, which Trungpa described as “six styles of imprisonment” (*Myth of Freedom*) in a pessimistic historicism. Further, Batchelor affirms this agnostic attitude to be more appropriate to the contemporary Western mind and lifestyle than the unverifiable and hence unscientific appeals Buddhist doctrine makes to the persistence of karma over uncountable lifetimes. This articulates the transcendence of the present shared by Kornfield, Salzberg, and Goldstein in their assertion of the contemporaneity of the Buddha’s original teachings, and the coincidence of insight meditation and mindfulness with the “pragmatism” Goldstein attributes to Shakyamuni, Our Contemporary. Batchelor is effectively stating to the widest swath of Buddhist Asia: *our version of your history is relevant now; your lived experience of this history as crystallized in your present is a relic of an outmoded, unreasoned, premodern past*. This is precisely the denial of coevalness characteristic of globalization mystified into a distinction between “modern” and “premodern” Buddhist views and practices, where the former represent a better-adequate worldview to the latter. I take such positions as tacit bigotry, positioned so as to never come to consciousness of the compliant, modern-identifying meditator insofar as thought is posited as antithetical to practice, and the field of history as irrelevant to the mind, in insight meditation.¹⁷⁶ *Buddhism without Beliefs* and its sequels are not infrequently read in insight meditation circles to the present; positions similar to Batchelor’s are taken by contemporary Zen teachers such as James Jundo Cohen and are repeated in claims on mindfulness as ancient wisdom for
modern times, as not religious or tied to any culture, as the practice for us now, for our time, by mindfulness advocates and by scholars.

Joseph Cheah observes that *Buddhism without Beliefs* presents a position “that is totally alien to traditional Asian Buddhist devotees” (69). Cheah argues that insight meditation, when understood as a mode of convert Buddhist engagement, produces, in practice and doctrine, a zone of “white supremacy” that is difficult for Asian Buddhists in North America to navigate, particularly for the Burmese immigrants Cheah observes—those whose experiences with converts are more likely to be determined by the converts’ experiences at IMS and Spirit Rock, or in insight meditation advice books, which have a historical association with Theravada Buddhism, than by converts to Mahayana Buddhist traditions, which have their own institutions. The Eurocentric assumptions through which meditation has been mediated, in aggregate the religion of capitalism, are invisibly reproduced in mindfulness; more than a doctrinal inconsistency, the tacit temporal bigotry of insight meditation that reaches its apogee in *Buddhism without Beliefs* is experienced as racism by those who are not positioned as us or of the present moment.

The invisibility of the Eurocentric standard that Cheah foregrounds is significant, because the imposition of it takes the form of a universality, a presumed freedom from the specificity of culture and the power to rearticulate the inner content of any culture. Such a presumption has penetrated to the core of the insight meditation scene since the beginning, and subsequently in generalized mindfulness. Here, the assumption common to many insight meditation instructors, Kabat-Zinn among them, that Buddhism is a kind of psychology—a body of knowledges, disciplines, and practices of and for the mind and
the development of consciousness—and, hence, that Buddhist practice is reducible to seated meditation, the absolute form by which consciousness may be explored and cultivated, is again relevant. By this logic, Buddhist practice in its purest form (mindfulness mediated through insight meditation) is advanced as culture-free and universal, insofar that everyone breathes and can become aware of that breathing, because everyone has a bioplastic brain—and anything calling itself Buddhism that seems in any way cultural, such as a body of doctrine or a ritual practice, may be taken as an aberration, a residual, a sign of degeneration from the pure form; or perhaps as a departure from the Buddhism which is relevant to *us*, that of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha or *our* contemporary true refuge.

This formation was not invented out of whole cloth in North America; some form of it was in circulation among the bureaucrats of the Anglophone bourgeoisie Lerner encountered in his 1972 meditation retreat in Burma, and it marks a distinction between Ledi’s Buddhist revivalism as experienced in Burma and the universalism of his tradition’s scion, S.N. Goenka.\(^\text{178}\) According to Wendy Cadge, Goenka “strictly avoided the words ‘Buddhism’ and ‘religion’” because the Buddha’s teaching is not a discrete body of doctrine with a discrete history, but “a universal teaching” (35-36)—and Goenka had extraordinary success in popularizing meditation among European and American “seekers” in India such as Lerner, among whom a ten-day *vipassana* retreat was *de rigueur*.\(^\text{179}\) Counterintuitively, there is a deep-seated sectarian claim at work in Goenka’s professed nonsectarianism: *our* sect is superior insofar as it is universal, while in comparison *yours* is sectarian, culture-bound, and limited.
Kornfield articulates the same position as Goenka’s with regard to insight meditation’s appeal in North America in a 1979 interview: “The aspect which seems most appealing to Westerners is that Vipassana is a completely non-cultural form of spiritual practice—whereas Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, and other Asian imports, all have very noticeable cultural overlays” (Roggenbuck 41). Here, Kornfield assumes that the “cultural overlays” of the spirituality-seeking 1970s that he, Levine, and Goldstein had begun to introduce are not noticeable, or that the Vipassana technique these writers had learned was not also an “Asian import” of recent manufacture. The commodity-logic of Kornfield’s diction in this early interview anticipates his later equation of Buddha Shakyamuni’s moment with the contemporary “spiritual marketplace” (Path with Heart 160); it is reproduced in mindfulness books to the present. To give a second early example, a text Kornfield co-edited, A Still Forest Pool (Kornfield & Breiter 1985), presents the oral teachings of the Thai monk Achaan Chah, who practiced rigorous austerities in the forest and was Kornfield’s teacher, as relevant to contemporary laypersons because it is “directed not toward ritual Buddhism or scholastic learning, but toward those who wish to purify their hearts and vision by actually living the teachings of the Buddha” (xv). In the frontmatter to A Still Forest Pool, ritual practice and study are terms in opposition to a presumably true and authentic practice in everyday life. By this logic, contemporary insight meditators and Thai Forest monks share in common a pure practice that is at once ancient and modern. The characteristic insistence of insight meditation teachers that the Buddha’s teachings are contemporary, of the present,
because the historical moment of the historical Buddha is fungible into our world, is legible as a mystification of the temporality of globalization.

The consequence of this mystification is the white supremacy that Cheah documents largely passes unnoticed among insight meditation practitioners. Insofar as Ledi and those following after him, such as Goenka, invented meditation as a generalized practice for laypersons, and defined their own practice as a uniquely Burmese and Buddhist (Ledi) and universal one (Goenka), as against a putatively degenerate (read: intellectualized, ritualized, sociable) culture, the insight meditation writers reproduce the relations of power that obtain under globalization realized as a denial of coevalness. This negation of the contemporaneity of Asian Buddhist cultures and persons coincides with the positioning of Buddhist masters as embodiments of an ancient wisdom, as “Oriental Monks.” The denial of coevalness that positions the Buddhist as an ancient other is a necessary condition for the most relevant contemporaneity of the “Oriental Monk,” whose body and being are presumed to demonstrate the perennial and timeless wisdom attributed to him.

It is as though insight meditation, realized in practice and in social interaction, assumes an end of history: that the Good has emerged as a particular worldview (Ours), to be realized through a self-imposed practice. To challenge this moment with evidence that history yet persists, and that the worldview called upon for salvation may reproduce the old and not displace it, is a heresy to the religion of capitalism, and a potential challenge to its application as a mode of discipline. In this sense, mindfulness discourse presupposes a specific lack of mindfulness of history and of the totality of relations.
promoted in the *For All Beings* imperative of Pop Buddhism. That is, generalized mindfulness necessarily occludes the racial category (the premodern Asian Buddhists) it assumes and concomitant repertoire of racialized attitudes and practices it engenders.

**THE PARADOX OF MINDFULNESS**

Insight meditation’s contradictions articulate mindfulness as a paradox of contemporary capitalism: It serves compensatory objectives, but also points out centripetally to other texts through its ecology of quotations and the specific kind of Buddhism it leans on and orients itself toward encodes within itself a critique of its moment of emergence and an aspiration for an alternative to the same.

To underscore the disjuncture from the Pop Buddhism of writers such as Trungpa and Nhat Hanh to mindfulness after insight meditation, I find four characteristics of the insight meditation advice book that more closely correspond to Trungpa’s account of spiritual materialism than any extant presentation of Buddhist praxis. First, in the universalism of Kabat-Zinn, Levine, Kornfield, and Brach, an appeal to a theistic unity or oneness, an Absolute and a self that is true obtains. Trungpa, fairly or not, compares such promises to the sales pitches of dishonest salesmen. The “spiritual marketplace” theme characteristic of insight meditation’s sense of itself in time is demolished in Trungpa’s description of the hopelessness of shopping for spiritual solutions as if at a natural-foods grocery. Second, especially in Kornfield and his followers, ego is understood as the site and substance of spiritual awakening; in Kabat-Zinn, meditation is presented as a means to the realization of a personal vision; in all of them, spiritual practice is understood euphemistically as a personal practice. Meditation is mobilized for and as a self-help
mode of therapy, especially by Kornfield and Brach, who posit it as a deep healing of the soul, and alternatively by Kabat-Zinn and Salzberg, who offer it for stress relief. All of these exemplify Trungpa’s most frequently-quoted definition of spiritual materialism as the trappings of spirituality turned to ego’s objectives (*Cutting Through 3*); this is not “for all beings.” Third, the antidote Trungpa posits to spiritual materialism, critical thought, is discouraged, and “thinking mind” and “concepts” are vilified, as evidenced in the meditation instructions insight meditation teachers give, with the consequence that urgent contradictions between the discourse’s aspirations and its actual practices remain not only unresolved, but *unrecognizable* from within. Fourth, no means of relating to the present formation with an eye toward proposing a positive solution to it—no shift in focus from the problem of spiritual materialism to the project of realizing the Shambhala vision, for instance—is available in the insight meditation discourse insofar as the modern mind is posited as the exclusive site of intervention, and the space of sociality and history is assumed to be irrelevant to life practice. In mindfulness after insight meditation, there is no alternative to the present. Rather, the status quo is the compliant meditator’s refuge.

As mindfulness is generalized and becomes ubiquitous, the traces of the contradiction between the utopian aspirations summoned by its Pop Buddhist affiliations and its own assumptions remain visible. This tension is exemplified in the articles published in the *Huffington Post* website. Arianna Huffington, its owner and editor, is herself a public advocate of mindfulness and wellbeing and has presented herself as a mindful leader in the conventional way—by authoring a mindfulness advice book
(Thrive, 2014). By July 2013, mindfulness had become such an entrenched feature of the Huffington Post that the site was willing to publish articles summarizing the myriad criticisms made of insight meditation and mindfulness by Buddhists in the previous decades. In one of them, “Beyond McMindfulness,” Ron Purser declares that mindfulness “must reclaim an ethical framework and aspire to more lofty purposes that take into account the well-being of all living beings” (n.p.). This for-all-beings objective animates the anti-capitalist concepts and somatic experiences at work in the Pop Buddhism of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Six months later, Joanna Piacenza asserts in a HuffPo blog post that “Buddhism has become something that you can fit into your life, not something you shape your life around [...] something we can pick apart and apply at will,” while also tackling the racial assumptions of mindfulness which remain “unchanged for a decade” (n.p.)—that it is a white, bourgeois practice, assumptions which mindfulness makes of itself in its denial of coevalness to the Other. That said, Piacenza’s own assumption that Buddhism and mindfulness are fungible into each other, a characteristic of insight meditation, is also in evidence.

The third phase of insight meditation provokes this paradox: by summoning the Buddhist as the image of the Good and compassion as a mode of wellbeing, mindfulness so generalized frustrates its objective of the devoted reproduction of the status quo by the compliant practitioner by motivating him or her to instead aspire to objectives contrary to the same.

CONCLUSION
Mindfulness has emerged through a wave of texts oriented around the founders of the Insight Meditation Society and affiliated teachers (including Kabat-Zinn himself), in which North Americans address their vision of Buddhism and meditation as mobilized in self-help practices such as the RR and MBSR. An advice book genre crystallizes into a predictable repertoire of reproducible features. Here, a simultaneous reliance on Buddhism for legitimation of a self-help practice that is explicitly syncretic and universalist but also presumed to be a Buddhist universalism, because its deep structure is Buddhism by the logic of psychological Buddhism (chapter one), emerges. As a consequence of positing the sacred as timeless and hence the temporal and immediate as irrelevant or unreal, an ecology of quotations emerges, including selections from *Walden*, Carlos Castaneda, Robert Bly, and the Christian Desert Fathers, which together speak to an elision of historical and experiential differences across culture, time, class, geographic distribution, and gender. A liberal concept of freedom is deployed to advance the goal of personal realization, the realization of a personal vision, or the “radical acceptance” of oneself and the status quo. An unqualified embrace of the means and ends of Jungian and positive psychologies is in evidence throughout, even as an appeal to the buzzwords of popularized cognitive science such as neural plasticity take greater prominence over time. Simplicity is praised and an avoidance of thinking is advocated as indispensable to practice, while prose that is progressively easier and easier to read, with ever-shortening chapters, paragraphs, and sentences. It is as though these books are inevitably prepared for beginners, and that today’s beginners are less prepared for reading about meditation (or reading at all) than yesterday’s, that merely to begin and to stick with a beginner’s
routine is enough, and that mastery means mastering only the introduction, the basics; or that mastery is for the Other, not for Us; or that there is no mastery, or that mastery is not valued. Who teaches, then—who has the legitimacy to give advice, to write advice books, if doctrine is devalued and mastery is mystified? In the last analysis, anyone: former celebrities, bloggers, business executives, a Rust-Belt Congressman. The easy reproduction of this genre may be a factor in the facility with which mindfulness as a discourse is also reproduced.

In content, the discourse of insight meditation articulates the religion of capitalism: a veneration of the present moment, Our present, with strong skepticism toward critical or historical thought. In the practice it prescribes its readers, it functions as a mode of discipline, a discipline of compliance motivated by a desire to attain the Good, a life of happiness and wellbeing in difficult times that enacts the reproduction of the structures of that same difficulty. In this way, mindfulness is made available as a mode of discipline. Here, mindfulness emerges as the disciplined reproduction of extant relations of power under the sign of self-empowerment and self-realization. In the image of the Good it summons, a complex and fraught relation to the Buddhism that legitimizes its advocates obtains, bringing to consciousness the contradictions in the moment and a desire for an alternative to the same.

The following chapters probe the prescribed use of mindfulness in workplaces as a discourse (conscious capitalism and mindful leadership) and as a practice for enhanced performance and wellbeing. Mindfulness as a mode of discipline is enacted in these contexts, and its paradox is realized.
CHAPTER FOUR: CORPORATE MINDFULNESS, CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM, AND CLASS POWER AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

This chapter considers the emergence of corporate mindfulness—the strategic insertion of mindfulness solutions to the objectives of capital accumulation and the reproduction of class power, the generalization of mindfulness as such to the stressed and belabored in everyday life. With insight meditation, the pieties of the present moment delimit mindfulness in such a way as to make it suitable for use as a discipline. This is the significance of the novel theology of insight meditation in this context. One is mindful of the present and deferent to it, but not mindful of the totality, its history, or its hurts. In the generalization of the therapeutic technique of mindfulness to the stressful environment of the belabored worker, increasingly interpellated as an entrepreneur, the same dynamic obtains. Where in insight meditation the lay Buddhist content associated with the Theravadin context of its emergence was displaced by a psychological content that mystified capitalist social relations, here a mystification of capitalist social relations in circulation as an integral theology is implemented as a series of economic programs: corporate social responsibility, conscious capitalism, mindful leadership, and the mindful workplace. Here, mindfulness practices and affiliated discourses already made available as a mode of discipline, as described in chapter three, are deployed as such. Mindful economic programs invoke or directly reproduce the conventions of the insight meditation advice book, including the positioning of the Buddhist and especially the
Tibetan as aspirational model. The insight meditation teacher and author is indistinguishable from the mindful CEO and author because both represent power, and the practice of mindfulness in both instances is the reproduction of power—class discipline. In the peculiarities of this deployment, the paradox of mindfulness is realized; the tendency of generalized mindfulness to frustrate the objectives to which it is put become visible.

**MANAGEMENT AS CLASS DISCIPLINE, MINDFULNESS AS MANAGEMENT**

In previous chapters, I have described how mindfulness as it has been generalized as an everyday life practice was summoned as a form of consciousness appropriate to the social conditions of everyday life as an environment of stress in North America. It was mobilized in terms of the ideologically-laded discourse of stress and stress relief, and mediated through the parameters of insight meditation books, primarily in North America. Generalized mindfulness differs in its objectives and methods from the Pop Buddhist practice with which it is often conflated, while retaining the diction and appeals to generalized happiness and wellbeing that inhere in that Buddhist discourse. This chapter and its sequels probe the deployment of mindfulness and attendant discourses as regimes of discipline in management, the labor market, and everyday life as a workplace. First, I describe the generalization of mindfulness as a function of the construction of the self as entrepreneur, making meaning through his or her choices in consumption and identities made in production, and the relations of power naturalized and spiritualized thereby. Where mindful leadership articulates the deployment of mindfulness as discipline, workplace mindfulness programs describe its implementation by the
disciplined in themselves. When mindfulness is then mobilized in the workplace, often by persons legitimized as mindfulness teachers by their status as Buddhist leaders, this distinction between Pop Buddhist and generalized mindfulness objectives is exacerbated into a paradox. In calling on a Pop Buddhist cultural imaginary to legitimize itself, generalized mindfulness affirms objectives that are contrary to its own, thereby summoning its own negation. Mindfulness practice demands a limited scope of awareness—one is to attend to the present moment without judgment, and no more—which has the capacity to broaden into a surplus of mindfulness that exceeds an attitude of assent and acceptance of the present, and involves contrary aspirations to mindfulness’ function as discipline.

A systematic logic of development by subordination obtains in the discourse of corporate mindfulness that articulates, in mystified form, objectives characteristic of capitalist social relations in the moment of stress. Just as uneven relations of economic development and exchange obtain under globalized capitalism, relations professed to be beneficial to all in doctrines of economic liberalization, and in the better-newer-faster waves of gadget accumulation in Silicon Valley that are presented as upgrades rendering previous iterations obsolete, so in corporate mindfulness the structures and functions of the human brain (the prefrontal cortex for instance) are posited as more advanced than others (such as the hippocampi or the amygdalae) and contemporary modes and strategies of spiritual aspiration represented as an evolutionary advance over the “retrograde” traditions of the world, as in the white supremacist temporal logic of insight meditation (chapter three). Through mindfulness, more evolved structures of the brain are activated
and strengthened, and made to assert themselves over more primitive structures and
functions for the benefit of the whole body; through enlightened teachers and advice
books, more evolved upgrades to extant worldviews and narratives are disseminated to
promote the development of practitioners, for the benefit of the corporation and its
shareholders (now reimagined as an organization and its stakeholders). Ultimately, the
relation of corporation, embodied by the mindful CEO and manager, to worker is
imagined to take its optimal form by adhering to this relation of development-by-
subordination through mindfulness. Mystifications of capitalist social relations are
popularized in self-help books in this period, drawing on the same cultural reservoir as
insight meditation did; these are positioned to be realized through the assent and
compliance of the managed. Assent is the acceptance of the objectives of the program as
one’s own means to personal development, authenticity, or purpose—one’s authentic
self. Compliance is effected through an enlightenment practice: a rationalized practice of
emotional self-regulation through self-knowledge, and simplistic axioms generalized to
all moments as in an uncritical categorical imperative. The practice of mindfulness is
mobilized as that very enlightenment discipline. In everyday life as a workplace,
mindfulness is incoherent without the discursive context in which it is inevitably
embedded, which explicitly articulates the objectives to which corporate mindfulness is
put, and the logic by which it is made available.

Mindfulness practice as discipline emerges from a management problem:
establishing the conditions for the reproduction of power through the establishment of
protocols of deference and the practice of coercion at the site of production. Management
as a workplace practice is generalized as *leadership* to account for the reproduction of power within all social institutions, and not only corporations or employers as such. In this context, leadership is a mode of coercion by inspiration. Leadership advice books emphasize the capacity of particular persons to inspire their subordinates to assent and comply to the given program. That is, management as leadership is generalizable across divergent institutional contexts because, advocates argue, the subjective *stuff* of the leader, the figure of power, is a psychological universal. Insofar as mindfulness is promised as a means to the cultivation of leadership excellence in the writings of advocates such as Daniel Goleman, and the management of workers is generalized to all social environments, the qualities that are believed to empower a leader, mindfulness is strategy for personal empowerment across all social institutions by a generalized workplace logic. For this reason, mindfulness is most conspicuously inserted into the workplace through the discourse of management and leadership, arguably more so than through instruction in meditation for workers.

Lacunae in two early leadership studies (both of them cited approvingly by mindfulness writers) invite a disciplined means to personal development to enter the boardroom. Mindfulness and emotional intelligence enter therein as one in the figure of the “primal” leader.\textsuperscript{188} Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) is foundational to the discourse of leadership. Published more or less simultaneously with *Full Catastrophe*, this book anticipates many of the themes later to emerge in *A Path with Heart* and *Everywhere You Go*. Senge lists “personal mastery” as one of the five key disciplines of an effective leader: “Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and
deepening our personal vision [...] of seeing reality objectively” (7). The parallels to insight meditation at the points of seeing clearly and realizing a personal vision are deepened in Senge’s claim that personal mastery is the “spiritual foundation” to any growing institution or organization (7). Significantly, the leader’s mastery of his or her person is assumed to be adequate to constitute the spiritual foundation of the organization as a whole, and hence his or her subordinates, an assumption I locate in the pieties of the “spiritual practice” advice book (below). Senge does not specify what means to personal mastery are best warranted.

A second canonical leadership volume, Jim Collins’ Good to Great (2001), claims that the most successful enterprises, the truly “great” ones, are run by “Level 5” leaders, who are inspiring and successful in themselves—and that Level 5 leadership can be cultivated. However, Collins claims to know “what it takes to shift a company from good to great,” but not “the inner development of a person to Level 5” (37). Importantly, a homology of corporations and persons here as units of organization that develop in ways that are measurable by the same scale (“Level 5”), is assumed here, as is the adequacy of the leader’s person to guarantee the relative good-to-greatness of the enterprise—beliefs with histories I trace in this chapter—even as Collins takes a pass on describing the means to the development of such a leader. In some mindfulness texts, such as Search Inside Yourself, Collins’ “great” companies are understood as measures of the greater good, of social benevolence as such; this vision of the Good is conflated with that of insight meditation and Pop Buddhism as representative of the Good in this context. One of Collins’ “greater good” corporations is Philip Morris (7), a tobacco conglomerate and
hence a firm that the socially responsible investors inspired by mindful living considered in this chapter be unwilling to invest in, and that—perhaps coincidentally—actively and materially supported the generalization of Hans Selye’s concept of stress as a disease of maladaptation as a public health crisis, an operative fiction intended to divert blame for the public health costs of consuming its own products that inadvertently gave rise to mindfulness as the relief of stress (chapter one). Such contradictions inhere in corporate mindfulness as discipline overall.

To the immediate point, Collins claims to know that a transition from “good” to “great” is possible for leaders and valuable for shareholders, and that the requisite skills to such a transition are learnable. Senge argues that leaders must cultivate a spiritual foundation through personal mastery, which is tied to a personal vision and seeing reality objectively, that is said to coincide with the spirituality and development of the organization as a whole. Therapeutic mindfulness after insight meditation, practically indistinguishable from Senge’s description of personal mastery in its objectives, is taken up as a means to transition from “good” to “great”—a means to cultivate what this discourse calls “leadership excellence”—for leaders and by extension for corporations and their shareholders, who have as their objective the accumulation of capital and maintenance of capitalist social relations. This is the compensatory objective to which mindfulness, happiness, and wellbeing are put now by CEOs as representatives, administrators, and bearers of class power, such as Charles Koch and other advice-giving business leaders who present themselves as singular and advanced souls.
Mindfulness and emotional intelligence are crystallized together as a means to greatness and hence power in the 2002 volume *Primal Leadership*. The authors, Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, assert that the best-developed leaders inspire others by appealing to their emotions—which requires emotional self-regulation (mindfulness) on the part of the leader and a willingness to be managed and to believe on the part of the led. This model of leadership is highly coercive. For instance, the book opens with vignette of a division of the BBC being led to *cheer its own termination* by a “resonant” leader, one who is “attuned to people’s feelings” and thereby able to direct them “in a positive emotional direction” (*Primal* 4-14). Directing the regulation of the emotions of subordinates serves the objective of capital accumulation and the reproduction of class power here. *Primal Leadership* is an important influence on workplace mindfulness and happiness programs at corporations such as Google and Zappos, and its themes recur throughout this discourse. The form of coercion it articulates assumes a cosmic and world-historical significance in the metaphysical speculations of the North American alternative spirituality scene through which mindfulness has been mediated, which are realized in the prescriptions for workplace and managerial mindfulness, summarized below. I mark that, much like the Clausewitzian diction of objective, strategy, discipline, and clear seeing from a higher perspective (*Kritik*) (Wills 292), leadership in itself is ambivalent; leadership need not be delimited only as a generalization of management to all contexts; organizations and initiatives of all kinds need leaders to accomplish their goals; the logic of pursuing an objective by strategy and tactic is not a practice exclusive to the reproduction of capitalist power.
However, I find the relation of the objectives of leadership as prescribed in corporate mindfulness problematic as they relate to the contemporary social and ecological crises that Pop Buddhist leaders lament (chapter two): here, leaders maintain an unjust relation of leader to led by the means of their spiritualized position, and profit thereby at the expense of the totality. Leadership thus posited serves to reproduce its own position—to the continual affirmation and reproduction of the same.

The strategy of resonant leadership demands some means for management to convince workers that their objectives ultimately, even spiritually, coincide with those of the corporation, as in the example of the enthusiastically laid-off workers cited in Primal Leadership. This means is realized in the temporal evolution (to use the mindful patois) of mindfulness from a practice taken within the context of a philosophy of negation\textsuperscript{191} and a reflection on totality (S. bodhicitta) described in previous chapters into a belief system, a practice taken on faith. Put differently, while the image of the Pop Buddhist leader, the “Oriental Monk,” is of use as a representative of the Good, an aspirational model of successful neural refashioning and plucky Tibetanness,\textsuperscript{192} the discourse of insight meditation is generalizable as management and hence leadership in ways that Pop Buddhist discourse is not because the former involves positioning the practitioner in a posture of piety to the present, finding meaning in its affirmation. As I will show, attempts at deploying Pop Buddhist means and themes to leadership objectives involve irresolvable contradictions. Emptiness and hopelessness are absent; purpose and performance measurable by corporate outcomes, to an affirmation of the present lacking a symptomatic practice of negation and critique are foregrounded. Such attempts exist,
however and they are significant to the generalization of mindfulness as a promised means to the Good; the assumptions about Buddhism and Buddhists that emerged as psychological Buddhism in the legitimation of the programs and objectives of self-help books in the 1970s are here made to do the same for corporate programs and objectives. That said, the third phase of insight meditation offers a means to assent and compliance to the objective of power on the promise of personal empowerment and authentic meaning. The mindful professional is led to truly believe in the mission of the employer and the tasks added to his or her Action Item List, and pursue them toward promised ends of Excellence, or the Good, or Truth as such as his or her own personal authenticity.

The life practice of the subject of work and life as entrepreneurship and its corresponding private salvations are typically articulated in the repertoire crystallized in the insight meditation advice book. Five salient characteristics carry over: an appeal to the certainty of mind science; a prescription for a DIY theology, which may take the form of the “personal vision” Kabat-Zinn espouses or the construction of a personally-meaningful refuge Brach enacts, and typically reproduces the form and content of the insight meditation advice book, including its ecology of quotations; a rationale of stress relief and performance enhancement; an idealist historicism celebratory of the present, Our present, at the expense of the past and the other; and a reliance on Pop Buddhist forms for legitimation and authority at the level of image and as subjects of neurological research, such that the specific modes of address and turns of phrase characteristic of Buddhist culture are recognizably reproduced by mindfulness leaders lacking and even disavowing any connection to Buddhism at all. Further, corporate mindfulness emerges
from the same social networks and institutions that had already endorsed therapeutic mindfulness, including insight meditation and some Pop Buddhist communities, leaders, and periodicals. At the historical moment all vestiges of Buddhist imagery and affiliation fall away from insight meditation books, they reappear in corporate mindfulness. While the aspiration for an alternative to the present characteristic of the Pop Buddhist advice book is scarcely legible here, that same repertoire is made to affirm and lubricate the reproduction of the present. Even as the content of Pop Buddhist books is negated here, their presence is summoned by the invocation of their authors as figures of spiritual ability fungible into temporal power. Corporate mindfulness is not ancillary or parallel to generalized mindfulness; it is its best articulation as a means to stress relief, performance enhancement, and pursuit of a meaningful and purposive life. Put differently, the compensatory valence of mindfulness is therapeutic mindfulness pursued to its logical conclusion: a universal means to adjusting happily, in a register of acceptance, to the suffering of the present, without judgment or regard for past or future.

This chapter and its sequels pursue these themes in three phases. First, I locate the specific metaphysics of development by subordination characteristic of corporate mindfulness in such discourses as conscious capitalism and corporate social responsibility, which emerged from the same cultural milieu as mindfulness did and through which mindfulness at work has been mediated in the summoning of the self as an entrepreneurial producer of itself. This mediation strongly inflects the next two phases: the formation of mindful leadership, and the emergence of model mindful workplaces in Silicon Valley. Here, a mindfulness obtains that is mobilized to the explicit maintenance
of capitalist social relations and the accumulation of capital through the enlightened self-disciplining of the worker to the objectives of the corporation and the moment of self-entrepreneurship. Here, the Buddhist traces inherent in the workplace mindfulness discourse become a means of contestation against the injustices of globalization by those left out of corporate mindfulness. The book is my primary archive, for reasons internal to the cultural rationale shared in common by conscious capitalism and mindfulness, along with the institution of the mindful leadership conference.

**ALL DEVELOPMENT IS ENVELOPMENT: THE MYSTIFICATION OF CAPITALIST POWER IN THE SPIRITUALITY ADVICE BOOK**

I observe in the mindful programs described in this and subsequent chapters that a diverse array of insight meditation authors, business consultants, psychologists, and CEOs are positioned, structurally, as equals to each other, and developmentally ahead of advice-book consumers and belabored workers—the managed. A spatial and temporal distribution of power is mystified as a means to spiritual development in this discourse. I trace the emergence of that mystification, mobilized again and again in mindfulness as discipline in everyday life as a workplace, here.

The temporal aspects of this mystification are explicit in the third phase of the insight meditation advice book, in the denial of coevalness by the modern and universal mindful one to the premodern other, while the vertical distribution of power legible in mindfulness as discipline remains implicit there. That vertical, structural, or spatial relation is specified as a theology of spiritual development and enters the discourse of mindfulness through the voluminous writings of Ken Wilber: omnipresent in the Eastern
Spirituality aisle in the late 1980s and for two decades after, a longstanding influence on insight meditation writers, and drawn upon in authoritative mindfulness resources such as The Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness (2009). Wilber’s books articulate a mystification of the deployment of class in the conventions of spirituality and positive-psychology advice books. Wilber’s Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality (1995, revised edition 2000) is an important artifact in this history as it anticipates the optimistic historicism of consciousness evolving through progressive worldviews in insight meditation discourse, and crystallizes many of the assumptions at work in the reception and mobilization of corporate mindfulness and of the expectations made of the people involved with it—the leaders and the followers recast as masters and disciples. The temporality of globalization, in which the enlightened One rationalizes and recuperates the backward, premodern Other and thus functions both as its colonizer and its corrector—legible in such insight meditation standbys as Buddhism without Beliefs—is articulated as a vertical theology of personal, professional, and cosmic development. This mystification of capitalist social relations is reproduced in conscious capitalism and mindful leadership, where it is made available to legitimize and celebrate contemporary social relations, and sanctify capital holders and business leaders and the worldviews they articulate. A presumed transcendence of the advice book author obtains, legitimized in this case by that author’s own schema of development and cultural universalism, buttressed as in insight meditation books by an extensive ecology of quotations. In sum, Wilber’s systematic speculations coincide directly to the mobilization of mindfulness as discipline in the moment of stress, and participate in it.
In *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, the structural relations of power prevailing at the mid-1990s apex of liberal-democratic optimism, and globalization inaugurated as the “end of history,” are posited as inevitable, natural, good, and right. Wilber repositions the universalism of the Eastern Spirituality aisle into a holistic ontology. The particulars of Wilber’s holism have their basis in the particular theology of his guru Franklin Jones, also known as Da Free John and Adi Da Samraj. Here, progressive blessings from a higher-ranking unit spurs the development of its subordinates, and while the superior profits thereby, this relation never flattens—the same *structural* relation is reproduced in perpetuity. This logic of subordination is visible in Jones’ poem “The First Word,” which appears in many books attributed to him:

Do Not Misunderstand Me—

I Am Not “Within” you, but you Are In Me,

and I Am Not a Mere “Man” in the “Middle” of Mankind,

but All of Mankind is Surrounded, and Pervaded,

and Blessed By Me. (Da 1)

In Wilber’s treatise, the relation of the guru who claims to have always already subordinated and enveloped the disciple as a means to the disciple’s benefit and growth is made universal to account for hierarchic relations among any and all forms of organization—indeed, anything that is coherent or recognizable as a thing, be it an object, an organ, or an ecosystem. Here, extant relations of power are celebrated as good, natural, right, and tending to the proper development of individuals insofar as they assent to the given and comply with given imperatives.
Wilber calls such units of organization holons, “wholes that are simultaneously parts of other wholes” (Sex 43). According to Wilber, holons relate to each other in a system of subordination he refers to as holarchy, where “every holon is actually a holon within other holons transfinitely—that is, every holon is simultaneously both a subholon (a part of some other holon) and a superholon (itself containing holons)” (Sex 54). And just as the “realizer” Jones claims to be the superholon of all consciousness—I contain you, but you do not contain Me—so does holarchy as such exist for the purpose of the “actualization” of all involved (Sex 45). That is, superholons are positioned to effect the development of subholons without altering the structural relation between them, and do so; Wilber claims, “The higher embraces the lower, as it were, so that all development is envelopment” (Sex 59). This holism’s social content is legible in the relations of power between super- and subholons that Wilber describes:195 “the new and senior pattern or wholeness can to some degree limit the indeterminacy (organize the freedom) of its junior holons” (Sex 60). The austerities and restructurings of the debtor (junior holon) are determined by the conditions demanded of the creditor (senior holon), or the manager to the managed. Meanwhile, the growth of the senior holon is dependent upon the orderly productivity of its subordinates. According to Wilber, the best developed and most conscious superholons are the deepest ones, the ones with the most-elaborated layers of subordinates to them (Sex 64-65). The effective articulation and accumulation of intensive and extensive power is the sign of evolutionary, and hence spiritual, development here. Just as insight meditation delimits the practitioner’s scope of mindfulness, so in Wilber’s metaphysics, there is no space in which to describe the
injustice it encodes. Rather, Wilber claims, holarchy becomes problematic only when it becomes pathological due to the personal failing of arrogance on the part of a superholon, initiating a pattern of organization that differs from the given (Sex 30-31). There are no problems resultant from structural causes here, only inadequacies of incompliant individuals holding inadequate worldviews which induce structural variations that are, to Wilber’s mind, analogous to cancers (Sex 107).

Wilber’s holarchy naturalizes, even makes cosmic, the implementation of the environment of stress from above, from the top down, and legitimizes it with a specific spiritual authority and temporal inevitability—those in power to impose such a regime are assumed to be, in effect, divinely empowered to do so, imparting wisdom and the means to development to those below, while those below, the juniors, feed the seniors. We promise you future development, we profit by your labor now—such is the contract of capitalist social relations, the material consequences of which conscious capitalists tend to blind themselves to in spite of their best aspirations, even as they acknowledge that they do it (of which more to follow). As I will show, when the “ripple effect” theme Nhat Hanh and others promote emerges in workplace mindfulness books, it typically carries this connotation of blessings from the successful, ethically-sound, and therefore presumed to be highly developed, boss to subordinates who must remain subordinate, happily so, as a condition of their own development (chapter five). As if by grace, the conscious leader, through her presence, radiates out to those around and below him or her the means to improve. Business gurus, the representatives of the power of the capitalist
class, become *literal gurus*; business advice books and meditative advice books become fungible into each other by the logic of holarchy.

These relations of power specifically mystify the relation of advice book reader and author. Wilber claims that history or “evolution” is progressing developmentally, even purposively, and that this development is measured by increasing complexity in organization and profundity in thought (*Sex* 74). According to Wilber, this development is driven by mindstuff, progressive worldviews: “Deeper and wider contexts *exert a pull*, a telos, on present limited contexts” (*Sex* 85), he claims, which is to say that the developed mind capable of introducing what Wilber regards as a new worldview, a broader context, is an agent of Spirit in Wilber’s theology. Because, by Wilber’s holistic logic, an author’s expertise in one area is necessarily generalizable to everything—a holon here is a holon there—such developed minds include scientists, philosophers, and a selection of religious leaders, with an assumption of a recuperation of the rational kernel of the contemplative east by the enlightened west at work in insight meditation and mindfulness advice books that privileges the present of the 1990s as the cusp of a new epoch, an end to history.\(^{196}\) Such authors, Wilber claims, are arrayed in historical time such that “each successive theorist gives a deeper or bigger or wider meaning to existence by finding *previously hidden contexts* that suddenly shift the autonomy out from under our feet and point to larger communions” (*Sex* 80). Significantly and anachronistically, Wilber identifies Hegel and especially Schilling as offering such a deeper-bigger-wider worldview than “postmodern” thinkers such as Michel Foucault—“postmodernism” is a recurring strawman villain in Wilber’s oeuvre—by insisting that all “social practices only
exist in, and because of, Spirit” (Sex 80). *I am not in you, but you are in Me.* In championing this Schelling-style historicism—and Schelling himself as a guru-figure—Wilber presents his book as the instrument of a new and better narrative of the contemporary and himself as an authority of at least equal significance. It also enables him to position doctrines and cultures he disapproves of to a less enlightened past, a theme elaborated at length in subsequent volumes such as *A Theory of Everything* and *Boomeritis!.*

Characteristically for a universalist and totalitarian treatise, *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* closes in apocalyptic-toned absolutism. Wilber declares that his new paradigm, intended to draw together extant knowledge on all and everything like beads on a string, christened “universal integralism” and crystallized in his many advice books and other media, “becomes more and more welcome” by the year (Sex xxv). *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, by Wilber’s logic, itself articulates a telos intended to broaden and deepen the scope of history to a New Age of plenary consciousness. Hence, Wilber’s insistence that the present, largely by virtue of his own intervention into it as the author of advice books, marks a threshold of a new moment and a new consensus simultaneously echoes the end-of-history celebrations of his moment, and seems an advertisement for Wilber’s own doctrine and those who identify with it. The closing lines of *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* take an apocalyptic tone:

if today is rationality, tomorrow is transrationality, and there is not a single scientific argument in the world that can disagree with that, and every argument for it […] so we stand now, at rationality, poised on the edge of trans-rational
perception, a *scientia visionis* that is bringing here and there, but ever more clearly, to all sorts of people in all sorts of places, powerful glimmers of a true Descent of the all-pervading World Soul. (*Sex* 551)

The inevitability attributed to a present to which there is no alternative, while glossed in the scientific diction of evolution and tied to a marketing pitch for Wilber’s potency as an advice book author, is imbued with a wholly theological force. This advice book author attributes absolute power as a means to the development of all creation to himself.

