



# Zen and the art of everything: Governing spirituality in entrepreneurship education

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## abstract

In recent discourses on adult education it has become a commonplace to note that adult learning and professional development should touch the ‘deeper’ or ‘higher’ recesses of human existence instead of mainly focusing on learning technical skills or attaining preset standards. These higher aspects are often depicted as spiritual experiences. In particular, mindfulness meditation which draws from Zen Buddhism, among other wisdom traditions, is today frequently used to provide conceptual and practical tools for governing spiritual experiences in adult education. By analysing the uses of Zen experience in entrepreneurial adult education and coaching, we advance two key points. First, we analyse spiritual experience as an indicator of the inherent tensions in a so-called general economy in which the highest forms of human existence are used as a means of producing profit. Second, we argue that whereas the notion of spiritual experience can be used as a springboard for criticizing capitalism, it is also assimilated into the management of productive work by the sweeping logic of capitalism.

## Introduction

Scholars across different levels and topics of adult education have recently called for addressing spiritual experiences in learning. As learning has become a lifelong task in post-industrial societies, the means of managing learning should allegedly be human-centred, that is, conform to the human capacities of learning to learn and the ability to find meaning and fulfilment in daily learning experiences. It has therefore become a commonplace to note that adult learning and professional development should touch the ‘deeper’ or ‘higher’ recesses of human existence instead of mainly learning technical skills or attaining pre-given

standards (see e.g. English, Fenwick and Parsons, 2003; Intrator and Kunzman, 2006; Vella, 2000; Vogel, 2000; Zajonc, 2006).

In the contemporary uses of the term 'spiritual experience', the 'spiritual' is an index for a celebration of authenticity, and self-realization, whereas 'experience' conveys a notion of subjective, private mental phenomena that can be psychologically discerned across cultural time-spaces, without adherence to any particular creed (Jay, 2005: 78-79; Proudfoot, 1985; Sharf, 1998). In the discourses of education across institutional levels, spiritual experience then indicates a grid of intelligibility for a holistic understanding of learning with a special sensitivity to experiences that represent the noblest aspects of all humanity.

In the past decade, mindfulness meditation that is influenced, among other wisdom traditions, by Zen Buddhism, has gained popularity in self-help and management discourses and practices. A Westernized and psychologized form of mindfulness highlights the ability to pay non-judgmental attention to the present moment. This is prominent in recent business magazine articles celebrating its effects on concentration, creativity and efficiency at work (see e.g. Essig, 2013; Schumpeter, 2013). Moreover, large companies such as Google and Apple now utilize mindfulness to enhance physical and mental well-being and productivity among their employees (Hansen, 2012; Schumpeter, 2013). Mindfulness has also spread to training in public sector professions from the military to social work and health care (Ryan, 2012).

In this article, we will analyse the uses of mindfulness in recent entrepreneurial learning discourses as a case in point in discussing the role of spiritual experience in late post-industrial capitalist societies. We argue that such learning discourses find resonance in certain dynamics of production in which the labour force has primarily become a mental category and the discourses of a self-fulfilment and flexibility are commonplace.

We approach the analysis of mindfulness as a 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1978), that is, by tracing how the contemporary truths of spiritual experience in Western Zen Buddhism have been formed and made amenable to integration into entrepreneurial discourses of adult education. This enables an understanding of the 'tactical polyvalence' (Foucault, 2001: 100-102) of spiritual experience, i.e., that it can be used for a multitude of purposes and aims that may even be at odds with each another.

We advance two key arguments. First, we argue that the nexus between entrepreneurial learning and spiritual experience in mindfulness can be

understood in the context of the inherent tensions of post-industrial capitalism. As production focuses on the higher human faculties such as spirituality as the source of profit, the temporal and spatial coordinates of production seem to be vanishing. Following Akseli Virtanen (2004; 2006), we call this the dynamics of 'general economy'. Spiritual experience as depicted in mindfulness discourses can be seen as an attempt to grapple with general economy in the conditions of productivity. Spiritual experience is located neither in the body nor in the soul, nor is the experience of mindfulness traceable in conventional notions of subjectivity and time. Thus it resonates with the abstract quality in the conditions of production.

