Metaphor, Metamorphosis, Mindfulness: Social change through the dispositive of "Mental Presence".

Metafora, Metamorfosi, Mindfulness: il cambiento sociale attraverso il dispositivo della "Presenza mentale"

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to define a new anthropological theory of social change through the case-study of mindfulness as instance of cultural transformation and sign of social change. Mindfulness meditation derives from Buddhist meditative practices reinterpreted in a clinical key by Jon Kabat-Zinn and represents what might be called 'new cultural phenomenon'. The purpose of the article is to answer some fundamental questions: 1) is it possible to understand mindfulness as an evolution of Buddhist meditation or 2) is Mindfulness the result of a phenomenon of transculturation? And ultimately, 3) how does Mindfulness participate in the mechanisms of identity construction in modern culture? The analysis of Mindfulness proposed will use an innovative method based on Ernesto de Martino's anthropological theory of cultural crisis and "crisis of the presence" as fundamental defense mechanism that takes part into the construction and protection of cultural identity as a fundamental dispositive of transculturation. In particular, the role of the body will be emphasized, demonstrating how an anthropology of the body in Meditation and in the subsequent Mindfulness can be understood as an anthropology of Foucault's dispositive of subjectivation made operative by the transculturation of meditation from Buddhist psychology to the cognitive behavioral one, a socio-cultural change imposed by a change in the etho-aesthetic valorizing force that requires the shaping of docile bodies and therefore rejects the instances of de-habituation brought about by the first meditation. The investigations presented in this article obviously do not claim to provide a definitive and exhaustive answer to the question but want to initiate a possible line of studies that deal with mindfulness and similar phenomena starting from de Martino's anthropological interpretative key. In this context, Mindfulness is presented as 1) a new cultural phenomenon that 2) is derived from the need to respond to the 'crisis' of the Anthropocene and, in many respects, is itself a child of the crisis, but also responds to a practical need: 3) providing an effective mechanism of subjectivation through dispotivies of organization of 'presence'.*

Key words: Mindfulness, Meditation, Social Change, Presence, Crisis, de Martino, Anthropology.

Introduction: Transculturation, Meditation, Crisis

Mindfulness contemplative psychology is a modern clinical practice inspired by Asian meditation techniques, specifically Buddhist meditation. Despite its evident success in the so-called Western world, the promotion and diffusion of meditation by Mindfulness has led to a proliferation of sensationalist and, to some degree, generalist discourses that tend to diminish the millennial Buddhist practice as well as its cultural value. Non-reductionist approaches to meditation, mindfulness or contemplative practices in general, capable of detecting psychosocial, ethical, spiritual and philosophical aspects, are today prevented by this proliferation of promotional discourses that make it more of a product than a practice rooted in a complex historical-cultural context. The purpose of this article is therefore to provide the necessary tools to get rid of this reductionism and to look at Mindfulness or Meditation in today's social context with the appropriate methodological tools to face such a challenge.

A possible modern definition of 'transculturation' is that of a process concerning the transformation of a certain culture through the influx of elements from different ones and which prove capable of replacing, altering, or transforming others that already exist. But if we want to be more precise, we should say that it is a complex phenomenon: interaction is not purely a process of exchanging or acquiring elements from a donor to a recipient culture. Nor are we satisfied to say that both cultures are mutually influenced through the well-known processes of identity formation. Cultural interaction produces new cultural elements that are neither the result of the adoption and reinterpretation of traditions from a culture that 'yields' to one that 'receives' them, nor are they 'equally' children of all cultures produced by such interaction.

The phenomenon of Mindfulness belongs precisely to this circumstance: it is a product of the psychological culture of the cognitive-behavioral tradition, but it has been re-elaborated and incorporated by what should properly be defined as a process of *medicalization*, following its introduction, in the form of the Indian meditative tradition, in the European and American world. Similarly to what happens with yoga,[1] meditation has been the subject of those logics of fascination for the exotic

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[1] India itself, through illustrious personalities such as Swami Vivekananda, Yogendra, Kuvalayananda and many others, built a 'yoga identity' functioning for the market and capitalist

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that the so-called 'oriental traditions' have in Europe and America, but, on the one hand, it has also become part of the discourse of identity construction in India, which has adopted yoga and meditation as symbols to emphasize its 'Indianness' (*hindutva*), accepting, among other things, the exotic discourse that certain Western claims expected to see in 'Indian practices' in order to 'recognize' them as 'Indian', and on the other hand, however, meditation, (at least a certain idea of meditation), has been so successful in the West that such discourses have become part of the biomedical world and have indeed been 'medicalized' in a process of transculturation that reshaped mindfulness as a completely new cultural construct, different from Indian meditation practices, and made it acceptable for the needs of allopathic biomedicine.[2]

According to Karunadasa, the emergence of the "self" in Buddhist philosophy can be explained through the cognitive process,[3] and as De Silva points out, a "Mindfulness psychology" was also possible thanks to the revolution consisting in cognitivism.[4]

But, although cognitive psychology has to all effects constituted the prerequisite for the assimilation of the Buddhist elements later constituted in the form of modern Mindfulness, it must also be said that there are significant differences between 'Western' and Buddhist psychology. These differences must no longer appear to us neither obvious nor irrelevant, since they could result in a substantial incompatibility of the two systems, which would possibly endanger the Mindfulness system, if not properly addressed.