Comparable assumptions of self-confidence obtain in conscious capitalism, and in the advice books of CEOs. The advice book is, in this context, presumed as an instrument and a guarantor of class power.

*Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* announces a New Age brought about by an advice book found in the Eastern Spirituality aisle of a chain bookstore, imagined as the singular vessel of meaning, legitimized by the author whose own development is signaled by the elevation or depth of his position and the worldview he articulates. Here, the CEO of an orderly corporation with many subordinates represents a well-developed, in fact world-historical, figure of authority by the social relations mystified here as holarchy. A book authored by such a one mobilizes the “telos” by which the reader-subordinate may be developed. The *books* of business gurus and spiritual masters are assumed to represent truths of universal significance, because the authorial position of both, the personal realization or state of development of both, are taken to be comparable, even fungible into each other. Wilber puts the advice book author in the position Jones claims for himself as the “realizer” of mankind, and thereby positions celebrity CEOs and business-
advice authors as always already spiritual authorities, and therefore temporally advanced relative to whatever formations they may choose to object to—postmodernism (whatever that may mean in context), socialism, and Cultural Studies are among the objects of Wilber’s scorn.

While Wilber’s worldview-as-commodity has not gained the foothold in North American public life he insists is its world-historical due, the mystification of capitalist relations of power and their reproduction in time that Wilber mobilizes as a contemplative solution to the felt hurts and crises of the present has been captured in the discourse of conscious capitalism and its mobilization of the repertoires of Pop Buddhism and mindfulness discourses. Here, the logic of Wilber’s “integral universalism” is repurposed for those attempting to capitalize on the present, to “lead” in the moment or at least profit by the orderly and productive management of others, as in the context of mindful leadership.198 Organizations affiliated with Wilber199 have followed suit by promoting “integral coaching” at mindful leadership and conscious capitalism events, and by repositioning Wilber’s own doctrines in terms of mindfulness, conscious capitalism, and emotional intelligence refigured as “vertical learning.”200 Conscious capitalism and mindful leadership share the same internal logic, body of assumptions, mode of address, and repertoire of sources as Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality. Selected spiritual advice books, business advice books, advice books by positive psychologists—all are positioned as repositories of an ultimate truth in its ecology of quotations and patterns of consumption. The broadening of the advice book genre and its ecology of quotations to include CEOs and leadership consultants suggests that business success legitimizes
someone to write advice books on happiness, wellbeing, life practice. Similarly, in the frontmatter of Michael Carroll’s The Mindful Leader (2007), a Chögyam Trungpa quotation is paired with a quotation of former General Electric CEO and advice-book author Jack Welch, putting mindful leadership on equal footing with the archetypal corporate leader. Welch’s words are indistinguishable from any other mindful bromide: “Face reality as it is, not as was or as you wish it to be.” Further, the cutting edge of history Wilber ties to broader and deeper worldviews is also associated with newer waves of consumer technology, and thereby carries with it a millenarian assumption of an emerging New Age of transcendence, of the Good. Taken together, such positions allow the conscious capitalist to isolate and dismiss dissent, critique, or alternatives to the present by ascribing them to the past as “retrograde,” “pathological,” or merely “postmodern,” and compliance to a program of the present as a means to progress, development, and the right. Enlightenment is understood here as the uncritical and radical acceptance of a given context or worldview—an affirmation, an act of faith, and the refusal of refusal.

If the Marxian position that metaphysical systems are mystifications of the social relations that produce them has merit, then Wilber’s integral theory represents a total and universal triumphalism of the project of economic liberalization at its historical apogee, in stark contrast to the Dalai Lama’s affirmation of his commitment to a “half-Marxist” position or Trungpa’s refusal of metaphysics active in the same cultural milieu, indeed invoked by the patterns of legitimation of mindful leadership and workplace mindfulness advocates (chapters five and six). This contrast is significant because it indicates which
discursive modes are generalizable to the workplace, and which are not. Natural hierarchy and holarchy both attempt to draw a parallel between the order of the natural world and a vision for an emergent sociality in the context of “spiritual practice” per the conventions of the spirituality and eastern religion bookstore aisle. If one’s objective is to promote the reproduction of class power, the book mysticism of a Wilber and the routines of devotion it summons are of greater use in summoning assent and compliance than the negative, creative, and hence unpredictable social modes promoted by a Trungpa.

Where Trungpa had advised his disciples to regard shopping for premade solutions to one’s problems at the organic grocery or in the spirituality bookstore’s shelves as hopeless, Wilber locates the redemption of history precisely in the compliant consumption of the spiritual advice book and the consciousness of its authors, Wilber among them, where compliance is enacted by accepting the author’s program as one’s own, and complying with the discipline it prescribes. To position oneself as an advice author with a nimbus of spiritual authority is to assume a position of tacit power in this context, which is of strategic use to a representative of capital such as a CEO or a business consultant peddling a promised means to greater productivity and workforce compliance. Further, Trungpa anticipates the position Wilber ascribes to the spiritual author, and identifies a species of violence and victim-blaming internal to it: “there’s no room left for questioning at all […] At that point, if I would like to practice my aggression and passion on you and you don’t accept that, then that’s your fault. You do not understand the ineffable spirituality, so you are at fault” (Crazy 9). That said, I mark that there is a significant relation of resemblance between the sociality prescribed by Pop...
Buddhists such as Trungpa and that of *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*—indeed, as I will show, both repertoires are drawn upon in the economic programs promoted as corresponding to mindful organizations and modes of management. The difference between these socialities is in their objectives and premises. Wilber’s holarchy is distinguished from Trungpa’s concept of natural hierarchy (chapter two) first by the divergences in temporality between them. Wilber posits a teleology of development he calls “evolution,” while Trungpa argues that history is, at best, directionless. The former position summons the practitioner to a compliant identification with what professes to be the most complete representation of the historical program, while the latter opens onto a radical concept of freedom in which anything, at least on principle, is possible for those who see through such narratives. Second, where Wilber celebrates the structural relations of the status quo as the logic of all development and growth, Trungpa insists on the disruption of the same, bringing the present to yield to a system of discipline. In sum, the sociality mystified in Wilber’s oeuvre is reproduced in conscious capitalism because it is strategically useful in ways that programs such as Trungpa’s are not, even as Trungpa’s own activities, as I will show, were formative upon the emergence of mindful modes of capitalism.

“Spiritual practice”—a cipher, recall, for insight meditation and hence mindfulness—is mobilized as a mode of discipline in economic programs and social modes corresponding to mindfulness practice.

**SPIRIT AS BUSINESS IN THE FREE AGENT ECONOMY**
The lexicon of Wilber’s mystification of class power in the moment of stress describes the spiritualized economic imperatives of this moment. These social and economic practices are articulated as generalizations of a Pop Buddhist ethos to capitalist objectives by a logic Wilber mystifies as a cosmic narrative of spiritual evolution. These include calls for a “free agent” economy in the writings of Daniel Pink; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) cast as “spirit as business,” a mode of being toward the moment that corresponds to the urgent needs of a spiritually evolved subject, the enterprise man Pink celebrates, which is, historically, an attempt to generalize Pop Buddhism to capitalist objectives. Buddhist cultures, particularly Tibetanness, figure as aspirational images of the Good that legitimize the programs calling on them, making consuming or investing a task of ensuring the wellbeing of oneself and, by implication, all sentient beings. CSR is the most significant among many such generalizations, among them the Buddhist economics of E. F. Schumacher, Buddhist-inflected proposals for Gross National Happiness, and the Right Livelihood Award, and alternative Nobel Prize in economics, which is specifically Buddhist in name (Anderson “Mixed”).

While *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* crystallizes the religion of capitalism in the alternative spirituality aisle of the bookstore, its doctrines and devotions are legible as an economic program in the middlebrow futurist writings of Daniel Pink, from whence they are directly adopted by advocates of conscious capitalism.\(^{203}\) The coming integral age promised in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* is recast here as an age of transcendence, which is characterized by an aspiration for meaning—broader and deeper contexts—which Pink presents as coterminous with a vision for personal economic freedom. Here,
the continuities from the aspiration for personal meaning in the status quo legible in the historicism of *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, and the discourse of insight meditation in *Free Agent Nation* (2001) and *A Whole New Mind* (2005) comes into view. Pink privileges the social world after economic liberalization in which the logic of the workplace is generalized to every aspect of everyday life as a kind of new age of self-actualization, as happily contemporary and cutting-edge; alternatives thereto are relegated to the past, or to unreality; the word “real” is its often-reiterated descriptor.

Pink claims that social programs he associates with the New Deal are inadequate to the needs of the self as entrepreneur whom he celebrates as a member of “Free Agent Nation,” because it somehow “no longer supports the emerging independent workforce. In its place will emerge Free Agent Nation’s ‘New Economy Deal’—a reform agenda keyed to the realities of work and life in the twenty-first century” (Free 289). The reform Pink demands is one of worldview, of adapting to a newer—and therefore broader, deeper, and more meaningful—context or telos. Two of Pink’s personal policy proposals involve transitions “From security to opportunity” and “From stability to mobility” (Free 289-290)—optimistic descriptors of a social environment made increasingly stressful. Further, Pink posits personal entrepreneurship, the self as a business enterprise, as a means to satisfy “higher-order needs” pace Maslow (Free 53), assuming the material need to reproduce one’s life day to day has been transcended and that work demands a new rationale by spiritualizing the status quo as the best of all possible environments in which to survive. Work is “not only a way to make money, but also a way to make
meaning’’ Pink claims (Free 55), a formulation that often recurs in corporate mindfulness books.204

The entrepreneurial selves Pink celebrates require support from above to actualize their freedom, such as advice books and personal coaches. These are supplements to oneself promising higher-order insights needed for one to be adequate to this new social world, which is to say that the mode of freedom Pink involves a kind of necessity. One can be free to the extent one can make oneself free on terms one may not negotiate—they are given from a source above one structurally, ahead of one temporally, and therefore more developed than one—or not at all, as in Wilber’s holarchy. The telos of the present, in this instance the doctrine of economic liberalism that Pink espouses, is posited as having no alternatives. Developing one’s work life as a site of meaning-making constitutes one’s life practice as Pink forecasts it. Pink pairs the inevitability of the present with an idealist historicism anticipatory of immanent revelation comparable to Wilber’s in A Whole New Mind—so titled because, Pink asserts, one who wishes to survive the present must adopt a new frame of reference, which Pink positions himself to espouse.

Where the theology of insight meditation opens onto a posture of radical acceptance, a willing reproduction in oneself of the means to the reproduction of the status quo, this theology prescribes economic activities—production and consumption—as “spiritual practice.” According to Pink, a transition from the present information age and concomitant “knowledge economy” to a broad-minded, “empathic,” and connection-finding “Conceptual Age” cognate to the “Descent of the all-pervading World-Soul”
Wilber prophesies is at hand (Whole 1-3). The economic reality Pink predicts will supercede the digital-technological and require of its workers a “transcendent” mindset is another consumer economy, “Spirit as business,” in which “commercial ventures that help a meaning-seeking population slake its craving for transcendence” as evidenced in “the proliferation of yoga studios, evangelical bookstores, and ‘green’ products [such as] the cosmetics of the Body Shop” (Whole 215). Whatever Transcendence may be here, it is posited as a need to be satisfied by a particular kind of consumption, the content of which is largely traceable in the reception of Pop Buddhism and insight meditation in North America in the 1980s. The overall constellation in the points Pink offers, of religious certainty and socially-responsible enterprises, points to a particular mode of discipline that mindfulness actualizes. Conscious capitalism is its name; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is its necessary precondition.

The specific cultural and economic order Pink identifies as “Spirit as business” and symptomatic of an age of transcendence, a new worldview, first crystallized as a discrete formation in the generalization of a Pop Buddhist ethos as a rationale for capitalism made ethical decades prior. CSR, or “conscientious commerce” (as announced in capital letters on the front and back covers of John Elkington’s 1998 book Cannibals with Forks), like generalized mindfulness, ties a universal spirituality to an appeal for social justice and environmental stewardship, to be realized by private enterprise. CSR—legible in the economic prescriptions of writers such as Pink—presents a Pop Buddhistic imaginary as an object of aspiration for the entrepreneurial shopper who aspires to make of his or her consumption and investment choices a transformational practice, and an
environmentally-mindful one in line with the green activism promoted in the writings of Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama. Elkington himself is an early promoter of “green capitalism,” if an unenthusiastic one. That said, Elkington takes the TINA view that because corporations now hold all the power and there is no position for contention left from the commons, therefore only corporations can help the totality of lifeforms on planet earth avoid the risk of total extinction. By the logic of CSR, the only way to save the totality of sentient beings, the objective of Pop Mahayana practice, is to comply with capitalist social relations. *Cannibals with Forks* proposes a program for doing so within a framework of market competition measured on three bottom lines: “economic prosperity, environmental quality, and—the element which business has tended to overlook—social justice” (2), a formulation that would later be promoted as a “triple bottom line” for businesses to pursue in this milieu. While Elkington is conscious of the injustices of uneven global economic development, and takes as his objective a redress of these economic and ecological injustices, he sees no other strategy to achieve this objective than to ask capital to solve the problem in good faith, and for consumers to fall in line.

Such a position, half-conscious of its own contradictions, emerges from an attempted generalization of Pop Buddhist aspirations through US-based organizations such as the Social Venture Network (SVN) and, later, the endorsement of mindfulness promoters such as Goleman. Initiated in the mid-1980s, SVN was “organized to promote the idea that business can and should be a vehicle for social change,” according to one of its participants, Jeffrey Hollander (1). One of the founders of SVN, Wayne Silby, was inspired in 1981 to reorganize Calvert, his investment firm, as a “right
livelihood” business after participating in a 1979 retreat led by Trungpa in Vermont around values in line with the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements, and later, anti-Apartheid movements tied to divestment.

The Pop Buddhist milieu, according to Hollander, established the aspirational trajectory of the SVN, which anticipates philanthro-capitalistic gatherings of the rich and powerful such as the Clinton Global Initiative and the Wisdom 2.0 Conference series in form and content, and the tendency toward invoking spiritual themes as solutions to impediments to global capital accumulation at events such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. Further, Silby and Calvert offers a case study in what happens when capitalists become mindful of the injustices of capitalist social relations, and attempts to use capitalist means, here figured as “impact investing,” to reduce the suffering of the poor and otherwise disadvantaged that ensue from these relations, while reproducing them—to serve all beings while serving shareholders a bit more.

Hollander observes that “One of the many distinctive features of SVN conferences is the palpable presence of spiritual and religious leaders,” among them Ram Dass (long an influence on mindfulness writers such as Kabat-Zinn, Salzberg, and Levine), the New York-based Zen teacher Bernie Glassman, and “the Venerable Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche […] who attended the first SVN meeting” (2). With the financialization of daily life underway, and while MBSR was mediated through the discourse of insight meditation, that same cultural matrix articulated a “new narrative” for American commerce parallel to Wilber’s narrative of spiritual evolution, legible in the 1987 invitation Ben Cohen (of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream) received to participate in SVN:
“‘An opportunity exists for us to build a new American story, a new American parable, a
new American mythology, which can provide an alternative and renewing vision for
some of the economic choices that face our culture’” (quoted in Hollander 8). Which
choices are unstated, and the persons who may be positioned to make them are assumed
to be the business leaders invited to the Network. More significant is the assumption
shared by Wilber and the insight meditation writers that a new narrative, a “soul story”
articulating a new and better worldview, is adequate to constitute an alternative sociality
to the one they reproduce in their work as financiers. The figure of a “new narrative” is
reproduced in conscious capitalist discourses explicitly, where capitalist power relations
are refigured in the dynamic of the advice book author to its reader, and in Silby’s
financial strategy, “insight investing.” As CSR was crystallized by mindful financiers and
CEOs at SVN, a spin-off of SVN, also involving Cohen, the group Businesses for Social
Responsibility (BSR), “became the preeminent forum […] for large businesses eager to
learn the basic tenets and practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR) from a
distinguished roster of experts” (13). Conscious consumer products of the kind Pink
celebrates as indicators of “Spirit as business,” as represented by the Body Shop’s social-
activist brand image in the 1990s, are generalized as representing a mode of affiliated
with and in some instances made fungible into a Pop Buddhist ethos.

Silby, whose Buddhist-informed aspiration for a “right livelihood” model for
finance that is mindful of the consequences of investment choices on the conditions of
life and social justice, launched the Calvert Social Investment fund in 1982.\textsuperscript{212} Initially,
Calvert made decisions by negation—declining to invest in defense-industry stocks, or in
enterprises with poor environmental accountability—in Wilber’s diction, organizing the freedom of its subordinates by capitalizing some and not others. However, Silby asserts, “‘We didn’t say no to drugs, like Nancy Reagan, because for the most part, we were high on pharmaceuticals’” (quoted in Hollander 6). Refusal as an investment strategy eventually began to compete with a vision for transformational, affirmative or “impact” investing, predicated in a mindfulness among some investors of the injustices of capitalist social relations. “We who are the knowledge workers benefiting from the free market system have lurking concerns about our chosen system and its growing divide between rich and poor,” Silby asserts (“Impact” 4), again assuming that contemporary social relations were chosen by “us,” whomever we may be. Silby declares, in contrast to “traditional venture capital investments [which] are just about ‘faster cheaper better,’ or how winners can take from losers” (“Impact” 5), that impact investors look to support private solutions to long-term social needs, “what just might be truly transformational” (“Impact” 5). By attending to needs, working with microfinance, and devising means to support small social enterprises (“Impact” 5-7), impact investors of high net worth effect the development of the impoverished by subordinating them in a relation of creditor to debtor. The mystified relation of the senior holon to the junior holon as Wilber describes it is enacted here, insofar as the impact investor earns a rate of return on his investment, and structural relations of the wealthy to the poor are not affected, a program later endorsed by conscious capitalists and mindful CEOs. Impact investing describes a mode of class power in strategy and tactic (microfinance) and in objective (enriching the totality while keeping extant relations of power intact), on the basis of a Pop Buddhistic
social network and cultural imaginary but absent its characteristic logic of renunciation, critique, or means to negation.

Meanwhile, the Pop Buddhist ethos that inheres in generalized mindfulness also persists in Calvert as an institution, according to Barbara Krumsieck, a longtime president and CEO of Calvert and occasional presenter at mindful leadership and “Spirit in Business” conferences.\textsuperscript{213} For instance, the six \textit{paramitas} or fundamental virtues of Mahayana Buddhism\textsuperscript{214} are appropriated as corporate values, articulated as “‘Intelligence, exertion, discipline, patience, generosity, and meditation’” (quoted in Patton 17)—though the “discipline” in question is ethics, traditionally—and the aspiration to “‘serve all beings’” is upheld (quoted in Patton 17). The theme of orienting one’s life practice toward the objective of realizing a personal vision characteristic of mindfulness post-\textit{Wherever You Go} is reproduced in Calvert’s promotional claims: “What we as a business do is nothing less than reinvent the corporate model to provide the best opportunity for people to bring together personal interests, professional pursuits and the deeper beliefs of ethics and purpose’” (quoted in Patton 17). In this mindful corporation, Pink’s insistence that work become a means to meaning is mediated through the diction of the insight meditation advice book and dressed in practices repurposed from the Pop Buddhist milieu.

That very repertoire in turn summons resistance to “Spirit as business” from the very canon of leaders—Buddhists and meditation teachers—it calls upon for legitimation. The appropriation of Pop Buddhist themes and means to capitalist objectives in CSR is negated in an open letter (published online in February 2013) to the Harvard Business
School professor and business leader William George, who advocates mindfulness as a means to business objectives and sits on the Boards of Directors of corporations such as Goldman Sachs and ExxonMobil. The letter’s author, the American Zen teacher David Loy, objects to the particular business practices of both those firms. Loy uses the diction of CSR in a probing question to George: “how has your practice influenced your understanding of the social responsibility of large corporations?” (“Can Mindfulness?” n.p.). Loy’s question identifies a contradiction shared by corporate mindfulness and CSR: corporations, by definition, are responsible to shareholders and not to social wellbeing or environmental sustainability, and therefore George’s promotion of himself as a contentious-because-mindful capitalist serves the objective of shareholder profit. Loy is as legitimized to speak to George about mindfulness in this context as George is to his own students. Loy’s letter and others like it represent a risk to corporate leaders such as George in that they threaten to bring what those leaders need to remain hidden—the remaking of class power moment by moment—to the mindfulness of those who may be sympathetic to the mindful capitalist project, those whom George seeks to lead.

CSR is of value to a corporation insofar as it functions to maintain the uneven relation of those who accumulate the capital extracted by corporations from the value created by workers through their labor and any material resources the earth may yield, and the workers themselves (Anderson “Accumulation”), and no further. These are the unjust social relations conscious capitalists wish to portray as heroic. “Spirit as business” is only business in this sense. The legitimation of CSR as the Good by its use of a Pop Buddhist ethos is of a piece with its cultural logic, and in contradiction to its objectives.
Even as a Pop Buddhist imaginary is credited as the kernel of CSR, and its structure of aspiration (if not their content) correspond to it, a mystification of capitalist relations and temporalities such as that in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* mobilized as an economic program, as in the futurism of Daniel Pink, is reproduced here. All these, including the contradictory invocations of Buddhistic otherness and goodness, are crystallized under the sign of conscious capitalism.

**CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM: THE NEW AGE AND THE SPIRITUAL CEO**

Conscious capitalism emerged as an aggregation of mystifications of capitalist relations of power such as *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* and the generalization of a spiritual nimbus around economic practices such as CSR and socially-conscious investing, first as a business-school topic and a tool for specialized consultants. I survey here a representative pair of academic-oriented conscious capitalist programs that legitimize the belief system of capitalism as a kind of knowledge: Patricia Aburdene’s *Megatrends 2010* (2005) and *Firms of Endearment* (2007) by a team of researchers led by Rajendra Sisodia.

The idealist historicism of progressing worldviews held in common among Wilber’s “universal integralism,” the third phase of insight meditation, and appeals for a “new narrative” for economic programs such as CSR gives the rationale for *Megatrends 2010* (2005). Here, Aburdene frames the “age of Conscious Capitalism,” which she distinguishes from a greed-is-good ethos characterizing Reagan-era governance, as inaugurated the moment in 2002 when free-market advocate and then-Federal Reserve chairperson Alan Greenspan testified before Congress against “infectious greed” among
business executives (xiv). To Aburdene’s mind, the 2000 crisis of overvalued technology stocks was a failing of personal ethics among a few leaders—too much greed—a “bug” and not a “feature” of the system that is resolvable into a New Age of plenitude by putting leaders on a steady diet of metaphysical commitment and unspecified ethical correction, as Wilber had claimed that pathological development is a consequence of an individual failure to conform to a higher order. This new age is to be “a new world where money and morals thrive side by side” (xiv), a “New Economy of Consciousness” (xvi), Aburdene claims. As Wilber does, Aburdene asserts that a personally-defined Absolute—the Absolute as the author envisions it, an explicitly private religion—is the agent of this world-historical transition, and does so in explicitly theologized diction: “Spirit, for me, is the attribute of God that dwells in humanity, the Great I AM, the Life Force, the aspect of us that most mirrors the Divine” (xxii). Aburdene, a business consultant, positions herself as a prophet of this Spirit, and her clients as its beneficiaries, by the same logic of consumption at work in mindfulness and happiness self-help books, as evidenced in The Happiness Project.

Aburdene asserts that Spirit as she has defined it—her personal vision as the Absolute—is the subject of history inaugurated in, as, and by conscious capitalists and “spiritual CEOs.” Here, the advice-author CEO embodies temporal and mundane power. Among them is Barbara Waugh of Hewlett Packard, described as briefly having served as “Angela Davis’s bodyguard” and who, according to Aburdene, commands a high degree of loyalty from her subordinates who prove willing to “come out of the spiritual closet at work” because “Barbara embodies the Love that supports them to speak their
truth” (Megatrends 62). The developmental relation of the senior to the junior holon in Wilber’s theological speculations consecrates the uneven relations of power between managers and subordinates, under the aegis of an Absolute that the author marks simultaneously as her own creation—a personal refuge of the kind Brach promotes—and as a description of history’s inner logic and force. The tendency in conscious capitalism to reify the boss as the agent of a spiritualized transformation to prosperity in her subordinates, tending to a New Age in historical time, is legible in mindful leadership books published afterward.

The 2007 volume *Firms of Endearment* reproduces many of the same doctrines that Aburdene articulates, suggesting a stable set of coordinates by which conscious capitalism as a business-school discourse may be mapped. The authors of *Firms of Endearment* surveyed global businesses to identify exemplary enterprises they call Firms of Endearment, or FoEs for short—inadvertently marking them as *foes*, enemies, agents hostile to the belabored reader. Making the list of FoEs are such mindful corporations as Amazon (now the parent company to Zappo’s, of which more to follow), The Container Store, Google, and Whole Foods, \(^{217}\) corporations whose CEOs or their designates have written advice books promoted at mindfulness conferences. \(^{218}\) Sisodia is eager to underscore that the FoEs he and his co-authors have identified outperform the “Good to Great” companies Collins writes of by criteria such as a desirable workplace environment and the intention to “make the world a better place” (17). Different dispensations of the New Age in among business gurus are, by 2007, already in competition with each other. Naming the authors’ aspiration as New Age is no exaggeration. The same end-of-history
triumphalism of the present that animates *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*’s self-importance is reproduced here: “This book reaches the public eye in the dawn of a new era in human history” (xix).

FoEs are characterized by the intentions of their leaders: “they strive through their words and deeds to endear themselves to all their primary stakeholder groups—customers, employees, partners, communities, and shareholders—by aligning the interests of all in such a way that no stakeholder group gains at the expense of other stakeholder groups” (xxi-xxii). Significantly, neither labor (especially “outsourced” labor) nor environment are mentioned except, perhaps, as “employees” or “partners.” The interests of productive forces and shareholders, whose material interests fundamentally contradict each other, are made to align in Sisodia’s doctrine by an immanent “Age of Transcendence” that will introduce a generalized spirituality into material history (xxii). Here, spirituality is imagined as a force of reconciliation activated by the intention to do right by all sentient beings—in Wilber’s terms, a broader and deeper context than that of maximizing profits for shareholders only—while simultaneously maximizing shareholder profits. The “triple bottom line” of CSR is advanced in near-Providential terms here. As it happens, the FoEs fail the stakeholders that are suggested in the spirit of the authors’ criteria (the totality of partners and employees, inclusive of globalized labor), but not the letter. The authors exclude productive forces of globalized labor that many of these companies profit from (Ikea), or customers unknowingly becoming productive of data in their online and mobile activities useful to a defense and intelligence contractor (Google) with whom a socially-conscious investor such as Silby would have nothing to
do, but which will emerge as the model mindful workplace (chapter six): in Wilber’s patois, the great majority of the world’s population is positioned as the junior holons whose freedom is organized by this spiritually-endowed ones to whom they are subordinated.

In the collaboration of Sisodia, the lead author of *Firms of Endearment*, with Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, and in the near-plagiarism of its subtitle, *How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*, in the writings of Zappo’s CEO Tony Hsieh, a metabolism between CEO-authors of mass market advice books and those written for business school readers and prospective clients of inspirational speakers and consultants is in evidence.

Circulating as knowledge for business leaders, the theology of conscious capitalism crystallizes the mystification of capitalist social relations in the “spiritual practice” scene (represented by *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*) and the contradictory attempts at generalizing Pop Buddhist aspiration in CSR. It reifies the advice author, especially the CEO as advice author, as a unique image of power and aspiration, capable of benevolent social interventions of world-historical significance. The reader is positioned to assent, comply, and to deeply aspire to better compliance.

**WHERE CEOS ARE GURUS AND GREED IS ALTRUISM**

Conscious capitalist advice books intended for a popular audience mobilize this constellation of cultural material to promote a libertarian policy program, and not only those authored by activist capitalists such as Charles Koch. Just as the mindfulness programs of self-help culture in the 1970s established a Buddhist imaginary—a set of
assumptions around Buddhists and Tibetanness as wholesome figures of wellbeing and
the Good for consumers to aspire to—so do conscious capitalist writers, including CEOs
as public-facing representatives of class power, do the same in their prescriptions for a
well-adjusted entrepreneurial self. The Pop Buddhistic intentions of CSR are again
reconfigured, mobilized with the third phase of insight meditation and mindfulness
practice, as a program of class discipline. And the roles of business leader and spiritual
master become, as in the writings of Wilber, indistinguishable.

The interpenetration of mindfulness’ Buddhistic themes and imagery into
conscious capitalism, a discourse heretofore articulated primarily through a kaleidoscope
of New Age and Hindu doctrines, is marked in Michael Strong’s 2009 attempt at a
popularization, Be The Solution, which is also among the first books on this topic
authored by a CEO. On the cover is a ladder rising, unsupported, into nothingness—
starting nowhere, going nowhere, serving no one and no purpose—an image in
contradiction to the direction of history posited in conscious capitalism and the emphasis
on purpose it holds in common with mindfulness. At the time of writing, Strong was the
CEO of an organization founded by Jeff Klein called FLOW, which was rebranded
“Conscious Capitalism” after this book’s publication.

Strong consistently articulates the imperative to economic liberalization in policy
and personal conduct that he promotes by appeal to Buddhist authority; “’Mind is the
forerunner of all things,’ observed the Buddha. [...] When we say that FLOW is
dedicated to ‘liberating the entrepreneurial spirit for good,’ we know that these words
represent a powerful intention with profound consequences” (333). Liberating, good,
intention, consequences (S. *karma*)—the patois of Pop Buddhist and insight meditation advice books, specifically the assumption of a meditation-oriented mode of Buddhist practice as a universal and timely spirituality—is here made to legitimize an economic libertarian project, and not for the last time. Similarly, Strong quotes the *Sutra of Hui Neng*, a scripture specific to East Asian Buddhism (also known as *The Platform Sutra*), to authorize an enlightenment program of overcoming internal and personal constraints, which include “degraded resources” (336-7), as though the environmental consequences of globalized capitalism can be overcome, for the capitalist, by adopting an appropriately Zen-themed worldview appropriate to the time. Strong’s program includes meditation to manage the stress of entrepreneurial life, and relies on much of Wilber’s lexicon to describe that practice (285-304).

In brief, mindfulness as stress relief, the Buddhist as an ethos of the Good, and the mystification of capitalist relations of power legible in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* are taken to be fungible into each other in conscious capitalism, where all of them are made to advance an agenda of economic liberalization. More so than conscious capitalists such as Aburdene, Strong is committed to an explicitly libertarian politics; FLOW stands for Freedom Lights Our World. The phrase “Liberating the entrepreneurial spirit for good” implies the end of history *for good*, permanently, once and for all (334), as much as it signals wellbeing. Strong asserts that “the good” is manifested in Whole Foods market—its CEO, John Mackey, wrote the Foreword to *Be The Solution*—and that Whole Foods represents a policy initiative oriented not around justice, but around freedom of a specific kind: “Economic freedom (including the rule of law and secure property rights) as well as
freedom, more broadly speaking, and protection of human rights” (335). Conscious capitalism mobilizes an ambivalent “spiritual practice” per insight meditation as a means to retrench capitalist social relations mystified as a means to the Good through a practiced compliance to the agenda of a boss presented as a figure of spiritual attainment, a guru.

This program is elaborated in the most prominent book on conscious capitalist to date, Mackey’s *Conscious Capitalism* (2013). Co-authored with Sisodia and published by the Harvard Business Review Press, it is legitimized as authoritative guidance for enterprises, as knowledge and not merely one man’s private religion. Significantly, in this context, Mackey is no mere man—he is the CEO of Whole Foods, a business that corresponds precisely to the expectations of CSR proponents such as Pink for “Spirit as business,” as The Body Shop had done two decades before. For this reason, Mackey is positioned as a figure of significant authority here. Like *Be The Solution*, *Conscious Capitalism* mobilizes mindfulness and its concomitant Buddhistic themes to advance a program of economic liberalization, mystified as an evolutionary-spiritual Good.

Mackey’s proposal celebrates the structural injustices of globalized and financialized capital legible in the holarchy of *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, which it also reproduces.

Generalized mindfulness is integral to *Conscious Capitalism*. Mackey defines the “conscious” in conscious capitalism in terms of mindfulness and karma: “To be conscious means to be fully awake and mindful, to see reality more clearly, and to more fully understand all the consequences—short and long term—of our actions” (29). Further, he ties emotional intelligence, the quality of empathy he feels a leader is supposed to have—with the capacity to identify with suffering of others (200-01), the
definition of compassion given in mindfulness advice books such as Salzberg’s *LovingKindness* and subsequently reiterated by mindful leaders such as Marturano. I mark in passing that Goleman’s concept of emotional intelligence is central among the positive psychology concepts that circulate in mindful workplace programs (chapter six). Mackey promotes insight meditation as a means to improve consciousness “in our normal working lives” (212) and recommends Kornfield and Goldstein’s *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* to leaders seeking guidance in this (318).

Just as significantly, Mackey shares with Wilber, Aburdene, and Sisodia an assumption that the present marks a point of historical transition, a moment of “rising” consciousness, which he believes is evidenced by global declines in slavery, violence, and communism (29). Like the founders of SVN decades prior and the authors of *Megatrends* and *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, Mackey finds it necessary to renarrate the present in light of the New Age he sees dawning in it as an antidote to the very “postmodern” thinkers that draw Wilber’s contempt:

Rather than being seen for what they really are—the heroes of the story—capitalism and business are all too frequently vilified as the bad guys and blamed for virtually everything our postmodern critics dislike about the world. Capitalism is portrayed as exploiting workers, cheating consumers, causing inequality by benefiting the rich but not the poor, homogenizing society, fragmenting communities, and destroying the environment. (15)

Mackey offers no rebuttals to the objections he attributes to the strawman “postmodernists” he, like Wilber, posits; he pleads *no contest* to the charges he levels.
Rather, Mackey attempts to offer capitalist social relations “a new narrative,” a mystification that papers over the histories and lived experiences he objects to, a rebranding (15) akin to Wilber’s insistence on disseminating a *telos* of his own device that he feels to be capable of introducing a new phase of history. And in his evocation of the capitalist as an archetypal hero in a narrative of deep meaning, Mackey mobilizes the “soul story” theme at the universalist core of the insight meditation book. The hero CEO as advice writer figures here as a spiritual writer; again, the practical and formal distinctions between business gurus and gurus as such have fallen away.

The “new narrative” Mackey promotes involves a celebration of the injustices in capitalist social relations that he freely acknowledges: “Much of today’s animosity toward capitalism stems from a misconception that we need to share all resources fairly and equitably. But the reality is that by artfully combining resources, labor, and innovation, wealth can be greatly expanded. The poor can become wealthier without requiring the well-off to become poorer” (17). As in *Firms of Endearment* and impact investing, through the inspired, primal work of meditating CEOs and the capitalist class capable of compassionately organizing the freedom of the less-empowered and those in need of development—a mindfully-disciplined labor force—the global economic pie is to grow without anything structural bending or breaking: capital, or environment, or labor. Structural relations, class relations, are held as immutable in this covenant of development. Here, a planet of entrepreneurs is posited, true to the gospel of economic liberalization: “we want to help end poverty around the world by making microcredit working-capital loans to millions of impoverished people to help them create and
improve their businesses” (64)—again realizing the relation of Wilber’s super- to sub-
holons as that of creditor-to-debtor, as in impact investing. *Conscious Capitalism*
reproduces the relations of power mystified into principles of universal development in
*Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* in the diction of mindfulness: while Mackey suggests the
possibility of the poor becoming less poor, he does not advocate for a democratic process
to determine, for instance, how resources are to be allocated or preserved. The
reproduction of the present figures as the means to the Good, and not, as in Nhat Hanh’s
meditations, as the means to suffering. Conscious capitalism, a mobilization of
mindfulness discourse and practice to everyday life as a workplace, is predicated in the
maintenance of social injustice, and would lose its rationale without it. As I will show,
the same rationale is reproduced in the generalization of MBSR as mindful leadership,
which puts extraordinary emphasis on the personal development—the ethical core and in-
the-moment presence—of the leader.

As Wilber and the other conscious capitalism authors do, Mackey insists that the
failings of contemporary capitalism must be attributed to the personal failings of
individual leaders, to their lack of consciousness, which is significant here insofar as
mindfulness is mobilized among leaders as a means to ameliorate such a lack. He
advocates “free-enterprise” capitalism as inherently ethical and virtuous without
describing a historical instance when or where such a thing ever existed, and “crony”
capitalism as vicious. The difference between them, Mackey insists, is corruption at the
level of personal ethics, which derives from a corrupting social system (21); Wilber’s
attribution of pathology in organizations to personal failings such as arrogance and not
structural problems is in evidence here. In another instance, Mackey marks free enterprise as a developmental stage after crony capitalism, and not as a pure state from which one is corrupted. Here, Mackey cites intention as the difference between crony and free-enterprise capital. Just as an insect transforms in the chrysalis, Mackey asserts, corporations can “reinvent themselves as agents of creation and collaboration, magnificent entities capable of cross-pollinating human potentials in ways that nothing else can, creating multiple kinds of value for everyone they touch” (26). The parable of a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly insists that contemporary capitalism is not inherently ethical, but is instead an early evolutionary stage to be transcended by the idealistic and virtuous capitalist in an age of transcendence, an age of broader meaning in which human potentials are realized at the hand of resonant leaders. Mackey does not specify here or elsewhere where value, materially, comes from if not from human labor or the environment or both, except to reiterate “intent” (26), as though in a consciousness economy, the entrepreneurial self’s compliant mind creates value, is value, and is the measure of value.

The holism Wilber articulates is also assumed here, as it is in mindful leadership; corporate transformation is homologous to personal transformation, and works the same way, because persons and corporations are assumed to be the same kinds of things, of the same nature, as in Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality. In this instance, however, an advice-writer CEO is celebrating other advice-writer CEOs as “senior holons,” those who tend to the development of those they subordinate by their power to subordinate. Wilber’s universal theology, a mystification of the social relations of finance capital, is here
specified to the glory of the business leader, who remains a figure of universal legitimacy, of archetypal heroism, at the head of corporations reimagined as agents of benevolent transformation and mindful transformation. Mackey endorses Zappo’s and Google as examples of companies showing “higher purpose,” which is defined as “the Good” (Zappo’s) and “the True” (Google) (60-61).