Second, we see that the uses of Western Zen Buddhism in entrepreneurial learning illustrate how capitalism works as a 'sweeping machine' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984), that continuously assimilates its own critique and broadens its own boundaries, in this case, by taking over the 'emancipatory' strategies of Zen Buddhism and humanistic psychology. We describe how mindfulness seeks to provide a deeply personal and authentic, yet at the same time universal basis for fashioning entrepreneurial lifelong learners. The background mindfulness has in Western Zen Buddhism provides a melange of notions of authenticity, individuality and creativity that have been a part of countercultural movements and a criticism of the Taylorist management of work.

### **General economy: Governing life itself**

Over the past few decades, there have been frequent calls to analyse the new capitalist regime with regard to current changes in modes of production and managerial techniques of work. It has been argued that capitalist societies have experienced transformation from industrial capitalism to post-industrialism and affective and/or cognitive capitalism (see e.g. Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2005; Lazzarato, 1996; Virtanen, 2006). Due to this transformation, it has been argued that the category of labour has become increasingly detached from its determinable physical and biological aspects, and become more and more an abstract mental and affective category (see e.g. Hardt & Negri, 2005: 145; Lazzarato, 1996; Virtanen, 2004; Vähämäki, 2004; cf. Sennett, 2006).

Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) make similar arguments, although from slightly different perspective. They argue that the 'new capitalist spirit' today deals with the strong tie between individual self-fulfilment and corporate productivity (see also Binkley, 2014; Julkunen, 2008: 126). In other words, work is no longer the simple 'production of necessities of life' (Arendt, 1958) but rather that pivot point where the self is constructed (see also Rose, 1998: 160).

Subjectification of work is therefore at the core of the contemporary capitalist regime. Personal, cognitive and emotional competencies and capacities have become essential to the contemporary work ethos (see e.g. Julkunen, 2008; Mäkinen, 2012). In contrast to Taylorist management of work, a worker and an adult learner as an affectual and cognitive being are no longer external in relation to work process. On the contrary, a person's affect, self-regulation in uncertain conditions and, for example, the ability to communicate and to be creative are prerequisites in an increasing number of jobs (see e.g. Virtanen, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2005: 145). Moreover, work is not seen as a constraint of freedom, but as a realm in which entrepreneurial subjects can express their autonomy and confirm their identities (Rose, 1998: 160).

In this regard, in the contemporary capitalist regime – whether one chooses to call it affective or cognitive capitalism – human life in itself has become a crucial element in managerial techniques of organization as well as in value creation. For illuminating this, Virtanen (2006; 2004) uses the concept of 'general economy'. With this concept, he seeks to rethink economy in the same way that Foucault (2008) sought to problematize political science and philosophy with the notion of biopolitics.

What defines economy and our experience of it today is that the bare humanness of human beings, that general potentiality and linguistic-relational abilities which distinguish human beings is revealing its self as the essence also of economic production. (Virtanen, 2004: 1)

Thus the concept of a general economy refers to a stage of capitalism where subjectivity has become capital and the bare humanness of human beings reveals itself as the essence of economic production. The term bare humanness does not refer to any specific form of human behavior, but rather the preconditions of human thought and action in general (Virtanen, 2006). This means that 'higher faculties' of human existence, such as mental resilience, flexibility and creativity, have now become objects of contemporary government of work (*ibid.*).

It follows from the logic of general economy that the modes of production and ways of organizing work cannot be unambiguously understood within a certain particular temporal or spatial framework. Instead of being traceable in the standardized behavior of a factory timespace, work is becoming increasingly immaterial: spatially boundless and temporally endless. It is difficult to make a distinction between working time and free time. It is also difficult to say where or when the actual act of production is being carried out, what is work and what is not, and what creates value and what does not (Virtanen, 2004; Virno, 2006; Lazzarato, 2009; Deleuze, 1992).

In a certain sense, the basic problem is quite same as it was before: how to control and organize the labour force. But how, then, to organize and manage human life itself, or those ‘highest recesses’ of human existence? According to Virtanen (2004: 54; 2006), governing life itself refers to a ‘power over mind’ which does not so much create physical, biological or spatial boundaries, but rather moods, sentiments and mentalities, ‘inscription habits’ on the mind:

The organization of immaterial production is possible only through the management of the general conditions of human action and communication, through organizing the general conditions of organizing. This organization of organization does not operate at the level of actual action or plain intimidation but on that of anxiety and inadequacy; not by confinement or demanding obedience to the rules and being afraid of their violation, but by setting expectations, moods, opinion climates, standards of communication and cooperation. (Virtanen, 2004: 229)

In this sense, Virtanen’s notion of a general economy reflects the ways in which theorists of affective capitalism have problematized ways of understanding the organization of human behavior as a source of value in capitalist production. The objects of governing work are becoming more and more general, as it were. As it focuses less on ‘actual action’, i.e. not regulating work in detail, it seems to give more and more autonomy to working subjects. This leads us to assess, how the criticism of standardized and disciplined work in the Taylorist regime has been assimilated to the current ethos of organizing work in general economy.