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symbolic logics that could on the one hand present India through a language understandable to the rest of the world, now colonized by the capitalist mentality, and on the other hand, however, subjected yoga itself to the same capitalist dynamics, making it in fact one of its products. In the case of Yoga, India has been forced to accept a certain self-image, a cradle of Yoga defined within certain canons and parameters enormously distant from those that can also be found simply in Patañjali's work which, although it is sometimes defined as the 'yoga's Bible', never mentions issues of postural gymnastics, on which all modern yoga is based. See ANDREA JAIN, *Peace Love Yoga: The politics of global spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2020).

[2] The term "Biomedicine" is used in Medical Anthropology to describe the medical model adopted by modern Western thought, based on the biological vision as central and on the technicalization of procedures as the preferred operative modality. See MARGARET LOCK & VINH-KIM NGUYEN, *An Anthropology of Biomedicine* (Oxford: Wiley-Backwell, 2010).

[3] YAKUPITIYAGE KARUNADASA, *Early Buddhist Teachings. The Middle Position on Theory and Practice* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2018), p. 41.

[4] PADMASIRI DE SILVA, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling: Pathways of Mindfulness-based Therapies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

This article gives for granted that the Buddhist philosophical system can be considered, at some extents, as a psychological vision. The question is not yet completely and unanimously solved, but in general, if we accept the very nature of Mindfulness, we must also admit that the Buddhist thought too is constituted as a de facto psychology.[5]

First of all, we must ask ourselves if it is appropriate to define psychology as a 'culture'. This answer has already been given by Medical Anthropology which considers health issues as a cultural fact, having shown how each culture builds its own idea on health and disease, and shape its cultural dispositives to deal with this problem.[6] Within these *cultural studies* of healing dispositives, transcultural psychology and transcultural psychiatry played a fundamental role in recognizing not only that different models of describing human thought outside the Western tradition are possible, but also that different models could interact each other. Transcultural studies on meditation and mindfulness must therefore necessarily be a '*transcultural psychiatry*' as it describes how *a process of transculturation took place between two different ethno-psychological systems*: Buddhist psychology and cognitive-behavioral psychology.[7]

Section 1: Meditation as a 'technique of the body': understanding Mindfulness as a starting point to outline a new anthropology of social change

From sati to mindfulness: the crisis and the protection

Beyond the psychological nature of Buddhist reflections, it is therefore necessary to be aware of the immediate interests that Western psychology has shown for the

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[5] In any case, since we cannot discuss the psychological nature of Buddhist philosophy in this context, we refer to what has already been said by other authors. For further information see the bibliography.

[6] When I use the term "dispositive" I refer to the original French "*dispositif*" for the use of this concept in the human sciences starting from Foucault and subsequent developments which are partly summarized in the work of Tom Frost, "The *Dispositif* between Foucault and Agamben", in *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 15.1 (Sage, 2015): 151-171.

[7] CHRIS KANG & KOA WHITTINGHAM, "Mindfulness: A Dialogue between Buddhism and Clinical Psychology", in *Mindfulness* 1 (2010): 161-173.

Buddhist tradition. Despite what we might expect, the psychological school that first became fascinated in Buddhism was not cognitivism, but psychoanalysis.

Freud's interest in meditation can be partly explained by the influences that the Indian thought had on Schopenhauer,[8] who is recognized by Freud himself as the true founder of psychoanalysis.[9]

Freud, "regards meditative experience as a regressive "oceanic" feeling characterized by "a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded" […]. Freud was ambivalent about this oceanic feeling because he himself did not experience it and such a feeling is hard to deal with scientifically".[10]

A systematic comparison of Buddhism and Psychoanalysis was made by Padmasiri De Silva.[11] His work is outstanding since, unlike previous writings, such as that of Fromm and Suzuki, it suggests a rigorous comparison that can also provide us various starting points. If we want to address the problem of the incompatibility between modern cognitive psychology and Buddhism, it is first necessary to understand what the psychological intentions of certain Buddhist statements are, which can only be appreciated starting from a comparative work such as that of De Silva. What interests us most at this point concerns three main aspects common to both psychologies: the conscious mind, the unconscious mind, and the formation of the Ego.

Both Buddhism and Freudian psychoanalysis recognize the ephemeral nature of the Ego, its being a psychological construct operated either by self-appropriation, or by mechanisms of narcissistic identification and projection.[12]

When it comes to cognitive tradition, the problem concerns the very foundation of the two psychologies. Even because of the long influence on the part of Ego Psychology, today it is believed that a correct, strong, and stable constitution of the Ego is synonymous of mental health. However, this conflicts with the Buddhist

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[8] STEPHEN CROSS, *Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013). See also PADMASIRI DE SILVA, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, cit. p. 188.

[9] As Freud himself states in *A Difficulty on the Path of Psycho-Analysis*, 1917.

[10] TAO JIANG, "Storehouse consciousness and the unconscious: a comparative study of Xuan Zang and Freud on the subliminal mind", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.1 (2004): 119-139; cit. p. 2.

[11] PADMASIRI DE SILVA, *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology* (Victoria: Shogam Publications, 2010).

[12] BHIKKHU SUJATO, *A History of Mindfulness: How insight worsted tranquillity in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Taiwan: Santipada, 2005).

idea, which instead has as its ultimate goal the deconstruction of the Ego through the recognition of its substantial emptiness (*anattā*).