The Good is imagined as happiness, the familiar theme of positive psychology and Pop Buddhism advice books, in the writings of the CEO of Zappo’s. Hsieh’s Delivering Happiness: A path to profits, passion, and purpose (2010) offers a useful example of a book by a CEO who positions himself as a business guru who deploys some of the features of the mindfulness advice book to do so. The subtitle itself amalgamates Kornfield’s A Path with Heart and the profits-passion-purpose formulation of Firms of Endearment. Further, Hsieh’s emphasis on happiness braids generalized mindfulness’ appeals to happiness directly into the discourse of conscious capitalism, which is reproduced in subsequent mindfulness books for the workplace; Chade-Meng Tan (effectively Google’s chief mindfulness officer), who finds inspiration in Hsieh’s leadership, identifies in Delivering Happiness “a corporate culture that is conducive to employee happiness,” which summons “happy customers” who “spend more money” (Search 132). That culture is supported, according to Hsieh, through the discipline of positive psychology. Jonathan Heidt’s Happiness Hypothesis (chapter one), a synthesis of universalist spirituality and positive psychology, is a significant influence on Hsieh; Zappo’s offers a “Science of Happiness” course to employees based on it (Hsieh 230).
Happiness figures primarily in the “wow moments” Hsieh finds in transactions around consumer goods (typically shoes), and the corporation as an agent of good constantly preoccupied by its own profitability and value. The sale of the company to Amazon in 2009 for $1.2 billion US is framed as “the beginning of the next leg of our journey to help change the world” (226)—while the content of that change remains unspecified, the position of the Amazon sale as the threshold of a benevolent new day recalls the New Age optimism of conscious capitalism. While the Buddhistic traces visible in Be the Solution and Conscious Capitalism are mostly implicit here, Hsieh’s reliance on the mindfulness repertoire is in evidence. For example, Hsieh quotes a Jon Kabat-Zinn “tweet to live by”: “You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf” (89). The Good and the Happy as imagined here are reproduced from generalized mindfulness and positive psychology in form and content, but as functions of and means to business objectives.

Echoing Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality, Hsieh posits the book and its author as means to personal and corporate growth—he intends Delivering Happiness to be such a means (xi)—and, as Wilber does, he positions authors of advice books like himself as uniquely capable personalities. Hsieh seeks to explain what it is about himself, his history, his person, that led him to such success as exemplified in Zappo’s (2). His “Childhood dream of making lots and lots of money” is framed by Gandhi’s motto of resistance: “First, they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win” (55). Here, a spiritual and political leader of the prominence of Mahatma Gandhi in pursuit of an organized program of nonviolent resistance becomes an analogue to the
conscious capitalist seeking happiness-profits, according to that conscious capitalist. Put differently, Hsieh positions himself as a singularly capable corporate guru from his youth, the position of the corporate guru as comparable to that of an actual guru of world-historical significance, and the marketing of shoes over the internet on the promise of a “wow moment” as a program comparable in quality and kind to nonviolent resistance against the most powerful empire on earth. Such are the expectations laid on mindfulness as a means to success in the workplace, the mindful leader as the legitimate dispenser of the means to success, and the parameters of success itself, after conscious capitalism.

In corporate mindfulness advice books such as *Delivering Happiness* and *Conscious Capitalism*, the for-all-beings aspiration of Pop Buddhist discourse is reinscribed into happiness as the realization of for-our-shareholders business objectives. In doing so, they elide the anticapitalism of Pop Buddhist discourse. An explicitly libertarian political program is made inseparable from generalized mindfulness here, which had already been promoted for decades as a means to personal realization, personal freedom, and personal mythmaking in the context of insight meditation (chapter three). The indistinguishability of conscious capitalism from generalized mindfulness after the emergence of the meditating CEO as an advice book writer and mindfulness advocate is signaled in a 28 March 2013 post James Gimian, the editor of *Mindful* magazine, made to his “Editor’s Blog.” Here, Gimian uses the terms “conscious capitalism” and “mindful leadership” as though they are fungible into each other—as though Janice Marturano (mindful leader) and Jeff Klein²²⁴ (conscious capitalist), whom he names, are doing the same thing—because, functionally, they are. In referring to Marturano, Klein, and Jeff
Walker (a retired partner of JPMorgan Partners) each as “our friend” on behalf of *Mindful*, a not insignificant archive of mindfulness discourse, Gimian endorses the marriage of mindful leadership and conscious capitalism, tacitly pronouncing: whatever conscious capitalism is, that is what mindfulness is now.

**CONCLUSION**

In conscious capitalism and impact investing, mindfulness and its repertoire of Buddhistic themes and images are made to legitimize the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Here, the mindfulness repertoire articulates capitalist social relations as a religious mode. This discourse positions the spiritual leader and the business advice book author as administrators of world-historical shifts in consciousness, indeed saviors of life on earth in some instances, and the book as the singular marker of legitimacy. These characteristics are legible in writings on mindful leadership and the mindful workplace, where they are contested on the ground of those Buddhistic traces. Such is the generalization of mindfulness: as a contested, paradoxical mode of discipline in an entrepreneurialized and stressful everyday life, articulated through mystifications of capitalist relations of power indigenous to the spirituality and advice-book genre.

Mindfulness is never only the “simple practice” of mindfulness, even when it professes to be so. Its advocates must profess it to be so precisely because it is not so. The obverse is also true. Generalized mindfulness does not have a Buddhist history (chapter one), and in its therapeutic and corporate applications mindfulness is not a Buddhist practice, but the Buddhist themes and images inherent in it are made to do specific kinds of cultural work—here, they legitimize capitalist relations, objectives, and figures of
managerial and entrepreneurial authority—while they also summon criticism of the same from Buddhist quarters. For instance, Ronald Purser, a professor of management in at San Francisco State University who, just as significantly, identifies as a Buddhist, asks: “Is it [mindfulness] a means of helping employees adapt to a toxic culture, rather than calling into question the fundamental reasons why stress is being generated in that toxic culture?” (quoted in Kingston n.p.). Purser’s Buddhist practice is germane here because mindfulness, even in the workplace, is organized around a set of codes particular to social networks and affiliations that are oriented largely around Buddhist institutions and advice books. Mindfulness is a coherent discourse with specific, legitimized participants and parameters of utterance and imagining. All this muddles the question of what mindfulness actually is and how it functions, and who is legitimately positioned to answer, and by what terms. Rep. Paul Ryan (D-Ohio) accurately observes that mindfulness is “happening everywhere because it is coming out of necessity,” a felt need for a means to self-empowerment and self-care among workers, and a demand on the part of capital holders to remain capital holders—which is to say that the generalized practice of mindfulness is a form of consciousness appropriate to this moment. Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the favored Buddhists of corporate mindfulness advocates, asserts that it would be helpful if CEOs actually practiced mindfulness as he teaches it, but if their meditations are intended to advance capitalist objectives, then they are not practicing mindfulness at all (Confino 2014). The coincidence of divergent practices and discourses as one by a specific and coherent logic marks the mindful conference, the mindful training, and the mindful workplace.
CHAPTER FIVE: MINDFUL LEADERSHIP AS DISCIPLINE

Mindful leadership is promoted as a timely, even urgent intervention. One of its advocates, Maria Gonzalez, prescribes it as an antidote to critical inquiry of a specific kind: a perceived increase in public scrutiny of corporate leaders by the public after 2008, which Gonzalez identifies as a threat to her readers (3). That is, public awareness of the income inequality that prevails between working-class persons and capital, of the inner mysteries of the financial industry, and of class and the reproduction of class power—a social mindfulness of the causes of suffering in the present moment—is figured as an existential problem to those who share capital’s objectives. That is, mindful leadership’s timeliness is a measure of its utility to the already-empowered, or as a means to prevent a crisis of overproduction of mindfulness, the penetration of the awareness of the belabored into the production of the present, into history. And insofar as therapeutic mindfulness is prescribed as a means to adjust skillfully to stressful times in an environment that can be threatening, mindfulness for leaders—persons in power and representing power—promises relief to the felt stress of administering and maintaining uneven relations of power. Overall, mindful leadership is of a piece with conscious capitalism and its cultural predicates in promoting a new narrative of capitalist right. It empowers management with this narrative to ask of the disciplined to identify with capitalist sociality as a force for good, to accept a contract of a promised empowerment in exchange for present
compliance to corporate objectives—in short, to inspire others to be mindful of the immediate present without regard to past or future and without judgment, to feel good about it, and to find one’s sense of self in it. It is a highly significant aspect of the compensatory valence of mindfulness.

The contradictions in the formation that mindful leadership represents, which emerge some years prior to the 2008 recession, follow from the contradictions in mindfulness as mediated through the insight meditation advice book and are legible in the convergence of a felt need among leaders for emotional self-regulation and self-knowledge, and mindfulness as a prescription to the same. This chapter is concerned less with the public image of mindful leaders such as the archetypal tech guru Steve Jobs or U.S. President Bill Clinton than with the deployment of routines and rationales for adherence to the given program in the workplace and in everyday life as a generalized workplace.

Here, I consider three mindful leadership advice programs: The Mindful Leader by Michael Carroll, Finding the Space to Lead by Janice Marturano, and Paul Ryan’s A Mindful Nation. Carroll is legitimized as a mindfulness teacher by his Buddhist credentials (specifically his affiliation with Vajradhatu/Shambhala), while Ryan and Marturano take their lead from Kabat-Zinn. All reproduce, in different ways, a belief in the necessity of contemporary relations of power pace conscious capitalism while evoking, consciously or not, a significant share of the explicitly anti-capitalist Pop Buddhist lexicon (chapter two). Carroll and Ryan articulate discomfort with the consequences of economic liberalization as they pronounce its inevitability—indeed,
Ryan promotes mindfulness largely as a therapeutic response to those consequences. *The Mindful Leader* attempts a generalization of a Pop Buddhist ethos to the problematic of leadership as discipline. The deployment of therapeutic mindfulness as discipline in *Finding the Space to Lead* summons a desire among the empowered and those aspiring to power for an alternative to capitalist sociality in its field of consumption. *A Mindful Nation* shows that when mindfulness is mobilized as a public policy program by a mindful leader, it draws on the reservoir of prosocial imperatives that crystallize in anticapitalist meditations in the Pop Buddhist advice book, such that a means to cope with hard times for working people (therapeutic mindfulness) is embedded in an aspiration for an alternative to hard times for all, while adapting to the present as naturalized. Finally, I describe the experience of attending mindful leadership conferences, where this body of claims and programs, mediated through the *techne* of the advice book, is drawn together by the singular social logic they share in common, the religion of capitalism.

In mindful leadership, enlightenment amounts to a subjective position of radical acceptance of and identification with business objectives, and ultimately the maintenance of capitalist social relations. It is a regimen that promises the practitioner a means to present and future empowerment in exchange for present and future assent and compliance. It is a primary path by which the religion of capital as articulated in insight meditation advice books and mediated through such economic programs as CSR and conscious capitalism is mobilized in everyday life as a generalized workplace. Its timeliness is suggested in ways in which management advice-book authors are
capitalizing on the word mindfulness after 2008. The paradox of mindfulness and its compensatory and emancipatory valences are legible in mindful leadership.

**LEADING FROM WITHIN: A POP BUDDHIST PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Michael Carroll’s 2007 volume *The Mindful Leader* represents an explicit departure from mindfulness per MBSR in that it attempts to situate Buddhism largely as Trungpa presented it into the boardroom as a strategic means to business objectives, with mindfulness as a significant function of that program. Carroll himself is legitimized as a mindfulness advocate by his training within Vajradhatu/Shambhala International, where he is authorized as a meditation teacher and author, and by his experience in the corporate world, which he engaged in simultaneously. "While Wall Street was training me to become a business leader,” Carroll explains, “my Buddhist teachers were training me to become a bodhisattva-warrior” (*Leader* 5). Parenthetically, by 2007, Trungpa’s leadership was no longer a taboo topic, and had again become exemplary to North American advice writers. Carroll presents mindfulness meditation as an explicitly Buddhist practice in terms recognizable to readers of Nhat Hanh and insight meditation advice books, here oriented toward the routines of an executive’s everyday life (*Leader* 112), and dedicates a full chapter to summarizing Trungpa’s instructions (among others) for seated meditation (*Leader* 195-99). He further posits mindfulness for his purposes as a humanistic and qualitative means to intimacy with one’s life and milieu rather than a scientific and quantitative approach to optimizing one’s performance, in direct contrast to the forms of practice popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Daniel Goleman. While Carroll is not consistently opposed to ambition or achievement in this volume, he does
present a qualitative alternative to attempts at quantifying such affects as kindness and wellbeing as inform popularizations of mindfulness since *Full Catastrophe Living*, and identifies the qualities of “vulnerability” and “heart” as antonyms to the calculations of strategy and tactic.

More significantly, Carroll describes the work of “opening,” his term for the function of becoming-intimate with moment in mindfulness practice (*Leader* 20-21). Carroll finds the imperative to a personal vision characteristic of such mindfulness touchstones as *A Path with Heart* and *Everywhere You Go* problematic insofar as it substitutes a body of tacit assumptions and automatized responses for the direct engagement with reality he calls “opening” (*Leader* 21). Carroll elaborates this concept of opening against the foil of realizing a personal vision, which he equates to self-deception and describes as cowardice (*Leader* 32), in the martial patois of the Shambhala books. For instance, the mindful leader—now equated to a “bodhisattva-warrior” (*Leader* 17)—is advised not to defend against blame or anticipate praise, but instead, like the image of the heart-exposed and defenseless monarch Trungpa advanced in *Great Eastern Sun*, to be brave enough to drop one’s weapons (*Leader* 42). According to Carroll, the defensive posture of just “holding on” and “playing the game” amounts to “behaving like cowards” (*Leader* 85), and the strategically superior posture is to assume a noncombatant role, to renounce to logic of violence behind the moment as given: “rather than holding in, we learn to *open out*; rather than holding on, we learn to *let go*” (*Leader* 85). While the deployment of mindfulness discourse as a belief system is negated here, and along with it the functions of means and compliance embedded in that doctrine, a subtle
instrumentality appropriate to the purposes of aspiring leaders is at work here. The strategic logic of conflict demands the renunciation of conventional modes of conflict in order to achieve the objective of a conflict. Here, a renunciation of violence becomes a strategic implementation of violence. In effect, Carroll advises the meditating manager to address the chronic insecurity and felt stress of the corporate work environment by ceasing to act by its logic—to stop defending oneself or competing with others on its terms at the level of everyday routine (Leader 45), because this is a more effective way to manage insecurity and compete for limited resources, thereby maintaining the status quo.

In Carroll’s description, this internal practice of renunciation allows for a sense of agency, for some mental space to respond intelligently and purposively rather than reactively, but requires the meditator to trust herself (Leader 50). However, the capacity to trust oneself assumes there is something trustworthy about a self and its objectives other than its function of “stifling the world with our views” that Carroll objects to (Leader 21). Here, Carroll mobilizes the concept of Buddha-nature as always-already accessible “basic sanity” in contrast to the stages-of-development, gradual-awakening logic of insight meditation and conscious capitalism. In meditation, Carroll asserts, the challenge is to actualize capacities already present in one’s mindstream, “discovering our basic sanity,” rather than adding a veneer of happiness (Leader 56). Again and again, the mindful leader is reminded to face reality and (again invoking Trungpa’s diction) not to “sugarcoat” it or accept it passively or uncritically (Leader 79-80). Carroll describes mindfulness, an inner practice of staying open in this way, as a practice in courage as such, a training that prepares the meditator to engage in conduct that is not motivated by
automatized personal fears or anxieties (*Leader* 87-88), but instead frees the leader to conduct a program for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. And here, the reorientation of Mahayana aspiration that Carroll undertakes is significant. The subordination of mindfulness practice to a program for the benefit of all beings without exception and without favor that is characteristic of Mahayana writers such as Trungpa, the Dalai Lama, and Nhat Hanh is simultaneously reproduced and contradicted by a nominally Buddhist prosperity gospel in *The Mindful Leader*.

Carroll describes the characteristic sufferings of contemporary humanity as the stuff of compassion, and as the consequence of ego-driven action:

> For all our progress and success, we also find ourselves in a world filled with unprecedented suffering. Sixteen thousand children starve to death every day, and 100 million people are without homes. Even our marvels can morph into tragedies: more than twenty thousand nuclear weapons are hidden throughout the world, and 4.6 million people die each year from air pollution. (*Leader* 7)

Here, the reader familiar with the Pop Buddhist discourse Carroll invokes would expect to find an exhortation to orient one’s conduct toward the wellbeing of the suffering totality that one has become newly conscious of—the present historical juncture becoming aware of itself through the lens of the meditator’s gaze. Carroll provides this, but with a significant innovation, in the “guiding principle” of the book: “More often than not, seeking success for ourselves proves pointless and shallow, whereas seeking success and inspiration for others almost always delivers prosperity and well-being right into our hands” (*Leader* 9). By this prosperity-gospel logic, the best way to seek success for
oneself is to seek it for others, or more particularly, to seek the benefit of one’s subordinates is upheld as a means to realizing the personal vision of the leader, which is assumed to promote the development of his or her subordinates. In Carroll’s hands, the selfless Mahayana aspiration simultaneously becomes an absolute personal vision and, as I will show, indistinguishable from business objectives, precisely what Trungpa would call spiritual materialism. It is legible in Carroll’s invocation of the Buddhist concept of Ṣaṁvara, or critical awareness, in part to argue that “Engendering this awareness at work is highly practical” as a means to set up “awareness competencies” needed to accomplish work tasks (Leader 121-122)—tasks that reproduce the very “marvels” Carroll objects to as “tragedies.”

This contradiction reflects Carroll’s novel (relative to the tradition he represents) presentation of renunciation. Carroll presents nonattachment as a matter of process, of means. Traditionally, as in the contemplations on the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind From Samsara that Carroll deploys (Leader 211), one is led to renounce worldly objectives but not necessarily worldly means; Carroll advocates this and other practices as means to assist leaders as they turn toward samsara in pursuit of business objectives. This inversion of means and ends in Carroll’s program repositions the profit motive as an objective of unquestioned legitimacy for a Buddhist in a capitalist society to pursue, now imagined with a patina of virtuous detachment. The workplace, generalized to all moments, here is fancied a site for meaning-making in the first instance. The reproduction of the same makes the meaning one finds in its reproduction.
Similarly, Carroll recasts “basic sanity” or Buddha-nature as a mode of inspiration—of management as discipline. Carroll positions Goleman’s description of “primal” leadership as inspiration (Leader 96), of self-awareness leading to improved emotional intelligence (Leader 117), and his advocacy for wellbeing in the workplace (Leader 158-74) as characteristics of the realization of the leader’s Buddha-nature. He claims: “all beings instinctively want to offer their best to others and in turn inspire others to do the same, and this can be done by anyone, anywhere, anytime” (Leader 18). Carroll describes such inspiration as “leading from the inside out,” and characterizes it as “the vital impulse that drives authentic leadership” (Leader 19). This impulse is posited as an explicit alternative to “top-down” leadership generally, which Carroll finds problematic, and mindfulness is posited as a means to openness and authenticity and therefore the cultivation of inside-out leadership (Leader 14-15), even as it enacts a top-down logic of coercion in Carroll’s examples. Here, as if by magic, the personal authenticity of the mindful leader is presented as an alternative to the retrenched and uneven relations of power in organizations such as workplaces—and contrariwise as means to stimulate productivity among one’s subordinates, whose labors are held to benefit the whole and not only the shareholder. As in conscious capitalism, Pop Buddhist topoi are mobilized to the reproduction of capitalist relations of power.

The same contradiction obtains throughout Carroll’s description of the specific capacities the mindful leader realizes. The personal qualities of “warmth” and “awareness” are posited as means to inspiration (Leader 133), which is to say that the qualities one trains in while practicing mindfulness meditation as Carroll prescribes it are
said to enable the manager to generate less resistance from workers and hence extract more productivity, while expecting fewer demands from them; just as the Buddha has been traditionally described as the healer of the spiritually sick, Carroll posits mindful managers as healers of toxic emotions in the workplace (Leader 170). Further, the practice of “opening our heart to the world” that comes from “practicing mindfulness meditation” (Leader 178) gives the leader access to a “command of the situation” (Leader 182), the “field of power” Trungpa described as authentic presence (T. wang thang) in Great Eastern Sun. Each of these abilities would offer a competitive advantage to any enterprise over others lacking in them, and also to the manager or consultant, the subject-as-enterprise, selling his or her labor in what is now a tacitly spiritual marketplace.

Carroll’s book asserts that if one wishes to enjoy a successful career in management, one must practice primal leadership, the leadership of inspiration, and to do this one will do well to cultivate the specifically Mahayana Buddhist qualities he promotes, refracted through Pop Buddhist books and institutions. In this context, Carroll’s managerial Mahayana merges with the top-down holarchy of Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality, where the reproduction of extant relations is mystified into a scheme of personal and cosmic development. According to Carroll, “The skillfulness of mindful leaders is how we inspire the best in others” (Leader 129), a claim that is not fully comprehensible without the Buddhist diction in it decoded. Carroll glosses upaya as skillfulness, (Leader 129), and bodhicitta as openness (Leader 131); in this formulation, Carroll signals a conviction that the mindful manager actualizes the capacity for
enlightenment (S. bodhicitta) of his or her subordinates through skillful means (S. upaya), assuming the role of the spiritual master (S. guru) to them—a position identical to that of a conscious capitalist and spiritual CEO. The advice book author, here, reproduces the power relations of debtor to creditor and advice book author to reader, and the temporality of the insight meditation book as mediated through conscious capitalism.

*The Mindful Leader*, unlike the Shambhala books but like *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* and the insight meditation genre, does not imagine an alternative set of social relations to capitalist ones. Carroll, who identifies explicitly as a creature of Wall Street (*Leader 82*) and, as an HR manager, has implemented mass layoffs (*Leader 91*), finds it necessary to remind the leaders among his readers that layoffs “put families at risk” and that this matters (*Leader 93*). He also articulates some skepticism toward “venture capitalists” and their exclusive objective of “short-term profits and personal gain” (*Leader 173*)—those who demand the layoffs that Carroll and other middle managers have been positioned to implement. However, with an in-the-moment sense of detachment, Carroll’s mindful leader is able to accomplish the objectives of the venture-capitalist class, beginning with the cultivation of humility, where humility is defined as an “absence of arrogance” (*Leader 143*), and is, again, tied to a kind of courage.

More significant as an example of the virtuous detachment of the mindful leader is Carroll’s claim that, “because we are patient and free from anger, we are willing to run a country or empty a bedpan, launch a new product or lay off an entire department” (*Leader 114*), silently bracketing the work of questioning given objectives—the endless negations of the given that Trungpa demanded of his disciples in *Cutting Through*
Spiritual Materialism—and the question of who may be free to choose who performs which tasks, for what compensation, or under what terms (Carroll does not consider the possibility of back office workers penetrating the ranks of the power brokers), while presenting enlightenment as a willingness to execute a given plan with a radical acceptance unmediated by critical thought. In short, there is a way in which Carroll’s book serves to help managers feel better about executing strategies they may be suspicious of, and that they know may cause suffering by exposing working-class families to hunger or homelessness, as in this anecdote: “We’re in a meeting with a group of executives trying to figure out how to cut salaries for the company’s ten thousand employees, a lunch of fresh sushi is delivered, and one executive, unaware of the delivery, naively observes out loud, ‘Something stinks in here!’” (Leader 190). Carroll intends for this anecdote to demonstrate the manner in which “sacred intelligence unfolds as an utterly synchronized moment” (Leader 190) for mindful leaders, but it is not clear that such intelligence locates the source of the stink correctly, or is mindful the source of the most toxic odor in the room.

The Mindful Leader is an attempt to generalize Pop Buddhist practice to the objective of reproducing class power, an extension of corporate projects such as CSR and impact investing in to the routines of aspiring executives. Like Silby, the impact investor, Carroll seems mindful of the problematic consequences of capitalist relations of power, and he proposes to redress them from Buddhist premises. But as does insight meditation, The Mindful Leader delimits the scope of the mindfulness of its practitioners such that the particular contradictions in its practice are unavailable to awareness. In his positioning of
the object of renunciation in process and not in objectives, Carroll’s mindful leader shares more in common with Wilber’s superholon than with the transformational imperative of the Shambhala warrior espoused in *Great Eastern Sun*. This contradicts Carroll’s legitimation as an advice-book author, his position as a business success and a spiritual leader in Shambhala International, and by extension the cultural substrate to the Pop Buddhist prosperity gospel he promotes. Finally, *The Mindful Leader* sets up Pop Buddhist leaders such as Trungpa as figures of aspiration for managers seeking means to further empowerment, making the explicit anticapitalism of Pop Buddhist discourse available in this milieu. The paradox of mindfulness is legible here even as Carroll distances his project from therapeutic programs such as MBSR generalized to everyday life.

**A PRESCRIPTION FOR MINDFUL DISCIPLINE**

In *Finding the Space to Lead* (2014), Janice Marturano posits mindfulness as a means to personal development for those who are made responsible for the development of subordinates, effectively parking her program at the intersection of generalized mindfulness and conscious capitalism. Marturano positions the mindful and inspiring leader as *a benevolent agent of coercion*, much as Mackey imagines the conscious capitalist and Goleman describes the resonant leader. Marturano is the “founder and executive director” of the “Institute for Mindful Leadership,” a vehicle for selling seats at retreats led by Marturano—effectively reproducing the business model of lay-Buddhist-oriented institutions such as IMS and Spirit Rock, and at a comparable cost. Marturano, as an advice book author and meditation teacher, is positioned as a cutting-
edge authority by the expectations conscious capitalism makes of its spiritual CEOs, the context into which Marturano is positioned even before she had begun to write. Mindful leadership as Marturano promotes it represents the generalization of MBSR after insight meditation mobilized as a mode of discipline by assent and coercion. Even as Marturano explicitly negates any Buddhist affiliation to her science-endorsed program, the paradox of mindfulness is legible in its reception among the global economic elite at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

In this role, Marturano instructs participants in specific routines of generalized mindfulness appropriate to the corner office. For instance, Marturano prescribes two ten-minute practices, including one called the “desk chair meditation,” which “can be done anywhere you are able to sit quietly and practice, even an airplane seat” (51)—a routine that turns out to be a simplified version of a body scan technique popularized by insight meditators. Generally, mindfulness as Marturano presents it corresponds to the approach of her teacher, Kabat-Zinn, and his associates, which she finds appealing because it presents itself as “grounded in science and not New Age slogans and clichés” (23). Marturano’s reproduction of post-*Everywhere You Go* mindfulness is visible in her definition of mindfulness *prima facie* as not New Age and not a religion (46). As in *The Mindful Leader*, which Marturano does not acknowledge, the Mahayana doctrine of Buddha nature as articulated for Anglophone readers—“the mind’s innate capabilities” made accessible by mindfulness (46)—is taken up, but now mobilized to the needs of upper and middle management, and to budding entrepreneurs. A religious premise is called upon to support a nonreligious program for a specific subset of meditators, a
program distanced by its rationality from the “clichés” of spiritualist cant while reproducing many of them.\textsuperscript{235} As with Ryan’s mindful citizenship, Marturano’s mobilization of mindfulness for management invokes prosocial Buddhist-affiliated modes of affect. Here, “purposeful pauses”—this phrase is a mindfulness cliché after Kabat-Zinn—are prescribed as means to cultivate compassion starting with oneself, because “compassion is a powerful guiding force for great leaders” (40). In all instances here, mindfulness and the Pop Buddhist lexicon reproduced in it are mobilized to the felt needs of management aspiring to “leadership excellence,” to optimized performance by means of managing one’s own emotions and manipulating those of one’s subordinates, the latter praised as a mode of “inspiration.”

Leadership excellence, like the mindfulness practice Marturano offers to promote it, is also described in terms that directly recall the insight meditation and Pop Buddhist advice book. The techniques Marturano offers are intended to help meditating CEOs to “notice when we are moving into a reactive mode and learn practices that will help us make conscious choices” (7)—the familiar enlightenment formula of transitioning from a state of limitation or bondage to one of freedom by rationally undermining one’s automatisms. Such attention introduces a “ripple effect,” Marturano claims (13-14) whereby all who are connected to this leader benefit, an idea identical to that posited by Nhat Hanh but for an implicit logic of subordination negated in Interbeing but well developed in writings of Wilber and the conscious capitalists. Marturano invokes the specifically Mahayana aspiration and diction of writers such as Nhat Hanh and especially Trungpa in her description of a mindful leader’s authentic presence: “A mindful leader
embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, creativity, and compassion in the service of others” (11). The content of that service and the structural relations among those “others,” and between them and the leadership class, however, depart significantly from the social aspirations of twentieth-century Mahayana writers and converge with the affirmations of conscious capitalism.

Marturano’s model of leadership is legible as a mode of discipline in the examples she gives to demonstrate inspiration. According to Marturano, presence opens onto inspiration, and inspiration ripples down into consent—freely given goodwill upward to the leader from his or her subordinates—and paints a public halo on the organization when possible. Among these examples is an anecdote of Rudy Giuliani’s physical presence on the streets of New York on 11 Sept. 2001, where Giuliani is implied to embody mindful leadership. Giuliani is given as an example of leadership presence on the principle of credit for showing up—for being there and behaving as though one is part of the team when times get tough (125-26). No concrete evidence for Giuliani’s claimed mindfulness, compassion, or leadership beyond acting the part is offered. Marturano takes this instance of credit-for-showing-up as an example of leadership capable of inspiring subordinates to “give their best effort” (126), to commit fully to the given agenda as an enlightened, feel-good program they believe they benefit from participating in and identifying with. Mindful leadership is, here, a mode of discipline that summons a disciplined self-making toward a felt personal authenticity.

In her second example of inspirational leadership, Marturano transitions to an instance of corporate philanthropy directed by absent-ly-present leaders. In a celebration
of Home Depot’s efforts at corporate philanthropy, a $50 million donation in support of “community housing projects” for US veterans returning from war abroad is coupled with an invitation by management on behalf of workers to volunteer their time and energy in building these housing units. In contrast to the Giuliani example, here Marturano makes no mention of Home Depot brass being present and participating in the home-building labor. Instead, the invitation to volunteer the time of one’s subordinates on their behalf, presumably for their benefit—in effect, to be present by proxy—is taken to be exemplary. And again, inspiration is described as a means to buy the assent and compliance of subordinates gratis, here to serve the corporate bottom line, the private interest of management: “Who would not have a feeling of pride to be working with colleagues who not only contribute to the bottom line of the organization”—an organization, in this instance, of which those colleagues have no ownership—“but also contribute to the community in such an important way?” Marturano asks (127). As in A Mindful Nation, the contemporary juncture, productive of soldiers returning home from wars abroad with injuries they are made responsible for managing, often with no employment or adequate social safety net, is the necessary social context for generalized mindfulness. Marturano promotes mindful-led projects such as this attempted rehabilitation for returning military personnel for corporate public relations and human resource management, not out of an urgent imperative to benefit all beings without exception of reward (chapter two). Bracketing the question of how helpful these housing units may be to the veterans in question, the Home Depot leaders are praised for finding the means to coerce their workers into participating in a publicity stunt for Home Depot on their own time, and to
feel good about it. This is a prescription for mindfulness as class discipline: Marturano’s discussion of leadership presence betrays a deeper interest in effective inspiration than in presence per se—in *organizing the freedom* of one’s subordinates in order to serve what the presumably more developed members of the hierarchy perceive to be in the best interests of the whole, but which may not correspond to their material interests.

The same pattern recurs in the instance of Marturano’s teaching of mindfulness at the World Economic Forum in Davos (2013), with scientist Mark Williams from the Oxford Mindfulness Centre (UK) (166), but with a significant variation. Where Giuliani and Home Depot management likely did not know they were practicing “mindful leadership,” when consultants such as Marturano invoke the discourse and practice of mindfulness in public, even at the global locus of class power, a specific and contradictory response is summoned. At Davos, Marturano is legitimized as a teacher of mindfulness by her success as a corporate strategist—as a business guru positioned to advised the articulation of power at the peak of the organizational summit, the highest of the high, with the certainty imputed to cognitive science embodied in Williams at her side. Marturano makes a categorical assumption of benevolence in this milieu, claiming that “nowhere is the desire to see the big picture and to influence it in a positive way more apparent than at the World Economic Forum” (165). For context, such “private policy councils” as the World Economic Forum, as Kees van der Pijl argues, are sites “in which a transnational class interest is synthesized and articulated”—where foreign relations and productive relations are asserted simultaneously (van der Pijl 42), an instance in which the social relations Wilber mystifies as holarchy describe the exchanges
among structurally the subordinated strata of global capitalism. It may be true that WEF participants have a desire to see the broadest and deepest context and, to continue the spatial metaphor, to influence those it looks down upon in a positive way, but positive for whom, and according to whom? As in conscious capitalism, the concept of totality, the “all sentient beings” served by the practitioner, seems limited instead to the maintenance of the structural status quo—the reproduction and elaboration of the same. Buddhists call that the miasma of *samsara*.

Marturano was not the first mindful leader to participate in the WEF. Nhat Hanh was a member of a multicultural roundtable on peacemaking by religious leaders in 2001; Goleman was present at Davos in 2011. But the popularity of Marturano’s session at the 2013 WEF among its participants, evidenced in its standing-room-only attendance, triggered the inclusion of still more mindful content at subsequent WEF events. Where the Tibetan Buddhist monk and subject of much neurological research on meditation and the brain, Matthieu Ricard, had participated in past WEF programs, such as 2009 panel on “Helping Others,” he returned in 2015 to lead three well-publicized sessions on his book *Altruism* (2015). As an extension of the Pop Buddhist discourses described in chapter two, *Altruism* proposes an explicitly non-capitalistic, socially just, and environmentally-sustainable political economy, in which all sentient beings are served according to their needs. The global elite gathered at Davos are summoned to aspire to the antithesis of the reproduction of class power by their commitment to mindfulness as a scientific program by the racial category (the “Oriental Monk”) assumed by that science. The insertion of mindfulness as discipline into the WEF (figured in Marturano) draws in
and legitimizes its dialectical opposite (figured in Ricard), a desirable alternative to the status quo advanced by a Tibetan-trained embodiment of wellbeing celebrated in mindfulness guides as the happiest man on earth (chapter six).

Overall, Marturano’s mindful leadership program functions as a mode of discipline, a generalized management tool, a means to encourage leaders and their subordinates to manage their emotions in such a way as to ensure cohesion and unity of purpose (as in the examples of Giuliani and Home Depot). The emphasis here is rather on directing leaders to get their own emotional house in order, in order to get in control of their organizations and thereby reproduce their positions into the future. Marturano as the leader and teacher of mindful leaders is situated, intentionally or not, as the archetypal conscious-capitalist guru in the diction of mindfulness. This discourse and corresponding practice summon capacities and aspirations that are contradictory to the objective of leadership as class discipline—the maintenance and reproduction of class power—particularly in the Pop Buddhist diction Marturano deploys while seeming unaware of doing so. The generalization of therapeutic mindfulness to the boardroom foregrounds desirable alternatives to the present among those aspiring to power in the present on the basis of the religious structures of feeling and personae that therapeutic mindfulness at once relies on and negates.

**THE PROMISE OF MINDFULESS AS PEOPLE POWER**

Congressman Paul Ryan (D-Ohio) positions himself in the role of the healer to a nation, much as Carroll describes the mindful manager as a Buddha-like physician to the spiritually sick in his charge. As a US Congressman and mindfulness advocate, he has
become a prominent mindful leader, and has been featured at mindful leadership conferences such as the Mindful Leadership Summit. However, the purpose of Ryan’s book, *A Mindful Nation* (2012), is to mobilize of therapeutic mindfulness in public policy and everyday life, mindfulness as people power rather than as mode of discipline, as in the “primal” leadership of Goleman and mindful leadership overall. When generalized as a coping mechanism for stressed people in a stressful environment, mindfulness as formulated after insight meditation tends to delimit awareness of the causal emergence of stressors in historical time. Simultaneously, however, the discursive space of mindfulness opens onto a promise for a desirable alternative social order to be implemented by mindful people. The paradox of mindfulness is legible here.

Ryan, who learned mindfulness practice under the direction of Kabat-Zinn, posits mindfulness as part of a program of revitalized public health and public discourse, and renewed economic wellbeing in the United States—a “quiet revolution,”

"236 a “peaceful revolution led by ordinary citizens” (xvii) for the belabored struggling in the environment of stress. Here, mindfulness is a secular and ecumenical, natural, and endorsed by scientists as a therapeutic mode and everyday life routine. Ryan defines mindfulness in social-utopian terms as “our capacity to be mindful is the natural pathway to addressing so many of the difficulties we face,” which is actualized by “being relaxed and aware of what’s going on in our own minds” (17). A social project is activated through an enlightenment discipline. In support of these claims, Ryan summons Kabat-Zinn to summarize the claims of researchers such as Richard Davidson to suggest the universality of mindfulness as a means to “’change the way the brain responds to its environment, and
how robustly it can deal with negative emotional states’” (59). Just as stress changes the brain, intentional practice can reverse those changes, and effect new ones; if the causes of stress are social and economic in nature, then mindfulness promises an intervention into the relation of citizen-subjects and their social environments. In the subsequent description of a dialectic between brain structures called the hippocampus and the amygdala (plural: amygdalae) that Ryan gives, the problem of stress naturalized and internalized, of automatism, finds a neurological basis that legitimizes mindfulness for public discourse. Here, a dialectic of consciousness and social conditions is projected and enacted inside the brains of all Americans. The third phase of insight meditation is proposed as public policy here.

Ryan takes pains to present mindfulness as an all-American practice, drawn to the bosoms of Rust Belt union men and articulated through Kabat-Zinn’s quotations of Thoreau and Emerson (31), and to imbue it with a kind of specifically American masculinity: “My football coaches would have loved it” (xviii). In this volume, mindfulness is promoted as eminently this-worldly, practical, and helpful to Americans now, and not only as a means to peak performance at work (109). That most Americans have been materially put on the defensive in the last three decades is a central premise of the text (of which more below); hence, Ryan emphasizes its claimed capacity to “foster resiliency” in its practitioners (95), and to take meaningful action in one’s life and in one’s community (105). It is significant that the very notion of taking effective action is not (or is no longer) taken for granted even in optimistic texts like Ryan’s—that the near-powerlessness of the belabored working class is tacitly assumed before before it is
presented with an alternative to its own powerlessness, or the means of its own empowerment, in mindfulness. MBSR is understood to make the practitioner ready for capable intervention, and not merely training in defending oneself in the employment market. Martial diction of this kind, thematically of a piece with the masculinity Ryan attempts to cast mindfulness with, recurs throughout *A Mindful Nation*. For instance, mindfulness is praised as an act of valor, as in *The Mindful Leader* (110).