### **Capitalism as a sweeping machine: Humanist psychology and Buddhist spirituality**

For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1984), capitalism is not a closed system, but a machine that sweeps new forms of life under its auspices. Capitalism is, therefore, continually broadening its own reach. This means, first, that capitalism does not only repress people, but also deals with the production of the real: it produces flows of desire, autonomy and freedom which are not opposite to individual interests, but rather produce arrangements in which certain kind of subjectivity is made possible (see also Hardt and Negri, 2000). Second, as a productive machine, capitalism assimilates heterogeneous elements from different fields, e.g. religion, humanist psychology and Western forms of Zen Buddhism.

To illustrate the logic of the capitalist machine, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the terms deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Deterritorialization functions as a withdrawal or expansion from the current system. Reterritorialization functions in the opposite way. Where deterritorialization

withdraws from the system or expands it, reterritorialization seeks to return these expansions to a new territory. Therefore capitalism is an inventive and productive system which 'progressively leaves the factory and invades, like a parasite, all spheres of life and the life-world itself. In the end, as we shall see, it is producing and consuming life itself', as Vandenberghé (2008: 878) puts it.

Since the 1960s, Europe and North America have witnessed an emergence of critical challenges to the nexus of positivist psychology of work and Taylorist management practices. This also entailed a demand that the public forms of human interaction be managed so as to make individual self-fulfilment and even spiritual experience possible at work (Binkley, 2014; Carrette and King, 2005). Abraham Maslow, a prominent proponent of humanist psychology, helped to legitimize religious experience as an object of psychological knowledge and praxis, and as irreducible to any particular religion. For Maslow, religious experiences were 'peak experiences' of creative, individualist minds that shunned organized and hierarchical forms of work and religion (Maslow, 1970). Maslowian ideas on spiritual experiences were quickly mobilized not only in the new psychology of work, but also in the countercultural movements of the 1960s (Carrette, 2007: 147-148; Herman, 1995: 269-275).

In the 1950s and 1960s, humanist and existential psychologies also encountered the wisdom traditions of the East, most prominently including Japanese Zen Buddhism. Carl Jung and Erich Fromm were among the leading psychoanalytic theorists using Zen Buddhist influences in their work. Fromm, for example, referred to Zen Buddhism as a model of finding abundance in the present moment as well as a liberation from the greed and illusion cultivated by capitalist societies (see e.g. Fromm, 1997; Fromm, Suzuki and De Martino, 1960). Moreover, popular philosopher Alan Watts and poets Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder made Zen an index of creative, counter-intuitive experiences that seemed to withhold forces able to challenge the cultural and political status quo (Goldberg, 2006: 290-291; Williams, 2011; Weir, 2011: 234, 236-246).

Yet the interest in spiritual experiences and Buddhism did not remain the property of the countercultural movement alone. From the 1970s, both humanist psychology and Buddhist wisdom traditions drew attention to theories and practices of work, learning, and psychotherapy to account for the higher human faculties of creativity, reflexivity and spirituality. These aspects were an index of essential skills and competences needed especially in white collar work. Thus, what used to be subversive and countercultural, now became a part and parcel of the pact between the human sciences and an emerging post-industrial economy (Carrette, 2007; Carrette and King, 2005; Herman, 1995; Obadia, 2011; Williams, 2011).

The 'sweeping' nature of spiritual experience illustrates the inventiveness of capitalism in assimilating elements outside itself and even critical to it. In a similar fashion, Boltanski and Chiapello (2007: 241-90) have demonstrated how capitalism swept the postmodernizing critique of the 1960s and 1970s and used it as a way to reorganize itself and expand infinitely. The critical challenges to the nexus of positivist psychology and Taylorist management of work since the 1960s have offered styles of reasoning and new kinds of governmental practices for managing the labour force in a contemporary capitalist regime.