The mindfulness method claims to refer to Indian meditation traditions with particular reference to Buddhist practices. In order to construct a specific identity, real foundation myths are often used, and this practice is no exception. It is not here to deny that mindfulness is clearly inspired by Buddhist practices. The systematizer of mindfulness himself, the professor emeritus of medicine Jon Kabat-Zinn, clearly refers to Buddhist practice.[13]

However, the modern narratives of mindfulness are constantly changing, and now that mindfulness has taken on a real cultural autonomy (that is, it perceives itself as a domain independent of so-called 'religious' practices), we read more and more often about new founding myths that, for example, refer to a multiple origin or identify with meditation even some practices of prayer.[14] The reason for this is simple: now that mindfulness is taking on cultural autonomy it needs to break away from a specific cultural origin. The filiation to Buddhist philosophy is a problem insofar as, despite the many efforts made to present Buddhism as the first 'scientific religion',[15] meditation is still too tied to spiritual issues, which convinced scientists that a purely scientific meditation was necessary in order to make it acceptable for the medical community. This process of 'scientization' resulted mostly in the medicalizing tendency that a rigid protocol such as that of clinical mindfulness has.

A multiple origin, on the other hand, perfectly inscribes mindfulness within a precise narrative in which there has been some kind of evolutionary development that, passing through various (and never explicitly defined) religious traditions, is then 'scientificized' to finally reach our clinical studies with a new 'medical' form.[16] Beyond these dynamics of identity construction, however, mindfulness

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[13] HUSGAFVEL, "The 'universal dharma foundation' of mindfulness-based stress reduction: non-duality and Mahāyāna Buddhist influences in the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn", *Contemporary Buddhism* 19.2 (2018): 275-326.

[14] REGINA CHOW TRAMMEL, "Tracing the roots of mindfulness: Transcendence in Buddhism and Christianity", in *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 36.3 (2017): 1-17.

[15] DAVID MCMAHAN, "Modernity and the early discourse of scientific Buddhism", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.4 (2004): 897-933.

[16] BART DIERYNCK, HANNES LEROY, GRANT SAVAGE, & ELLEN CHOI, "The Role of Individual and Collective Mindfulness in Promoting Occupational Safety in Health Care", in *Medical Care Research and Review* 74.1 (Sage, 2017): 79–96.

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clearly remains a phenomenon inspired by the Buddhist tradition. Indeed, much has been done in the past and much continues to be done today to study how similar mindfulness and Buddhist meditation are, but always from the point of view of a 'scientification' of Buddhism, and never through a 'Buddhification' of Mindfulness.

Beyond the problem of the very term 'mindfulness', used to translate the original Pāli *sati*, and which has been discussed on countless occasions, what interests us in this article concerns the method.[17] From a point of view of *transcultural psychology*, the Buddhist philosophical system requires a complex and elaborate psychological conception, centered on the problem of cognition, of the construction of reality in opposition to things "as they are" (*yathābhūta*), and meditation is inscribed distinctly in a conception of corporeality and body technicality aimed at freeing the subject from the deceit of knowledge and language that traps us in a world of suffering. All this provides a specific philosophical background that leads to formulate the meditation practice in a defined way. Here, is meditation adaptable to a different philosophical background such as that of Western psychology? Answering this question is crucial to understanding whether or not Mindfulness can be defined as a continuation of Buddhist meditation.

Like any cultural phenomenon, meditation is subject to a prejudicial gaze, which therefore "judges before" seeing.[18] The western gaze judges first as it expects to see something that proves certain stereotypical ideas, now introjected into the collective mentality, of India as a land of spirituality, peace, and tranquility. The stereotype of meditation as a technique of 'calm' and 'inner peace' fits perfectly into this stereotype which, however, does not correspond to reality. Mindfulness has certainly taken on this fundamental goal, and in this it has also been shown to be effective in preventing panic attacks or promoting a state of stillness that also brings proven long-term benefits to prevent even depression.[19] Buddhist meditation, however,

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[17] For more information on the use of the term *sati* see Bhikkhu Bodhi, "What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective", in *Contemporary Buddhism* 12.1 (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2011): 19-39. See also Bhikkhu Anālayo, "Early Buddhist Mindfulness and Memory, the Body, and Pain", in *Mindfulness* 7.6 (Springer, 2016): 1271–1280 and Idem, "Once Again on Mindfulness and Memory in Early Buddhism", in *Mindfulness* 9 (Springer, 2018): 1-6.

[18] The term *praeiūdicium* in Latin means exactly this: to judge (*iūdicium*) in advance (*prae*-).

[19] Melbourne Academic Mindfulness Interest Group, "Mindfulness-based psychotherapies: a review of conceptual foundations, empirical evidence and practical considerations", in *Journal compilation* (The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2006): 285-294.

while having concentration as a necessary starting state before a deeper 'immersion', is structured on the contrary as a technique capable of inducing a '*crisis*' in the meditator.

What I mean by 'crisis' is mainly implicit the way in which Early Buddhist meditation was conceived. The purpose of Buddhist philosophy is the liberation (*mokkha*) from a condition of existential discomfort (*dukkha*) caused by a series of cognitive deceptions linked to language but also to tradition and the structure of society, from which in fact a good Buddhist withdraws because he recognizes its internal mechanisms as intrinsically pathogenetic. The dynamics of power lead to the three poisons: craving (*taṇhā*), ignorance (*avijjā*) and hatred (*dosa*). The social aspect is often underestimated forgetting how the Buddha promoted a substantially anti-violent worldview (*ahiṃsā*) which revealed a fundamental revulsion of the Buddha for castes and social divisions.