Finally, Ryan ties mindfulness to virtues such as compassion and wellbeing, and positions them as inherent to the human brain and antithetical to assumptions about human motivation and sociality indigenous to discourses such as conscious capitalism. Mindfulness is “contagious,” for practitioners, Ryan claims, “because it’s based on a deep concern for the well-being of their fellow men and women” (xviii-xix). Even though, historically, these virtues are carryovers from the mediation of MBSR through lay Buddhist formulations such as Salzberg’s *Lovingkindness*, Ryan legitimizes them not by appeal to Buddhist tradition, but to science—the research of Dacher Keltner (of the University of California at Berkeley) exploring a neural basis for compassion (61). As in psychological Buddhism, the values associated with the “Oriental Monk” are verified by the observations of a specially curated selection of neuroscientists. Here, the characteristic virtues of the Pop Buddhist advice book—wellbeing, compassion, happiness—are silently mobilized by a US Congressman as alternatives to the fundamental assumptions of liberal-capitalist policy and sociality. By articulating his position through the claims of cognitive scientists working at elite US universities, Ryan moves to denaturalize the production of selves as entrepreneurs in this milieu. Such is the
significance of Ryan’s insistence on what he believes mindfulness not to be—something exotic or out of the American mainstream, a flight for reality, or a religion (18). That said, mindfulness’ relation to a specific religious formation largely indigenous to North America since the early 1970s, the Pop Buddhist advice book, is clearly legible in Ryan’s text, as I will show. The discursive and practical traces of Pop Buddhist discourse are tied to a sense of urgency in Ryan’s program—as though the present is not trending toward an integral age of plenitude on its own or by the intervention of high-minded advice authors, as promised in conscious capitalism and some insight meditation books.

In his “Foreword” to *A Mindful Nation*, Kabat-Zinn underscores a sense of timeliness in Ryan’s generalization of mindfulness, as a means of recovery and empowerment for a diminished population coping with a sense of deep “loss” (ix). Here, the stress of the present exceeds the notion of a chronic and urgent health pathology, and mindfulness as a means to foster wellbeing in response to it (Ryan *Nation* 93–94). *A Mindful Nation* positions mindfulness as a generalized practice in response to the general impoverishment, disempowerment, and a sense of trauma among working people in North America after economic liberalization: “I see 55-year-old people who have worked hard their whole lives lose everything. Mothers weep as they tell me about not having health care for their children. This is real-world stress that doesn’t go away after a few minutes” (*Nation* 54). This stress has become so omnipresent that *the social reality at its base becomes a figure for the neurological strain it causes*. “Given the complexities in American life today,” Ryan asserts, “the brain seems to be overworked and underpaid” (51)—and here, shorthand descriptors of contemporary social relations become
metaphors for the neurological strain of grappling with the same. Further, Ryan posits “real world stress” to include some of the lived consequences the military interventions of the Bush-era American state, which Ryan names “The breadth and depth of the pain caused by our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan” (114); these include “alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, divorce, and, all too often, suicide” for many returning soldiers struggling with PTS, for which Ryan posits mindfulness as a helpful therapeutic intervention (120). The lived violence of everyday life in the form of Bush-era interventionism’s consequences and the increasingly uneven distribution of the means to wealth, the environment in which class power is articulated now, offers Ryan his rationale for promoting mindfulness, in contrast to the opportunistic jingoism of the Home Depot executives Marturano praises as mindful leaders.

For the working people Ryan hopes to lead, mindfulness is precisely a means to cope with a social environment that is explicitly and purposively stressful. As in insight meditation, the historical causes of the emergence of this environment are not nameable by the mindful, even as one may become mindful the social nature of the pain of the present in this context (chapter three). Given this, Ryan situates mindfulness practice first as a means of coping with a stressful social milieu, and second as a discursive space in which a desirable alternative to the reproduction of the status quo can be imagined, in part through the martial lexicon of the Pop Buddhist advice book and the ambient masculinity of insight meditation books.

Ryan describes the sense of injustice and struggle among families accustomed to Fordist working-class life, now struggling in the Rust Belt, who “see CEOs getting
golden parachutes and huge bonuses and tax cuts” (7), such that “in many parts of our country, this economic anxiety is the norm, not the exception […] People are maxed out, squeezed, and crunched” (9). Here, Ryan poses mindfulness as a kind of antidote to the lived consequences of economic liberalization in public policy and to the financialization of capitalism (9), and as a mode of valuation tied to qualitative measures, to a job well done: “Instead of an economic system that rewards craftsmanship, high manufacturing standards, and excellence in the skilled trades, we reward clever tricks and stratagems” (10-11). Significantly, Ryan positions the machinations of finance as dishonest, dishonorable, and effete against the working-class and martial masculinity he associates with mindfulness, arguing that “the phony concept of an America based on materialism, consumerism, and looking out for number one, where financial chicanery is our proudest accomplishment” is without value and “honor” (12). In sum, the mindfulness Ryan evokes as a means and a moment to call for “a new model to organize our society” along environmentally-sustainable and socially just lines carries simultaneous anti-capitalist and macho connotations (144).

While recognizing that mindfulness is, in itself, inadequate to address the “real world” stresses he diagnoses—a different kind of reality from that imagined in the libertarian utopianism of *Free Agent Nation*—Ryan argues that “it can arm us with a way of being that allows us to deal with them more effectively” (34), primarily because “it seems likely that mindfulness may help us by increasing our body armor” (96). Here, the practice of mindfulness is tied to a defensive position against the moment, a tactic to negotiate with it, not negate it. Ryan presents mindfulness as kind of neural training that
offers a competitive advantage for individual workers (49), thus reinscribing the logic of labor insecurity he describes as real world stress as a desire for a better life for me. Mindfulness, here, is a prescribed as a DIY means to better days for working people. A psychological coping mechanism doubles as an economic tactic.

At the same time, Ryan ties mindfulness closely to a contrasting communitarian vision for an alternative to the present rooted in the labor movement, where mindfulness articulates the interests of working class people rather than individual meditators. Here, a nostalgia for the labor movement of the Fordist era is paired with the For All Beings imperative of Pop Buddhist discourses: “better lives for everyone” (74). This social utopianism is contrasted against the finance capitalism Ryan finds dishonorable, and appeals to compassion as a venue for remediation of the pain of the moment. For Ryan, mindfulness is not a consumer good, and consumer goods are not solutions; “We can’t buy our solutions off a late-night infomercial,” he asserts (110), recalling Trungpa’s variations on the theme of hopelessness. In much of A Mindful Nation, the emphasis is on active, collaborative production and the making of personal meaning through particular consumption or investment decisions.

The everyday lives of members of the US military offer Ryan another example of real world stress into which mindfulness may be beneficially inserted. Ryan promotes specially-designed mindfulness programs as means to improve the effectiveness of soldiers at war, and to help them recover from its traumas. In Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT), aspects of the Shambhalian warrior ideal converge into the certainty attributed to cognitive science, where “a warrior’s mind fitness is an ancient
ideal that is now being supported by science” (116). Here, as for Carroll’s mindful leader, the wisdom emerging from mindfulness practice is coterminous with a kind of courage. If mindfulness is a radical practice that addresses problems at the root, as Ryan claims, then the reader would expect Ryan to engage with the belligerent aspect of “real world stress,” the liberal state’s reliance on warfare and the means to warfare (defense contracting) to achieve its objectives of protecting capital and maintaining the status quo. While Ryan does acknowledge the material basis of contemporary armed conflict—wars are, he notes, “in substantial measure about fighting for resources” (151)—in describing the role of mindfulness in relation to armed conflict and its consequences, Ryan brackets the question of causation and preventability, and instead demurs, observing in the passive voice that “war seems to happen” (135). As in the applications of mindfulness to the lives of non-military workers Ryan describes, here an impulse to accept and cope with the present competes with an aspiration to become mindful of its causes, and to uproot and overturn it. Appeals to mindfulness as a means to compete efficiently in the job market for an individual worker and to mitigate the consequences of wars that just seem to happen represent the former; the latter is articulated in becoming-mindful of the material causes of war, and of alternatives to entrepreneurial sociality.

Even as Ryan correctly observes in his public appearances that mindfulness now is of the present, summoned by present necessity and not by the advent of an Age of Transcendence or a hypothetical evolution of Buddhist practice, A Mindful Nation is largely continuous with the Pop Buddhist and insight meditation discourses it prefers not
to acknowledge, in ways that exceed his association with Kabat-Zinn and that give him the diction he uses to challenge the social relations mystified in conscious capitalism and in mindful leadership overall. For instance, he lets slip that mindfulness has a history prior to or other than MBSR (125). Other significant Buddhist leaders are mentioned—Sharon Salzberg and the Dalai Lama (who has a good laugh, Ryan points out [36]) explicitly, Nhat Hanh implicitly, in a tacit acknowledgement that mindfulness, in a sense, exceeds Ryan’s description of it. As a practical matter, Carolyn Gimian is credited with editorial assistance on *A Mindful Nation* (201); she is the editor of many of Trungpa’s books, including *The Great Eastern Sun*, and those of his disciples. *A Mindful Nation* has emerged from the specific cultural, social, and intellectual milieu described in previous chapters, and the diction Ryan uses to describe the present and offer the promise of an emancipatory alternative in it largely derive from that discourse.

Ryan’s invocations of compassion, like those of subsequent mindful leaders, indicate this history. The “natural instinct for compassion” that Ryan attributes to Americans post-9/11 (2), like his claim that “We are fundamentally good. Our basic nature is not unadulterated self-indulgence and consumption” (12), is unmixed Buddha-nature talk as it is articulated by Buddhist teachers in North America since the early 1970s. It seems implausible that Ryan’s insistence on compassion as an inherent capacity through mindfulness practice (17) could have any precedent other than a mediation of mindfulness through the Pop Buddhist advice discourse and related media and institutions. It is instantly recognizable in *A Mindful Nation* to a reader familiar with this discourse. For instance, as Ryan opened the floor to questions after a public talk
promoting the book in 2012 that I attended, the first two questions from the audience were about Buddhism, Ryan’s attitude toward it, and his knowledge of it. These readers expected Ryan to know something about Buddhism since he had, from their perspective, just written a book about it. Such Buddhistic echoes are summoned by generalized mindfulness at every turn, and this is significant because, as in mindfulness after the advice book genre, so in *A Mindful Nation*, the openly radical social content visible in it is articulated through the Anglophone Buddhist concepts that interpenetrate it.

Like Carroll and Silby, Ryan articulates his skepticism toward capitalist social relations in Buddhist diction, consciously or not, but also like Carroll and Silby, Ryan is not committed to overturning those relations. I mark that he arrives at this position not from the generalization of a Pop Buddhist ethos to capitalist problematics, but from the discursive context of mindfulness after insight meditation, which tends to pull a Pop Buddhist lexicon along with itself. Ryan is no “half-Marxist, half-Buddhist.” That said, his generalization of therapeutic mindfulness as a means to cope doubles as an economic coping method and offers a space in which an alternative to the present can be imagined, drawing on the Pop Buddhist imaginary that follows mindfulness like a shadow. The paradox of mindfulness emerges here: Coping reproduces the same, while a desirable alternative to the same is promised as aspiration legitimized by a mindful leader and sitting Congressman. Where mindful leadership generalizes management as assent to a program and compliance with its implementation toward the objective of the reproduction of the present, *A Mindful Nation* suggests there is more than one way to be a leader, and that mindfulness may open onto ambivalent and contradictory possibilities.
SELF-MAKING AT THE MINDFUL LEADER CONFERENCE

Mindfulness leadership conventions show the patterns of consumption of mindfulness discourse at the site of discipline. Diverse themes, projects, and methods are made fungible into each other by the unifying logic of the conference program, and the array of books and brochures for sale in the lobby of the venue. At these events, authors promote their books and may lead participants through brief exercises and sample practices, but more frequently the presentations are given to the accompaniment of PowerPoint slides and prepared for the passive consumption of the audience, while yoga and meditation sessions are made available in the early morning hours and at breaks. The conference attendee, then, is positioned as a consumer of strategies for authentic self-making as professional development, while the presenter is situated ahead of the audience developmentally and temporally—the relation of business guru to disciple, a denial of coevalness, is reproduced. Further, the coincidence of a prescription for a far-seeing and responsive leader who observes the moment from a higher and broader position with an eye toward pursuing capitalist objectives in a historical moment privileging strategic action, and the seeing-reality-as-it-is discourse of mindfulness, is concretely realized in corporate mindfulness conferences. The cultural repertoire of mindfulness is mobilized for explicitly strategic use in this way.

Individual presentations at mindfulness conferences are intended less for consumption in the way one may consume a next-greatest-thing gadget or a piece of organic fruit than for mobilization. Hence, the rationale and framing given for these conferences is as significant as the content of the presentations and breakout sessions,
which most often merely summarize the most recent books of the presenters, whose services as consultants and motivational speakers are also promoted. Before, after, and sometimes during sessions, attendees can be observed networking with each other and, more often, attempting to connect with the presenters. Overgeneralized claims regarding the neuroscience of meditation are made by business consultants, and concomitant Buddha-imagery is omnipresent. Early-morning or midday periods for seated meditation and hatha yoga are reliably scheduled, with the consequence that social interaction is necessarily negotiated around the encumbrance of a yoga mat and a change of close overflowing from an attendee’s satchel. Finally, these conferences show a convergence of many modes of address and cultural repertoires at once under the sign of mindfulness. This convergence is typically tacit and invisible, but tensions and sharp divergences in objective among its constituents do emerge into view. I attended two different annual conferences as a participant observer, one of them on two occasions: the Mindful Leadership Summit (2014) and the Leading to Wellbeing Conference (2013 and 2014).

The inaugural Mindful Leadership Summit took place 14-16 November 2014 at the Artisphere, a public event complex in Arlington, Virginia. Conference presenters included, Tara Brach, Carroll, Goleman, Rasmus Hougaard, Barbara Krum siek, Nance Lucas, Marturano, Ryan, and Sharon Salzberg. A regular ticket for the full event cost $798 US; early registration tickets were discounted. In contrast to Wisdom 2.0 (chapter six), the MLS was not an event for the upscale—attendees ate box-lunch sandwiches at their seats or on the floor. It emphasized coaching and consulting within institutions over
self-entrepreneurship in the absolute sense or as the next upgrade in tech-for-tech’s-sake.

Between 500 and 600 persons attended.

The generalization of mindfulness through nominally Buddhist social institutions is in evidence in MLS, which emerged from particular insight meditation institutions and their leadership. Edjali and Eric Forbis, the two organizers of the event, were members of the Board of Directors of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington (IMCW), a large group meeting regularly in the comfortably middle-class suburb of Bethesda, Maryland, and led by Brach. Salzberg has long made regular visits to Washington’s suburbs to lead meditation events, insight meditation practitioners in and near Washington have had significant contact with her, and hence the participation of Salzberg and Brach at MLS. Also present was an “integral coaching” group called New Ventures West; Edjali had taken a course of trainings in integral coaching, a Wilber-inspired practice, and endorses it. Forbis has led an annual mindfulness-oriented event in Arlington called BuddhaFest. In 2014, BuddhaFest attracted approximately 1000 visitors; past participants have included Salzberg and Ricard.

In their opening remarks to the conference, Edjali and Forbis present business objectives in the lexicon of Pop Buddhist objectives. This is legible in the way they tie leadership fast and tight to the objective of perceiving the moment with clarity and without the mediation of prejudice or uncritical assumptions. Edjali repeated a quotation he attributes to Nancy Adler, a psychologist, on “seeing reality as it is” that could be found in the writings of any one of dozens of insight meditation teachers, or in corporate strategy Bibles; recall that Carroll quotes former GE CEO Jack Welch’s
imperative, “‘Face reality as it is, not as was or as you wish it to be,’” in the frontispiece to The Mindful Leader. Here, the higher perspective from which such seeing is believed possible is derived from conscious capitalism, which Forbis explicitly praised as an inspiration to him and for the Summit. Business objectives are made fungible into the meditator’s objectives through the strategic role of seeing the moment clearly.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist traces inherent in mindfulness, such as the Mahayana appeal to the ultimate wellbeing of all beings, is recast as the work of inspiration, of primal leadership. Here, according to Forbis and Edjali, the mindful leader inspires through altruism, happiness, caring, and purpose. Forbis stated that the MLS event itself was intended as an act of altruism that should lead to “less suffering and more peace in the world,” while Edjali positioned it as an act of “giving back” to the local community that may ripple out rings of benefit well beyond the conference venue.

I survey five representative presentations at MLS 2014 to suggest the discursive consistency of mindfulness as leadership, and leadership as a disciplinary program: those of Brach, Carroll, Hougaard, Krumskiek, and Marturano. It is necessary to mark that not all of the presentations hewed exclusively to the sage-on-the-stage format favored by most; an unscripted dialogue between Salzberg and fashion designer Eileen Fisher stood out as an exception to this convention. Many of the speakers at MLS gave accurate descriptions of the historical moment of stress as a social environment through acronyms such as PAID (Pressured, Always on, Info-overloaded, and Distracted) and VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous). In each of these, problem mindfulness is positioned to solve is encoded as explicitly external to the subject’s mind, something
having to do with this VUCA-moment or PAID-situation, but the speakers consistently insist that the problem is all in the stressed one’s head—in one’s reaction to this moment—as in the pathology of stress, and hence that the best solution is from the subjective position of mental culture, to assent to a program by the given logic of the moment and comply with its reproduction, not to problematize it.

Four of the five presentations I discuss were given by leaders who identify as Buddhists, are legitimized to speak on mindfulness by virtue of being Buddhist authors, or describe their thinking on corporate mindfulness as emergent from Buddhist practice (Brach, Carroll, Hougaard, and Krumsiek); further, Hougaard remarked that his Buddhist teachers (whom he did not name) would surely object to the positions he had staked out in his corporate work, including portions of his MLS presentation. Three of the presenters (Brach, Hougaard, and Marturano) emphasized science-informed rationales for mindfulness practice, but in distinct ways. There was a tendency among all the presenters, and especially Carroll, Krumsiek, and Marturano, to describe their personal histories in some detail, as though their persons legitimated their remarks or are inherently relevant to the audience and the purpose of the meeting. Brach, Carroll, and Marturano reproduced the organization, tone, and content of their own advice books in their presentations, as did many of the other presenters at the conference, such as Ryan. These overlapping characteristics among Buddhistic and business leadership modes suggest how the development-by-subordination doctrine mystified as speculative cosmogony in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, and as Buddha-glossed libertarianism
conscious capitalism, is enacted at the site of the advice-giving leader’s enunciation in corporate mindfulness.

In her MLS talk, Brach situated many of the characteristics of the insight meditation advice book into an evolution-of-consciousness doctrine of the kind featured in conscious capitalism and Wilber’s integral theory. These characteristics included the ecology of quotations typical to insight meditation discourse, appeal to Buddhistic authority coinciding with that of science (this in an anecdote of her time with the Dalai Lama at a Mind Science event in Washington), and of stress relief as a subjective problem of one piling up too many tasks on oneself, of taking to “false refuges” from inner discontent such as busy-ness, perfectionism, obsessing—as though the problem of not having enough time is necessarily a problem of “self-unworthiness,” and not of struggling to make ends meet. In positing a “universal intelligence that flows through us” and citing the “archetype” of the bodhisattva, Brach mobilized the theological speculations of insight meditation books such as her own True Refuge, much closer in content and context to the personal theology-making in Megatrends 2010 than to the sunny hopelessness of Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. She recontextualized all of this into a vision of consciousness evolving by intentional practice, a world-historical and earth-saving event that the audience at MLS was interpellated as already participating in. Here, the “egoic” consciousness of automatism, centered around a sense of personal unworthiness and associated with the biological impulse to fight-or-flight yields to a higher-order sense of collective consciousness, formless and timeless—this theme, already described in A Mindful Nation and Managing Pain, becomes “the hope for the
world,” in Brach’s theology. Such a mystification of capitalist relations of power into the regimes of spiritual practice is indistinguishable from that in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*. Implicit here is the doctrine of neural plasticity, whereby ancient structures of the brain which tend to primitive responses (amygdalae) are effectively overridden by more evolved portions of the brain through disciplined practice, just as presumably less advanced aspects of Buddhist doctrine are superseded by the skepticism of enlightened *Us* in insight meditation books such as *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. At MLS, Brach positioned the mindful capitalist and thus her auditors as figures of world salvation at the breaking edge of historical emergence, much as conscious capitalism does, by materializing the broader and deeper worldview of collective consciousness in brain structures visible by fMRI scans. Her talk shows how the constellation of the discursive formations described so far as insight meditation, conscious capitalism and mindful leadership are aggregated as one and deployed together, as if they constitute singular program. Insofar as they articulate the same mode of discipline, they do.

Carroll’s presentation, in contrast to Brach’s, emphasized the practical aspects of maintaining a mindfulness practice while performing the role of a leader. While much of his talk summarized *The Mindful Leader*, his mode of address differed from the text in that he relied more heavily on shorter sentences and exclamations (“no big deal,” “just straight up sitting there”) on the stage rather than the page. Carroll spoke authoritatively, and after his talk fielded questions informally and with visible joy at a small cash bar outside the auditorium. If Brach’s objective is to save the world by effecting an evolution of consciousness through mindfulness, Carroll’s is rather more specific: to encourage
executives to be more comfortable in their roles and thereby become more effective and less prone to causing problems for others, or at least to diminish the hurt consequent to the problems one causes as a manager serving the imperatives of shareholders (recalling the example of mass layoffs in *The Mindful Leader*). This principle gained a Buddhistic patina when presented from Carroll’s position as a longtime practitioner and teacher in Vajradhatu/Shambhala.

While Brach, Carroll, and Marturano, well-known in North American mindfulness circles, were able to present themselves without any rationale for their presence needed, Hougaard was assigned the task of describing the function of mindfulness in Fortune 500 companies. He did so by summarizing the work of his own Denmark-based company, The Potential Project, which has offered “mindfulness solutions” in workplaces, particularly for executives, since 2009. Its explicit mission, here Buddhist-inflected, is to make the world more peaceful. Hougaard first insisted that “the problems are always—always—in the minds of people,” but then claimed that productivity is declining due to a distracting and pressurized environment. In an attempt to resolve this contradiction in his own thinking, he endorsed these words, projected on the screens behind him: “Understanding and managing attention is the single most important determinant of business success.” Since the objective of the mindful leader is not to transform the environment but rather to profit by the opportunities for exploitation it offers, the mindfulness solution Hougaard described involves convincing workers to rewire their own brains on purpose in order to better cope with the given, and ultimately to thrive in it and not object to it, taking corporate objectives as the horizon of
their self-making. This is how The Potential Project advised Fortune 500 companies.

Hougaard closed his presentation with a request for any US-based “mindful leaders” seeking jobs to approach him, because he intended to open offices in North America and anticipated hiring consultants soon. Within minutes, dozens of business cards waited for him at the edge of the stage.

Krumsiek’s presence at MLS signaled the necessity of the pioneering “right livelihood corporation” and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the discourse of corporate mindfulness. The Buddhist traces that inhere in mindfulness draw the business she leads, Calvert Investment Group, into the discourse of mindful leadership, even if her presentation had little of substance to say of mindfulness as such. Rather, the emphasis was on finance as a means to be helpful to others and the business as an agent of good, for instance by helping the working poor to save for their future goals by means other than stuffing cash into a mattress, and her own role as a donor to Buddhist organizations such as Shambhala International and retreat attendee. Krumsiek’s claim that “the corporate sector has a lot to do to help with the health of the planet” was not likely intended as an indictment of how little corporations as a whole have done to mitigate the environmental crises they have caused (Davis Planet, Nixon, Slow), but rather as an endorsement of the capacity for good she attributes to capital. Similarly, Krumsiek’s objection to the regulation and oversight of finance by the state is tied to an appeal to corporate benevolence appropriate to conscious capitalism, to “unleash” corporations and capital holders for the greater good. Here, as in Silby’s account of “impact investing,” economic liberalization is articulated through the lexicon of Pop Buddhist aspiration as a
means to the Good. Significantly, Krumsieck closed her presentation with the aspiration that her presentation may ultimately “benefit all beings,” an in-crowd signal of her Pop Buddhist affiliation as recognizable to an insider as the deep appreciation she professed for an Oprah Winfrey-endorsed advice writer, the Buddhist nun and Trungpa disciple Pema Chödrön, and evocative of aspirations for alternatives to her objectives as described in chapter two.

Finally, Marturano used her time on stage at MLS to give her own biography, summarize and promote her book, and invite those in attendance to consider joining a retreat under her direction. Marturano founded her organization, the Institute for Mindful Leadership, in 2010, with five years of preparation prior, which began after she had attended “an intensive retreat for executives and innovators” led by Kabat-Zinn. At the time of her MLS talk, Marturano had had less than ten years’ experience with mindfulness, while maintaining a demanding career and family commitments, under her belt. I underscore the timeline of her mindfulness practice as she gave it at MLS to show, again, that the criteria by which a mindfulness leader is designated are inconsistent institutionally—Marturano made no mention of participating in varying the week-, month-, or year-long meditation intensives or study programs demanded of novice meditation teachers in varying organizations—but culturally. By the holistic logic of conscious capitalism, Marturano—a successful business leader for decades and recently an author of an advice book—is already an exemplar in her person, and thereby already positioned to give advice on success as such, inclusive of success in mindfulness, which is deployed here as a means to success. In spite of Marturano’s insistence, reiterated in
her presentation, that mindfulness is a science-based practice and not a “New Age”
diversion, specific Buddhist traces arose, for instance in her definition of compassion as
the recognition of suffering in others and conducting oneself with kindness in response.
Compassion so defined is the premise of Marturano’s notion of the best business
objectives as “win win win” outcomes—positive for business, for clients, and for
communities, echoing the “triple bottom line” promoted by John Elkington and other
advocates of CSR.251

The MLS reproduced and mobilized the diverse and in some instances non
sequitur formations at work in corporate mindfulness, made fungible into each other as a
coherent singularity in the contract of the conference program. While the religion of
capitalism is most explicitly in evidence in the deployment of mindfulness as a mode of
discipline, the Buddhistic lexicon assumed to be part of the mindfulness scene—
Krumsiek’s presentation had nothing to do with mindfulness per se, and all to do with a
mediated form of Pop Buddhism—proves to be inseparable from mindful leadership. As
suggested in the reception of mindfulness practice at Davos, this structure of feeling,
inevitable for mindfulness, is the substrate to that practice’s compensatory valence.

In the annual Leading to Wellbeing (LWB) conference series at George Mason
University, the same objectives are met and the same body of cultural material is drawn
upon, but a stronger emphasis is put on mindfulness and happiness as themes emergent in
positive psychology than on insight meditation, even as a Pop Buddhist ethos is held as
an image of aspiration in common between them.

The LWB is organized by GMU’s Center for the Advancement of Wellbeing
(CAW), which was known as the Center for Consciousness and Transformation before a 2013 rebranding. The Center was funded by a private donation from the Delasky Family Foundation. This conference as an instance of mindfulness made for use by management to pursue corporate objectives. I attended the 2013 and 2014 events in a conference hotel on GMU’s campus as a participant observer. About 380 participants attended the 2013 conference, and about half of the people I interacted with identified as GMU students, faculty, or staff attending on discounted or free tickets. The full cost of registration for the 2015 conference was $492.61 US, with discounts available for GMU students and faculty, and graduate students from any institution. The 2013 conference’s theme was “Facilitating Leadership for a Well-Lived Life”—given that “life” is in the singular, I understand this conference to be concerned with the wellbeing of the leader or facilitator, rather than with the lives of the led and facilitated.

Like the Mindful Leader Summit, here a series of expert speakers presented their findings to paying participants. In 2013, the keynote speakers included Daniel Goleman, Primal Leadership co-author Annie McKee, an insight meditation instructor named Hugh Byrne (affiliated with IMCW), Mariel Hemingway, and the conference organizers themselves. Sonja Lyubomirsky and Daniel Pink were among the keynote speakers in 2014 and 2015 respectively. This array of presenters represents the spectrum of authority in the discourse of corporate mindfulness already described: former celebrities, positive psychologists, and insight meditators are all represented in a framework strongly inflected by conscious capitalism and its cognates, and naturalized together as authorities
on the same topic by virtue of having been summoned (and in most instances paid) to share the same stage.

In their opening remarks at the 2013 event, the conference organizers reproduced many of the expectations of the mindful leaders and conscious capitalists already discussed. Here, GMU is explicitly positioned as the first “well-being university” in North America, but what this designation might mean in practice for the university as a site of learning and an employer is not described. Todd Kashdan, a CAW faculty member, described the purpose of mindfulness in leadership in terms of becoming “more generative.” The absence of specificity in what the leader may be generating is less significant than the promise to increase one’s capability as such: mindfulness is posited as a means for leaders to become more able, to accomplish objectives that are assumed to be unnecessary to name. Lucas, the Director of CAW, in claiming that leaders inspire others by modelling wellbeing, positions herself, a leader and leadership expert, as a model for wellbeing. The work of a subordinate, by this reasoning, is to faithfully emulate the leader, and thereby, Lucas claims, everyone can flourish. Lucas’ position assumes the logic of development through subordination in Wilber’s integral theory and conscious capitalism, and its means to legitimation of the leader as a business guru. The keynote presentations and breakout sessions also reproduced these logics and positioned the cultural repertoires of mindfulness as strategic means to leadership effectiveness, stress relief, and wellbeing, such that all of these topoi converge and, as in the smooth space of the financial derivative, became fungible into each other.
Annie McKee, in her presentation on “resonant” leadership, asserted that resonant people are “whole” people who have the capacity to move other people (with the measure of “wholeness” remaining undefined), and who use intentional means to internal stress-regulation, by which mindfulness is intended. McKee explicitly posited the regulation of emotions as a means to wholeness and therefore power; the disempowered, by this logic, are incomplete and inadequate (as evidenced by their disempowerment), and would do well to aspire to the wholeness represented in their superiors. “When it comes to power,” McKee asserted, “who you are matters.” The presentation did not pause to unpack this rich statement, where it was taken to reflect the leader’s personal values and personal growth as means to a promised empowerment of others, not one’s position relative to structured modes of inequality—“who you are” in relations to others—that make finding and mastering the means to a promised self-empowerment feel necessary to so many, even as these means reproduce the structures of power already extant.

Over the banquet-hall din of a catered buffet lunch—a sharp contrast to the box-lunch economizing of the MLS—Byrne, an insight meditation teacher affiliated with Kornfield and Brach, attempted to give a detailed presentation of mindfulness, surveying neuroplasticity and amygdalae, lovingkindness practice and happiness. The room was loud with the clatter of cutlery and chatter, some voices dissenting from the program, and others merely gossiping over the salmon, while Byrne struggled to lead the briefest of mindful-eating meditations and body-scan techniques, with only brief intervals of silence given from the lectern. This episode shows that when mindfulness is positioned at cross-purposes to felt material needs—here, the need for calories, and the need for
professionals to network and self-promote—mindfulness and regard for the “resonance” of the leader are jettisoned.

Finally, when Goleman took to the podium, he faced the rhetorical problem of having had many of his own ideas repeated by presenters such as Byrne and McKee that his PowerPoint slides and his talk seemed rather to summarize the conference than to contribute to it. Significantly, Goleman’s ideas on emotional intelligence and neuroplasticity are deployed by insight meditation advocates such as Byrne as part of mindfulness; self-help programs such as emotional intelligence and mindfulness are, here as in the therapeutic context, functionally indistinguishable. The paradox of mindfulness surfaced in Goleman’s presentation with regard to the mindful workplace. Here, Goleman positioned Ricard as a laudable example of “emotional contagion”—someone whose happiness has the quality of making others happy too—and thereby invited the assembled to follow Ricard’s path. Goleman did not mark that such a path, that of a monk, demands renouncing any kind of career objectives. In Goleman’s use of Ricard as an exemplar, the generalization of Mahayana Buddhism as a life practice is assumed as a means to wellbeing and effectiveness, as it is in the mindful leadership-derived context Lucas established at the start of the conference, the “flourishing” of all: It becomes a means to motivate and move others, a kind of compassion-coated coercion. The paradox is legible here: Goleman deploys an aspirational figure, Ricard, as a means to attain the objective of leadership excellence, here a kind of compassion-coated coercion. But that figure represents the total renunciation of all worldly objectives—Ricard is a monk—and in
particular, those associated with capitalist relations of power, such as greed and will-to-power. The latter imperative paradoxically negates the former while legitimizing it.

These conferences show how mindfulness is crystallized into a cluster of other discourses mobilized to orient the subject’s enlightenment efforts at self-empowerment and self-regulation toward corporate objectives of profitability and brand maintenance—the maintenance of capitalist social relations. The inspiring leader is at once an agent of coercion-as-inspiration, and subject to the demands of a moment offering no alternative, as figured in the example of the middle manager who is positioned to implement a layoff he or she may know is brutal and even strategically unsound, and to do it anyway while maintaining the warm goodwill of those losing their livelihoods.

Mindfulness and positive psychology as regimes of workplace discipline are deployed with a repertoire of Pop Buddhist themes and images as objects of aspiration, as in Goleman’s invocation of Ricard, at mindful leadership conferences. On the ground of this repertoire, the paradox of mindfulness comes into view. Conferences as socially useful sites of professional networking and self-promotion for advice-book authors, consultants, life-coaches, and attendees are cast as world-historical events, venues for the evolution of consciousness to a higher paradigm among the developmentally-advanced (Us), in the patios of conscious capitalism and insight meditation—mystifying the retrenchment of capitalist social relations into a professional context. The mindful manager is empowered as the temporal edge of social and psychological development, and everyday life as a workplace becomes “Spirit as business” here.
CONCLUSION

Mindful leadership is posited as timely, transformational of persons and organizations, and effective in realizing business objectives, which are articulated to coincide with the personal enlightenment of the mindful worker. It functions primarily as a mode of discipline, by which extant relations of power are reproduced by the assent and routinized compliance enacted by the disciplined, on the promise of present and future benefit through purposive self-making, a practiced authenticity—the compensatory valence of mindfulness. In this sense, it is an act of faith corresponding to a religious doctrine, what I call the religion of capitalism. Further, mindful leadership is a primary instance of how mindfulness is made available in the workplace. While it contains in some instances a resistance to the present and to contemporary social relations, overall it mobilizes a means to coercion, the doctrines of conscious capitalism in the diction of mindfulness and, often, Pop Buddhism. The objective of one’s personal meditation practice is made to coincide with that of one’s employer or the terms of one’s employment, and understood as identical to the objectives of Buddhist practice, even as that Buddhist content evokes a desirable alternative to the endless recurrence of the same. This convergence is realized in descriptions of and prescriptions for the mindful workplace explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: THE PARADOX OF MINDFULNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

If mindful leadership articulates mindfulness as a disciplinary mode, the mindful workplace describes its implementation and realization by the disciplined on themselves. Workplace mindfulness initiatives are the deployment of mindfulness-oriented therapeutic programs—a practice of self-restructuring and remaking.252 Insofar as everyday life for the belabored is a site of stress, and the precarity of seeking work, working under exploitative conditions, risking recurrent unemployment or underemployment, and committing more and more time and energy living toward the horizon of preparing for the same—in short the generalization of stress as a pathology at its social root in North America after economic liberalization, the entrepreneurial economy—then workplace mindfulness as stress relief is therapeutic mindfulness pursued to its logical terminus. This is the generalization of mindfulness as promised stress relief, performance enhancement, and personal meaning-making. Upon scrutiny, however, it is shown to prescribe less a mode of intimacy with the emergence of one’s lived experience in historical time than with a mode of willed ignorance of it.

The emphasis on not thinking in the universalism and ahistoricism of mindfulness discourse after insight meditation functions as a mode of discipline when generalized to everyday life as a workplace. Here, one is to attend to the present in a register of devotion, in faithful compliance to power mystified as wisdom, disregarding reflections
on one’s present at work that could make one mindful of ongoing injustices and potential horizontal solidarities among those who suffer that are legible in the routines of one’s everyday life at work or seeking work. In this sense, mindfulness can represent the total colonization of the work process in the mind of the worker. The freedom of a worker to reflect critically on his position while at work—in fact to think of whatever he pleases as he labors—represents, for Antonio Gramsci, an invaluable means to critical consciousness for the wage-earner (308-310). “One can walk without having to think about all the movements needed in order to move,” Gramsci explains; “One walks automatically, and at the same time thinks about whatever one chooses” (309)—this in precise contradistinction to the claims of efficiency experts in the employ of the American industrialists of the 1920s under Gramsci’s scrutiny and their contemporary heir in the imperative of generalized mindfulness to bring walking and walking only to consciousness when walking, to be fully aware of it and it alone, actively renouncing any discursive thought about whatever one pleases or even whatever thoughts or feelings may arise in the mind. Hence, because no space is allowed for critical thought in the mindful workplace—rather, the worker is inspired by the mindful leader reified as a vertical means to self-development as career advancement to cut off thought for his or her own benefit—the kind of affective freedom mindfulness promises forecloses freedom of thought, and hence submerges the mindful subject wholly in the affirmation of the status quo. Hence, the attempt to be free from stress in the inherently and intentionally stressful environment that is everyday life as a workplace amounts to taking refuge in the asocial cult of the individual, the religion of capitalism, which is to say in a metaphysical
resolution of material contradictions and sufferings that serves to reproduce extant social relations.

Like mindful leadership, this is a function of the compensatory valence of generalized mindfulness. It is legitimized by appeals to assumptions about Buddhists as crystallized in the self-help books of the 1970s and well-publicized brain scans of Tibetan masters as much as the participation of some advocates for workplace mindfulness who are themselves authorized as mindfulness experts by virtue of their Buddhist affiliation.\textsuperscript{254} This legitimation initiates a demand for mindfulness of the sufferings of the present, for a practice of recognition that contrasts the willed ignorance of workplace mindfulness. It also summons a body of aspirations for a desirable social alternative to the present around themes such as peace, wellbeing, and environmental stewardship, the content of the Pop Buddhist advice book (chapter two). In mobilizing this practice and attendant discourses as a means to the smooth reproduction of capitalist social relations as described in mindful workplace advice books and other materials, contrary aspirations and objectives are summoned, and in this way mindfulness interrupts itself.

I describe the discipline of the mindful workplace in three phases. First, I survey representative mindfulness advice books addressing workplace concerns. Next, I analyze the archetypal mindful workplace, Google’s Search Inside Yourself program, and finally mindfulness for the generalized workplace in the Wisdom 2.0 book and conference series.

\textbf{COMPLIANCE AS EMPOWERMENT: SELF-HELP PROGRAMS FOR THE MINDFUL WORKPLACE}
Distinct from and largely subsequent to the emergence of the mindful leader is a stream of advice books for workers just trying to cope, and not only edited volumes of previously unpublished material by deceased masters such as Trungpa newly branded as concerning mindfulness at work. Here, I survey three representative mindful self-help programs for the belabored at work. Michael Carroll’s *Awake at Work* (2004) participates in much of the cultural logic of conscious capitalism by elevating management and owners of capital as spiritualized means of development. *In Buddha Walks Into the Office* (2014), Lodro Rinzler legitimizes the objectives of insight meditation practice, such as the realization of a true self in imperatives of everyday life, a personal vision, as promised means to self-empowerment for belabored workers seeking a competitive advantage. Sharon Salzberg’s *Real Happiness at Work* (2013) offers mindfulness as articulated in the third phase of insight meditation as a coping mechanism appropriate to hard times, which are tacitly naturalized as inevitable. In two of these volumes, mindfulness is presented on the legitimacy of Pop Buddhist institutions and in its lexicon, while the third, *Real Happiness at Work*, makes no mention of Buddhism at all. Ultimately, all three texts are oriented to the objectives of employers by promoting a placid, committed, stable, and productive work force. This is the compensatory valence of mindfulness realized as a self-help program for the worker as self-manager and self-maker, positioned to identify with the objectives of class power.