As we will see, especially the use of Buddhism is indicative of the inherent problems of management of work in general economy. It is an attempt to harness the most general and flexible human capacities for production. It also represents the sweeping gesture whereupon critical movements aimed at an emancipation from the narrow forms of knowing are reappropriated. What seems to enable this overcoding is spiritual experience as a loose signifier of the highest faculties of human beings (cf. Žižek, 2001: 12-13).

### **'Beat Zen' and mindfulness: Spiritual experience in Western Zen Buddhism**

A central figure of the Westernization of Zen at the turn of the twentieth century was D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966). He was profoundly influenced by William James's *The Varieties of religious experience* (1902), which characterized the core of religion residing in a subjective experience of transcendence that can be psychologically described across cultural and religious differences. Thus Suzuki saw Zen as a universal practice of cultivating spiritual experiences. For him, the essential part of Zen is the practice of meditation (*zazen*), in which a person can witness his/her own sensations, emotions and thoughts without judgment. The ultimate aim of this practice is a spiritual enlightenment experience (*satori*), in which one realizes the impermanence or 'emptiness' of all existence, including one's own self (Suzuki, 1962).

Suzuki argues that Buddhism materializes clear-headed rationality more than any other religion as it is not reducible to ritualistic or supernatural aspects of religion (Suzuki, 1908: 81). Yet this does not mean credence to mere intellect, for enlightenment is an ineffable personal experience of bare existence beyond any dichotomies produced by thought and language (Suzuki, 1957: 36-37; Suzuki, 1962: 5-7; Suzuki, 1969: 21-27). Having this experience is also to slip beyond time as a measurable, chronological succession of events (Suzuki, 1957: 98-99; Suzuki, 1969: 57). This resulted in Zen being understood as an individualistic way of life outside formal religious institutions or dogma. Moreover, as it was

based on subjective experience beyond language and culture, it could be discerned in other cultures and religions as well. Thus it is no wonder that Suzuki's Zen could be quickly assimilated into American intellectual and popular culture (Borup, 2004; McMahan, 2008; Sharf, 1995).

Coextensive with Suzuki's academic Zen, a trans-Pacific movement was established, whereupon Zen monks started frequenting the United States (especially Hawaii and California) and American pilgrims were visiting Japanese Zen monasteries. As Robert Sharf (1995) notes, it wasn't the Zen of the most notable Japanese schools of *Rinzai* or *Sōtō* that was mediated, but a marginalized, maverick Zen of *Sanbōkyōdan* established in the 1950s. It accentuated non-religious aspects of Zen as well as intensive meditation which would quickly bring about enlightenment experiences. This was not restricted to monastic life, but to be proliferated among lay people. This is the Zen that was to be aggressively proliferated in American Zen Buddhist communities from the 1960s onwards (Sharf, 1995; cf. Prebish, 1999: 8-26).

Alan Watts aided in making Suzuki's Zen popular in the Anglo-American world. For Watts, the core of Zen lies in the fact that wisdom can be found in the most ordinary aspects of living, without a life spent in pilgrimage or a monastery (Watts, 1958: 47-48). Zen is based on an experience which is so quotidian and universal that it can also be mapped in thinkers in European and American culture as well (*ibid.*; see also Ames, 1962).

Like Suzuki, Watts also refers to a universal, 'astonishing moment of insight', which escapes any labels or dualisms one might attach to it. In meditative experience all existence seems to be focused into the present moment: 'the immediate *now*...is the goal and fulfillment of all living' (Watts, 1960: 18). This experience also conveys ultimate satisfaction and disappearance of personal problems and fears of future events, which result only from language and a false sense of temporality. Reality confronted in the now is the ineffable experience of existence as perfect, as lacking nothing (Watts, 1960: 17-30; see also Suzuki, 1969: 57-60).