> The recognition of the unity and oneness of humankind is the foundation for the practice of all spiritual life. Those who are "bound by racial prejudices" (*jāti-vāda-vinibbaddhā*) as well as those who are "bound by caste prejudices" (*gottavāda-vinibbaddhā*), says the Buddha, "have strayed far from the way of salvation" (*ārakā anuttarāya vijjā-caraṇa-sampadāya*).[20]

This aspect of social criticism that was fundamental in ancient Buddhism is totally ignored in modern Mindfulness, and this also constitutes the criticism that some authors such as Purser address to Mindfulness, seen as a product of the capitalist market and not as a form of holistic anthropology of the individual, in which therefore philosophical, but also moral, political and social issues coexist on the same level.[21] We must not forget the fundamental *avaidika* nature of ancient Buddhism, that is the rejection of the Vedic tradition and the very role of the authority of the Brahmanic caste, which caused the early Buddhists to be addressed with a series of negative epithets including that of *nāstika*.[22] Mindfulness seems to be thoroughly lacking in all these aspects.

[20] KARUNADASA, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, cit. p. 178.
[21] UMA CHAKRAVARTI, *Social dimensions of early Buddhism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996).
[22] FEDERICO SQUARCINI, "*Pāṣaṇḍin*, *vaitaṇḍika*, *vedanindaka* and *nāstika*. On criticism, dissenters and polemics and the South Asian struggle for the semiotic primacy of veridiction", Orientalia Suecana 60 (2011): 101-115. However, in his article in response to Purser's book, Anālayo denies any social implication of Buddhism ("The Buddha's Attitude to Politics"), but the exact

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> Rather than cultivating a desire to abandon the world, Buddhism is seen as a science of hap-
> piness — a way of easing the pain of existence. […] Mindfulness is promoted as a cure-all
> for anxiety and affective disorders including post-traumatic stress, for alcoholism and drug
> dependency, for attention-deficit disorder, for anti-social and criminal behavior, and for the
> commonplace debilitating stress of modern urban life.[23]

We can just imagine what ancient meditation was like only through the philoso-
phy that is described in the Buddhist texts, as there is no practical notion in them,
just some reference to concentration.[24] It seems that the essential element is
knowledge (*ñāṇa*) resulting from the pure study and contemplation of one's own
cognitive processes as well as from the examination of reality. Even the methods
considered more traditional and addressed as the foundation for mindfulness –
namely the *samatha* and *vipassanā* techniques – were actually developed later in
nineteenth-twentieth century Burma.[25] The basis for the codification of these tech-
niques are suttas considered very ancient such as the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of which,

opposite was proved by Squarcini when he demonstrates that the *nāstika*'s attitude was explicitly
averse to an established order, and there is nothing more political than social rebellion. For the
rejoinder see BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO, "The Myth of McMindfulness", in *Mindfulness* 11 (2020): 472-
479. As a possible further answer to this, see FEDERICO SQUARCINI, *Tradition, veda and law: studies
on South Asian classical intellectual traditions* (Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2018).

[23] ROBERT SHARF, "Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)", in *Transcultural Psychiatry*
52.4 (2014): 470-484; cit. p. 472.

[24] EVIATAR SHULMAN, *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative
Perception*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[25] Mindfulness therefore starts from the *vipassanā* technique developed by the masters Ledi
Sayādaw and Mingun Sayādaw and disciple Mahāsī. Of the latter we must keep in mind that he
designed the *vipassanā* already having in mind a global and transcultural perspective, keeping in
mind how a layman, without any knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, could have benefited from it.
However, this has inevitably led to an extreme simplification and technicalization of meditation. The
term "bare attention" then became popular thanks to its use made by a student of Mahāsī, the German
monk Nyanaponika Thera. I would like to mention the studies on ancient meditation in Crosby's
work which highlights not only the Burmese origin of *vipassanā* but also how traditions considered
archaic such as *borān kammaṭṭhāna* still envisaged a meditation strongly linked to the philosophical
conceptions of ancient Buddhism and the Abhidhamma as well as to visualization and mental
imaging techniques, but also how similar techniques have as prerequisite and preliminary
preparation both phases of *samatha* and *vipassana*. See Kate Crosby, *Esoteric Theravada: The Story
of the Forgotten Meditation Tradition of Southeast Asia*, (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2020):
pp. 38-42.

however, the in-depth psychosemantic analysis of cognitive doubling is not considered. This brings us to the problem of *crisis*. Buddhism wants to induce a crisis in the practitioner, but what kind of crisis?

The followers of the Buddha in ancient times were called *samaṇa*, i.e., 'ascetics'. More precisely, the *samaṇa* is the one who 'toil' and 'exercise'. Later they will be defined 'mendicants', beggars (*bhikkhu*, see the Sanskrit *bhikṣa* "to beg") as they were people who had to leave their comfort zone, their possessions and the amenities of society to undertake a path of inner analysis that would have deeply undermined their convictions. Without this crisis there is no liberation. Sharf recognizes correctly how the Early Buddhist institution "comprised a renunciate community that embodied, quite literally, a critique of mainstream social values and cultural norms".[26]

Meditation and Cultural Crisis

The crisis understood in Buddhist thought also pertains to the difficult problem of nihilistic anguish, which power is used for control purposes, and which instead the meditator must overcome, going beyond the conceptual categories of nothingness, like any other affirmation of entity and identity.

The concept of crisis in Anthropology was developed by Ernesto de Martino whose educational background ranged from the history of religions to philosophy.[27]

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[26] SHARF, "Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)", cit. p. 478.

[27] De Martino's anthropology is useful for understanding how the dispositive of mindfulness re-proposes a phenomenon of transculturation to the extent that transculturation can be included in the dimension that de Martino defines as "economy". De Martino develops part of these reflections in his anonymous writings, cfr. MARCELLO MASSENZIO ed., *Storia e Metastoria: I fondamenti di una teoria del sacro*, (Lecce: Argo, 1995). Here he presents the "bare life" (*mera vita*) as opposed to an "economic life" (p. 106), where economic life is a force that through the attribution of values (*valorization*, in Italian: "valorizzazione") harnesses the things of the world in categories that can be dominated by the social organization through, precisely, economic force. These phenomena interest de Martino as an anthropologist and cultural scholar but also and above all as a thinker of the crisis, a theorist of the dispositive of cultural de-historification as a model for the resolution of historical becoming through mythic consciousness (p. 54). Although at the beginning the dispositive belongs to religion as the holder of the economic organization, which structures the sacred as a mythical-ritual technique (p. 83), over time this domain passes to science and technology or in what de Martino defines "technical domination over nature".