Among the first mindfulness books to explicitly address the problems of work life is Carroll’s *Awake at Work*, published three years prior to *A Mindful Leader*. The book is advertised to include “35 Practical Buddhist Principles for Discovering Clarity and
Balance amidst the World’s Chaos,” which positions a Pop Buddhist ethos and mindfulness practice as an folio of tactics for coping with a chaotic, unclear, and unbalanced social existence. Carroll begins with mindfulness meditation, and as in The Mindful Leader, Trungpa-isms saturate the text.256 Carroll assumes that the needs of someone seeking for some means to cope with a world felt to be out of control in the bookstore shelves, coincide with the needs of business executives. Insofar as Carroll effectively deifies management and owners of capital, the worker is positioned to adopt an attitude of assent and reverence, and to adopt a conduct of compliance as a means to workplace empowerment as spiritual practice. Carroll positions the four activities traditionally ascribed to a Buddhist deity in the Tibetan tradition—pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying—as management tools, insofar as an effective manager is to embody all four activities, and thereby function as deities257 in the workplace (Awake 106-115). Such deities (T. yidam) are, traditionally, means to the development of the Vajrayana practitioner. Further, in offering these practices, Carroll pursues the objective of alleviating the stress of uncertainty in investments or executive decisions—uncertain outcomes for the capital-holding class (Awake 84-86)—rather than the externally imposed problems of those who are not owners or investors of capital. Carroll advocates “stillness” and other Buddhist virtues as useful to those who are empowered to make decisions that impact the lives of others. For instance, Carroll’s meditation on “contemplating wealth” assumes the meditator has wealth to contemplate losing (Awake 80). Awake at Work implicitly presents two programs for two kinds of readers: It is pitched to the pinched or penniless, the hopelessly indebted, or the bedpan cleaner
celebrated in *A Mindful Leader* as a mode of discipline on one side, and like *Full Catastrophe*, to those anxious about losing what they have on the other side, it offers a mode of stress management.

Ten years after its publication, Lodro Rinzler, also a prominent leader in Shambhala International, reproduces *Awake at Work*’s themes in *Buddha Walks into the Office*. In contrast to the silver-bearded Carroll, whose decades-long experience in Buddhist communities is deep enough for him to casually allude to encounters with long-deceased and highly esteemed Tibetan masters such as Dezhung Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche, Rinzler’s experience is comparatively shallow—and because his first job out of college was to lead the Boston Shambhala Center, what remains available to him as a writer of a workplace advice book is to reproduce the teachings of his master, the current head of Shambhala International, the Sakyong Mipham (born Ösel Rangdröl Mukpo).  

Hence, much of *Buddha Walks* reads like a faithful redaction of the Sakyong’s interpretation of Trungpa’s distinctive interventions, specifically as published in the volume *Ruling Your World* (2005), while looking to Carroll’s example and absorbing the diction of mindfulness-based therapeutic discourses after insight meditation. *Buddha Walks* is at once a case study in the mobilization of mindfulness in the workplace as a means to self-empowerment and the speed with which such discourse crystallizes into a predictable repertoire.

Rinzler prescribes mindfulness meditation as a means to an unproblematic worklife for the belabored in terms recalling Brach’s insight meditation and the stress-relief podcasts of Belleruth Naparstek, such as a mediation on “discovering our
worthiness” (7). Workplace-meditative virtues such as openness are given the capacity to open onto world-altering conduct: “It is about opening your heart to the world and letting that open heart create true change in society” (7). Here, Rinzler reproduces the “ripple effect” idea in Nhat Hanh and mindful leadership books, while reifying the singular worker-consumer, the entrepreneurial self, as the unit of social and spiritual activity. Rinzler ties happiness to an intention that is personal (9), recalling the realize-a-personal-vision objective of insight meditation. As Carroll does, Rinzler mobilizes specific traditional practices to ease workplace relationships; reflection on intention and karma are delimited into worksheets for determining one’s best career path; a contemplation on the miasma of the six realms of existence, what Trungpa had described in pessimistic-historicist terms as “six styles of imprisonment” in *The Myth of Freedom*, becomes an occasion to reflect on six improvised categories of workplace culture (92-97) and a meditation on the value of not being a “jerk” to one’s co-workers (98-100). And like *Awake at Work*, while *Buddha Walks* is explicitly offered to the disempowered as a means to advancement, its implicit objective is to reify the position of the leader. With regard to a teaching said to have been given in private by Trungpa in the context of the Shambhala cycle and later published in *Ruling Your World*, Rinzler assures his reader, “You are capable of leading in this way. You have everything you need to live a life that is in line with the Six Ways of Ruling. You may not be ‘the boss,’ but you can still be a leader […] In any given moment you can wake up to a heart of authentic leadership by exhibiting the Six Ways of Ruling” (166). Regardless of material conditions or actual relations of power, the person living “a life of mindfulness and empathy” (166) is
guaranteed the consolation of a position of inner empowerment, according to Rinzler, much as the impoverished are promised an enlarged but still proportionally tiny slice of a hypothetically expanding economic pie in *Conscious Capitalism*. The realization of that promised empowerment and benefit is, as in other articulations of the religion of capitalism, deferred. Changes in structural relations among such leaders and bosses are not imaginable here, and this marks the gap between *Great Eastern Sun* and *Buddha Walks Into the Office*.

I mark here that a historical trend peculiar to mindfulness discourse recurs upon itself here. Insofar as Rinzler’s authorial position is entirely a product of Shambhala International, his formative work experience and his authority as a spiritual teacher, which together constitute his legitimation as a mindfulness teacher and author—an advocate for and expert in the therapeutic modes he invokes—is traceable to a Pop Buddhist formulation. The image of Tibetanness and the Buddhist maps of the mind upheld as universal and worthy of emulation returns here to actively legitimize the psychological Buddhist that had before delimited it decades before: A Buddhist leader conforms to the expectations of Buddhism held among self-help writers of the 1970s about Buddhism on this point.

Unlike Carroll’s and Rinzler’s books, which position a kind of reimagined Pop Buddhism without Buddhist objectives as a means to effect a promised inner transformation of value to the contemporary worker, Salzberg’s *Real Happiness at Work* (2013)—a sequel to *Real Happiness*—is, like its predecessor, at a remove from the “revolutionary” appeals of the previous generation of insight meditation books, and is in
no way marked as a Buddhist text. And while mindfulness as a health intervention since the 1970s posits stress as an internal problem to be overridden or reprogrammed away with a dutiful affirmation of self-acceptance formulae, Salzberg at least occasionally names the source of stress as social in this text. Uncertain circumstances and economic insecurity—in aggregate the social environment of stress—are the primary stressors Salzberg targets (Work 8). Salzberg acknowledges the lived situation of working people now, the diminished horizons for empowerment and the “fear of being fired along with chronic nervousness over the prospect of not getting hired elsewhere” it induces (Work 8), and not maladaptation to the same, as pathological. Here, mindfulness is framed in the first instance as a means to cope rather than a tool to optimize performance or a framework for what some workplace mindfulness programs call “useful mental habits” for profiting in the moment of stress.

In this context, Salzberg includes a series of meditations the belabored can undertake while at work, while supervised—“stealth meditations”—so that one can carry on with one’s meditative practice while also attending to work tasks. A kind of internal freedom is made available in this way to the timecrunched worker. One example of a stealth meditation: “Use doorways consciously. As you come upon that in-between space, feel your feet against the floor, your hand on the knob; touch the doorway you pass through” (Work 208). Intentional sense-contact with materiality of the office space becomes a support to the work of being present to it, of literally coming to grips with the moment and the emergence of experience in historical time. Here, the personal vision of the mindful wage slave, stealthily meditating for her own reasons, is not assumed to
correspond to the imperatives of management or made to correspond, as in nearly every other piece of workplace meditation advice examined for this chapter. That said, absent a consistent method of critical inquiry, and in the context of a radical acceptance of the imperatives of the moment, no means is available for one to consider if one’s meditation tends to a compensatory objective, or an emancipatory one.

As it happens, Real Happiness at Work is more consistently of a piece with mindful leadership and therapeutic workplace mindfulnesses on this point. For instance, when Salzberg asserts that “Mindfulness is a relational quality, in that it does not depend on what is happening, but on how we are relating to what is happening” (Work 12), she simultaneously directs the meditator to attend to his or her relation to the moment from within, delimiting any capacity to act meaningfully on it or to collaborate with others to do so. Further, Salzberg ties peace, long the antonym to “egoic” activity in mindfulness books, as a cognate to personal achievement in a competitive workplace (this in the subtitle to the book, Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace), which sets the terms by which the problem of stress as Salzberg defines it is produced. Mindfulness finds its effective meaning here only by measures given by the corporate environment, by success as indicated by the measures given in the workplace; when one finds peace in personal achievement, one again ripples out, and according to the tacit contract of the text, up in the organization (Work 163-64). Here, Salzberg recontextualizes the ripple effect of mindful leadership into the aspirations of persons seeking social mobility—in part. At the same time, in the context Salzberg gives, it is difficult to imagine her book as an emancipatory alternative to mindful leadership or
Buddha Walks Into the Office. Her workplace meditations are consistently punctuated with examples that address the worries and wants of CEOs and hedge-fund managers seeking to improve the bottom line, to maintain extant structural relations, and to demand others implement the layoffs that mindful leaders are preoccupied with performing compassionately.

Advice books directed to the belabored that promise mindfulness as a means to redress the disempowerments and devaluations of work prescribe routines of austerity and self-restructuring that tend to the elevation and reproduction of extant social relations. They do so even when invoking Pop Buddhist projects with explicit anticapitalist elements as means to legitimation, or naming the social causes of the felt stresses of the present. The tendency of this discourse generally to promote Pop Buddhist aspirations for a desirable alternative among the belabored, however, will not prove insignificant.

THE MOMENT OF STRESS AS THE PRESENT IN THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE

The archetypal mindful workplace is Silicon Valley—the high-tech workplace of the present that had been positioned as a postindustrial future. This is anticipated in early studies in emotional intelligence at IBM (Caplan and Cherniss 2001), and generalized after Search Inside Yourself—a celebration of Google’s in-house mindfulness and emotional intelligence program, emerged as a strong bestseller and the Wisdom 2.0 conference series became a news item not long after. The centrality of the tech-industry example is acknowledged in secondary and follow-on guides such as Mindfulness at
Work for Dummies (254-55). Google is a darling of conscious capitalist and mindful leadership discourses—Soren Gordhamer, author of Wisdom 2.0, cites it as an example of an enlightened-run organization (151) as conscious capitalists such as Sisodia do. While it may be objected that these two examples may be limited to the peculiarities of working in Silicon Valley, I find five continuities from insight meditation and conscious capitalism discursively to the mindful workplace as posited in SIY and Wisdom 2.0 that are not unique to tech culture and employment, but are best exemplified in it.

First among these is the enlightenment logic of temporality common to both, mobilized first in an industry that markets its products and hence its being as on the cutting edge of history—the high-tech industry promised as the workplace of the future, as Fordist production faded with the advent of finance capitalism. For instance, Silicon Valley-based meditation teacher Kenneth Folk promotes his approach to workplace mental fitness as follows: “‘All that woo-woo mystical stuff is so retrograde. This is training the brain’” (quoted in Schachtman n.p.). The “mystical stuff” in question is Buddhist practice and its cultural trappings.263 Approached differently, the curious spirituality of tech culture can be attributed to the way in which the temporality of Silicon Valley articulates such mystifications of capitalist relations as those upheld in conscious capitalism. In Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality, the evolutionary development of any unit of organization is evidenced in its ability to draw under itself layers of other units in a complex hierarchy of subordination. By this logic, two of Silicon Valley’s exemplary corporations, Apple and Alphabet (parent company of Google since 2016) represent the most evolved and hence spiritually authoritative institutions on earth insofar as they are
the largest corporations extant, subordinating beneath them a turtles-all-the-way-down hierarchy of divisions, contractors, and freelancers.

Second, the conflation of business and spiritual authority characteristic of conscious capitalism’s holistic logic is also in evidence here. “There is a world in which the works of Dōgen and Eisai as human achievements are indistinguishable from a game that encourages users to buy and trade pastel-colored animals on social media sites,” Richard Eskow claims, and “To attend conferences like Wisdom 2.0 is to enter that world” (n.p.). Silicon Valley is a site where the role of the business innovator, an exemplar of the creative class, is fungible into that of the guru. In this instance, Eric Schiermeyer, founder of the company that bought the company that made the online game Eskow alludes to, Farmville, is positioned in an identical position as the author of the Shōbōgenzō—a spiritual leader of historical significance to the present.

Third, the mindful workplace extends the logic of subordination on which conscious capitalism is built into the prescribed routines of ordinary workers, effectively offering instructions in the happy enactment of the coercion of oneself, the reproduction of extant social relations as a seemingly entrepreneurial act of self-making and personal authenticity. The mindful workplace is less a phenomenon limited to Silicon Valley than an enactment of everyday life as a work site in the explicitly entrepreneurial, startup-privileging economy favored by the gospel of economic liberalization.

Fourth, where mindfulness after insight meditation delimits the scope of one’s awareness to the present moment of one’s immediate environment without judgment or context, thereby discouraging inquiry into the emergence of the present in historical time
from knowable causes and conditions in concert with the emergence of other coincident phenomena, so does Silicon Valley enact a kind of make-believe regarding the production of its own consumer goods, its ideas, and the source of its capital. Here, an abstract and personal creativity, “the Creative,” is the presumed source of prosperity—not the relations of power realized as exploitation in globalized factories and the equally “outsourced” pollution consequent to the production of high-tech gadgets and the violence attendant upon the mining of rare-earth minerals such as coltan required for their production.

Finally, the do-it-yourself spirituality prescribed in insight meditation texts and described in their patterns of consumption (*The Happiness Project*), and the “free agent” entrepreneurship as self-making promoted as a sign of the advent of an Age of Transcendence among advocates for economic liberalization and conscious capitalism, is realized in the presumptuous self-importance of Silicon Valley and, more importantly, the precariousness and stressfulness experienced by its belabored workers. As Andrew Ross argues, precariousness in the workplace and inevitable, recurrent cycles through the job market is a general problem for the belabored, but it is especially pronounced in high tech, the “creative industries,” and higher education (2)—not coincidentally, industries in which mindfulness programs have most comprehensively caught on so far.

The Silicon Valley employer figures as the archetypal mindful workplace because it represents capitalist relations of power and the pretentious claims made on behalf of the empowered, but with the volume turned all the way up—not because it is playing a
different tune from the same relations anywhere else. Silicon Valley is not special, but it is exemplary for the purposes of this inquiry.

THE WORLD’S LARGEST DEFENSE CONTRACTOR PERFECTS THE MEANS TO WORLD PEACE

Search Inside Yourself (SIY), Google’s in-house mindfulness and emotional intelligence training, is the first well-known program of its kind in a North American corporation. Initiated in 2007 by engineer Tan Chade-Meng, with the assistance of Daniel Goleman, Jon Kabat-Zinn, insight meditation teacher Mirabai Bush, and US-based Zen teacher Norman Fischer, SIY’s premises and practices are generalized for the contemporary workplace in Tan’s bestselling 2012 advice book *Search Inside Yourself*, where the subjective needs of Google’s creative-class “Type A personalities” are also generalized to all workers, as in *Free Agent Nation*. SIY is not without precedent; Bush had actively promoted mindfulness in corporations for a decade and more prior, and Tan acknowledges a debt to the program in emotional intelligence previously implemented at IBM in his design of SIY. But *Search Inside Yourself*, the book, like the Wisdom 2.0 conference, marks the penetration of the mindfulness-and-conscious-capitalism convergence into the workplace as such, for all workers and not only for leaders. The text is, not coincidentally, saturated with Pop Buddhist themes and imagery, which constitute Tan’s point of departure and mode of address, and ultimately summon criticism from Buddhist leaders such as Nhat Hanh. In addition to happiness and enlightenment, Tan asks, “What if people can also use contemplative practices to help them succeed in life and work?” (*Search 3*). The inversion of objectives and contexts for practice in *The
Mindful Leader is in evidence in Tan’s rationale. In Search Inside Yourself, the “real life” objective of mindfulness is made to coincide with those of one’s employer or the demands of the labor market, thus mobilizing the developmental logic and spiritual lexicon of conscious capitalism into the model mindful workplace.

While Tan claims that mindfulness in SIY is framed in such a way as to appeal to the methodical engineers of Google (Search 20)—and this is legible in Tan’s diction—more remarkable is Tan’s reliance on Buddhist themes and images to describe this practice in Search Inside Yourself (Tan identifies as a Buddhist [Search 243]). Tan defines mindfulness in this context as training in attention and meta-attention, “the ability to know your attention has wandered away” (Search 30), which makes the manager of engineers more productive insofar as his mind becomes “relaxed and alert at the same time” (Search 31), on task and undistracted. The temporality and objective of Tan’s mindfulness is unmistakable; he proposes that “upgrading the operational efficiency of our brains with mindfulness meditation” may be possible, opining that “maybe this meditation thing can help you get a raise” (Search 49). The contract logic of conscious capitalism and mindfulness as discipline is in evidence here: A deferred promise is offered in exchange for present assent and compliance. Simultaneously, the content of “this meditation thing” invokes much of the Pop Buddhist discourse described in previous chapters. Tan instructs the meditator in body scan techniques (Search 91-93), ties mindfulness to the concept of remembrance (P. sati, S. smṛti) (Search 225) that early translators of Buddhist scriptures had intended for it, and advises meditators to practice seated meditation in short intervals repeated often, a traditional Tibetan formulation.
even “one breath a day” (Search 67). Overall, the meditation method prescribed in SIY is breath meditation as in insight meditation and Shambhala Training, with an emphasis on good posture (Search 39-40) and an earnest imperative attributed to Kabat-Zinn:

“Breathing out as if your life depends on it” (Search 43). In this context, Tan invites the meditator to contemplate a poem that bears a strong relation of resemblance to one of Nhat Hanh’s:268 “Breathing in, I am calm/Breathing out, I smile./This present moment./Wonderful” (Search 46). Here, the history of mindfulness as a cognitive intervention mediated through Pop Buddhist and insight meditation discourses is further indicated in Tan’s invocation of happiness and self confidence in which the doctrine of Buddha-nature is invoked:269 “When the mind is calm and clear at the same time, happiness spontaneously arises,” Tan claims, because the “natural state” of mind is happiness (Search 32), reproducing the Dalai Lama’s English-language translation of Buddha-Nature (S. Tathagātagarbha) and the bromides of positive psychology advice books.

However, Tan’s Buddhist-inflected evocation of empowering valuable latent capacities from within by means of contemplation—the self-confidence born of “deep self-knowledge and blatant self-honesty” (Search 86)—opens onto the same enlightenment logic of self-regulation articulated in Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence:270 According to Tan, such meta-awareness enables the engineer to “act in rational ways that are best for ourselves and everybody else” (Search 18), and to become conscious of his emotional triggers and manage them by choosing among given alternatives rather than leaping irrationally into an automatized repertoire of reactivity (Search 116-122). Tan
situates the cultivation of virtues indigenous to positive psychology such as emotional intelligence in this context, which, he asserts, promotes “Stellar work performance” (Search 12), “Outstanding leadership” (Search 13), and “The ability to create the conditions for happiness” (Search 15). Here, mindfulness is mobilized to discipline workers to a placid compliance, reproducing with each breath the relation of productive labor to management and ownership.

While the discourse of emotional self-regulation is a significant emphasis of Goleman’s writings, and Goleman was a key participant in the design and implementation of the SIY program within Google, Tan articulates this practice primarily through a lexicon derived from Pop Buddhist advice books. For instance, the chapter “Riding your Emotions Like a Horse” in Search Inside Yourself recalls the practice of “raising windhorse” in the Shambhala books, itself a recontextualization of the Tibetan concept of lungta (which, in practice, traditionally involves the installation of prayer flags); lung means wind in Tibetan, and refers to wind as such but also the breath and the subtle “winds” that Tantric physiology claims prevail in the practitioner’s body, the “horse” on which the mind rides.271 Here, a Pop Buddhist translation of “lungta” becomes a cipher for an enlightenment transition “From Compulsion to Choice” and poses a rhetorical question: is the mind of intention and reason in control of the horse of embodiment and emotional response, or does the horse carry its rider where it pleases? (Search 103-104). Through practice, Tan implies, the meditator should be able to put the reigns in the hand of reason. In this way, the Buddhist masters and topoi Tan invokes authorize a practice that corresponds to an enlightenment logic of contemporary worklife.
A Pop Buddhist cultural repertoire is made to articulate an enlightenment discipline in the workplace.

Overall, the SIY practice is intended to meet the objectives of “real” life, which is articulated as “the lives and needs of real people” in Tan’s public comments. In a 2009 article in *Shambhala Sun* magazine’s blog, Tan asserts that that meditation “needs to align with the lives and interests of real people,” a theme reiterated in *Search Inside Yourself*. Tan’s mobilization of meditation as a tactic to achieve the real life interests he posits, which typically center on the accumulation of wealth or the means to it as objectives, contradicts the Buddhist motivations for practice he invokes, which are predicated in selflessness, generosity, and service to the whole (chapter two). Tan enjoins the meditator to bring mindfulness to bear in every aspect of one’s daily routines, such as journaling (*Search* 95-99), emailing (*Search* 224-226), and conversing with others (*Search* 60); many of these sub-routines Tan attributes to Fischer, the Zen teacher. Integrating mindfulness practice in one’s every waking moment, and integrating its internal logic totally into the fiber of one’s conduct, Tan promises, will yield desirable outcomes:

- you will learn how to calm your mind on demand. Your concentration and creativity will improve. You will perceive your mental and emotional processes with increasing clarity. You will discover that self-confidence is something that can arise naturally in a trained mind. You will learn to uncover your ideal future and develop the optimism and resilience necessary to thrive. You will find that
you can deliberately improve empathy with practice. You will learn that social
skills are highly trainable and that you can help others love you. (Search 6)

All this in a corporate setting, Tan emphasizes. SIY is premised in an entrepreneurial
gospel of prosperity by self-improvement and self-actualization.

The specific objectives to which mindfulness is deployed in the model mindful
workplace—the contents of Tan’s Pop Buddhist-inflected prosperity gospel—can be read
in the practice instructions Tan gives. SIY is organized in three phases or steps. The first
and second, attention training, and self-knowledge and self-mastery, represent
mindfulness and emotional intelligence, respectively. The third phase, creating useful
mental habits, involves a series of reflections and contemplations, many of them
reproduced from Pop Buddhist and insight meditation advice books, such as
lovingkindness and compassion, but with a difference. Here, the “ripple effect” of peace
Nhat Hanh attributes to mindful people—who had been dispersed globally well before
the advent of SIY—is presented as a Google-specific, first-person-singular mode of
vanguardism.

Peace and happiness are assumed to have their source in the use of a Google
product by a sovereign consumer, the site from which peace and happiness radiate.273
Further, Tan mobilizes the insistence in insight meditation books for the practitioner to
seek the realization of a personal vision that is assumed to be of a piece with the
entrepreneurial utopianism he promotes. The meditator is told to become mindful of his
or her “core values, purposes, and priorities” (Search 139), and to envision an ideal future
for him or herself to take inspiration from (Search 145). These aspirations remain
personal and unquestioned, even if the exemplary ideal future, Tan’s, seems world-revolutionary and Buddhist-inflected in context: “My own dream, for example, is to create the conditions for world peace in my lifetime” (Search 145). In contrast to the social utopianism Trungpa taught, and the social enlightenment Nhat Hanh promotes, here world peace is imagined to be made possible by the worker meditating alone for a raise in pay and for someone to love him or her by according to a program endorsed by management and offered at work as a means to corporate ends. The “useful mental habits” Tan promotes are upheld as means to improvement in work outcomes, on the assumption that workers and middle managers who realize themselves—an aspect of themselves idealized a priori—in their work may be more productive and less inclined to leave or create friction than those who do not. The worker envisions and idealizes the means to his or her own management, and is enjoined to enact in it, feel good about it, and not think critically about it. Where mindful leadership is articulates the mobilization of a kind of mindful discipline, the mindful workplace describes its implementation by the disciplined on and within themselves through the consumption of a Google-branded gadget.

Tan draws out the imperative to cultivate “useful mental habits” into extensive discourses in inspirational leadership in Search Inside Yourself. The purpose of these is comprehensible in the context of the elevation of managers, CEOs, and capital holders as aspirational images—business gurus—and the prescription of a radical acceptance of one’s subordination as figured in conscious capitalism and mindful leadership as a means to personal development and empowerment. One chapter title alludes to a familiar
Machiavellian formula, promising the means to “Being Effective and Loved at the Same Time” (*Search* 193), suggesting that effectiveness is analogous with being feared—or the capacity of an empowered class to reserve the legitimate right to fearsomeness to itself. Tan’s premise here is that “goodness is inspiring” (*Search* 217), which is to say that prosocial affects such as interpersonal warmth, attentiveness in listening, and compassion empower managers to *organize the freedom* of their subordinates in ways those subordinates may perceive to be empowering rather than limiting or exploitative. Carroll’s example of the utility of mindfulness in facing the challenge of laying off workers with a feeling of good conscience and with their goodwill intact recurs here (*Search* 166)—meaning that, according to Google’s on-site “leadership insititute,” it is possible for the mindful manager to strategically separate workers from their means to subsistence while convincing them not to regard the employer as an adversary (it surely is one in context) but as an ally (which it surely is not). As *The Mindful Leader* does, *Search Inside Yourself* also assumes its readers share the positions of those who implement layoffs, not those needing advice in surviving one. Overall, corporate mindfulness serves the objectives of those positioned to profit from layoffs but no longer wish to play the now-gauche role of Gordon Geko,\(^{274}\) not belabored pink or blue collar workers.

Tan presents the cultivation of useful mental habits in SIY as a means to corporate philanthropy, anticipating the examples Janice Marturano gives of mindful leadership. For instance, Goleman writes approvingly (*Search* ix) of Tan’s intention to “give it away as one of Google’s gifts to the world” (*Search* 235). The branded bundle of skills
promoted in SIY as the singular means to world peace is offered for free by one of the world’s largest and best-capitalized corporations, specifically a defense and intelligence contractor—and one that has long been a darling of conscious-capitalist writers such as Sisodia and Mackey. These mental habits are virtuous, and useful to the promotion of Google as a brand that, at least according to its own brand history, avoids being “evil.”

Here, Tan posits

“Three Easy Steps to World Peace:

1. Start with me.

2. Make meditation a field of science.

3. Align meditation with real life.” (*Search* 231)

These steps, if taken in the context of Tan’s overriding concern for the objectives of management and corporate shareholders, presents mindfulness and the Mahayana aspiration to serve the wellbeing of all—“real people”—mediated into a mode of corporate philanthropy. Tan’s first point is axiomatic to SIY, and his second is bolstered by reference to neurological research in the wake of Richard Davidson’s MRI examinations of Buddhist practitioners at the Dalai Lama’s request and Goleman’s refashioning of contemplative practices as the rewiring of the brain, but contradicted by the saturation of themes and allusions specific to Buddhist cultures by which many of his claims on mindfulness and “useful” habits of mind are legitimized. Tan’s third step, on the alignment of meditation with “real life,” assumes that heretofore mindfulness *had not been* aligned with real life. That is, Tan assumes that Buddhist meditation has been heretofore out of alignment with “the lives and interests of real people, the average Joes...
of the world” (Search 233), presumably inclusive of the anticapitalist projects described in chapter two. If Tan thinks SIY is in alignment with those interests, then he also must accept that the interests of average Joes and Janes correspond to, or at least do not conflict with, those leaders who seek the means to feel good about relating to Mr. and Ms. Average in a way that is inherently exploitative, as in the naturalized sociality emergent after economic liberalization. That Tan neglects the obverse of his proposal, the possibility that one may instead realign contemporary social relations with the aspirations of one’s meditation practice, as advocated in the programs of Nhat Hanh and Trungpa that he draws on, indicates his commitment to mobilizing mindfulness in service to the reproduction of class power. I mark that the temporality of insight meditation, where a modern and rational practice (Ours) is defined against a premodern and irrelevant one (of the other) is tacitly reproduced here. I see a parallel in Tan’s aspiration to put meditation in alignment with contemporary lifeways to the rationalization of Buddhism in insight meditation, particularly Buddhism without Beliefs, but here faith in the transcendent corporation, and not the skeptical and presumably modern Western mind, actualizes the enlightenment of the practice and its practitioners. SIY comes into focus as exceeding the assumption among advocates for economic liberalization that private enterprise is the least imperfect of all known forms of social order. Here, Tan positions one enterprise, a defense contractor, as the means to the perfectability of the means to world peace (Search 235).

Tan’s rationale for SIY is grounded in the very assumptions mindfulness writers since Full Catastrophe Living have made about the science of stress, Hans Selye’s
mystification of free-market doctrine into the relation of an organism to its inevitable, implacable, and hostile environment. Here, the temporality of evolutionism as crystallized in conscious capitalism and mindful leadership is in evidence. Tan explicitly situates SIY in the cognitive science context Goleman introduced to the mindfulness discourse with *The Meditative Mind* (*Search* 5). As Paul Ryan does, Tan attempts to explain the practice of mindfulness as a kind of neural calisthenics, wherein certain bits of the brain, such as the prefrontal cortex, are strengthened, while others, such as the stress-aggravated primitive-brain amygdalae, are calmed; the prefrontal cortex, Tan asserts, boosts communication among parts of the brain (*Search* 115), and hence is pictured as a kind of attentive, mindful leader over subordinates in need of pacifying and clear direction in times of insecurity. And like Marturano, Tan underscores his appeals to the perceived certainty of scientific evidence by presenting positive psychology and especially the figure of Daniel Goleman and a kind of science-enlightened Zen as fungible into each other,²⁷⁶ and by distancing himself from any hypothetical “New Age crank from San Francisco” (*Search* 234), and SIY from equally hypothetical “woo-woo talk by some New Age person” (*Search* 50). In doing so, Tan positions himself as an insight meditation instructor does relative to scientific discourses. As Folk, the Silicon Valley meditation coach, explicitly casts “New Age” approaches as “retrograde,” so does Tan implicitly participate in the temporality of insight meditation and conscious capitalism as an evolutionary advance, a worldview more developed than the New Age, appropriate to the subordination of less-evolved brain bits by more-evolved ones.
The rest of Tan’s rationale for SIY, which relies on the legitimation offered by the availability of Buddhist leaders for allusion and not only the claims of scientists, is also characterized by the same contradictions as the mindfulness discourse it reproduces in its imperative to cultivate useful mental habits. For instance, when Tan explains how he finds the “great” leaders Jim Collins in describes in *Good to Great* “inspiring” insofar as they are “ambitious for the greater good” (*Search* 201), and the greater good throughout as a Mahayana aspiration for world peace and wellbeing, he invokes the equation of business gurus to Buddhist ones characteristic of conscious capitalism and mindful leadership, and *Good to Great* as an advice book belonging to a canon analogous to the writings of the Dalai Lama.

Tan’s prescription for prosocial affects reproduces the contradiction of mindfulness at the site of its conscription of Buddhist modes of legitimation and themes, compassion foremost among them. Compassion, which Nhat Hanh asks his disciples to cultivate by reflecting on what goes wrong when business as such is successful (chapter two), is presented in SIY as “not just for fun” because “it has real business benefits as well, especially in the context of business leadership” (*Search* 199). The compassionate business leader, recall, is the one who can retain the loyalty of his subordinates while removing them from the payroll, and acknowledge the trauma to the former employee while bringing them to affirm the business objectives that caused the trauma. Meanwhile, Tan paraphrases the view of the Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, described in *Search Inside Yourself* as “by far, the happiest person ever measured by science” (*Search* 2): “compassion is the happiest state ever” (*Search* 198). In the context of Buddhist
discourse in English after the Dalai Lama, this largely means that compassion is the state of being most representative of one who actualizes his or her latent enlightened qualities; the well-regarded Ricard is certainly presented as an exemplary of this in *Search Inside Yourself* and in this milieu. The happy manager or CEO, like the conscious capitalist, becomes a figure for enlightened subjectivity analogous to a highly-trained and long-practicing monk like Ricard, and an “Oriental Monk” image of enlightened sociality and aspiration in this discourse. Drawing on the authority of William George, the meditating CEO to whom the Zen teacher David Loy addressed his criticisms, Tan equates Buddhist compassion to the current business-school theme of a shift in focus from “I” to “We,” as part of a process of “becoming authentic” (*Search* 199). While the meaning of that shift remains opaque in this context, the equation of Buddhist and business discourses, and the being of Buddhist and business leaders as represented by their books, as modes of legitimation and truth-production is transparent.

The objectives of any enterprise and the structural relations on which it depends remain unseen and unquestioned here, and are made to coincide with the objective of any subordinate’s mindfulness practice as a means to personal authenticity, meaning, and purpose. These are the terms by which *Search Inside Yourself* generalizes mindfulness and makes it available in the archetypal entrepreneurialized workplace—that is, the entrepreneurial workplace made desirable, normative, of the moment—one that is not made conscious of the contradiction in its aspiration to perfect the means to world peace from within the walls of a highly profitable defense contractor, just as the terms of insight meditation demand a refusal of recognition of the contradictions in the everyday routines.
of insight meditation teaching and practice (chapter three). Workplace mindfulness, as figured in SIY, leads the belabored to implement the program of their own management on themselves, on the promise of their own future benefit and their present position on the cutting edge of historical emergence. As a mode of discipline, it leads to the development of certain capacities of mind and aspiration that correspond to a body of cultural aspirations for an alternative to the same.

Specifically, the Buddhist traces in Search Inside Yourself summon a response, in this instance lightly critical, from Nhat Hanh. In September 2013, he led a meditation at the Google campus attended by “around 700 employees” (Confino n.p.). Nhat Hanh instructed those present to disregard the pursuit of profit as an objective for practice, and instead to pursue the wellbeing of all beings; as reported by journalist Jo Confino, “‘Time is not money,’ he told them. ‘Time is life, time is love’” (n.p.). Here, a renunciant positioned as a master and final authority on the discipline that has been promised as a means to a promotion and profit has been invited by an employer to encourage its employees to stop what they are doing and work instead for the wellbeing of all if they wish to be happy—bringing to mindfulness a suspicion that the tacit and explicit promises of SIY may not be fulfilled equally or at all. Nhat Hanh’s 2013 Google visit represents an instance of surplus mindfulness, of the paradox of mindfulness. While it is unknown if any or many Google engineers have implemented Nhat Hanh’s instructions in their lives to date, the inevitable negation of mindfulness by the means its advocates use to affirm mindfulness tends to frustrate the objective of the unproblematic reproduction of capitalist relations legible in corporate mindfulness. The same pattern of mindfulness
tripping over itself obtains in regard to *Wisdom 2.0*, which, like Pink’s *Free Agent Nation*, generalizes all of space and time as a work zone, and the worker as an enterprise—and which summons a significant critical response from dissenting Buddhists.

**WISDOM 2.0 AND ITS DISCONTENTS**

The wisdom promised in Soren Gordhamer’s 2008 volume *Wisdom 2.0*, in its very title, is positioned as having superseded or upgraded previous articulations of wisdom, in the patois of computer software—situated ahead of the previous product line, it promises an advance on the previous broader-deeper context insofar as it explicitly embraces a now-naturalized and “true” social environment after economic liberalization. Where Tan had first established a program of action later generalized into a book, Gordhamer proposes a program in his 2007 book that is later outshined by the spectacle of the Wisdom 2.0 conferences it summoned. In the book’s acknowledgments, Stephen and Ondrea Levine, Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Ram Dass, Kabat-Zinn—all familiar names to readers of insight meditation books—Joan Halifax, a New Mexico-based Zen teacher, and the New Age writer Eckhardt Tolle (235) are listed. Gordhamer credits Kornfield for the idea of the book. The mediation of insight meditation practice, discourse, and figures of authority into everyday life as a workplace is explicit here. *Wisdom 2.0* articulates mindfulness *pace* insight meditation as mediated through the triumphant temporality and means to discipline offered by conscious capitalism. The *Us* of insight meditation is displaced again; the apex of the curve of time is no longer in the skeptical meditator’s reflective hours, but in the faithful digital consumer’s space of anticipation. Mindfulness
is made available here as a means to enhanced performance and stress relief for the belabored self as entrepreneur. This book and the Wisdom 2.0 conference series subsequent to it crystallize many of the assumptions of mindfulness so defined in the lived environment of everyday life for a privileged set of meditators. Like Pink, Gordhamer celebrates consumers as creative meaning makers, mystifies consumption as creativity and creativity as Buddha-mind, and ignores the productive forces at work in the materiality of those consumer goods. Insofar as the workplace is generalized to include all waking hours and the innermost aspirations of the Free Agent, mindfulness becomes a means to life as such, a full life practice. Mindfulness here is the singular form of consciousness appropriate to this juncture—a mystification of the moment of stress, and a discipline for its reproduction.

Gordhamer interpellates his reader—the subject appropriate to mindfulness now—as a member of the “creative class” much as Pink describes it, and the reader’s lived environment as simultaneously a workplace and a matrix of digital diversions: “Who are you? You are passionate, networked, and ambitious. You crave cool gadgets that allow you to communicate in new ways, and you want to stay up-to-date on the most innovative Web sites and Internet tools” (2). Gordhamer’s enthusiasm for the connected life of network man is tempered by his concern that omnipresent connectivity and distraction correlates to stressful, and hence unhealthful and unproductive, living (6), which he associates with the contemporary sense of always feeling rushed—the internalized timecrunch of work (96). Stress is bad for creativity, and conventional pain management is inadequate to the pain and promise of the present, so try mindfulness...
instead (111)—this pitch repeats like a refrain throughout. Gordhamer defines stress as a problem internal to the subject, “our fighting or non-accepting what is true in a given moment. Whatever is happening, we think, should not be. Our definition of stress relief, then, is accepting and allowing our experience, no matter what it is” (45). This is a prescription for the radical acceptance of the given, without judgment on it. Significantly, the social environment of the stressed one—the rushed and always-on, always-connected worklife of the entrepreneurial self—is not only presumed to be a nonfactor in the production of stress, but it is also posited as true—as something to be accepted, and further, that resistance to the presumed truth of the given is precisely the means by which stress is produced.