This provides a basis for world-affirming action in everyday life. Acting in the Zen way in quotidian life is always effortless and flexible, which follows from not being in opposition with one's outer and inner reality (Watts, 1960: 67). A human being expressing Zen

is likened to a ball in a mountain stream, which is to say that he cannot be blocked, stopped, or embarrassed in any situation. He never wobbles or dithers in his mind, for though he may pause in overt action to think a problem out, the stream of his consciousness always moves straight ahead without being caught in the

vicious circles of of anxiety or indecisive doubt, wherein thought whirls wildly around without issue. (Watts, 1960: 68)

Such a flexible and creative person expresses the aforementioned emptiness or void (*sunyata*), which means the utter impermanence of existence. No thoughts or outer obstacles 'stick' in the person who acts effortlessly: they float by without friction, without clinging to conceptions of good or evil, possible or impossible (Watts, 1960: 68, 83-91). Watts claims that this attitude is discernible in 'Beat Zen', in which the younger generation of the 1950s was expressing passive resistance to the 'American way of life'. Such resistance opts for a highly individualistic, easygoing lifestyle in which one 'does not seek to change the existing order but simply turns away from it to find the significance of life in subjective experience rather than objective achievement' (Watts, 1960: 91). This is opposed to what Watts rather pejoratively calls 'Square Zen', organized Buddhism obsessed with rituals and hierarchies that restrains the free flow of spiritual experiences (Watts, 1960: 103-105).

The aforementioned elements of ineffable experience, world affirmation, and effortless and flexible action in the present moment are still discernible in contemporary popular Zen literature. Books on humanist psychology, self-help and management celebrate the ability to say 'yes' to the world without distorting dualisms and frictions. In management literature, the Zen experience gained popularity in the 1980s with the remarkable success of Japanese management theories and practices. Companies such as Toyota and Honda seemed to embody a holistic, intuitive and flexible management ideology that was conveyed to the Western hemisphere with such works as the all-time bestseller management book *In Search of Excellence*. In the 1990s, Zen received further attention as the tech gurus of the Silicon Valley (such as Steve Jobs) advocated Zen meditation as a resource of focus and creativity (Williams, 2011: 44-49).

Western Zen experience also plays a part in Jon Kabat-Zinn's idea of mindfulness. Trained in Korean Zen Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as a meditative practice of non-judgmental focus on the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Kabat-Zinnian mindfulness is a therapeutic practice for treating experiences of stress, anxiety and pain that admits a Buddhist influence while being completely secular and resting on a Western scientific foundation. Kabat-Zinn also gives detailed accounts on how to assume meditation postures, how to observe one's own breathing and how to relate to one's own emotions and thoughts without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Williams and Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Today, spiritual experiences in meditation are also being made an object of an emerging discipline called contemplative studies. It uses Buddhist wisdom traditions along with cognitivist theories of mind and neuroscientific studies of the human brain. These aim at a scientific mapping of the aspects of spiritual experience and developing holistic teaching and learning practices (Roth, 2006; Siegel, 2007; Miller, 2014; Zajonc, 2006).

In sum, the following cultural trajectories were aligned to designate spiritual experience in Western Zen. First of all, the core of spiritual experience is expressed as Zen Buddhist meditation (instead of anything related to rituals, scriptures or beliefs). Although rooted in a particular wisdom tradition, this experience is allegedly characteristic of all humanity and irreducible to any creed, language or culture. This means that spiritual experiences can be studied in modern psychology and the neurosciences, as well as annexed to their theories of mind and learning. Zen experience also elevates the bare consciousness of the present moment to a deep insight that allegedly deconstructs Western notions of stable selfhood. This is supposed to overcome a subject's temporal attachments to past and future and frees her to act intuitively and flexibly in the present moment.

Although not all forms of spirituality are currently marketized (see e.g. King, 2009), lifting Zen meditation to a level of universal spiritual experience also made it easy to assimilate it into discourses varying from countercultural movements to the management of work and learning in post-industrial timespaces. It also easily became an object of the sweeping gestures of the general economy described above. However, this does not mean that all uses of holistic discourses and practices are immediately brought under the sweeping logic of capitalism. For instance, there are forms of 'engaged Buddhism' which intentionally counteract many facets of global capitalism. They entail various forms of mindfulness in their practices and ideals. (King, 2009; Queen, 2012.)

### **Governing the spirituality of an entrepreneurial learner**

Turning to the case of entrepreneurship education, we argue first that many of the values and ways of characterizing the entrepreneurial self and entrepreneurial behavior are commensurable with those depicted in the spiritual experience of Western Zen. Second, we show how Zen ideas and practices are explicitly mobilized in entrepreneurship education as techniques to fabricate a resilient, flexible and creative adult learner. It can thus be understood as an instance of the sweeping logic of general economy. Furthermore, this indicates

the aspects of general economy in which the space-times of production are impossible to locate.