Most importantly, de Martino has not only developed a theory on the *crisis* from which we can start to define the problem of modern Mindfulness as a form of protection from the crisis of the contemporary, but he is also considered one of the pioneers in transcultural psychiatry.[28]

His anthropological theory therefore includes the problems of the culturality of health and disease and concerns culture can structure knowledge about the ideas of health and disease. This Demartinian theory embraces in itself not only the problem of the crisis but also how it fits into discourses about institutionalization and the techniques for *historicization* of health (to use de Martino's words), but also about processes we now call transculturation, although he did not use this term.

De Martino is fundamentally a thinker of the crisis, but what exactly does he mean by this term? Crisis indicates a rupture, the collapse of a mental, cultural, social or any other environment on which an entire system was previously based. From the individual to society, therefore, de Martino points out that the ability to "be in the world" (*esserci*) is expressed through the state of presence (*presenza*). Presence can be individual as well as social, but it is always declined starting from mechanisms of recognition and acceptance. A wavering presence inevitably leads to a crisis: a sense of anguish, trouble, stasis or dissolution of a previously established order. In order to avoid the "crisis of presence", that is, any situation that reveals the fragility of the anthropological, social and cultural constructions of identity, several dispositives are instituted to protect presence. The crisis, however, is not necessarily a tragic fact. Certainly, as de Martino reveals in transcultural psychiatry studies, the protection of presence is necessary to safeguard the individual from real psychopathological crises that degenerate into what ethnopsychiatry has identified as culture-based syndromes, even to the anguish of death, which is faced with a complex system of codification of the funeral lament that de Martino has well explained in his work.[29]

The crisis, however, is in some respects also *necessary*, where the mechanisms of protection of the presence and identity are so strong and isolating as to generate a form of alienation from the world. Paradoxically, those who have too strong a

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[28] GOFFREDO BARTOCCI & RAYMOND PRINCE, "Pioneers in Transcultural Psychiatry: Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965)", in *Transcultural Psychiatry* 35.1 (McGill University, 1998): 111-123.

[29] For a complete introduction to de Martino's thought, see the work of FLAVIO GEISSHUESLER, *The Life and Work of Ernesto De Martino: Italian Perspectives on Apocalypse and Rebirth in the Modern Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

presence are unable to conceive the otherness: they live with fear and suspicion, and the manifestation of an element perceived as 'foreign' to their system can lead to a real violent rejection. By expanding it to an entire cultural system, where the protective structures are too self-referential, we would inevitably slide into a closed culture, trivially into a racist or self-centered culture. De Martino is aware of this, so much so that his first major work focused on a critique of the "naturalistic" system as a closed cultural structure unable to understand otherness.[30] On the contrary, a non-naturalized anthropology (for de Martino it is fundamental to consider the contextual dimension of "historicity") can be a true science of otherness as the ethnological foundation of anthropology should be precisely that of seeking the crisis, inducing it through the confrontation with different and unthinkable worlds.[31] The anthropologist voluntarily decides to undergo a culture shock by immersing himself in a world other than his own and abandoning all his convictions and 'Eurocentric' ideas (of course de Martino focuses particularly on his sociocultural world) for which one haughtily sees himself above all other cultural dimensions, deemed incapable of constructing *valid* discourses on philosophy, art or even medicine and psychology.[32] Also for this reason de Martino has been seen as an anticipator of Said's Orientalism. [33]

From this point of view, meditation, although not known by de Martino,[34] is an excellent method to experience the crisis, an induced and controlled crisis because

[30] ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *Naturalismo e Storicismo nell'Etnologia*, (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1941).

[31] This critique of Eurocentrism as the proposal of an ethnology capable of a true transcultural process through the crisis, that is, the questioning of its principles through the acceptance of otherness, is part of the discourse about the so-called "critical ethnocentrism" of de Martino, a fundamental theme of his work. For more information about this theme see GEORGE SAUNDERS, "'Critical Ethnocentrism" and the Ethnology of Ernesto De Martino", in *American Anthropologist* 95.4 (American Anthropological Association, 1993): 875-893; for the "humanistic ethnography" see cit. p. 885.

[32] Actually, for de Martino, especially at the beginning of his career, the field ethnography is not indispensable for understanding cultural otherness. History is also enough to understand how culture itself (one's own or that of others) is not monolithic and a closed and invariable world. Any scholar of culture, therefore, from the historian to the philosopher, if he accepts this 'crisis', he is for de Martino a good scientist.

[33] GEISSHUESLER, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[34] Actually, de Martino knows Indian traditions and yoga, which he mentions only rarely in his works. The most important mention is certainly in *La Fine del Mondo. Contributo all'Analisi delle Apocalissi Culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019), cit. p. 142, in which he refers to the yoga practice and

it is not generated by an unwanted impact, the meditator cannot have a closed mind and adverse to the otherness, but must rather voluntarily deconstruct his own beliefs, through a careful analysis of the cognitive process and the nature of reality that lead him to realize that his identity (*attā*) is actually a psychological construct, caused (*uppada*) by various factors, and therefore impermanent (*anicca*). This meant for Early Buddhism to be "mentally present" (*sati*).