Further, according to Gordhamer, stress relief is of benefit to the self as entrepreneur because it improves productivity (59). Various other productivity tricks are invoked here: to “invite the creative,” allowing ideas and progress to emerge from within (121) as enlightened qualities do from one’s Buddha-nature, except here these qualities are cultivated precisely to be commodified and sold. While the meditator is advised to make space for silence in his or her work routine (133), Gordhamer also insists that mindfulness makes it possible for the stressed subject to engage with the televisual spectacle without becoming stressed by it (24)—to become an unresisting, happy consumer of distraction. Because they are posited as symptoms of a single inner problem, in Wisdom 2.0 stresses cannot be differentiated by distinct causes or qualities: the stresses of entertainment and distraction, of consuming, are assumed to be of the same fabric as
that of the workplace for the meditator whose entire field of experience and action, including relaxation and recreation, is posited as a workplace.

Overall, the practical advice Gordhamer gives is largely indistinguishable from that of other mindfulness books of this period. The meditator is to do one thing at a time and do it with full attention, not multitasking or thinking critically about it (Wisdom 2.0 27), and to meditate for at least five minutes daily (42), to take a “pause” from time to time in order to collect oneself (84-89), and to eat mindfully, too (79-83). The particular regimes of practice Gordhamer prescribes for the entrepreneurial worker closely resemble those Tan presents to his meditating engineers at Google.

And like Search Inside Yourself, Wisdom 2.0 appeals to Buddhist public figures as means to legitimacy—the Dalai Lama (54-55), among others—and is saturated with decontextualized Zen themes. For instance, Gordhamer reworks a familiar Zen aphorism to state, “if you meet the creative on the road, kill it” (164-65). Further, as the mindful leadership books do, Wisdom 2.0 participates in the ecology of quotations initiated by the insight meditation book genre. The logic behind Gordhamer’s seemingly non sequitur interruption of himself with a retelling of a particular Sufi parable (61-62) comes into coherence only in this context; Kornfield and Goldstein had previously spun the same yarn in Seeking the Heart of Wisdom (119), in a genre demonstrating the universality of its claims by mobilizing an ecology of quotations from globalized sources. Further, such mindful themes as happiness and wellbeing are claimed to be documented here, as in the writings of Kabat-Zinn, by convincing scientific evidence (Gordhamer 179). Gordhamer assumes that mindfulness as prescribed by writers such as Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn, and
Brach is a means to reproduce the working life and agenda of the belabored-as-entrepreneur in Silicon Valley. This analogy is warranted insofar as the prescription of mindfulness as a means of stress relief—of engaging with the moment on less resistant terms—coincides with Gordhamer’s arrangement of Buddhist glosses. For example, Gordhamer reiterates his project in with an epithet, the “Middle Way,” that Buddhism uses to describe itself: “I sought a middle way, a means to use the great technologies of our age creatively and effectively instead of habitually” (10). In Gordhamer’s appropriation of this lexicon, the acceptance of the structural injustices in contemporary social life as reality and a felt sense of nonattachment to the technovisual spectacle that network man is made to crave to displace the imperatives to renunciation and utopian aspirations for alternatives legible in Pop Buddhist advice books, such as Nhat Hanh’s insistence that the televisual spectacle is a mind poison and species of imperialism.

Further, the broader solution Gordhamer proposes to the problem of inner stress he posits is not to simply unplug from it as Nhat Hanh advises—neither Wisdom 2.0 nor Search Inside Yourself involve a logic of renunciation—but to engage what Gordhamer calls “the creative mind,” which is “the mind that experiences life freshly, thinks out of the box, finds new solutions to old problems, and expresses ourselves in innovative ways” [sic] (6). The creative mind is the mindful mind, “Buddha nature” instrumentalized for the belabored creative class. Here again, a key Buddhist concept is repurposed to the assumed needs of a now-omnipresent employer or potential employer and by a financialized temporality.
Here, the transformation of leisure time, even when explicitly dedicated to anything but work, into highly productive creative-labor time—and some characteristic assumptions about class—are legible in Gordhamer’s narrative of a “wealthy Japanese businessman” who felt his business success was owed to his time with family and friends on the weekends, in a “non-thinking” and “work-free zone,” his private yacht: “Out on the yacht, without trying to think about work, good ideas came. He would then make a note of them and give them more attention during the week. This, he said, was the secret of his financial success” (172-73). An open and unthinking mind frees the creative to manifest its salable qualities: Here, Gordhamer transposes the logic of Pop Buddhist meditation, whereby one’s innate Buddha-qualities emerge through cultivation, into the patois of the self as entrepreneur, and work as a creative, meaning-making calling. While Gordhamer presents mindful yachting as function of a prosperity gospel—work less so you can make more money, do less so you can accumulate more277—the open secret of successful non-doing and non-thinking in his example is for one to start out materially successful, with privacy, private time, and private money and power to reproduce one’s success—all necessary preconditions for mindful yachting. Far from innate to all, the means to “the creative” has a specific and exclusive material basis. The business-guru logic of conscious capitalism is also at work in this instance; Gordhamer’s narrative is legitimizied by having been handed down as a lesson from the already empowered and capitalized, one whose success in commerce legitimizes him to describe success as such. Again, mindfulness as a workplace intervention is mobilized as a means to mystify and reproduce extant class relations.
Mindfulness is generalized for the workplace in *Wisdom 2.0* much as it is in *Search Inside Yourself* as a mode of discipline, with certain kinds of Buddhist traces intact, but more absolutely; the work-time and work-space of the creative class is without limit, and institutionally, in the emergence of the Wisdom 2.0 Conference series, which has proven much more significant than the book of the same title, even as the book was the Conference’s condition of possibility. And much more than SIY has, Wisdom 2.0 and its participants have become a magnet for specifically Buddhist criticisms around questions of social justice and class, invited by the Buddhist lexicon in which the book and hence the conference are articulated and their reliance on Pop Buddhist modes of legitimation.

According to Noah Schachtman, the first annual Wisdom 2.0 Conference in 2010 drew “a couple hundred” participants; by 2013, “nearly 1,700 signed up” (Schachtman n.p.), and the conference series had become a fixture, emerging in different variants such as Wisdom 2.0 Business and Wisdom 2.0 Europe. Many insight meditation leaders, including Kabat-Zinn, Kornfield, and Salzberg, have spoken at these events (some more than once), as have business leaders such as Bill Ford of Ford Motor Company (2013) and Congressman Ryan. Jay Michaelson, a blogger for *Tricycle* magazine, situates the Wisdom 2.0 Conference in the context of contemporary Buddhism, and describes it as follows: “a program of millionaires and celebrities […] presentations on corporate efficiency with A-list tech names, product rollouts that range from the sublime to the ridiculous, and lots and lots of networking […] I’m reminded that a lot of this stuff pisses Buddhists off” (*Evolving* 132-33). Michaelson observes that this anger is registered in
Loy’s open letter to George, which asks if anyone committed to Dharma practice of any kind can, in Michaelson’s words, “serve in good conscience on the boards of corporations that have been involved in unethical business practices” (Evolving 133). Where capitalist relations are understood as a moral wrong in the Buddhist advice books summarized in chapter two, here the rhetoric of Corporate Social Responsibility, the conscription of a Pop Buddhist ethos to legitimized capitalist accumulation, is taken as normative and applied as a discursive lever against mindfulness as a mode of class discipline on behalf of a Buddhist-serving periodical.

Michaelson posed the issue Loy raised to Kabat-Zinn at a Wisdom 2.0 event. Kabat-Zinn’s response, according to Michaelson: “It’s not like Goldman Sachs can just do a little mindfulness and then be driven by greed, hatred, and delusion all the more. That’s not mindfulness. This is about restructuring things so that your business is aligned with the deepest domains of integrity and morality. You can make money in service of creation of wealth, but not lying, cheating, and stealing, or cutting every corner” (quoted in Michaelson Evolving 133-34). In Kabat-Zinn’s attempt to defend corporate mindfulness from Loy’s criticisms of mindfulness in corporations, the accumulation of capital for its own sake is ensconced as a legitimate objective, as it is in The Mindful Leader; and as in conscious capitalism, the contradictions subsequent thereto are attributed to personal and ethical shortcomings, to instances of poor leadership, and not to baked-in structural injustices, in sharp contrast to the positions writers such as The Dalai Lama and Nhat Hanh had advanced earlier (chapter two). The “restructuring” Kabat-Zinn advocates is articulated in terms of personal virtue and not structural transformation as in
conscious capitalism. Kabat-Zinn and other mindfulness leaders articulate here a departure from Pop Buddhist objectives while relying on the legitimacy of these forms, with the consequence that criticism from Buddhist leaders such as Loy and Nhat Hanh (in the case of Google) are summoned by the form mindfulness has taken. Direct and comprehensive criticisms of the Wisdom 2.0 conference have been similarly summoned by the Buddhist traces in *Wisdom 2.0* and the Buddhist or Buddhist-oriented leaders on the stage at the Conferences. The compensatory valence of mindfulness invokes the emancipatory aspirations that inhere in it. I survey some of these here.

Objections to the compensatory valence of Wisdom 2.0 have been publicly raised as early as 2012, from the stage of the conference itself at 2013, and by the protesters in possession of a sound grasp of Buddhist doctrine and rhetorical forms who disrupted the conference in 2014, with much of the criticism coming from Buddhists and published in Buddhist venues such as *Tricycle* magazine. These “pissed off” Buddhists, especially the protestors, attempt to bring the totality of the moment of stress to the consciousness of the stressed entrepreneur-self of the creative class—a dialectic of consciousness and conditions made possible by the Pop Buddhist repertoires through which therapeutic mindfulness and hence corporate mindfulness is articulated.

Detailed criticisms of the Wisdom 2.0 conference appeared in the Buddhist monthly *Tricycle*, in print and online, in 2012. In an article entitled “Buying Wisdom,” Richard Eskow observes that the designation “2.0” in software marketing connotes an upgraded version, an update—the newer and therefore superior version. In the context of the universalism that the insight meditation discourse assumes to itself, such an upgrade
must be a total one, Eskow observes: “Upgrading the world’s wisdom teachings is a pretty heady ambition. Maybe an inflated sense of self-importance is simply to be expected when an executive from one of the organization’s corporate sponsors, himself a speaker at the event, says things like ‘Wisdom 2.0 is, quite possibly, the most important gathering of our times’” (n.p.) Such a sense of world-historical self-importance, as I have shown, inheres in the historicism of insight meditation books, in Wilber’s integral theory, and in conscious capitalism; at the Wisdom 2.0 Conference, it is embraced by a social class concerned with its own position imagined as the historical front of emerging technological and economic forms. Wisdom 2.0, Eskow observes, has become one of many “events where powerful and wealthy elites come to network, schmooze, and congratulate themselves on their own generosity and understanding,” and it offers “the same kind of balm for the corporate conscience” as the Clinton Global Initiative (n.p.)—suggesting a parallel to the role of mindfulness at Wisdom 2.0 and the mindful leader at cognate events, such as the World Economic Forum at Davos. In contrast, Eskow recalls the function of mindfulness as presented, in the meditations of Nhat Hanh as an alternative to the class structure baked into Wisdom 2.0. Eskow argues instead that if mindfulness is to do any good,

It must entail being mindful of the social and economic forces that allow some to prosper while others struggle, forces that promote and perpetuate certain behaviors and thought patterns while discouraging or suppressing others. Without that awareness, ‘mindfulness’ will quickly descend into another luxury item that permits the few to ignore the impact of their behavior on others. (n.p.)
I mark that while this marks straightforward continuity of the meditations on the uneven distribution of wealth, poverty, and pollution—and the pain of that injustice—in the writings of Nhat Hanh to the moment of corporate mindfulness, it is a meditative outcome unacceptable to the mindful leader, who demands to be regarded with goodwill by those he or she lays off. That is, for mindfulness to function as a means to the reproduction of the same, it cannot appear to be such—it must circulate as a means to generalized wellbeing and goodwill, without the disciplined or disciplining becoming mindful of its function as discipline, or its consequences as such. Even hypothetically realizable as an alternative to the uneven distribution of the means to wellbeing, mindfulness’s objective as class discipline becomes obvious and hence lost.

Marianne Williamson’s presentation onstage at the Wisdom 2.0 Conference in 2013—a jeremiad—took a position very near to Eskow’s:

‘Let me tell you something ladies and gentlemen: no spiritual leader person [sic] is going to come here and be a dancing monkey to help a bunch of rich capitalists talk about the fact that they can have a more compassionate workplace and meditation rooms while not dealing with the moral calling and the moral invitation of our species to deal with the fact that we have so much and so many have so little […] Only in modern America could we come up with some ersatz version of spirituality that gives us a pass on addressing the unnecessary human suffering in our midst.’ (quoted in Drda n.p.)

Williamson explicitly casts Wisdom 2.0 as such an “ersatz” spirituality, and, implicitly, other presenters there, including Kabat-Zinn, Kornfield, and Salzberg, as teachers of
something other than spirituality, and the authentic self produced through a disciplined application of mindfulness as necessarily inauthentic—observing that mindfulness is other than its promises, while mobilizing the Pop Buddhist imperative to recognize the suffering of all beings (compassion, S. karuna) as an alternative. Williamson has not been invited to participate in subsequent Wisdom 2.0 events.

Protests that disrupted the 2014 Wisdom 2.0 conference are more significant than these criticisms, and not only because they were reported in the U.S. on National Public Radio afterward (Kurwa 2014). In their intervention and in their comments after the event, the protesters problematize the metabolism of contemporary social conditions and mindfulness as a specific cultural repertoire, and not the universal truth of the mind it is presented as, in some detail. Amanda Ream, organizer of the 2014 protest, objects to the gentrification of San Francisco by Silicon Valley and its hangers-on, and ties the impoverishment of working people in that city to the injustices of global capitalism. Further, she identifies specifically entrepreneurial and asocial features of mindfulness as it circulates at the Conference, like its insistence on purely subjective means to address a challenging environment and not challenging the problems in and of that environment, while delivering rhetorical jabs at its characteristic discursive forms, such as the “evolution of consciousness” theme common to Wilber and Brach:

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 it does so without offering an analysis of where this disconnection comes from. The conference presents an evolution in consciousness
of the wealthiest among us as the antidote to suffering rather than the redistribution of wealth and power. (n.p.)

Significantly, Ream recuperates critical thought—in evidence in Pop Buddhist advice books such as *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* and its sequels but negated in MBSR, insight meditation, and corporate mindfulness—into the presentation of Wisdom 2.0. Other protesters also tie the same contradiction in corporate mindfulness explicitly to the “disconnection” between global north and south, and tech consumers and producers that passes unnoticed at the Conference. In contrast to the denial of temporal and moral coevalness characteristic of insight meditation and generalized mindfulness discourses, protesters such as Ream promote a politics of recognition. 280

The significance of the rupture between the theologies of conscious capitalism reproduced at Wisdom 2.0 as mindfulness discourse and the Pop Buddhism it summons in the intervention of these protesters can be measured in contrasting claims to completeness of vision. The universalism held in common among discourses such as insight meditation and Wilber’s integral theory are tacitly or explicitly promoted as the most complete among worldviews, and the most timely. Dani Matthews, a participant at a Wisdom 2.0 Business event and a *Huffington Post* blogger, argues that the Wisdom 2.0 milieu presents a complete picture and program of action from the perspective of a user of Wilber’s integral theory in the workplace. 281 But Wisdom 2.0 protesters such as Katie Loncke point out that such assumptions of all-inclusiveness suggested in the universalism of integral thought and the insight meditation advice book and its ecology of quotations are symptoms of a failure in mindfulness. For Loncke, mindfulness promoters are
missing something obvious. Loncke objects to the exclusion of laborers in the endless meditations on consumption of technology at Wisdom 2.0 from a specifically Mahayana Buddhist position: “What about the mindfulness, happiness, and well being of the people mining coltan in the DRC, or the people assembling iPhones at the infamous Foxconn sweatshops? […] such deep exclusion invites deep delusion. Something important is missing. Entire groups of relevant people are cut out of the conversation altogether” (n.p.). As in Nhat Hanh’s *Interbeing*, the Mahayana objective to serve all beings is mobilized in Loncke’s remarks to bring to consciousness unrecognized structural injustices, and call for their negation. Loncke observes that the ignorance she diagnoses at the core of Wisdom 2.0 is the fundamental problem Buddhist practice attempts to address—and hence her analysis of Wisdom 2.0 and her intervention into it can be described as Buddhist social criticism. That is, the “wisdom” of Wisdom 2.0 is ignorance according to that wisdom’s means to legitimation.

After Ream, Loncke, and the other protestors disrupted the Conference with shouts and the unfurling of a banner they had snuck in to the event as one might tote a thick yoga mat about at such an event, the response among conference participants to their intervention was remarkable: attendees were invited to just sit through it, to “check in with our bodies” as Loncke remembers it, and participants did so: marking the disruption as sound, as sensation and movement, observing undifferentiated sensations arising and fading in the moment without acknowledging their discursive content. While Reams acted on the hope “that mindfulness and the teachings of the Buddha will help bring them to the table with people like us who are living right at the edges of the havoc
that's being created” (quoted in Kurwa n.p.), generalized mindfulness was used as a technique to actively avoid the instruction in basic Buddhist concepts that the protesters offered. As I have argued, generalized Buddhism is not a Buddhist formation historically or functionally. It is significant that such an introduction to Buddhist praxis is necessary at an event saturated with nominally Buddhist themes, images, and affiliated presenters. This underscores the historical emergence of mindfulness as a novel formation, a self-help program generalized to everyone living with stress, and not a facet of an “evolving Dharma” as writers such as Michaelson posit it, and as the “Western Buddhist” narrative holds. In this instance, a negated Buddhism remains the site of utopian aspiration in dialectical relation to corporate mindfulness. Simultaneously, mindfulness as prescribed in Wisdom 2.0 is, according to these protestors, mobilized as a means to ignorance, to a negation of critical thought and mindfulness of the totality of suffering beings.

Reviewing this protest and Williamson’s address to the 2013 conference, Darrin Drda concludes that “corporate mindfulness serves mainly to reduce the stress and assuage the guilt of powerful and wealthy people” (n.p.), as outlined in the conscious capitalism discourse inflecting it. Further, Drda asserts, “any such benefits to a select few elites” that may practice meditation and thereby transition from good to great leaders “must be weighed against the terrifying speed at which human communities and natural ecosystems are being ravaged by global capitalism” (n.p.). The urgency of global injustice and environmental crises contrasts sharply against the manufactured urgency of newer-better-faster Silicon Valley gadget culture. In the context of conscious capitalism,
mindful leadership, and programs such as SIY and Wisdom 2.0, Drda offers a clear summary of the compensatory valence of mindfulness.

However, to generalize mindfulness as a means to class discipline, a means to self-imposed ignorance of the moment in history, is to generalize aspirations for a desirable alternative to the present predicated in a demand for the recognition of the suffering of the totality and its causes—a peaceful, healthful, and just social environment. These aspirations are figured in the Buddhists who are positioned as objects of emulation in this context, their commitment to compassion legible in scans of their brains. They impede the smooth reproduction of the present as an imagined moment of transcendence, and the presumption that the accumulation of capital is an acceptable objective for one to pursue if one adopts a program of personal ethics otherwise. That is the paradox of mindfulness.

**CONCLUSION**

Mindfulness has been prescribed as a self-disciplined means to stress relief, performance enhancement, and wellbeing for those diagnosed with the pathology of stress—which means everyone struggling with the social conditions of the present. Mindfulness, by this logic, is for everyone. When promoted as a workplace program, it is primarily a discipline by which extant relations of power are affirmed and reproduced in the present toward the future repetition of the same. The compensatory valence of mindfulness is legible in the self-help guides of mindfulness experts offered to belabored workers, who are asked to identify with, even deify, management as a means to self-realization and enlightenment. Here, in the archetypal mindful workplace program,
Google’s Search Inside Yourself, and in the mindful workplace generalized for the self as entrepreneur, Wisdom 2.0, the emancipatory valence of mindfulness is summoned as an aspirational mode and a means to legitimize mindfulness as a means to produce persons who correspond to the expectations held by self-help readers and authors about Buddhists: a compassionate, well-adjusted, self-abnegating, and just-detached-enough subjective state. In summoning the emancipatory valence, however, generalized mindfulness trips over itself, makes itself ignorant of itself and the pulse of the moment it makes transcendent, and affirms its own negation.
CONCLUSION: MINDFULNESS AND THE PARADOX OF ENLIGHTENMENT DISCIPLINE

I have argued that generalized mindfulness, which is at once a mystification of the social dynamics of its historical moment and a discipline for the reproduction of the status quo, encodes an emancipatory valence. It does so through a repertoire of specifically Buddhist practices and aspirations as crystallized in the diction of English-language Pop Buddhist advice books. The aspiration to the liberation of the totality legible in Pop Buddhist texts and evoked in mindfulness discourse articulates an optimistic act-content, a cultural repertoire in motion and capable of being realized insofar as it represents the aspirations of living people. I have argued that this lexicon in mindfulness discourse appeals as such an act-content. It is predicated in an overproduction of mindfulness by the self interpellated as a capitalist—of becoming overaware of the present moment as it emerges in totality, flooding the channel of mindfulness prescribed as a private religion. I have also argued against claims and assumptions among scholars and promoters of mindfulness that this formation represents another example of Buddhism’s unique capability to adapt itself to new cultures—as though mindfulness’s emergence into North American culture can be adequately understood as a religious event, and mindfulness as a new, modern, even Enlightened form of Buddhist practice generalized to North American soil and souls, a “Western Buddhism.” Instead, I have observed that the latter set of assumptions reproduce the
denial of coevalness at work in the injustices of globalization and the religion of capitalism, and that the practice of mindfulness is summoned by a “Western” logic—the retrenchment of class power I have called the moment of stress—and that the Buddhistic content mindfulness appropriates sheds more light on contemporary social dynamics and aspirations than it does on any hypothesized rational core of Buddhadharma to be recovered by Anglophone spirituality writers and neuroscientists claiming a decultured and restructured Shakyamuni as their contemporary.

Buddhistic themes such as compassion and lovingkindness are evoked with frequency in corporate leadership discourses and workplace mindfulness programs as means to a productive and compliant workforce. Martin Hartmann and Axel Honneth observe that capitalism after economic liberalization has “managed, with reference to an available vocabulary of normative self-description, to formulate new justifications for social inequality, injustice, or discrimination” (48). The mediation of Buddhist themes such as compassion through generalized mindfulness is one such vocabulary. However, in this instance, the for-all-beings Pop Buddhist act-content directly contradicts any justification for inequality, injustice, or the individualism summoned by the social relations of contemporary capitalism, or the self-interested subjectivity it assumes, insofar as it draws the meditator’s attention to the causes and consequences of that injustice.

Hartmann and Honneth characterize certain contradictory formations as paradoxical—having the quality that “precisely through the attempt to realize [it], the probability of realizing it is decreased” (47). I have argued, perhaps against the spirit of Hartmann and Honneth’s position,\textsuperscript{283} that mindfulness is precisely such a paradoxical
formation when mobilized as a means to reproduce the injustices of the present insofar as it summons, intellectually and even somatically, a revulsion toward the moment of injustice that sets in motion an act-content toward an alternative. The paradox concept extends analysis of contradictions of a certain kind by observing how they have been strategically mobilized by the management and capital-holding classes to accomplish specific objectives, such as the reproduction of relations of power (Hartmann & Honneth 48). I have argued that mindfulness has been generalized as a kind of moment-to-moment discipline with the objective of reproducing extant social relations, which is realized now and for the foreseeable future as the moment of stress; a social environment that summons a means to a placid, productive, truly-believing, and compliant workforce that contains within itself the negation of class discipline as an objective and the strategy of those mobilizing it. Put differently: If the tacit but legible objective of generalized mindfulness is to reproduce contemporary class relations by making the stress of inhabiting them feel less unbearable and seem inevitable and good, then the paradox of mindfulness lies in its capacity to somatically foreground the general and not only individual unbearableness of contemporary social relations.

Conceptualizing mindfulness as a paradoxic formation enables an accounting of its compensatory and emancipatory functions. One side of mindfulness’s paradox is its mobilization to supplement, reify, and reproduce the social relations of the present. By managing stress as a symptom of those relations, it empowers the social origin of stress, capitalist social relations, to retrench. A mutual reinscription of social conditions with social consciousness is in evidence here. The other side of mindfulness’s paradox is its
emancipatory capacity, the act-content emerging from consciousness of the social origin of stress, revulsion toward the same, and systematic renunciation of its imperatives. This represents a break, if temporary, in the endless production and reproduction of the same described above. As I have argued, the compensatory/emancipatory paradox itself has its material basis in the recurrent cycles of everyday life as a generalized workplace, and in the dynamic of capital accumulation (Cooper 60). I have claimed that mindfulness practice and discourses enact, paradoxically, the same motion of promoting creative and free human life, and delimiting it—a movement that is adequately comprehended only in the context of the objective of capital accumulation and the reproduction of uneven relations of power. Mindfulness reproduces the social contradictions and social aspirations of its moment, and in its means of doing so, resists the realization of its objectives by negating its premises and suggesting desirable alternatives to them.

To specify this claim, I have marked that, like the “authentic” modes of subjectivity and being that are mediated through and mobilized by the generalized workplace, the repertoires of mindfulness have a cultural origin—the anti-war and countercultural sentiments and practices in North America through the mid-1970s among the generation of the Great Refusal—that have been explicitly dismissed as “new age” or “woo woo” in contemporary mindfulness discourse. The paradox of mindfulness lies in capital’s management of the contradiction between labor and life by appropriating, denaturing, and generalizing means to life formerly held in common in a subculture. For example, the alternative modes of distribution and consumption of goods such as natural foods became mediated through capitalist values and generalized into “greenwashed”
forms such as CSR, Conscious Capitalism, and Whole Foods Supermarket that extend capitalist logics and values into “the commons,” the everyday, and the aspirational (Fleming 113), while retaining a recognizable web of significations and referents recalling the now-negated cooperative form of which it is, at best, a simulacrum. I have argued that the for-all-beings act-content of mindfulness is made available to be generalized in this way. That is, I have found that mindfulness at once encodes the temporalities of social life under capital, and aspirations for solidarity that opposes the same. Unlike a struggling natural-foods co-op displaced by a well-capitalized Whole Foods market, however, advice books specifically and structures of feeling generally tend not to be pushed out of business and abruptly disappear. Rather, a canon of mindfulness books is backformed of particular Pop Buddhist authors and historical figures, whose writings are selectively excerpted and anthologized in periodicals and web-based media, which puts meditations on and moral objections to the injustices of present in circulation in the mindfulness milieu as mindfulness.²⁸⁴ I have located the persistence and stability I see in the mindfulness discourse since the late 1980s in this feature of the advice book as techne.

The compensatory valence of mindfulness practice is legible from the start in its definition as a disciplined in-the-moment awareness of the present without reference to past or future, and without judgement, in the mobilization of this practice toward the objective of stress relief and performance enhancement, and in the religion of capitalism reproduced in mindfulness and insight meditation discourses. The need for stress management presupposes a stressful environment to be managed, and summons a self
made willing and able to discipline itself toward the objective of finding success in that social space. The objective of generalized mindfulness is identical to the objective of the environment that summoned it: the political program of economic liberalization, which coincided with and enabled economic transformations such as financialization and globalization that, taken together, reinforce the most basic class divide globally and produce increasing inequalities in income, health, and power. Here, as a mode of being toward stress and by extension being toward work, mindfulness practice naturalizes the made environment of contemporary class relations, and inscribes the labor of addressing the dissonance and difficulty of coping with it as a perennial and universal (if personal) pathology, and the prescribed therapy as a program of disciplined self-restructuring for better adjustment to the new and timeless reality, on one’s own.

Second, the daily devotions of committed mindfulness practice enact specific functions of financialization in everyday life, and invoke an attitude of reverence or “radical acceptance” of the same. Acceptance of the advice book contract mirrors the austerities and intervals of payment of the debt relation and its uneven relations of power, insofar as mutual equality is typically deferred; just as the advice book consumer is always a novice to the author as master (necessarily a figure of success such as the celebrity CEO, or legitimized as such), so are the roles of debtor and creditor always reified in every self-imposed program of austerity, and every self-restructuring. Further, the universalism and timelessness of the derivative is mirrored in the timelessness and ahistoricity of mindfulness practice and discourse. Both generalized mindfulness and the derivative describe what Jameson calls a contemporary “insistence on our temporal
imprisonment in the present” (“End” 709). And as the derivative offers a model for monetary universalism appropriate to globalized exchange, so does the universalism of mindfulness discourse, in which all “wisdom traditions” as represented in an ecology of quotations are made fungible into each other for the duration of the book-as-contract enact the same. This is a zone of transcendence in which the spiritual productivity of the Other, globally, is appropriated, mediated, made known in the same language, valued by the same measure, and exchanged to the benefit of appropriator. Here, mindfulness and insight meditation discourses reproduce in the realm of a universalist mysticism of the self the dominant mode of social intercourse of its moment: finance capital.

As a rationalizing and modernizing figure of development of others, the author as master represents an advance in development, a more evolved worldview, relative to those who consume the program he devises on the promise of their development. The denial of coevalness between the One and the Other of globalization as capitalist exploitation is reinscribed here. In international development by financialization, the global Other must implement on itself the disciplines, restructurings, and austerities of the One—to the profit of the One. This logic of globalization is reproduced in the relation of the advice book author and corporate consultant to the consumer aspiring to mindful compliance to the program of promised development. Further, the temporal logic of globalization, positioning the One as modern and developmentally superior to the premodern Other, is in evidence in mindfulness’ relation to its own posited Other, the “premodern views” and cooperative folkways attributed to Buddhists, and by extension, the people who correspond to those views and ways: Asian people, whose cultures and
bodies are positioned as a racial category that at once guarantees the legitimacy of mindfulness by its presumed temporal proximity, and gives the measure of mindfulness’s modernity by its presumed ancientness, the “Oriental Monk.” In this denial of coevalness, the mindful consumer is hailed to identify with and as the modern One, even as he or she is positioned structurally as an undeveloped Other in debt to the One and hailed to identify with it and its objectives. Here, an identity that feels real, meaningful, and purposive is produced through the operative fiction of capitalist religion, in direct contradiction with itself.

Third, the identity constructed by the consumer of mindfulness as a compliant subject of capital is the “self” that Wilson identifies as a novel innovation that mindfulness introduces into Buddhist history (113). The compliantly-mindful self becomes “a slave to itself” at the site of personal meaning and personal authenticity, which is the workplace (Fleming 165). The mobilization of a “true self” initiated in advice books by mindfulness and insight meditation writers such as Kabat-Zinn and Jack Kornfield, which comes into focus not as a modernization of Buddhist doctrine but as an example of the production of an operational fiction that needs to be convincing—a social need for a self that feels real, meaningful, and purposive in a social milieu that demands the performance of such as a demonstration of competence and therefore employability, and promotes the realization of such as an attainment of success, the “purpose-driven” life. Put differently, as Fleming observes, values associated with mindfulness such as compassion are tied to efforts to encourage employees to identify with and find meaning in corporate values (3). In the workplace and everyday life as a generalized workplace,
mindfulness mediates the contradiction between labor and capital to the material benefit of capital and the promise of affective comfort of labor at the site of a self produced by self-discipline toward the program of capitalism-as-religion. The “true self” that marks mindfulness’s novelty for scholars who assume mindfulness is a Buddhist program is a function of its compensatory valence that is representative of the religion of capitalism.

Overall, mindfulness practice and discourse function systematically as a compensatory formation. As such, I have argued that it is mobilized to produce and reproduce uneven relations of power in the moment of stress by summoning a self-disciplining subject that is devotional in action and faithful in conviction among increasingly proletarianized and pressured office workers and shopkeepers. In its ahistoricism, mindfulness evacuates the present of past models of sociability, which are rendered premodern, irrelevant, and undesirable even if they are remembered. In its refusal of critical judgment, mindfulness denies reflection on alternative courses in the present to the present and toward the horizon of a future that does not merely reproduce the same and demand those who labor toward that reproduction to feel good about it.

But it is not so simple as that. The emancipatory act-content of mindfulness discourse and practice resist the realization of mindfulness’s compensatory valence. This is in evidence in mindfulness practice as an Enlightenment negation of automatism, and then more trenchantly in certain of the renunciations, refusals, and affirmations of mindfulness discourse’s primary means to cultural legitimacy, its Pop Buddhist substrate.

Mindfulness practice itself contradicts its moment and objective. First, insofar as economic liberalization universalizes market relations as the measure and means of social
engagement, it upholds a regime of quantitative valuation: a practice’s value is to be measured by improvements in performance that can be quantified, or simply by the amount of money it gained the practitioner or its absence would have cost him or her. In contrast, mindfulness in practice is an exercise in qualitative valuation. No two sensations are alike, no two moments, and all are to be regarded in their specificity, with appreciation and equanimity. Second, where the financialization of everyday life is built on the market logics of self-branding by consumption, mindfulness practice negates the necessity of self and consumption—denying the impulse to “retail therapy” along with any other impulse, and instead opening onto prosocial structures of feeling perhaps not yet colonized by capital. Some of these are signaled in the diction of mindfulness discourse appropriated from Pop Buddhist texts and contexts.

Much as the One of globalization can make itself coherent only in opposition to its Others, so is mindfulness discourse preoccupied with defining itself against its own Other: the Buddhist traditions it calls upon to legitimize itself, and draws upon for much of its content, and which it reproduces in mediated, even stereotyped, form. Pop Buddhism, specifically, is the Other of mindfulness that is most readily accessible to Anglophone consumers. It often, but not always without contradiction, proposes an integral alternative to the same. This begins in a radical difference in objective between generalized mindfulness and Pop Buddhist practice. Where the former’s purpose is to empower the practitioner to manage stress and improve performance in negotiating the competitive workplace that is now everyday life, Pop Buddhism typically advocates instead a negation, renunciation, or transformation of everyday life and its objectives into
a zone of generalized liberation from compulsion—even from meaning, purpose, or direction as such. I have argued that the aspiration to liberate all beings quilted liberally into mindfulness texts is a daily affirmation to the follower of Pop Mahayana, and practice toward the realization of this aspiration necessarily brings recognition of and solidarity with those who suffer and consciousness of the causes of that suffering.

The Pop Buddhist meditations and discourses that mindfulness discourse summons often enact a critical and systematic practice of negation. The meditator declines to accept anything as real, substantial, permanent, or universal; in this context, Jameson’s claim that such negations are necessarily radical acts of resistance, even as they are paired with a renunciation of conflict and its terms of engagement, suggests some political content to the systematic negations of Pop Buddhist meditation described in chapter two. A refusal of universalism is in evidence in the Pop Buddhist practitioner’s affirmation of the specificity of tradition, school, and teacher in the act of taking refuge. Where the contemporary advice book is characterized by a demand for faithful allegiance, Pop Buddhist discourse tends to an emphasis on critical distance, at times taking a mocking attitude toward the promised redemptions of commodified spirituality specifically and consumerism generally.

Further, I have argued that the meditations in evidence in Pop Buddhist discourses do anticapitalist work—here in contrast to the mainstream of insight meditation and mindfulness books—as means to a debunking of the sense of “personal authenticity” constructed by self-disciplined consumption of advice books and participation in workplace self-development programs as “an experience of self shot through with the
tools of its own neurotic self-domination” (Fleming 12). The radical openness and indeterminacy of the emptiness of self realized in the context of Pop Buddhist practice represents the dialectical opposite to the presumably real self of the universalist advice book, and proposes alternative forms of self-making and sociability.

A central theme to Pop Buddhist discourse, the emptiness of self, is typically presented in the context of concepts such as interconnection and interbeing. These concepts name the emergence of all formations, including all individuals, societies, and ecosystems—all beings in totality—in reciprocal and dependent relation to each other, in historical time. This is how karma, the law of cause and effect and hence determination, is typically articulated in the Pop Buddhist discourses most consistently invoked in mindfulness contexts. Recalling that generalized mindfulness practice demands moment-to-moment awareness in the present, without reference to past or future and without judgment, I observe in contrast that the contemplations often prescribed in Pop Buddhist texts involve awareness of the present moment with discernment of its emergence in time, by causes and conditions, in dialectical relation to specific forms of consciousness. A specific kind of historical consciousness, of history as “what hurts” (Jameson Political Unconscious 88), obtains in these accounts of sociality as interbeing and interconnection.

Just as the ahistoricism and the reduction to the body common to generalized mindfulness and the religion of capitalism are negated here, so is the teleology of modernization common to globalization and mindfulness discourse. Far from the field of progressive or evolutionary worldviews, legible in insight meditation and conscious
capitalism, I have argued that Pop Mahayana discourse assumes a pessimistic temporality: history as a trajectory of endless and recurrent cycles of decline prior to the emergence of the next Buddha into a given world-system (S. lokadhatu), such that the present is not infrequently characterized as a “Dharma-ending age” (S. kali-yuga), inauspicious and inevitably getting worse—a miasma of endless frictions and determinations. There is no meaning or purpose ultimately to be found here; history as such is held to be inherently meaningless on its own terms, hopeless, and hence a space of possibility by virtue of its being unbound by an a priori agenda of progress or modernization. The pessimistic historicism negates the narratives of progress and modernization reproduced in mindfulness discourse from the ideologies of globalization, and mindfulness’s universalist appeal to an authentic or “purpose-driven” life.

The emancipatory valence that mindfulness brings forward as its Other is not limited to negation. The meditator made willing through disciplined practice to affirm that he or she need not assume the universality of his or her historical position or naturalized sense of self is simultaneously called upon to reflect on the equal capacity of all to the same realization. This capacity, described as Buddha-nature in Pop Buddhist discourse, is the context for meditations on the injustices of globalization, inducing a felt sense of solidarity in the practitioner with the Other, which is an antonym to the identifications at work in the consumption of the contemporary advice book. These meditations are in especially strong evidence in the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the so-called “grandfather” of mindfulness. Generally, Pop Buddhist meditations on compassion and lovingkindness, which are now omnipresent themes in mindfulness
discourse, tend to invoke a revulsion with the injustices of capitalist social relations, and a diction of peace and peacemaking explicitly in opposition to the objectives of capital accumulation, which are often described in the shorthand of greed and violence. I locate the appeals for environmental and social justice made by writers such as the current Dalai Lama here. The imperative to ensure the well-being of all beings and not one’s own position only is refracted into reflections on the totality of sentient beings, and then beyond into the totality of lived relations. *For All Beings* crosses into social justice and environmental justice activism—a systematic cultivation of a recognition of coevalness, and eagerness for mutuality. While they are not unproblematic, Pop Buddhist texts do make a utopian mode available that recuperates a future that is embedded in an Enlightenment discourse of the present, a call for a just, nonviolent future as an alternative to the private redemptions of the present.