In a broad sense, entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial education carries two different meanings. First, it has become one of the most essential educational reforms in the field of formal education since the turn of the millennium. For example, in most European countries, it is now offered at all levels of schooling from kindergarten through university programmes. Second, it can also be understood as informal adult education, e.g. as entrepreneurship coaching or entrepreneurial self-education, more particularly by means of self-help literature. There is a large amount of self-help literature, websites, courses and self-evaluation measurement tools in which entrepreneurs and those who strive for an entrepreneurial mindset in their everyday lives are encouraged to develop themselves as persons, to seize the day, to learn to rule their thoughts and to cope with increasing uncertainty. Here, we refer to entrepreneurship education in both registers. As data for illustrating what styles of reasoning lie in entrepreneurship education discourse and how they correlate with the Zen-Buddhist spiritual experience and tensions of a general economy, we use scientific articles about entrepreneurial behavior and descriptions and advertisements from the field of entrepreneurship coaching. Thereby we do not seek to locate entrepreneurship education discourses in any specific institutional context. Instead, we analyze them as highly mobile discourses that can be linked to personal experience in a legion of different contexts in work and private life (cf. Miller & Rose, 2008: 215).

Alan Gibb (2005), one of the most well-known entrepreneurship education scholars, argues that the growing interest in entrepreneurialism reflects fundamental changes in society. He sees that the increasing uncertainty and complexity in contemporary societies has created a demand for entrepreneurial and enterprising behavior at global, individual, societal and organizational levels (Gibb, 2005). Thus, rather than entrepreneurs as persons starting a business, contemporary entrepreneurship education discourse deals with ‘personal entrepreneurs’ or ‘intrapreneurs’ who act as if they were entrepreneurs in every area of their lives (see e.g. Olsson and Frödin, 2007; for an analysis of personal entrepreneurship, see Rose, 1998: 150-169; Peters, 2001).

Entrepreneurship is no longer just a business term anymore – it’s a way of life. You don’t need to be an entrepreneur to be entrepreneurial. You just need to cultivate the entrepreneurial attitude. This is exactly what people feel in their gut every day and why they desire the direction to enable their entrepreneurial spirit. (Lopis, 2013)

At the core of entrepreneurship education is a psychological idea of entrepreneurship as a behavioral process or as an entrepreneurial mindset which is not innate or pre-given, but something that can be learned or achieved, yet something that lies in a person's general potentiality (Chell, 2013; Gartner, 2008; on potentiality see Mäkinen, 2013). Thus, it has been argued that 'there is an entrepreneur that exists deep-down inside of each of us' (Lopis, 2013).

Entrepreneurial behaviour is not simply a rational and economical means-end calculation, but, rather, a way of living in which a person renounces his/her old self and becomes a new person who can be called an entrepreneurial self (Gartner, 2008: 361-368; Hägg, 2011: 16). Therefore, it interestingly deals with personal development, as well as self-renouncement. In a fashion similar to Western Zen's ontology of the self, the entrepreneurial person engages in a twin project of subjectification and desubjectification, i.e. deconstructing an illusionary understanding of the self and making room for a more flexible and even foundationless identity (cf. Binkley, 2011: 12).

A manifesto in the self-improvement site Createapreneur mentions mindfulness as a possible way to find one's true, creative and flexible identity through transforming the relationship a person has to his/her own body and emotions:

Clean The Mind, Clear The body and Connect With Your Inner ENTREPRENEUR. How? Through yoga, healthy habits and mindfulness techniques. Trust me, the world needs you, creating! (Createapreneur, 2014)

The entrepreneurial self therefore renounces her former understanding of stable identity, and these kind of personal entrepreneurs denote a new era of mankind 'comprising all those people who make things happen and who discover how they can create new energy by discovering that much of what they previously believed in was not true' (Berglund, 2013: 5). Under the rubric of entrepreneurship education, children as well as adult learners and self-employees are taught how to work on improving themselves, how to emphasize positive thinking, joy of creating and an awareness of the value of their own interests and passions (*ibid.*).