Awareness of the true nature of things coincides with Mindfulness. In modern Mindfulness-psychology, on the other hand, not only there is no mention of the need to deconstruct one's psychological identity, but *sati* is reinterpreted as a state of stillness, inner peace and, implicitly, as an adaptation to society, the ability to coexist (endurance) in perfect continuity with the Ego-psychology which believes that a strong Ego is synonymous with mental health. Rather than being just an archaic Indian technique the continuity is with the cognitive-behavioral tradition that does not focus, as psychoanalysis does, on the etiological relationship of cause and effect, but ignores the causes and origins of the discomfort to focus only on how to re-educate the subject to adopt new behaviors, considered more appropriate.[35] In other words: "our brains can be optimized to cope with the present".[36]

Building identities through psychologies: medicalization and transculturation

the concept of *pratiloma* as a *regressus ad origenem*. Certainly, the phenomenon deserves more in-depth study than what he dedicates to it, but de Martino, not having the necessary indological knowledge despite his often-disagreeing exchanges with Mircea Eliade, left these analyzes to future investigators.

[35] Buddhism is in this sense much more akin to psychoanalysis than it is to behavioral psychology. Central is the analysis of the origins (*samudaya*) of every psychological or physical factor, and this attention to mental processes and the nature of discomfort (*dukkha*) has not gone unnoticed by a whole series of authors who have focused precisely on a comparative study between Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, citing primarily PADMASIRI DE SILVA, *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology*. The studies on the unconscious are also fundamental: the following study that the unconscious which among other things also reports other similar concepts between the two systems of thought, and which is the work of WILLIAM WALDRON, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The ālaya-vijñāna in the context of Indian Buddhist thought* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003). This book can be integrated by another interesting study, which is worth mentioning, by TAO JIANG, *Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[36] RONALD PURSER, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality* (London: Repeater Books, 2019), cit. p. 52.

For de Martino, "Magic and religion are technologies of the mind, which emerge in response to the crisis of presence",[37] this definition, however, should also be extended to all cultural systems that envisage a 'use of knowledge'. Therefore, not only magic or religion but also psychology as a system of knowledge is subject to the cultural mechanisms of protection of presence.[38]

Psychology, as a discourse about the ways of thinking of the human being made by the humans, is a cultural product and is subject to cultural ideas such as the definition of normality, health, and disease. Psychology can therefore appear in different cultures, which produce different forms of psychology, each linked to a particular cultural way of conceiving psychological facts. Given therefore this assumption, accepted by anthropology and transcultural psychology, we can also include psychology in those construction mechanisms of identity aimed at protecting presence.

> If a general "culture" of health and mental illness exists, there is no doubt that the psychiatrist participates in it. However, our psychiatrist does not himself live apart in an abstract institution, but exercises a function that places him in the role, and in the general ideology, of medical power.[39]

Western psychology, therefore, far from being objective and capable of describing universal mechanisms, sets its own cultural idea of the world and of the way of

[37] ROSARIO FORLENZA, "Magic, religion, and the South: notes on Ernesto De Martino", in *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 4.2 (Routledge, 2018): 137-155; cit. p. 143.

[38] Presence is the "first human vital good" as it is capable of giving meaning but also because it risks being lost in given historical conditions. Cfr. ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *Storia e Metastoria: I fondamenti di una teoria del sacro*, (Lecce: Argo, 1995); cit. p. 59. In this context, "the *homo faber*, as the founder of production techniques, always lets himself realistically be guided by the criterion of the efficiency of his tools" (cit., p. 58). It is in order to 'stem the crisis' that the "need for a *technique*" arises to bend the things of the world according to human needs, just as there is also "a technics of presence towards itself" that preserves presence from getting confused in nature and allowing oneself to live in culture, "a technics that can also be thought of as domination over nature, but in the sense of a struggle against the naturalization of presence and to prevent the absolute triumph of the vital-animal" (cit., p. 60). This technique is *political* and *pre-categorial* (*ibidem*). In this sense, the sacred is not only religious, as "the moment in which the presence recedes in horror before the process of its own alienation" (p. 61), moreover, the presence fights the threatening force by "isolating it" (*ibidem*), that is, it uses isolation as a weapon for depleting power.

[39] GIOVANNI JERVIS, "Psychiatry in Crisis: Institutional Contradictions", in *International Journal of Mental Health* 14.1/2 (Spring-Summer: Taylor & Francis, 1985): 52-69; cit. p. 56.

being human that leads to the construction of discourses that are functional to maintain, protect and strengthen those conceptions, certainly not to put them into crisis. They are in fact part of the way in which 'collective presence' is perceived in a certain culture, that is, it pertains to those mechanisms of identity construction to protect the 'presence'.

Naturally, it is not my intention to generalize, but the thesis I want to support is precisely that Western psychology has gradually structured itself as a *technique of constitution of the collective self* of Western culture, which can be defined, among other things, as a culture capable of propose a certain way of conceiving and analyzing the human mind. Thus, however, psychology has inevitably become part of identity affirmation mechanisms which are also forms of power and control over knowledge.[40] "In other words, neoliberal institutions exercise micro-levels of power, reformulating what it means to be a person, self and identity".[41]

Meditation, as part of a philosophy that accepted crisis as a model, potentially risked also putting psychology in trouble, which in fact initially rejected the Buddhist system as a possible theraphy, just as academic philosophy initially refused to consider the 'Asian philosophies' like Western ones. However, it must be said that right from the start the West used the idea of the East to build its identity, with a process that represents both a form of cultural domination and a form of protection from (one's own) crisis.