The mobilization of mindfulness brings with it a chain of negations and affirmations that resist the strategic use of mindfulness as a means to the reproduction of class power in the moment of stress. Stress is not only to be managed as a personal problem here; the production of stress and its injustices are negated, and an alternative is affirmed. This refraction, coupled with the sociability demanded of the Mahayana practitioner makes an Enlightenment conversion possible. Unlike the consumer of the workplace mindfulness who is hailed to accept the terms of the contract to restructure his or her life toward compensatory objectives on the promise of personal freedom, the Pop Mahayanist is positioned to envision him or herself as an agent for the liberation of all—
making a covenant to realize an emancipatory objective. Both imperatives are available at once in generalized mindfulness.

In this way, mindfulness counters the objective that set it into motion—the management of stress and enhancement of performance by the standards and toward the objectives of the generalized workplace—and brings to mind appealing alternative objectives and trajectories, puts them in circulation, and empowers them at the level of practice. The paradox of mindfulness is made legible by cutting through the narratives mindfulness discourse articulates about itself and instead situating it in the historical and social context that is mystified in it—the stress and the temporality that are its preoccupation and give its rationale.
NOTES

1 Wilson describes the emergence of mindfulness as a Buddhist practice generalized to American culture: “authorized by science, endorsed by Oprah, marketed by Buddhists, appropriated by self-help gurus, it appeared in such a tidal wave of publications and applications that it seemed that everyone was doing mindfulness, in every conceivable situation, without any need to announce one’s commitment to Buddhism to do so” (Wilson 40).

2 The March 2005 issue of National Geographic magazine features the striking cover photo of the Tibetan Buddhist master Drugu Chogyal Rinpoche’s face covered in electrodes as a representative image of cutting-edge research in neuroscience. The Tibetan is at once ancient and modern here, thanks to well-publicized research on the brain activity of Tibetan and Tibetan trained masters in research labs such as Richard Davidson’s at the University of Wisconsin, prompted and encouraged by the current Dalai Lama.

3 This argument is informed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concept of the commons or “communism of capital” (51).

4 Bateson’s presence is significant in that his contributions to mind-body therapies such as biofeedback anticipate mindfulness self-help programs such as the Relaxation Response and mindfulness-based stress reduction.

5 Kornfield is named as Sunno Bikkhu in Loka, indicating that he was formally a monk at the time

6 Kornfield left IMS in 1984 to teach in California, building the center that would be called Spirit Rock, arguably more influential to generalized mindfulness than IMS. According to Wendy Cadge, this split came as “growing pains as tensions developed around how the center should institutionalize and plan for the future” (34), and marked differences from IMS in Kornfield’s direction at Spirit Rock, where more non-Theravadin, and specifically more psychotherapeutic, material was incorporated. In this context, Cadge observes with some understatement that “The line between vipassana meditation and psychotherapy has been blurry at some insight meditation centers” (35).

7 Wilson argues that mindfulness was transformed from “an obscure Asian religious technique to a widely touted panacea and a serious money-making industry” in the last twenty years (2).

8 I mark that scholars of religion are not alone in reproducing this narrative. It is also legible, for example, in the chapters of The Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness.

9 While David McMahan does describe the emergence of “modernist” Budddhisms as exemplars of a singular historical movement (5-6), he also observes that they arise not only as accommodations to Eurocentric power, but often as sites of resistance to imperialism and “western hegemony” (14).

10 Prebish locates both insight meditation and MBSR together—he treats them as an integrated totality—as one among many “North American Buddhist communities” (152). Similarly, Richard Hughes Seager describes insight meditation as an American Buddhist movement (170-71), and aspect of what he calls the “Theravada Spectrum” (59)—meaning it is at once an Americanization, a novelty, but recognizable as belonging to Theravada Buddhist tradition. Wilson relies on these very categories in his distinction of “modern” from “premodern” Buddhist views, and association of generalized mindfulness with the modern (45).

11 “The Everyday Sublime” is Batchelor’s contribution to the volume After Mindfulness, intended for researchers in clinical psychology. Here, an insight meditation instructor, Batchelor, is anthologized as an authority among positive psychologists, and his descriptions of Buddhism and mindfulness are taken as normative throughout the volume. This is an example of what I call “psychological Buddhism.”
12 Much historical scholarship on Buddhism in North America follows in the path cut by Rick Fields’ *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (1981), which gives a trajectory American spiritual history leading to a redemptive moment when Baby Boomers find their authentic calling in Buddhist centers.

13 Iwamura argues that “the particular way in which Americans write themselves into the story” of Buddhist history “is not a benign, nonideological act; rather, it constructs a modernized cultural patriarchy in which Anglo-Americans reimagine themselves as the protectors, innovators, and guardians of Asian religions and cultures and wrest the authority to define these traditions from others” (*Virtual* 21).

14 Cheah characterizes this dynamic as one of white supremacy he traces through Western Buddhist, particularly insight meditation, discourse.

15 Sedgwick claims it introduces “distortions” into the scholarship on contemporary Buddhist forms and practices in North America, including but not limited to: “a narrative of decline that deligitimates the modern and the vernacular in Buddhist studies; an eagerness to attribute Western roots to Asian Buddhist representation; histories of complicity with nativist and colonialist projects in Japan as well as fascist ones in Italy; arrogant and ignorant claims, such as Jung’s, to speak for an exotic Oriental psyche; and a double-binding enlistment of Asian Buddhists in the incompatible roles of informant and guru to scholars from the West” (155).

16 I mark that the reduction of the qualitatively diverse Buddhist traditions extant in North America now to a singular modernizing trend in the Western Buddhist narrative bears a strong resemblance to capital’s appropriation of qualitatively diverse productive forces (labor and the produce of nature) to a singular, qualitative regime of value (Anderson, “Critical,” “Natura Naturans,” “Accumulating-Capital”).

17 Davies offers a second explanation for why there is such a thing as a mindfulness discourse that is distinct from its scientific rationale. In describing the content and function of neural activity, researchers follow the injunction of their discipline to refrain from making any remarks that do not seem objective, and in doing so, “they leave a gap for a more ‘subjective’ and passive discourse,” including “quasi-Buddhist injunctions to simply sit, be, and ‘notice’ events as they flow in and out of the consciousness” (259-260).

18 Between 2007 and 2016, I attended seven English-language Buddhist events in North America (including three multi-day retreats) in which the word “mindfulness” was not uttered once; at such an event when it was, mindfulness was described in contradistinction to “what you may have read about in meditation books.”

19 This dissertation is concerned with the specifically Buddhist programs of these authors, and brackets explicitly Engaged Buddhist agendas as much as possible. Sallie King defines Engaged Buddhism as a kind of social ethic corresponding to a globalized and modern Buddhist sensibility in *Being Benevolence*. Ken Knabb has published critical analyses of Engaged Buddhist tactics and strategies at his *Bureau of Public Secrets* website.

20 Barbara Brown’s *New Mind, New Body* (1974), describing the practice of biofeedback, is one example.

21 In *Loka*, Trungpa asserts that his rationale for the 1974 summer session was “not so much trying to bring it together, like a spoon of sugar in your lemonade so that it becomes more drinkable, but the point is more like a firework—not so much that each will fight with each other in the destructive sense, but that there is an enormous individualism in terms of the doctrines and teachings that are presented. All of them are valid but at the same time there is a meeting point which takes place in a spark!” (18).

22 The Buddhist primers, anthologies, and meditation manuals available to North American consumers prior to Trungpa, including those by Asian Buddhist teachers or scholars resident in the United States, situated Buddhism (especially Zen) as a kind of mysticism worthy of the Western mind and distinct from any archaic superstition. Nyogen Senzaki (1953) distinguishes Zen as mysticism from Buddhism as religion, and positions the Christian mystic Meister Eckhardt as a Zen master; D.T. Suzuki (1957) identifies a mysticism common to Zen Buddhist practice and the Christianity of Eckhardt. A philosophical idealism saturates the translations in the 1952 edition of Dwight Goddard’s *Buddhist Bible*, an important substrate to the writings of Jack Kerouac and other Beat Buddhist popularizers.

23 McMahan argues that the “privatization” of Buddhism has “radically decontextualized particular elements of the tradition, sundered them from traditional goals and contexts, and re-embedded Buddhism in wholly new contexts” (251). I argue that there is no reason to assume that a historically Buddhist practice
such as seated meditation, when recontextualized toward a wholly new set of objectives and therefore serving an entirely different function, remains a Buddhist practice.

24 The Western Buddhist narrative makes distinctions among practices by the relative modernity of doctrines or worldviews corresponding to them. Here, I propose a means to functional distinctions among practices that occupy much of the same cultural space.

25 I mark that this set of objectives does not correspond to or imply a philosophical nihilism (Norbu 31-65).

26 I mark systematic gender inequality in Buddhist cultures, institutions, and scriptures as one way in which traditional Buddhism is problematic in its own ways. The ways in which gender inequality is articulated in Pop Buddhism and insight meditation is an unspoken subtext to this dissertation.

27 This dissertation attempts an ontology of the present, which requires, according to Jameson, “an ideological analysis as well as a phenomenological description” (“Aesthetics” 101). I describe the phenomenon of mindfulness in the context of its historical emergence and generalization, which makes a functional interpretation possible. However, mindfulness’s function exceeds ideology—Jameson’s target (“Aesthetics” 102)—insofar as it paradoxically challenges itself at the level of strategy and objective.

28 According to Garry Wills’ summary of this dialectic, “the process of war [...] is reciprocal, a mutual altering, one of the other (Wechselwirkung), which works each side up, ratchet by ratchet” a process that describes an “oscillation as well as a mutuality” (Wills 282-283). I mark in passing the resemblance of Joanna Macy’s description of dependent origination in World As Lover, World As Self to the reciprocities Foucault sees in capitalist social relations, and the mutual reinvention of Buddhism and American culture Wilson claims in Mindful America.

29 Melinda Cooper observes that “in order to maximize its own process of self-accumulation, capital needs to mobilize and promote the creative forces of human life, yet at the same time the imperatives of surplus-value extortion mean that it is constantly trying to undermine these very forces” (60).

30 Foucault is not alone in this assessment. Julian Reid describes Clausewitz, the archetypal theorist of war, precisely as a strategist of and even for contemporary capitalism, observing that “military strategists make the same adjustments to the way they think about war making as business strategists have made over recent years to the ways they think about wealth creation” (21).

31 I mark here that the anticapitalist modes in Pop Buddhist discourse repurpose the lexicon of warfare—one trains to become a warrior for peace, one meditates to be peace—to register an alternative to warfare as such, and the microaggressions of everyday life that the belabored endure.

32 According to Benjamin, capitalism is “not only as a religiously conditioned construction, as Weber thought, but as an essentially religious phenomenon” (259). That is, where Weber sought to describe as a work ethic specific to Protestantism impactful on the development of capitalist society, Benjamin outlined specific characteristics of the doctrines and devotions peculiar to capitalist societies generally. All of them are legible in generalized mindfulness and insight meditation discourses.

33 Michael Stone, for example, objects to the use of mindfulness as means to optimize “institutions of organized violence” such as Google and the U.S. military—given its origin in a systematic practice of nonviolence (P. avihimsa, S. ahimsa) (n.p.)

34 While, as Lau asserts, “Through commodification and consumption, seemingly subversive cultural critiques are integrated” into what “systems of New Age capitalism” (133), Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that “religious brand cultures are positioned as a response—even a challenge—to advanced capitalism” (169). Together, these claims describe a dynamic that involves contemporary capital positioning a means to its reproduction as a challenge to the same.

35 Sloterdijk defines “any operation that provides or improves the actor’s qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not” as practice (4). In a spiritual discipline, the intervals of practice are universalized, leaving no “off” time, into a total “doctrine of life practice” (6), and the operations and renunciations invoked become if not ends in themselves, then omnipresent engagements.

36 Sloterdijk argues, following Foucault, that “human claims to freedom and self-determination are not suppressed by the disciplines, regimes, and power games, but rather enabled” (152)—claims to freedom, as distinct from material access to the means to live freely, may be merely claims but they are not without significance.
If the financialized self is to invest in his or herself as a capitalist would in the production of a commodity (in this case that self’s own labor-power), then it follows that the fundamental crisis of capital that Marx describes in Capital III—that of overproduction, would obtain in the entrepreneurial self. Rudolf Bahro’s concept of surplus consciousnes is made newly relevant on this point (256-7).

It is not merely coincidence that mindfulness discourse is a practice of affirmation (of a true self, of a personal meaning, of a personal life made of the stuff of samsara) (chapter three), while the Pop Buddhism it summons (chapters four, five, and six) involves a systematic logic of analysis and negation of the same (chapter two).

The value of the paradox concept to this inquiry is in elucidating the strategic use of culture in the application of power, in this instance class power. In Hartmann and Honneth’s emphasis on objectives, their concept of paradox is in continuity with the analysis of capitalism Foucault initiates in his Clausewitz-inspired lectures on biopolitics, and with Harvey’s claim that economic liberalization is a program of retrenching the position of the capitalist class in a time of vulnerability—that is, a program with a knowable objective, the reproduction of class relations.

This text records a dialogue between the Greek king Menander and the Indian Buddhist monk Nagasena—enacting what I imagined at the time as a kind of dialogue between the militarized and rational West and the spiritual-ascetic East, an assumption reiterated in the insight meditation books of the time.

Macy’s World as Lover, World as Self (1991), which includes an early attempt to reckon with Buddhist dialectics in an accessible manner, and Surya Das’ Awakening the Buddha Within (1998), came to drive my interest in Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhist dialectics, and Dzogchen.

I led a Tendai Buddhist practice group based in Arlington, Virginia called Great River Tendai Sangha from 2010 to 2015.

The Oxford English Dictionary archives stress’s emergence from a novel scientific discourse in the mid-20th century to a descriptor of a “familiar human experience” by 1976, when its contemporary use had crystallized.

Touchstones in this scholarship include Ernst Mandel’s Late Capitalism, Michel Aglietta’s A Theory of Capitalist Regulation, and Giovanni Arrighi’s The Long Twentieth Century.

This is in part because Harvey offers an account of this juncture way that is conceptually contiguous with Birmingham-era Cultural Studies work such as Policing the Crisis, in which economic liberalization as a political program is seen waiting in the wings as a solution (for capital) to the crisis policed in the mid-1970s in the figure of Margaret Thatcher.

Juliet B. Schor (1991) and Arlie Russell Hochschild (1997) describe the emergence of a uniquely stressful work and life experience in North America in this period.

At this time, some Buddhists welcomed Kabat-Zinn’s innovation. For instance, the word stress by the same time had entered translations of Buddhist scriptures intended for North American readers: the American monk Thanissaro Bikkhu’s Access to Insight website, freely distributing texts in English since the early 1990s, translates the Buddhist concept of dukkha not in the conventional way, as suffering, but as stress, and the Buddhist path, by extension, as stress relief.

Economic liberalization is also visible in some of Kabat-Zinn’s later comments on health care generally. Good medicine should “challenge and encourage people to become their own authorities, to take more responsibility for their own lives, their own bodies, their own health” (Wherever 191-2). Kabat-Zinn claims: “We call it ‘mobilizing the inner resources of the patient’ for healing, or for just coping better […] for getting by more skillfully” (Wherever 192). The discourse of personal empowerment here reifies the compensatory form mindfulness takes: rather than seeking to promote better health for all by addressing the social causes of disease, the intervention involves arming and armoring the subject to get along better with the present.

Joshua Eaton and Kali Holloway make such claims in articles published at salon.com, with titles such as “Gentrifying the Dharma: How the 1 percent is Hijacking Mindfulness” and “Mindfulness is Capitalist Grift: How Faux Enlightenment Maintains our Status Quo.” Holloway argues that mindfulness as prescribed “by America’s titans of industry bears no relation to its anti-materialist origins” (n.p.). According to Carole Pateman, the contract in politically and economically liberal societies is a means to the regulation of binding associations, enforceable by the state, whereby men presumed to be free enter into...
a relation that is presumed to be mutually beneficial, as in liberal and neoliberal assumptions regarding the wage relation (Hayek120-2).

51 According to John Frow, neoliberal doctrine involves, “as Gary Becker puts it, a ‘unified framework for understanding all human behavior’” (Frow 426)

52 Harvey claims that “Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite” (Brief 19).

53 According to Peter Fleming, the “authentic” workplace disciplines through the coercion of the belabored finding personal meaning and purpose in productive activity that profits the shareholders in the corporation for which one works, and not oneself (40). Workers willingly participate in the program of authenticity. Fleming claims, because authenticity represents an aspiration to address a felt lack: “a lack of power, lack of control, lack of choice, lack of dignity, lack of meaningful joy, a lack of community outside the commodity form; to put it rather telegraphically, a lack of a life” (5) in everyday life as a workplace.

54 Futurists such as Daniel Pink have celebrated the generalization of the flexible workplace into all aspects of everyday life as a site of creative meaning- and self-making. Pink celebrates workers as entrepreneurial selves, volunteers in a “free agent” army, heroic figures in the flexible economy, in which a putatively liberatory array of self-arranged informal, unpredictable, term-limited, and freelance work arrangements displace the adamantine routines of industrial capitalism. In practice, however, free agency is a cipher for precariousness. As Andrew Ross observes, “No one […] can any longer expect a fixed pattern of employment in the course of their lifetime, and they are under more and more pressure to anticipate, and prepare for, a future in which they will still be able to compete in a changing marketplace” (2).

55 Here, a social environment is made that summons a particular kind of self—a self-making self, a self that is attentive to the present-tense textures of his or her moment in anticipation of making tactical and strategic changes in response to environmental shifts. Foucault famously refers to this self as the enterprise subject or homo economicus: “the individual’s life itself—with his relationships to his private property, for example, with his family, household, insurance, and retirement—must make him into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise” (Birth 241). The self as public citizen or worker is reinscribed as a singular, self-responsible actor, and everyday life is recast as a workplace appropriate to an entrepreneur.

56 Lazzarato emphasizes the “univocity of production” of subjectivity and commodities—the same power relations and modes of discipline articulate both at once, in the same movement (88).

57 Carrette and King specify the function of commodified spiritualities in everyday life at present as means to “an efficient, productive, and pacified workforce” (29), and to promote compliance to class power (17). Fleming analyzes the reduction of such spiritualities among other alternative subject positions to stereotype and their mobilization as means to management in Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work. According to Martin, “Financialization promises a way to develop the self” insofar as it “offers a highly elastic mode of self-mastery that channels doubt over uncertain activity into fruitful activity” (Financialization 9).

59 According to Lazzarato, the debt relation enacts at once a retrenchment of class relations globally—those with the power to lend, and those who must borrow to reproduce their own lives (4)—and couples the production of a class-specific subjectivity with production as such: “Debt directly entails life discipline and a way of life that requires ‘work on the self,’ a permanent negotiation with oneself, a specific form of subjectivity: that of the indebted man. In other words, debt reconfigures biopolitical power by demanding a production of subjectivity specific to indebted man” (104).

60 Fredric Jameson, in “The End of Temporality” and “The Aesthetics of Singularity,” and Randy Martin, in Knowledge LTD and Financialization of Daily Life, argue that the derivative is a figure with significant explanatory power for contemporary culture.

61 This is informed by analyses of the political economy of the derivative is described by Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee, and Dick Bryan and Michael Rafferty.

62 According to Jameson, this is experienced as a “contemporary imprisonment in the present” (“Aesthetics”120), which corresponds to a “reduction of our temporality to the present of the body” (“Aesthetics”127)—a juncture he describes here and elsewhere as “the death of historicity.”
Fabian describes the temporalizing function of capital’s universalism as a denial of coevalness between the One and the Other by the One: “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (31). While Fabian presents this as delimited to anthropology, his evidence is not limited only to that discipline insofar as the denial of coevalness is an intellectual and political tactic of capital; it is now a means to the reproduction of the class power of the One over the Other. Further, his argument is generalizable to discourses that assume the same temporality, such as the religion of capital generally and mindfulness discourses specifically.

Cooper describes the creditor-debtor relationship in globalization as governmentality in terms of the violence of that imperialism; the self-implementation of what Cooper calls “home-grown” structural adjustment policies” in South Africa and across the so-called developing world at the behest of lender-advisor institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (59) enact on a global scale the demand of creditors to restructure workers’ everyday lives around the imperative to honor a debt, and the uneven relation of power at work in that imperative. The development of the global Other by the rational and modern order posited by finance through credit parallels that of the belabored subject of the flexible workplace, who is offered means to personal restructuring and austerity to compete in a generalized (“global”) marketplace. The same kind of power differential articulates both junctures: the power to promise credit as a means to potential improvements in competitiveness and demand timely, predictable repayment mirrors the power to promise potential employment in the future at the cost of timely, predictable practice toward a given program now.

Evolution, Fabian observes, is not mobilized in this context in the Darwinian sense of discontinuity and directionlessness, but in a seemingly Providential unfolding of progressively better-developed worldviews, benchmarks of 19th century taxonomies of development (15). Such evolutionary thought, significantly for this dissertation, is explicitly in circulation among mindfulness advocates, and articulated in close detail in the writings of the New Age author Ken Wilber.

The compensatory valence of mindfulness corresponds to the “Western Buddhism” in Slavoj Žižek’s puckish declaration in 2001 that such formations represent “the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism” (n.p.). The emancipatory valence of mindfulness corresponds to Sloterdijk’s concept of conversion, which is available in Pop Buddhist formations in the practice of refuge, but not in generalized mindfulness. Sloterdijk argues that “all conversion is subversion” and for this reason in the process of conversion “lies an inexhaustible ‘revolutionary’ potential, at least as long as it does not content itself with individual reversal” (300).

“Mindfulness articles and books are primarily illustrated by pictures of smiling, happy white folks,” Wilson observes (64). This is in evidence in the editorial policies and practices of Tricycle magazine, which had positioned itself as a Western Buddhist publication by the mid-1990s. Samuel Bercholz, a founding editor of the magazine, to declare in 1998 that Tricycle had become a “platform for disparaging teachers of Asian descent” (n.p.).

Eudaimonia has long been upheld as an objective for mindfulness practice. In “Mindfulness and the Good Life,” Manu Bazzano promotes eudaimonia as a positive outcome for mindfulness (“Good Life” 66). This objective was first proposed by the psychologist C.D. Ryff in 1989; eudaimonia is an example of the emergence of generalized mindfulness not from Buddhism, but from research in psychology.

David Loy and Ron Purser, a Zen teacher and a management professor respectively, object to what they understand to be the reduction of the Buddhist practice of mindfulness to what they call McMindfulness, or mindfulness generalized, in a 2013 Huffington Post column. This jeremiad and the consequent exchanges among mindfulness leaders indicate that there is a consensus that the differences between the use of the term “mindfulness” among Buddhists and in mass culture are significant.

David Brazier attributes the narrative of mindfulness as capable of “smuggling a variety of Buddhist ways of thinking into popular culture” to the insight meditation teacher Stephen Batchelor (59).
73 The Sanity We Are Born With (2005), like Work, Sex, Money (2011) and Mindfulness in Action (2015), is part of an apparent effort by Shambhala Publications and disciples of Trungpa to recuperate the late Buddhist master as a contemporary mindfulness expert.
74 It was around this time that Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Prize for Peace (Forest 105).
75 Donald Lopez summarizes the research performed by scholars such as Davidson and its significance (197-210). While mindfulness writers tend to present these findings as unproblematic, neuroscientists including Davidson describe extraordinary difficulties and limitations in this research (Davidson et. al.2002, Davidson et. al. 2007).
76 Extensive treatments on the role of motivation for practice exist in both traditions. Nearly all are summarized in the “graduated path” tradition of the eleventh-century Indian pandit Atisha, which is available to the present in the Lam Rim literature of the Kagyu and Gelug schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In one of these is personal stress relief in the sense Selye gave it, the realization of a personal vision pace the “soul stories” Kabat-Zinn celebrates in Wherever You Go, There You Are, or the elucidation of a “true self” as in Kornfield’s A Path with Heart, suggested as plausible objectives for Buddhist practice.
77 Wilson claims: “There were virtually no publications on mindfulness in the 1980s by non-Buddhist authors, and even among the Buddhist authors that used the word mindfulness in their title were nearly all by Thich Nhat Hanh or writers with a connection to the Theravada tradition” (37).
78 It is not coincidental that the dialectical logic Goleman identifies in the conquest of the mind by Enlightenment discipline is identical to the dialectic Foucault recognizes in contemporary capitalist sociality (Birth 164).
79 This figure, borrowed from a translated Zen aphorism, is often reproduced in insight meditation and mindfulness guides. Kornfield uses it in different contexts to describe the archetypal meaning behind the tales of a wise storyteller (Wise 147) and the universal significance of widely-varying spiritual traditions as maps of the mind (Laundry 117), in both cases making disparate value systems fungible into each other, as a financial derivative does.
80 Hanson’s Buddha’s Brain exemplifies this trend.
81 The formula of abandoning evil actions, cultivating good ones, and purifying the mind is a summary of a traditional verse (P. and S. gāthā) that appears throughout the extensive Buddhist canon, and is regularly recited in many temples.
82 The psychological Buddhism of The Meditative Mind is in evidence in the 1995 bestseller Emotional Intelligence (311), which gives a lexicon of practice used in mindfulness workplace programs such as Google’s Search Inside Yourself.
83 Dawn Foster, writing in The Guardian, argues for this possibility from her own experience in a workplace mindfulness program.
84 Here, Kabat-Zinn is departing significantly from the main of Buddhist doctrine, particularly with regard to the two categories of truth, provisional and ultimate, described concisely in the writings of Kabat-Zinn’s Zen teacher, Seung Sahn (Sahn 291-300): while history is ultimately empty and hence unreal, from the perspective of those who suffer, the field of history is reality. His position corresponds much more closely to insight meditation writers such as Kornfield.
85 This marks a doctrinal difference between mindfulness and Pop Buddhism on the site of Enlightenment in the subject: the former emphasizes brain structures and archetypal speculations on the world’s cultural heritage, while the latter is predicated in the concept of Buddha-nature (S. Tathagatagarbha), which signifies the capability of all sentient beings to awaken.
86 Kabat-Zinn misspells Wilber’s name as Wilbur, which may mislead some readers. Further, Wilber’s extensive and highly idiosyncratic remarks on the concept of emptiness (S. śānyatā) and his methodological presuppositions largely correspond to the concept of psychological Buddhism (5-6).
87 Biofeedback offers an equally relevant if more complex and technologically-mediated example. It was popularized in Barbara Brown’s 1974 guide, New Mind, New Body.
88 For example, see Kabat-Zinn’s remarks on “voluntary simplicity” in Wherever You Go, There You Are (Wherever 69), or the emphasis on cultivating “useful mental habits” in Search Inside Yourself.
I hypothesize that the precedent for Trungpa’s meditation-as-sacrifice theme is Chö (Lion’s Roar 58), which is a rigorous Tibetan form of meditation practice—a ritual practice in every sense—and according to Jerome Edou, the only major tradition of Buddhist meditation founded by a woman (Machig Labdrön, 1055-1149). Chö has been popularized by Tsultrim Allione as a means to resolve inner conflict in Feeding your Demons (2008), an advice book with significant Jungian glosses suggestive of influence from insight meditation writers.

Taking wellbeing as an ultimate objective for meditation practice differs from the use of long-life rituals and other healing practices among Buddhist traditions. In the former, Buddhism as such is regarded, in the last analysis, as a health program. In the latter, practitioners who face mundane problems are given tactics for overcoming or managing them, so that practitioners can pursue the objective of arhatship (in Theravada) or Buddhahood (in Mahayana). While Buddhist cultures do contain therapeutic interventions, as evidenced by Janet Gyatso’s analysis of such elaborate systems as traditional Tibetan medicine, these are not regarded as ends in themselves by Buddhist institutions or leaders (as distinct from medical professionals), and Buddhist praxis is not understood as a means to improved health in an everyday sense.

Barbara Ehrenreich observes there are no consistent measures of happiness or wellbeing—no consistent definitions—in the positive psychology books she surveyed (2-3).

I mark here that traditional Buddhist presentations of mindfulness (P. sati, S. smṛti) rarely resemble the affirmations of positive psychology and generalized mindfulness discourse. For example, a 1982 poem of the Tibetan master Nyoshul Khenpo informs the practitioner: “Lack of mindfulness piles up lots of shit./Without mindfulness you sleep in an ocean of piss./Without mindfulness you are a heartless zombie, a walking corpse” (124).

The “contented heart” theme emerges from Rubin’s reading of Samuel Pepys in the context of her attempts at loving-kindness practice (258-9). This seemingly non sequitur juxtaposition is sensible in the ecology of quotations in insight meditation books by Kornfield and Goldstein (Seeking 175) and Sylvia Boorstein (22) in which the phrase recurs; it is also reproduced by the San Francisco-based Zen teacher Reb Anderson (36).

This is an allusion to Goleman’s concept of primal leadership, described in chapter four.

This is an allusion to insight meditation leader Tara Brach’s 2013 volume True Refuge, analyzed in chapter three.

Trungpa’s description of samsara as an endless cycle of affirmation, described in a previous chapter, is the intended referent here.

This alludes to Trungpa’s concept of hopelessness, described in chapter two.

The emphasis on negation as an Enlightenment practice of emancipatory political significance in this chapter and beyond is informed by Reason and Revolution and The Young Hegel.

Trungpa’s spoken English was still limited in the late 1960s, but he had mastered it by his 1970 debut in North America (Gimian “Introduction” xxiv).

Trungpa asserts: “When you spell out the truth it loses its essence and becomes either ‘my’ truth or ‘your’ truth; it becomes an end in itself. When you spell out the truth you are spending your capital while no one gets any profit [...] By implying the truth, the truth doesn’t become anyone’s property” (Shambhala 170).

In Liberating Intimacy, Peter Hershock describes this mode of Buddhist discourse as a kind of enlightening narrativity (the jazz analogy is Hershock’s); my understanding of Trungpa’s use of shock, surprise, and cynical humor as a mobilization of a specifically Buddhist dialectic is informed by Brook Ziporyn’s Being and Ambiguity.

Trungpa explicitly advised against anyone attempting to “systematize” his work, as Ouspensky had done to Gurdjieff’s (“Spiritual Will”).

The pun on Trungpa’s monastic name, Chökyi Gyatso (“Ocean of Dharma”) is, of course, intended.

In Trungpa’s teaching, mindfulness is “entirely associated with traditional Buddhist goals,” and not applied to “eating, sex, work, parenting, school, or other such activities” (Wilson 36) even though his work would later be edited into advice books with titles like Work, Sex, Money on topics such as mindful work, and he would be cited as an exemplar of mindful leadership (chapter four).
Trungpa’s frequent references to the present as a dark age, most explicit perhaps in his *Sadhana of Mahamudra*, glosses the Sanskrit concept of Kali-yuga—an age of decline and deterioration of Buddhist practice and institutions (*Bodhisattva Path* 311).

Buddha-nature (*S. Tathagatagarbha*) is a concept developed to an extraordinary degree of complexity and nuance in Mahayana Buddhism generally. SK Hookham’s *The Buddha Within* summarizes the *zhentong* interpretation thereof of Trungpa and his Karma Kagyu school favor.

Convert Buddhism in North America prior to Trungpa had been tied to a kind of irrationalism that claimed an affiliation to Japanese Zen traditions, as in the writings of Alan Watts. For instance, *A Buddhist Bible* (1932), deeply influential among the Beat writers, presents the best of Buddhist culture as an alternative to rationality, including the rationality internal to Buddhist tradition.

This overgeneralized summary of Madhyamaka primarily reflects my own understanding of the philosopher Nagarjuna, whom I have studied independently and in the course of my training as a novice priest at Tendai Buddhist Institute, Canaan, New York.

Trungpa’s concepts of enlightened society and basic sanity likely emerged at least in part from ongoing discussion with his students around Eric Fromm’s *The Sane Society*, which he encouraged some of his students to read with care (Gimian “Introduction” xxiv).

There is one potential exception to this claim in the Mahayana canon. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, if read literally and selectively, has been taken to endorse a “true self” by some internet commenters and bloggers.

Kabat-Zinn’s dismissal of the concept of a true self as a “New Age distortion” is representative of this tendency (*Wherever* 238).

*Cutting Through* is a thoroughly ground Buddhist text. For instance, the titular “cutting through,” like the sacrifice theme in “Is Meditation Therapy?,” recalls the practice of Chö (the Tibetan word means “to sever”). Chö is strongly influenced by the writings of the Indian master Aryadeva, whose writings on Madhyamaka emphasize the distinctions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist views, as does *Cutting Through* (Edou 15-38). At the same time, Trungpa suggests the text also has a connection to the Dzogchen (*S. Maha Ati*) practice of Trekchö, sometimes translated as “cutting through,” when he claims: “The maha ati level is necessary in order to save the dharma [Buddhist teachings] from being parcelled and marketed” (*Journey Without Goal* 135).

Thirty years later, Whole Foods market would, in generalizing the organic food market as a venue for commodities of conviction and well-being, also contribute to the generalization of mindfulness as good business sense (*Conscious Capitalism*). Allison Lakomski’s history of Whole Foods accounts for the mediation of the utopian aspirations represented in cooperative cultures around food through the economic liberalism of this corporation.

Trungpa identifies absolute renunciation with the activity of Dorje Trollö (*Crazy Wisdom* 11), which is the core of the *Sadhana of Mahamudra* practice performed regularly to the present at Shambhala Centers.

In contrast to Trungpa’s insistence on its secular nature, the Shambhala teachings have their roots in Buddhist scripture, specifically the *Kalachakra Tantra*, and in the Tibetan Buddhist genre of “treasure” texts or terma (*Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature*).

I hypothesize that Trungpa’s use of descriptors indicating dignity of posture in meditation practice is an artifact of his well-known interest in Japanese Buddhism, particularly the Sōtō school of Zen. One of Dōgen’s aphorisms, “A dignified bearing is Buddhahood,” ties physical posture to the realization of Buddha-nature (quoted in Yokohama 126).

“Authentic presence” is Trungpa’s translation of the Tibetan term *wang thang*, which, he claims, more literally means “field of power” (*Shambhala* 159)

Here I recall Jameson’s insistence that “history is what hurts” (*Political Unconscious* 102)

As a marker of his conviction that the Shambhala vision could be realized in his own lifetime, Trungpa stipulated in his will what should be done with his estate if it had been fully realized, and what should be done if it had not yet (“Spiritual Will”).

Trungpa’s summary interpretation of the history of utopianism and its failures in the USSR corresponds in general outline to that of Susan Buck-Morss (*Dreamworld*).
I will argue that Wilber’s self-styled magnum opus, *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* (2000) and other business-school spirituality texts, consistently do just this.

I describe Rich’s leadership as fatal insofar as his practice of knowingly having unprotected sex with his disciples without disclosing he had been diagnosed as HIV-positive led to at least one death other than his own. Jeremy Hayward gives a firsthand account of this (407-408).

I mark that the Dalai Lama’s encouragement of Tibetan masters to participate in brain-imaging studies probing the impact of meditation on the central nervous system as in the work of Richard Davidson has been a necessary condition for the positioning of the Buddhist as a legitimator of generalized mindfulness practice.

Tara Brach, for instance, relies on the Dalai Lama’s universalism of the instinct to happiness (*Radical 132*).

This claim is documented in the 1993 VHS series *Western Buddhist Teachers’ Conference*. Many insight meditation leaders, including Kornfield and Batchelor, were present at the Conference.

The *Art of Happiness* (1998) was preceded by insight meditation author Sharon Salzberg’s *Lovingkindness*, which also purports to be about happiness. This coincidence suggests the early adoption of happiness and wellbeing into the mindfulness discourse, and perhaps a demand for it from readers at this time.

This is a point of contradiction in Pop Buddhist discourses. While masters such as Trungpa and the Dalai Lama advocate for particular uses of critical thought as Buddhist practice, mindfulness influenced writers such as Steve Hagen, author of *Buddhism is Not What you Think* (2004), argue instead that thought and Buddhist practice are largely antithetical to each other.

For instance, Google’s mindfulness director Chade-Meng Tan quotes it (*Search Inside Yourself* 47); Alan Wallace argues a strong version of this position in *Contemplative Science and Meditations of a Buddhist Skeptic*, and it is clearly legible in Rick Hanson’s *Buddha’s Brain*.

These are repeated betimes in insight meditation books such as Batchelor’s *The Awakening of the West* (1994).

Nhat Hanh is described by journalists such as Jo Confino as “the father of mindfulness in the west” (n.p.)

This is in evidence especially in *Transformation at the Base* (2001) and *Opening the Heart of the Cosmos* (2003), which are anything but unsophisticated or simplistic.

It is also of the same cycle of texts, the Pali Canon, that Mu observes to be privileged as “psychological Buddhism” by advocates of mindfulness.

A nearly-identical passage is found in *Being Peace* (7-8).

This passage also appears in *The Sun My Heart* (75), with identical wording.

One of four guiding principles behind the fourteen Order of Interbeing precepts is “Appropriateness,” which means: “If a teaching is not in accord with the needs of the people and the realities of society, it is not truly Buddhist” (*Interbeing 17*), a theme he reaffirms elsewhere (*Being Peace 84*).

This assumption persists even to the present among North American Zen practitioners and scholars such as Steve Hagen; interventions such as *Zongmi on Ch’an* (2009) are explicitly intended to draw on the historical record to rebut it.

Nhat Hanh is particularly concerned to caution his students against incompetent or fraudulent spiritual masters who are motivated to exploit their vulnerabilities for personal gain. Here, his comments recall a portion of the Tenth Precept of the Order of Interbeing: “Do not use the Buddhist community for gain or profit” (*Interbeing 49*).

The authors of *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra, and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, Gary Zukav, would have long careers in precisely this genre. Zukav was a frequent guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* beginning in the late 1990s.

Ken Knabb, in a series of independently-published broadsides, criticizes Nhat Hanh and his disciples for political naiveté and irrelevance in this context (“Engaged Buddhism,” “Strong Lessons”).

To give a representative selection, Nhat Hanh wrote forwards for *Full Catastrophe Living* and Macy’s *World as Lover, World as Self*; The Dalai Lama did so for Goldstein and Kornfield’s *Discovering the Heart of Meditation*, and Goldstein’s *ONE Dharma*. 

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The most explicit example here is Goldstein, *ONE Dharma*.

There is also an element of what Kimberly Lau refers to as traditionalization, a process by which an appropriated and commodified form of a cultural tradition is positioned as the authentic and original one (12), at work in claims in insight meditation discourse to represent the teachings of the Buddha as of the present, of modernity.

Not coincidentally, Kabat-Zinn had been a student of Kornfield and Goldstein prior to formulating MBSR. The social networks integrating mindfulness therapies with self-help and psychological Buddhism were in place in the 1970s.

Meditation is defined here as seated anapassati and vipassana practice, that is, meditation as understood by writers such as Nhat Hanh, Kornfield, and Kabat-Zinn.

In this context, Brown credits Ledi as “the architect for the reconfiguration of the lay Buddhist, such that meditating made sense in the modern world (and the modern world made sense in meditation)” (148).

Ledi also corresponded with early Buddhist popularizers in the UK such as Caroline Rhys-Davids (128).