In studies of entrepreneurial learning (see e.g. Kyrö, Seikkula-Leino and Mylläri, 2011) it has been noted that the dynamics of cognitive, conative and affective constructs and meta-level self-regulating abilities are crucial in achieving entrepreneurial behavior and an entrepreneurial mindset. Kyrö et al. (2011) note that 'self-regulation refers to an individual's active participation in his or her own learning process'. Moreover, 'it is the process through which self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions are planned and systematically adapted as necessary to affect one's learning.' These entrepreneurial meta-abilities can be

seen as techniques of self-regulation, but also as helpful in coping with an increasing uncertainty and complexity of society. They offer tools to increase person's resilience and flexibility (cf. Rerup, 2005). In this regard, the entrepreneurial self is a figure who is perfectly liquid and flexible in relation to the turbulence of his/her surrounding environment.

This resonates well with the aforementioned ontological ramifications of spirituality in Western Zen Buddhism, where the self is decidedly empty, i.e. not fixed in its delusions of stable identity. As Watts described above, the person focused on the present only is flexible and creative, and not prone to hesitation or rigid beliefs concerning one's internal or external reality.

Entrepreneurial mindfulness discourses entail meticulous descriptions on how to calm the mind by focusing on the present moment. One can first learn to train one's focus on the movement of one's own breath, by counting exhalations and inhalations.

**Follow your breath and observe your thoughts.** When you are sitting in a secluded spot, close your eyes. Begin to take slow, deep breaths. As you continue, simply follow your breath – allow your mind, your thoughts and your feelings to lead you. Do not try to force your thoughts, but rather observe them. (Jacobs, 2014)

One should remain in a state of alert passivity. When thoughts or feelings spring to mind, they are recognized and then set free. One should even let go of the very notion of trying to achieve something through mindfulness practice. Slowly but surely, the mind becomes more and more relaxed and calm, and one learns not to attach to and identify with one's own emotions and thoughts. (See e.g. Simmons, 2014.) This is how the notion of 'emptiness' of the self acquires a concrete and practical form. A practitioner of mindfulness notices that one's own self is not something stable, but a stream of darting thoughts and emotions. To attach to them and to consider them as one's own identity is to fall prey to a harmful illusion (Gunatillake, 2014).

This practice can then be broadened to cover all aspects of a person's daily life, from home routines to a day at the office. By practicing mindfulness, one supposedly learns not to falter into emotional reactions to surprising adversities, but retain clear-headedness and self-control (Dewalt, 2013; Simmons, 2014; Toren, 2014). This is how mindfulness resonates with the government of work typical of general economy. As mindfulness is a decidedly personal practice, it is seemingly abstracted from the limitations of space and time. Thereby mindfulness practice is a suitable and flexible tool for governing just those aspects of mental work which are not reducible to a certain time and space. Instead of presenting a fixed set of skills and information particular to a certain

type of work, it governs those sentiments and mentalities conducive to creative, autonomous and spiritually rewarding work.

Terry Hyland (2010) advocates the use of mindfulness as serving the humanistic and therapeutic goals of adult education: self-esteem, authenticity and self-realization. Moreover, he sees that the ideas of emptiness and no-self are commensurable with the contemporary social constructionist understanding of subjectivity (Hyland, 2010: 527-528). Thus it is no wonder that mindfulness is often presented as compatible with 'transformative' adult learning, through which one can radically change one's self and acquire stress resilience as well as mental flexibility and creativity (Altobello, 2007; Hyland, 2010: 527-528; Langer, 1998: 4; cf. Siegel, 2007; Shapiro, Brown and Astin, 2008). In entrepreneurial education, Rerup (2005: 2) has argued that mindfulness can enable entrepreneurs to minimize errors and remain vigilant. Furthermore, she stresses that mindfulness can 'enable habitual entrepreneurs to better anticipate and respond to unexpected events and opportunities and to use their prior entrepreneurial experience to successfully exploit opportunities' (*ibid.*: 2).

The individualistic ethos in entrepreneurship education is also articulated as a holistic view of human behavior that entails bodily as well as emotional and spiritual aspects of human existence (see e.g. Jensen, 2014). It has become a commonplace, for example, to say that if a person thinks positively, he/she actually becomes positive, happy person. Entrepreneurial ethos, therefore, deals with idea of a person who is self-satisfied, and more specific, someone who produces her own satisfaction and happiness (Pyykkönen, 2014: 95-97; see also Foucault, 2008: 215-239). Furthermore, this holistic tendency also indicates that entrepreneurial self is inseparable from a person's life as a whole. As it has been framed in the field of entrepreneurship coaching:

Being a holistic entrepreneur means there is no separation between your love, life, work and spirituality. It's a way of life that lends to serving in whatever capacity you're living in that very moment. It's diving into that path that makes your heart sing; your Divine calling. (Swiha, 2014)

Through learning to control one's self through mindfulness meditation, an entrepreneurial person can have a deeper, healthier relation to her own affects and bodily well-being:

Don't let your thoughts rule you – learn to rule your thoughts. A restless mind has many effects that can include trouble sleeping, poor decision-making, anxiety and even depression when left to run a muck. Learning to foster a calm mind will help you become a better entrepreneur. (Toren, 2014)

This self-control also reflects the ability to take responsibility for one's own life. As Nikolas Rose (1998; see also Miller and Rose, 2008; Brunila, 2012) has noted, therapeutic ethos operates with an aim of 'autonomisation' and 'responsibilization of the self', whereupon the 'whole' of human existence is annexed to work in an emancipatory fashion that frees the worker to take control and responsibility for his/her own work. This is clearly apparent in entrepreneurship education and its uses of mindfulness. It seeks emancipation from standardizing external conduct, and organizing the creative powers of the human mind (Virtanen, 2004; 2006).

This holistic ethos has its roots in the above mentioned discourses of humanistic psychology that have been mobilized to depict and manage the working subject in a post-industrial economy. To this amalgam, elements from Western Zen Buddhism have also been added to limn the contours of the spiritual aspects of work. It is used to account for the characteristics of creativity and intuitiveness which do not seem fit into the Western binaries of body and mind, reason and affect.

In sum, one can understand the position that the Zen-Buddhist notion of spiritual experience has acquired in entrepreneurial education through an analysis of how they share similar assumptions about the self. We have argued that the Western form of Zen experience correlates well at several levels with the styles of reasoning in entrepreneurship education. Both indicate crucial governmental technologies in the tensions of a general economy consisting of discourses of self-fulfilment, authenticity and self-development. Moreover, they share a similar emancipatory promise of cultivating positive thinking, the joy of creating, and consciousness of the present moment.

The aforementioned character of spiritual experience as being universal and a quotidian aspect of the psyche buttresses Zen as something that can be easily mobilized in both countercultural and entrepreneurial education discourses. In addition, both Zen and entrepreneurial discourse in general can be traced back to a tradition of criticism of the nexus of positivist psychology and Taylorist management practices which lends them both a seemingly holistic, emancipatory edge.

## Conclusion

In his classic essay *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, Max Weber examined how Protestantism and especially Calvinist doctrines influenced large numbers of people to engage in work in the secular world, and especially in

developing their own business enterprises. Weber described a subjective interiority as a private space for moulding religious virtues which would then also make up the foundation of a work ethic of effectiveness and profit responsibility (Weber, 1930). One can find consistency with the Weberian account in the way subjective interiority and spirituality have become the focal point of the entrepreneurial work ethic. However, the very notion of subjectivity now assumes a liquidity or 'emptiness', as there is seemingly nothing stable and unchanging in the ideal entrepreneur. Arguably, Zen discourse also destabilizes ontological categories and the binaries of mind and body and rationality and affects, in favour of the affective and intuitive aspect of productive action. This also has a different temporal orientation, as a person practicing mindfulness is not attached to the future nor the past, but focuses stringently on the present moment only.

Holistic characterizations of spirituality in mindfulness discourses also resonate well with the notion of general economy, in which the most general aspects of what makes us human, are governed as sources of profit. Drawing from Zen Buddhism, the entrepreneurial celebration of mindfulness highlights its ability to cultivate creativity, intuitive and flexible action and learning to learn. It does not specify exactly how and where entrepreneurial spirit should be manifest, but instead, focuses on these meta-level conditions of entrepreneurial behavior. This can be understood as an attempt to grasp the nature of productive work as irreducible to spatial or temporal exigencies.

Moreover, the way Zen spirituality is used in entrepreneurship education shows the inventive sweeping logic of capitalism: it broadens its own boundaries by assimilating criticism that seems to come from outside it. In this case, the countercultural and at times decidedly anti-capitalist ethos of Zen Buddhism was deterritorialized and annexed to the very conditions of productive work in general economy. This also highlights the way capitalism does not only 'repress' in the sense of suffocating human life, but creates human reality and cultivates its productive forces.

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