The problem of building one's own identity through the imposition of preconceived notions on 'others' had already been understood by Gramsci in 1933 when he wrote about the paradox whereby, through the English linguistic dispositive (and with the analogous cultural hegemony), the idea that a Japanese is "far eastern" is imposed. An idea that for Gramsci is paradoxical to the extent that a Japanese is considered to be "far eastern" even for a Californian, and perhaps for a Japanese himself.[42] This is the same idea that expresses Said in *Orientalism* (1978), attacking

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[40] See the position of GRAMSCI about the production of knowledge: "it will not be possible to escape any form of reductionism of the Other when writing a scientific paper whose ultimate meaning is to produce a knowledge…" as reported by EMILIO BERROCAL, "Other-Hegemony in de Martino: The Figure of the Gramscian Fieldworker between Lucania and London", in *The Journal of American Folklore* 128.507 (University of Illinois Press: American Folklore Society, 2015): 18-45; cit. p. 32.

[41] RONALD PURSER, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality* (London: Repeater Books, 2019), cit. p. 30.

[42] TOSHIO MIYAKE, "Il boom dell'Italia in Giappone: riflessioni critiche su Occidentalismo e Italianismo", in *Between* 1.1 (2010), cit. pp. 2-4.

directly those knowledges that have been constituted by benefiting from the institutionalization of an East (Orient) separated from a West (Occident).

Mindfulness is precisely part of this category of appropriation through transculturation. In fact, if the West had accepted the meditation practice as it is found in Buddhist discourses, it would not have superimposed its interpretation, its psychology, and its protocols on it. Maybe it would have accepted an intellectual exchange in which both disciplines, as equals, enriched themselves. Rather, we have witnessed a form of univocal appropriation in which Western psychology has built the identity of Mindfulness for use and consumption of its own idea of psychotherapy, erasing or rejecting all the basic elements that were part of Buddhist philosophy. Western psychology, in the form of Mindfulness, categorically rejects any dialogue with certain aspects of Buddhist philosophy, imposing a protocol such as the MBSR which is rigidly based on its own scientific and objectivist categories, in open contrast to the Buddhist idea of meditation, without even bothering to let mindfulness psychotherapists know how to read a Pāli text or any other Buddhist language.[43]

From his personal experience with Buddhist meditation in a monastic setting, Sharf is skeptical that it has anything akin to mindfulness in its modern clinical guise. Indeed — and this is very significant from an anthropological point of view — it should be noted that mindfulness was adopted as a strongly Euro-American-centered clinical method, taking for granted what were the models of health and disease of Western culture and with them also the expectations of healing from certain states defined as pathological. Looking at traditional meditation, Sharf wonders, "it is not clear that they aspire to our model of mental health in the first place".[44]

It therefore appears evident that Mindfulness Psychology was established as an identity mechanism of cognitive-behavioral psychology and more generally of the Euro-Atlantic or Euro-American culture which on the one hand uses Mindfulness to define its identity as scientific and rational, capable of producing a modern and effective healing mechanism, and on the other hand, it reiterates its own cultural domination by imposing on a generic 'India' a constructed and idealized identity of a certain exotic and fascinating practice such as 'oriental meditation', which does not resembles real meditation as it is described by the texts. This idea proceeds just

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[43] For an overview of the standardized practices of Mindfulness and their history, see PADMASIRI DE SILVA, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling.*

[44] ROBERT SHARF, "Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)", cit. p. 479.

by imposing on meditation a categorical west-made identity, which therefore will not recognize any meditation other than its own *idea* of meditation: the identity mechanism that Said described in *Orientalism* is perpetuated, and this pertains exactly to internal logics regarding the dynamics of power in modern society.

One of the fundamental mechanisms that has been used to build a mindfulness identity is the scientific discourse. If Buddhism can be conceived as a 'scientific' philosophy, then it would speak the same language of modern Western culture, which is a 'scientific culture'. From here, all the modern interest of neuroscience can also be explained as a form capable of favoring the construction of identity of the rationalist culture itself.

Such discourses are not always necessarily devoted to cultural domination, but they can also produce interesting cross-cultural encounters. For example, the modern scientific conception, also thanks to the studies of McGilchrist, has revolutionized neuroscience by rediscovering the functional difference between the left hemisphere, endowed with focusing, analytical skills and able to manipulate objects, and the right hemisphere, able to understand the whole as a unit and not as separable pieces.[45] This binarism that McGilchrist has pointed out is also, by his own admission, the unconscious foundation of many ancient philosophies and religions.[46] The human being seems to have been unconsciously aware of this internal division, and Buddhism also seems to have had its own way of describing this dualism in the forms of the metaphorical paths of the right and left hand,[47] or in the meditative paths of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.[48] Interestingly, the same considerations about the

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[45] IAIN MCGILCHRIST, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, (Yale: Yale University Press 2019).

[46] MCGILCHRIST's work also inspired scholars in religious studies to try and apply his model to Buddhism, resulting in an interesting article by Dan Arnold, "Where in the brain does Buddhism come from? Critical thoughts regarding Iain McGilchrist's reflections on religion", in *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (Routledge, 2019): 33-50.

[47] KATE CROSBY, "Tantic Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and others on the Yogāvacara Tradition", in *Contemporary Buddhism* 1.2 (2000): 141-198; cit. 162-165.