Lama Surya Das describes the period of 1971-72 in India: “[T]he bridge that would help the Dharma cross from East to West was being constructed right before our eyes and under our noses. I met many Westerners there who today teach Dharma all over the world” (32).

Psychologists Chris Kang and Koa Whittingham (2010) conclude “that mindfulness, as it is understood and applied in Buddhism, is a richer concept than thus far understood and applied in psychology” (161), and propose to elaborate mindfulness for clinical use along more specifically Buddhist lines. Similarly, Margaret Cullen (2011) explicitly redefines clinical mindfulness to include prescriptions for pro-social conduct derived from Buddhism, including the virtues outlined in Salzberg’s *Lovingkindness*. There seems to be significantly less skepticism toward Buddhist thought and practice among psychologists working on mindfulness in the 2010s than there is among many public mindfulness exponents who are often quick to dismiss any connection between mindfulness and Buddhism, or to redefine Buddhist practices toward the conventions of self-help programs, and not the reverse.

The objective of the aspiring Arhat differs substantially from the contemporary seeker of a purpose-driven life, however. The Arhat by definition has no agenda, no experience of person or habit of identification, and therefore no personal vision to realize—in stark contrast to the insight meditation objective to realize a “true self.”

While such speculations may be legible in contemporary Theravada Buddhist discourse in English, they are not found in canonical Theravada Buddhist texts such as Buddhaghosa’s *Path of Purification*, and are explicitly negated in the Pali Canon, which is upheld by the Theravada school as the authoritative teaching of the historical Buddha (Bodhi, *Connected Discourses* 544; 951-955). Noa Ronkin gives a critical examination of this doctrinal history (86-131).

Joanna Macy describes this in *Dharma and Development*.

This describes the circumstances of those who limited their seeking to intervals brief enough not to allow mastery of the local language adequate to undertake serious study of any kind in it—as distinct from those who limited their seeking only to teaching engagements under the direction of English-speaking leaders such as Goenka and Munindra.

“Bare attention” is a term Trungpa had been using to describe mindfulness no later than the 1974 lectures later published as *The Path is the Goal* (1995). This may be an early instance of Trungpa’s influence on insight meditation.

“The essence of the practice is to bring the mind to an experiential level rather than a conceptual one,” Goldstein claims (*Experience* 16).

Insight meditation and generalized mindfulness are presented as informed by a Buddhism posited as a “revolutionary” body of psychological knowledge, not a religious or cultural tradition—the revolution posited here is internal, as announced in such titles as Robert Thurman’s 1998 *The Inner Revolution*, Alan Wallace’s *The Attention Revolution* (2006), and Shambhala Publications’ 2011 anthology of articles previously published in *Shambhala Sun* magazine, *The Mindfulness Revolution*.

This volume is especially significant as it is referenced favorably by conscious capitalists as a guide to mindfulness (chapter four).
present day world, you will turn your back on the Way; if you would not turn your back on the Way, do not follow the world” (The Unfettered Mind). I position refuge-taking in the context of Sloterdijk’s treatment of the “revolutionary” capacity in conversions (Sloterdijk 299-300)—a capacity absent in generalized mindfulness.

For example, Kornfield’s version of this quotation reappears in his own book Lamp in the Darkness (76), A Mindful Nation by Paul Ryan (38), and Mindful Coaching by Liz Hall (208). Smalley and Winston’s Fully Present is distinctive because its authors or an editor corrected the quotation to coincide with Joyce’s text (65): “He lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side-glances” (“A Painful Case” 120).

In contrast, Trungpa asserts that Buddha nature (S. tathagatagarbha) is more like a null state than a personally-unique matrix of mindstuff; “there are problems, but they are temporary and superficial defilements that cover over one’s basic goodness (tathagatagarbha)” (“Meeting” 9), meaning that the contents of one’s sense of self are not at all comparable to anything with qualities that have positive or negative values attached to them. Trungpa presents klesas or defilements, instead, as temporary restraints on one’s freedom—hence the value of egolessness, or the emptiness of self and other, in traditional Buddhist accounts. According to Trungpa, egolessness “means that you can let go of your habitual patterns and then when you let go, you genuinely let go. You do not re-create or rebuild another shell immediately afterward” (“Meeting” 10)—again, in direct contrast to Kornfield’s position that realizing a stable, healthy sense of self is imperative.

Kornfield posits a transformation of ego, traditionally understood as an aggregate of diverse afflictions, into wisdoms. Here, in his role as a “Western Buddhist” teacher, Kornfield is reproducing an argument indigenous to Vajrayana Buddhism, which has very specific protocols for evaluating the qualifications of a teacher that are regarded as indispensable to Vajrayana practice. At least as of the writing of A Path with Heart, Kornfield had not been authorized to teach in this capacity, so this passage represents a significant departure from traditional protocols.

While Kornfield approves of psychiatrist J. Engler’s position, paraphrased as “You must be somebody before you can be nobody” (Path 205), Kabat-Zinn characterizes this as “one of the big New Age distortions of meditation practice” (Wherever 238). For Kabat-Zinn, the work required to construct for oneself a firm identity before undermining it by recognizing that said identity is merely a construction seems a fruitless endeavor—meaning that Kabat-Zinn had evaluated Kornfield’s claim and found it wanting on pragmatic grounds, not logical ones.

Here, Kabat-Zinn’s explanation of “not knowing” and inquiry as a mode of meditation gives the sense of his teacher Seung Sahn’s motto, “only don’t know” (Compass).

Kabat-Zinn quotes the US-based Zen teacher Peter Matthiessen quoting an unspecified lama in praise of “the precision and openness and intelligence of the present” (Wherever 200). That lama is Trungpa (Cutting Through 155).

I mark that The Kabir Book, as Bly’s revision of Rabindranath Tagore’s 1915 English-language treatment of the fifteenth-century Persian poet based on Tagore’s reading of a Hindi and Bengali source texts, is more plausibly a work of twentieth-century universalism than an account of the teachings of the gaul and Sufi master.

In at least one instance, Kornfield’s position is much closer to Nhat Hanh’s than Kabat-Zinn’s: “The riches we enjoy in modern Western society come at great costs, which include the exploitation of other cultures, the economic colonization of much of the world, the ecological devastation of habitats and species” (Laundry 265). Unlike Nhat Hanh, Kornfield does not propose a specific intervention into the cause of this exploitation beyond the mediator’s mind.

Where Kornfield, Kabat-Zinn, and Brach attribute to the Sufi poet Kabir ideas mediated through the universalism of Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Bly, here Brach mobilizes the Sufi poet Rumi as presented by the New Age teacher and self-help celebrity, Deepak Chopra.

There is no cognate concept in traditional Buddhist accounts of consciousness or cosmology to those Brach attributes to Nisargadatta.

An aphorism of Takuan Sōhō (1573-1645), an esteemed Rinzai Zen master, describes the practice of refuge-taking as a constant act of conversion in everyday life at the point of objective: “If you follow the present day world, you will turn your back on the Way; if you would not turn your back on the Way, do not follow the world” (The Unfettered Mind). I position refuge-taking in the context of Sloterdijk’s treatment of the “revolutionary” capacity in conversions (Sloterdijk 299-300)—a capacity absent in generalized mindfulness.
Trungpa makes this connection explicit in his commentary to the *Sadhana of Mahamudra*, which has not seen mass-market distribution to date.

A similar refuge formula to Brach’s had already appeared in *Buddha’s Brain* (94).

This is, unambiguously, an instance of what Trungpa and other Tibetan masters would describe as homemade “stew,” as described earlier in this chapter.

I mark here the convergence of stereotype as the result of a mediation of alternative subject modes through capitalist logics in the third phase of insight meditation, and in the workplace authenticity programs Fleming describes (8).

I distinguish this mindful topic from such Buddhist rituals as the Vajrayana feast offering (S. *ganapuja*, T. *tsok*), or the *o-ryoki* practice characteristic of Japanese Buddhism, in which food and drink are shared and consumed.

Lau identifies the nineteenth-century American practice of “fletcherizing” or “chewing food until all of its flavor is extracted and then involuntarily swallowing it” (6) as a substrate to what she calls New Age Capitalism, the appropriation of Asian cultural traditions to capitalist objectives. Mindful eating, in this context, appears as a Buddhist-seeming practice continuous with non-Buddhist residuals such as fletcherizing.

This entrenchment is especially legible on the topic of mindful parenting, where Kabat-Zinn’s own book on the subject, *Everyday Blessings* (1997, co-authored with Myla Kabat-Zinn), is followed by *Mindful Discipline* (2014), a volume endorsed by an unsorted gallery of popular health-advice and Buddhist figures, including Dean Ornish, Andrew Weil, Brach, Kornfield, Noah Levine, Sylvia Boorstein, and Joan Halifax. Here the coincidence of healthy living (Ornish and Weil) and mindfulness (a catalogue of insight meditation and Zen teachers) is foregrounded.

Buddhist practices, almost without exception, involve either chanting or incense, and usually both. Marturano’s use of “new age” as a dismissal mischaracterizes Buddhism and denigrates New Age teachings as a distinct mode of practice, and New Age practitioners, while echoing the rhetorical form of Trungpa’s *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* but not its content.

This pattern of thought that bears a strong resemblance to the attitude of “self-clinging” that women such as Mandell are accused of participating in when speaking out about sexism within insight meditation communities.

By “white supremacy,” Cheah means a formation in which “Euro-American values, ideals, beliefs, and practices have become the norm according to which other cultures and social practices are judged, objectified, and consequently relegated to the margins [...] as it relates to American Buddhism or a Western arrangement of modern Buddhism, in most instances, white supremacy operates in the United States as an invisible standard of normality for many white Buddhists and sympathizers” (4).

Whether Ledi’s English-language writings imply a modern, urban, and middle-class practitioner in contrast to the ritual life of traditional village temples remains an open question.

Whether Ledi’s English-language writings imply a modern, urban, and middle-class practitioner in contrast to the ritual life of traditional village temples remains an open question.

By 2009, Kornfield has reversed his position on the rejection of such cultural repertoires by a specifically Jungian rationale. To view such cultural matters as “trappings,” Kornfield asserts, “is to miss a great psychological truth. Our imagination works in symbols [...] Buddhist psychology uses these human images of Buddhas and saints and enlightened ancestors as symbolic doorways, to point to and evoke the qualities of love, dedication, inner beauty, and courage” (*Wise* 276). For Kornfield, culture has value not as an embodiment of the practice, as in Trungpa’s enlightened society or Nhat Hanh’s enlightening-activity, but in the mythopoetic sense presented novels such as Bly’s *Iron John* and repeated in advice books such as *Wherever You Go*.

This is a problematic claim for Kornfield to make. The core of the practice anthologized in *A Still Forest Pool* is *anapatasati*, but also strict adherence to the precepts of monastic life (P. and S. *Vinaya*), with special
emphasis on the renunciation of sex, is also strongly emphasized—not an imperative that is commonly
given to insight meditation practitioners.

which seems to repeat much of its cover story on insight meditation from ten years prior, “The Science of
Meditation” (Aug. 4, 2014), inclusive of a cover photo featuring a middle-class white woman at peace.

184 Mindful interventions such as Corporate Social Responsibility and conscious capitalism are among the
“new justifications for social inequality, injustice, or discrimination” that Hartmann and Honneth identify
with “network capitalism,” the current juncture (48). But these justifications contradict themselves in the
Pop Buddhist imaginary they appropriate, with the consequence that generalized mindfulness is a
paradoxical formation, one that tends to undermine its own realization.

185 This doctrine is professed, to give but one example, in Thomas Friedman’s 1999 concept of the “Golden
Straitjacket.”

186 I mark here that the gadget culture of Silicon Valley, celebrated in mindfulness programs such as
*Wisdom 2.0*, corresponds to the category of “therapy” in Trungpa’s argument that mindfulness is not
therapy (“Therapy?” 182-83).

187 The former corresponds to the final chapter of Spinoza’s *Ethics*; the latter, to Kant’s ethical program
(*Grounding* 30).

188 The diction of leadership had, by 2003, already converged with that of mindfulness in a granular,
implicit way: "The best way to become an aware, authentic person is to practice being awake and alive
eight hours a day every day at work" (xvii)—this in a book titled *The Art of Waking People Up*, which
makes no explicit mention of mindfulness at all.

189 The discourse of happiness and well-being has been explicitly adopted by advocates of economic
liberalization and those who stand to gain materially from the reproduction of extant class relations in the
United States. The Well-Being Initiative, founded by Charles Koch—among the most significant libertarian
activists in contemporary North America, and among the wealthiest—"‘aims to advance understanding of
what it means to flourish, how to understand and measure the various aspects of well-being, and how to
empower individuals to live better lives,’” in Koch’s words (quoted in Young n.p.). Its advocates appeal to
corporate benevolence in the diction of free-market freedoms and opposition to “‘collectivism.’”

Significantly for chapters five and six, George Mason University president Angel Cabrera and libertarian
economics professor Tyler Cowan sit on the Board of Directors of the Well-Being Initiative.

190 Jodi Dean’s analysis of the failures attendant upon leaderlessness in the Occupy movement (*Horizon*
210) point to the value of leadership for oppositional projects. Not all modes of leadership need be coercive
or compensatory, but “primal” leadership is, importantly, both—and intimately tied to mindfulness.

191 Such a mode is widely distributed in Pop Buddhist discourse. For instance, the endless negations of
Madhyamaka are made available in North America in mass-market advice books such as *Cutting Through
Spiritual Materialism* (chapter two).

192 For example, the Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, on the basis of claims made about his brain
by neuroscientists studying the effects of meditation on the body such as Richard Davidson, is promoted as
an example of what corporate mindfulness can offer a belabored employee or overextended manager.

193 This is figured in the positioning of mindfulness advocates as experienced hands in the spiritual and
corporate domains. Michael Carroll, for instance, is promoted as a “Meditation teacher, executive coach,
and corporate director” on the cover of his book *Awake at Work* (2004).

194 Wilber, writing in 1980, asserts that Jones is “a Spiritual Master and religious genius of the ultimate
degree” and his “teaching is, I believe, unsurpassed by that of any other spiritual Hero, of any period, of
any place, of any time, of any persuasion” (“Foreword” 6). While the extent and duration of his
involvement with Jones’ organization to the present is unclear, Wilber remained convinced of Jones’ genius
and regarded him as his guru until 1997, well after he had published the first edition of *Sex, Ecology, and
Spirituality*. This is evidenced in Wilber’s brief essay “The Strange Case of Adi Da,” published online in
1998 at the Shambhala Publications website but removed some years after. Members of Jones’ community
claim that Wilber’s 1997 public disavowal of Jones is contradicted by Wilber’s private correspondence
with them (“Private Letter”)
Friedman’s concept of the Golden Straitjacket, whereby creditor institutions define the terms by which debtor nations may act and organize, offers a direct parallel to the logic of subordination Wilber describes as “Kosmic.”

Wilber agrees with Francis Fukuyama’s end-of-history premise but specifies that it is only “egoic” history that has ended (Sex 320-22)—to Wilber’s mind, the World Soul is satisfied with the present social order, but inner, contemplative work remains to be done in historical time. Perry Anderson gives a history of this formation in A Zone of Engagement (279-375).

The four philosophers most celebrated by Wilber as having world-historical significance are Plotinus, Nagarjuna, Schelling, and Aurobindo Ghose—the latter two are idealist-historicist philosophers.

Wilber’s mystification of the temporalities and social relations of capitalism are remade into a prescription for mindful leadership by the US-based Zen teacher Ginny Whitelaw. In The Zen Leader (2012), Whitelaw positions Wilber’s theology as representing a temporally-advanced doctrine, explicitly ahead of the leadership programs of Daniel Goleman, as a sign and means of personal development (221-223).

Apart from main organization supporting Wilber’s activities, IntegralLife, others, such as MetaIntegral Associates, focus on specific initiatives.

Barrett C. Brown argues for the application of “vertical learning” as a means to implement conscious capitalism by leaders competent to do so—made competent by vertical learning. Among Wilber’s associates, vertical learning appears to mean a synthesis of mindfulness and emotional intelligence, in which people and organizations develop through predictable stages (Petrie 11). Brown articulates the universalist, developmental logic shared in common by mindfulness and Wilber’s integral theory to promote the latter in terms of the former.

This is made explicit in Andrew Cohen’s blog post, “Tony Robbins and the Buddha Compare Notes” (2013). Here, Cohen—former editor of What Is Enlightenment? magazine and, like Jones, a professional spiritual teacher—stages a dialogue on contemporary personal development between motivational speaker Tony Robbins and the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, in the newsletter of one of Wilber’s organization. Cohen presents Shakyamuni, our contemporary, affirming the words of “‘the great one, Robbins.’”

The pedagogy Wilber describes is that of passive consumerism. The integral disciples in Boomeritis! endure interminable PowerPoint presentations again and again until they convince themselves to affirm their contents, a pedagogy that, when narrated, makes for a vapid novel.

Pink’s writings, like those of Ray Kurzweil and Richard Florida, participate in a genre I call “speculative futurism”: optimistic predictions of the future offerings of techno-capitalism that tend to reproduce contemporary consumer expectations and a libertarian ethos into the future, with a patina of scientific legitimacy.

This can take on the valence of work becoming something one does as an avocation, even for fun. This notion recurs in mindful leadership texts (Leader 98); Chade-Meng Tan claims that “The secret is to create a situation in which your work is something you do for fun […] and somebody just happens to be paying you for it” (Search 134). The motto of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream, a mindfully-led company, is: “If it’s not fun, why do it?”

The figure of the “green capitalist” represents “an oxymoron for which I must accept responsibility” (xi) The Green Capitalists is the title of another of Elkington’s books.

In Elkington’s terms, “Have the powers of Mammon turned the watchdogs into lapdogs—or have the revolutionaries taken the castle? The answer is a bit of both” (42).

That Hollander is also mindful of the contradictions in CSR seems especially relevant here. In describing CSR as “window-dressing, as a means of deflecting public attention from other, deeper, structural shortcomings […] a fig leaf for the fundamentally destructive and rapacious character of unbridled free-market capitalism” (13) that justifies the displacement of public oversight and regulation on business mandated by economic liberalization, Hollander asserts that CSR is not, in itself, adequate to do anything other than reproduce the same.

Goleman claims that “a mindful consumer can change the world” (“Consumer” 242), positioning the act of shopping for environmentally-friendly detergent is as a practice analogous to the Engaged Buddhism of
Buddhist popularizer Nhat Hanh in a way entirely out of the spirit of Nhat Hanh’s own meditations as described in texts like *Interbeing*.

Accounts of this retreat differ. Silby claims the 1979 retreat was “at a post-hippie commune in New Hampshire” where “the guru from the conference center” had been one Marc Sarkady (“Impact” 3).

Pop Buddhism is mobilized as a means to performance enhancement and stress relief in this milieu. According to Merlyn Seeley, former U.S. President Bill Clinton has “hired his own personal Buddhist monk to teach him how to properly meditate,” and uses a mantra now when things get “hectic” (n.p.).

Nhat Hanh was among the participants in a roundtable of global religious leaders committed to peacemaking at the WEF in 2001. This anticipates the mobilization of mindfulness practice at Davos described in chapter five by over a decade.

Right Livelihood (P. *samma-ājīva*, S. *samyag-ājīva*) is the fifth imperative of the Buddhist Eightfold Path. Calvert is not alone in taking this tack; Abacus Wealth Partners is an explicitly Buddhist investment firm that, as evidenced in its advertisements in magazines such as *Shambhala Sun* and *Tricycle*, serves a clientele of convert Buddhists and fellow-travelers in North America.

A 2002 article in *Mandala*, a newsletter of the Tibetan Buddhist organization The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), gives a transcript of Krumsie’s address to a “Spirit in Business” conference, indicating that such a thing existed in 2002, that Krumsie was summoned to participate, and that the Buddhist readership of *Mandala* would care (Patton).

This topic is described extensively in Pop Buddhist advice books such as Trungpa’s *The Myth of Freedom* (108-124).

These features are legible in early examples such as David Schwerin’s *Conscious Capitalism* (1998), but subsequent attempts are more representative of the discourse overall.

Waugh’s *The Soul in the Computer: The Story of a Corporate Revolutionary* (2001) is an important early artifact in the brief history of spiritual CEO advice books that mobilize anti-management and anti-capitalist sentiment into aspirational models and management protocols for use in corporations.

The full list of FoEs: Amazon, BMW, Carmax, Caterpillar, Commerce Bank, Container Store, Costco, eBay, Google, Harley-Davidson, Honda, IDEO, IKEA, JetBlue, Johnson & Johnson, Jordan’s Furniture, LL Bean, New Balance, Patagonia, REI, Southwest, Starbucks, Timberland, Toyota, Trader Joe’s, UPS, Wegmans, Whole Foods.

While I do not consider the advice books associated with The Container Store here, but they are significant. Sisodia is a member of the Board of Directors of The Container Store; its CEO, Kip Tendell, celebrates conscious capitalism as a means to profitability and worker compliance in *Uncontainable* (2014).

The “Age of Transcendence” diction is explicitly derived from Pink’s *A Whole New Mind*.

Jane Meyer documents Koch’s libertarianism, far-right political activism, and their consequences in *Dark Money* (2016). The CEO of Koch Industries is also an advice author. His *Good Profits* (2015), the sequel to *Science of Success* (2007), presents the accumulation of capital itself as an act of altruism—creating value for others (but not all others, or equally), as in the book’s subtitle. One of the endorsements on the back cover, claiming Koch “is right,” is attributed to John Mackey.

The idiosyncratic claims regarding Buddhist figures such as the philosopher Nagarjuna, an exemplar of the Madhyamaka philosophy that Trungpa and other Pop Buddhist leaders that Wilber makes in *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* demonstrate the author’s commitment to an affirmative universalist or idealist position, rather than to Madhyamaka as such.

The influence of Wilber on *Be The Solution* is marked with the mobilization of the “green meme” as a catch-call category for “postmodern” thought the author finds objectionable (296-97), a tactic Wilber adapted from his reading of the business-advice book *Spiral Dynamics* (1996) and reproduced in many of his own books.

That maxim is the title of a chapter in *Wherever You Go*. Kabat-Zinn attributes the phrase itself to Swami Satchitananda (32).

Klein was the founder of FLOW, the organization behind Michael Strong’s *Be The Solution*, that would later be rebranded as Conscious Capitalism.

Ryan made this remark in a public lecture at George Mason University in September 2012.
The rising import of mindful leadership among management advice books is figured in the revision and retitling of the 2002 volume Connecting Leadership to the Brain into Mindful Leadership (2009), suggesting that advice-book authors in this period are capitalizing on the word mindfulness.

Carroll describes his experience in Vajradhatu/Shambhala itself in terms of leadership development: “My Buddhist training revealed a different model of leadership not based on ambition, will, and achievement but inspired by wisdom, gentleness, and authenticity” (Leader 5).

Carroll quotes the Anapassati Sutta in his meditation instructions (Leader 109), an ancient text used in insight meditation instruction and anthologized in Nhat Hanh’s Miracle of Mindfulness. Further, he describes in business-friendly language practices familiar to readers of Sharon Salzberg’s books, such as the four Brahma Viharas (lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) recast as Respect, Genuine Caring, Delight, and Impartiality (Leader 134-35).

Carroll also mixes Neo-confucianist practices into The Mindful Leader’s repertoire (201-08).

Carroll celebrates “the millions of people throughout history who practiced mindfulness meditation were rediscovering something about being human—something so simple and so deeply profound that it could only be understood intimately rather than scientifically; something so direct and authentic that it demands vulnerability and heart rather than ambition and achievement” as exemplars for contemporary managers (Leader 3).

For instance, Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (1608-unknown), a scion of both the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions of Tibetan Buddhism with which Carroll identifies, asserts with regard to Buddhist practice in everyday life that “One who does not abandon worldly pursuits squanders this life. Therefore, completely sever attachments and ties and remain in secluded mountain dwellings” (Mirror of Mindfulness 21).

A meditation retreat, by Rangdrol’s logic, is its own objective; by Carroll’s, its purpose for the leader is at least in part to achieve “worldly pursuits,” such as the implementation of a layoff or across-the-board paycut for workers in his employ.

Carroll distinguishes the power of wang thang from the violence of the commander, bully, or tyrant (Leader 182). The sense here is rather of having a firm grasp on the situation.

According to Carroll, “if we cultivate the humility of the mindful leader, in a very literal sense, it does not matter what our job or station is” (Leader 142). For example, because it requires courage for “power brokers” to mingle with back office workers in their employ, Carroll asserts that those who do should be celebrated (Leader 90).

To give an example, as of March 2015, registration for Marturano’s “Leading Differently: The Power of a Purposeful Pause” retreat at the Garrison Institute near Rhinecliff, New York, 10-12 June 2015), cost $530 with offsite lodging, or up to $650 for two nights onsite. Meanwhile, at Spirit Rock, one may register for a three-night retreat on “Insight Meditation for the Curious” (31 March-3 April 2015) for $830-$415 on a sliding scale (three nights’ lodging included), with a donation requested for the teachers. Per night, the cost of these retreats is roughly comparable, near $300 per 24 hours, depending on the Spirit Rock retreatant’s generosity (P. dana) and position on the sliding scale, and bracketing the cost of travel to the retreat site. Marturano also offers private retreats for organizations and individuals; the price for these services is not distributed publicly.

That Marturano’s text is peppered with quotations from poems venerating the natural world seems non sequitur without the context of the discursive parameters of Wherever You Go—in its wake, nature-writer quotations are de rireur for mindfulness books. This is one way the book and its characteristics reproduce legitimacy in mindfulness: the authoritative teacher is the one with the authoritative-looking book with his or her name on the front.

The recurrence of descriptors such as “revolutionary” and “radical,” which had fallen away from the insight meditation scene years prior, is significant—here and in volumes such as Boyce’s 2011 The Mindfulness Revolution. In A Mindful Nation, mindfulness is associated strongly with the etymological sense of the word radical: “By slowing my mind down, I could see the root of some of my troubles, not just the troubles themselves,” Ryan asserts (19); in his Foreword to this book, Kabat-Zinn claims that in drawing attention to the qualities of experience and pro-social behaviors such as kindness and compassion, in this social context, “The shift in consciousness that mindfulness involves really is a radical act, in the sense of going to the very root of our problems with suffering and its human causes” (xiii-xiv).
Ryan consistently describes mindfulness as warranted in response to the consequences of social, economic, and martial violence: “this simple practice could help my constituents face the many stressful challenges of daily life. The pain of war. Economic insecurity. The frustrations of being sick or taking care of sick relatives in a broken health-care system. The challenge of teaching children to pay attention and be kind to themselves and others as they swim in a world of distraction and aggression” (xviii).

Ryan articulates values such as wisdom and bravery in the lexicon of insight meditation discourse: “Wisdom is defined as the ability to see clearly how things are, not how we want them to be, and then use that information to make the most effective decision in the moment. Bravery […] is the ability to stay present with any experience, even an extremely difficult one, without needing it to be different” (116).

Ryan does reproduce many of the features of Kabat-Zinn’s books, including his appreciation for Joseph Campbell and a certain kind of appeal to the natural environment as sacred: “For life to be in balance, we need to find moments of peace and inner strength, what the mythologist Joseph Campbell talked about as sacred spaces and ministers call sanctuary” (39).

Ryan states, “I wanted to share what one teacher has called ‘the miracle of mindfulness’ with my friends, family, and fellow citizens” (35) — but not, significantly, Being Peace or Interbeing. The author of The Miracle of Mindfulness is not named here.

In Ryan’s terms: “The question must be: do our investments sustain or create systems that are compassionate or simply create wealth at any cost?” (168)

This is legible, for instance, in Friedman’s 1999 remarks: “if you can't see the world, and you can't see the interactions that are shaping the world, you surely cannot strategize about the world” (232).

Mo Edjali, one of the conference organizers, graciously offered me a ticket to the event in exchange for helping to promote the event on social media, which I did for several weeks in advance of the conference.

I mark that this is an objective held in common between the mindful CEO and Clausewitz’s field marshal in training (Wills). It is assumed in this context that the skills of use in a battlefield may be profitably transposed to the competitive business environment.

This recalls “idiot compassion” insofar as the mindful leader seeks a reward for his or her performance of kindness — in this instance, a financial reward.

About one third of this dialogue (by duration) involved Salzberg directing the venue staff and event volunteers to bring the stage furnishings, clocks, and microphones to her specifications.

A reduction of the Mahayana Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva to a Jungian shibboleth has been in circulation in this milieu since Taigen Daniel Leighton’s 1998 volume Bodhisattva Archetypes, subsequently republished in two updated editions under the title Faces of Compassion (2003 and 2012).

While Hougaard’s Buddhist affiliations were not made explicit at MLS, I later learned that he is involved in the “Universal Teaching for Wisdom and Compassion” project associated with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, an organization associated with the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

On one of Hougaard’s brochures, this statement is attributed to Thomas Davenport, a “former director of Accenture Institute of Strategic Change.”

Mahayana Buddhists traditionally close any significant benevolent act or contemplative practice with a dedication of merit — an aspiration that whatever positive karma was generated may become a cause for the enlightenment of all beings, and not only oneself. By dedicating the merits of her presentation, she repositions her advocacy for economic liberalization through Pop Buddhist diction as a benevolent act, in fact an instance of instruction, by invoking Buddhist protocols.

The “triple bottom line” is typically articulated as “people, planet, and profit,” meaning that the objective of a corporation must be social justice, environmental sustainability, and profitability.

Michael Chaskalson describes this in The Mindful Workplace (2011). Here, the reproduction of Google’s Search Inside Yourself programs’ contents as the normative mindful workplace is in evidence.

I mean horizontal to indicate a mode of mutual recognition in contrast to the emphasis on hierarchic and vertical logics of subordination characteristic of conscious capitalism and corporate mindfulness.

For example, in the spring of 2013, the Zen Center of San Francisco sponsored a monthlong “Zen at work” series of trainings, led by Zen teachers Leo Babauta and Robert Thomas. The series included a free
The premise of this training is less Zen than MBSR, however: “How can we find peace in the middle of this chaos? The answer is mindfulness, and changing our mindless habits” (n.p.).

255 Trungpa’s *Work, Sex, Money: Real Life on the Path of Mindfulness* (2011) title indicates a desire on the part of the owner of the copyright to Trungpa’s published and unpublished writings to mobilize him as a mindfulness writer, and not exclusively a Buddhist one.

256 For instance, Carroll emphasizes such tropes as “credentials,” and “idiot compassion,” and his comments on “vajra pride clearly echo Trunpa’s thinking on Vajrayana practice in the workplace, which were published subsequently to Carroll’s text (*Work, Sex, Money* 215).

257 While it is true that one initiated into Vajrayana practice does cultivate “vajra pride,” the conviction that he or she really is the deity (T. yidam) of his or her meditation, such practice is undertaken in the context of particular teachings and relationships, which are not indicated or available in *Awake at Work*—and with a set of strict commitments, secrecy inevitably among them (S. samaya).

258 There is a precedent for this discursive pattern. *Buddha in the Palm of your Hand* (1982) by Ösel Tenzin (Thomas Rich), Trungpa’s designated successor, reads like a carefully curated and rehearsed selection of Trungpa’s pronouncements, paraphrased.

259 These include, for instance, contemplations on the lojong slogans, which are also included in *Search Inside Yourself*.

260 To mark the two-year gap from *Real Happiness* to *Real Happiness at Work* in terms of technological waves, the latter volume comes with a link to streaming online audio instead of including a CD, as the previous volume did.

261 Stealth meditations are, perhaps, analogous to *la perruque*, the art of pursuing one’s own objectives and not the employer’s while engaged in wage labor and using the tools, materials, and skills available in the work site, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*—a consideration for future inquiry.

262 Here, the mindful worker is positioned in a loosely analogous way to the mentally free and critically thinking worker Gramsci describes, but for the diminished position of critical thought in workplace mindfulness.

263 An anonymous commenter to the *Wired* magazine article containing this remark is noteworthy: “good old spiritual materialism.” Trungpa’s critique of the terms by which early-1970s spiritual seekers sought remains in circulation as a means to take a critical position on workplace mindfulness.

264 Tan’s assertion that mindfulness as the means to world peace are perfectible at Google, as though anything could be perfectible especially in an economy that favors planned obsolescence, is but one example.

265 Tan made this claim in a 2012 interview on the NPR radio program *Interfaith Voices*.

266 Robert Caplan and Cary Cherniss (2001) proclaim an EI program instituted at IBM a success—and that limitations in outcomes reflect difficulties in implementation and departures from the theory of EI, not problems in or of the model.

267 For instance, the phrase “short moments repeated many times” (*As It Is II* 145) appears frequently in the translated discourses of the late Tibetan master Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche—this version of the formula, the one Tan invokes, would enter the spiritual marketplace through the writings of the New Age teacher Candice O’Denver, who attempted to trademark it.

268 Tan’s poem appears to be a redaction of one published in *Being Peace*: “Breathing in, I calm my body./Breathing out, I smile./Dwelling in the present moment/I know this is a wonderful moment” (*Being 5*).

269 In the chapter on self-confidence, Tan tells the parable of the hidden jewel from a Mahayana Buddhist scripture, the *Lotus Sutra* (*Search* 79)—a passage conventionally taught to explain the concept of Buddha-nature in the East Asian Buddhism in which I have been trained.

270 This mode of self-discipline by self-rationalization is cognate to that of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, where the attentive mind is called upon to bring out-of-control emotions to the heel of reason for one’s own benefit in a spiritualized program. I mark this as a continuity from the historical Enlightenment to mindfulness programs.

271 Traditionally, this concept is connected to yogic breathing practices and a tantric view of the body (channels, chakras, winds) from which emotions emerge, not emotions as such (Reynolds 82)
Significantly, the authors of the *Shambhala Sun* blog assume that SIY is of interest to its presumably Buddhist readership—that SIY is in some sense a Buddhist or Buddhist-oriented project.

“I believe the skills offered here will help create greater peace and happiness in your life and the lives of those around you, and that peace and happiness can ultimately spread around the world,” Tan asserts (3).

This fictional character, famous for espousing a “greed is good” philosophy, recurs with some frequency in conscious capitalism and mindful leadership programs such as *Megatrends 2010* to describe what one ought no longer to do or believe.

Google’s longstanding and profitable role as a defense and intelligence contractor is well-known to Silicon Valley journalists. Yasha Levine describes the corporation as “snugly in bed with the US military-surveillance complex” (n.p.).

The intersubsumption of positive psychology, Pop Buddhism, and insight meditation is marked in a series of equations Tan makes between concepts Goleman uses and those current in the Buddhist discourses he references. For instance, Tan claims that what Goleman calls self-awareness, Kabat-Zinn calls mindfulness (*Search 89*), and that Goleman’s description of peak performance as “flow” represents “Zen in action” (*Search 135*).

Gordhamer inverts Kabat-Zinn’s rationale for voluntary simplicity: “Voluntary simplicity means going fewer places in one day rather than more, seeing less so I can see more, doing less so I can do more, acquiring less so I can have more” (*Wherever 69*).

I did not attend a Wisdom 2.0 conference in researching this dissertation due to prohibitive cost.

The influence of Wilber’s historicism is visible in Michaelson’s writings in the very title of his book *Evolving Dharma* (2013), and throughout *Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism* (2009).

Axel Honneth describes a practice of mutual recognition of the self and other as a necessary predicate for “relations of solidarity” and, by extension, any project of social justice (Honneth 179). Mutual recognition as Honneth defines it is the dialectical antonym to the denial of coevalness characteristic of globalized capitalism, which characterized in the first instance by a refusal of recognition of one to the other as a function of unjust relations of power.

Matthews maps the 2014 Wisdom 2.0 Business conference and its contents onto the four-quadrant AQAL grid that Wilber promotes in which all possible phenomena are said to be classifiable. A full grid suggests a complete set of practices, a whole program. Matthews claims that Wisdom 2.0 Business represents a whole, integral approach to Everything, by Wilber’s logic, according to a writer sympathetic to Wilber’s position.

Bloch calls “the act-content of hope” a “consciously illuminated, knowingly-elucidated content, the positive utopian function; the historical content of hope, first represented in ideas, encyclopedically explored in real judgments […] human culture referred to its concrete-utopian horizon” (146).

Hartmann and Honneth assert, for example, that analyses of paradoxical contradictions must do without reference to class, because social relations after economic liberalization emphasize individual actualization and not social solidarity (48). I find that mindfulness demands a class-theoretical analysis in order to account for the specific solidarities it evokes in discourse and in practice, in paradoxical relation to the individual actualizations the doctrine of economic liberalization upholds.

Barry Boyce’s *Mindfulness Revolution* (2011) is an example of such a backformation in that it recuperates specific Pop Buddhist figures as mindfulness teachers, and serves as an important archive for scholars of mindfulness such as Wilson. I hypothesize that the narrative of mindfulness in religious histories such as *Mindful America* is in no small part a product of backformations such as *The Mindfulness Revolution*.

Hershock describes specific modes of sociality, and not individual attainment, as the objective of Buddhist practice in Chinese Buddhism (*Liberating Intimacy*). Such modes of sociality are typically dismissed as premorden “cultural accretions” in mindfulness and insight meditation texts.

Buddhists characterize the experience of a self as a temporary aggregation of coincident factors (P. *khandha*, S. *skandha*) that are in constant metabolism with each other and with others, and are constantly changing—and therefore negate the Vedic notion of a transcendent, true, or real self.
Jameson argues that the “struggle against universals is [...] a struggle against hegemonic norms and institutional values” (“Aesthetics” 126).

Refuge-taking is the formal commitment to Buddha Dharma that marks a practitioner as a Buddhist. Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*.

These are attempts to articulate the Buddhist concepts of emptiness (S. śūnyatā) and dependent origination (P. patīcasamuppāda, S. pratītyasamutpāda) typical in Pop Buddhist texts.

Macy’s *World as Lover, World as Self* represents a kind of discursive and social bridge from the insight meditation scene to the circle of influence around Thich Nhat Hanh; Macy was a disciple of the latter whose books have long been in circulation among insight meditation practitioners but are less well-known among mindfulness advocates.

Here, I find a closer cognate Pop Buddhist practice in radical historicism than in the transcendence of the present moment characteristic of mindfulness, specifically in Perry Anderson’s call for historical consciousness as a means to “causal knowledge” (*Arguments* 85).

This is a typical translation for the Sanskrit concept *Tathagathagarbha* in this context.

I locate Carrette and King’s claim that “Engaged spiritualities can resist neoliberal forms of capitalism and the takeover of religion” (168) in this context insofar as Nhat Hanh’s program *in toto* is saturated with the imperative to engage with social justice programs as an exemplar of Engaged Buddhism.

I recall here Sloterdijk’s claim that the existence of a teacher and a school makes secession possible—the systematic training in which the content of such a conversion is realized (299). Generalized mindfulness, realized in the workplace or as a consumer, lacks this secessionary aspect of conversion, but it is available in the Pop Buddhist milieu in the practice of refuge-taking.
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