[48] A crucial phase of *borān* meditation is to catch all the luminous *nimitta*-spheres (lit. "sign-spheres"). The catching (*gaṇheti*) happens starting from the tip of the nose, then into the nostrils. But with different directions for women and men. This distinction is quite peculiar, since the right nostril for the males corresponds to the right side of the body which is under the control of the left hemisphere, currently considered by modern neuroscience as the hemisphere that is able to know the world through manipulation, conceiving reality only as a function of divided and separate entities. The right hemisphere, on the contrary, which controls the left part of the body, is linked to

hemispheres were made by other characters, such as that of Jill Taylor, who defined the state of *nirvāṇa* as total domination of the right hemisphere and silence of the left hemisphere.[49]

Avoiding cultural crisis: the guarantee of the protocol

Who can deal with Mindfulness in a therapeutic function? Modern Western society sees the social role of the therapist in an extremely elitist and closed way. Specifically, the figure of the 'mental therapist', or the one who uses words in a therapeutic function, is seen in an increasingly exclusive way, reserving the possibility of using discourses in a therapeutic key only to specific professionals, and this happens because, in turn, there is an idea of extremely professionalized therapy. This process is generally defined as "medicalization", the domain of techno-medical discourse in various aspects of modern society.

A first controversial aspect therefore concerns the professional figure. Being a medicalized practice, established by detailed clinical protocols, Mindfulness is administered as a therapy only by authorized psychologists or doctors, which relegates it to a relevant sectoral and specialist area. What is more paradoxical is that often these Mindfulness operators are not scholars of Buddhism, nor would they be able to study the original texts but are authorized only by virtue of their ability to adhere to a protocol, which has nothing to do with Buddhist meditation.

Conversely, if an anthropologist or a Buddhist philosophy scholar wanted to educate someone else in the therapeutic aspects of meditation, he or she would today risk being accused of professional abuse by some psychotherapists.

But not only are the ideas of health and illness vague and undefined, culturally constructed and not objectively real, but likewise, the relationship between speech and well-being through self-narration or counselor-led mental exercise is equally

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a more holistic thought, with an attitude opposite to the left, which therefore looks at the world as an indivisible whole. This comment is obviously a simplification, but it refers to McGilchrist's studies that radically changed the old more pop conception around the hemispheres according to which the right was linked to art and the left to logic. Both hemispheres deal with everything, but seeing the world in two radically different ways, two ways that often (perhaps erroneously, but which is still interesting to report) are defined as "male hemisphere" (the left one) and "female hemisphere" (the right one). This does not pertain to biological sex at all, but rather to archetypal behaviors that have nothing to do with gender. See KATE CROSBY, *Esoteric Theravada*, p. 57.

[49] ROBERT SHARF, "Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)", p. 477.

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subjective and unmanageable modality for modern medicine. Freud had a similar problem when he published *Die Frage der Laienanalyse* (1926) in order to protect his students who operated psychoanalysis coming from the most disparate formations (especially philosophy) and who were hindered by the institution that conceived psychoanalysis as a medical practice.[50]

The protocol is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it is seen as the guarantee of the scientific nature of the method, but on the other it is a very rigid approach that totally distorts the intentions of meditation itself. It is therefore only an identity brand of psychology that makes use of it and thus, by adhering rigidly to the protocol, can maintain its 'scientific' identity, which sees in the protocol the objectivity of the method.

> Mindfulness is hostage to the neoliberal mindset: it must be put to use, it must be proved that it "works", it must deliver the desired results. This prevents it being offered as a tool of resistance, restricting it instead to a technique for "self-care".[51]

If, on the other hand, psychology abandoned the protocol and tried to define the subjective benefits of a meditation thought in broader terms, it would lose the recognition of scientificity and therefore its identity. What we must understand, however, is that these discussions on the scientific nature and use of the protocol and evidence-based techniques, are all dispositives of a precise cultural identity, and therefore only within a certain culture possess a value and authorities, but they still re-

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[50] In his text as on many other occasions, Freud disagreed with the idea that psychoanalysis was reducible to a medical practice, considering the "cure of words" as pertinent to various fields, from philosophers to anthropology, of which Freud himself was interested, and therefore he saw nothing strange in the fact that a philosopher was a psychoanalyst. From Theodor Reik to Otto Rank there have been numerous philosopher psychoanalysts. James Hillman himself, to name a more contemporary one, has a basic philosophical education. Although initially the debate on the so-called "Lay Analysis" concerned the possibility that nonphysicians conduct psychoanalytic psychotherapy, today, with the birth of the psychologist, the question has extended to any humanist (nonpsychologist and nonphysician) who would claim the right to conduct a psychoanalysis after adequate training in the psychoanalytic method itself, which therefore does not imply knowledge of medicine or psychology as it is understood today. Unfortunately for most of the cases the debate remains focused on nonphysicians, as we read in WENDY OLESKER, "Thoughts on Medication and Psychoanalysis: a Lay Analyst's view", in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 54.3 (2006): 763-779.

[51] RONALD PURSER, *McMindfulness*, p. 20.

main cultural constructions that impose themselves on others to construct a narrative of a certain objective truth which, however, is a significant epistemological problem.

Section 2: What is a 'body': from the body to the meta-bodies

What is the 'body' of the 'body techniques'

Undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of meditation, from traditional yoga to mindfulness, is the role of the *body*. I have not yet talked about body and corporeality in this article, since to be discussed it needed all the premises made so far. As we will see, the question of the body that arises in ancient meditation as yogic practice is actually configured as a *technique of the body*, in the words of Marcel Mauss. The technique of the body in meditation, however, as we have seen, is not a discipline suited to control, but a practice whose goal is liberation. It is therefore not a total re-education, but on the contrary, it is an exercise of dis-habiution from what wrong habits are, be they cognitive, moral, and so on. Ancient meditation is a de-technicizing method, and also for this reason it is extremely interesting: while all body techniques are traditionally designed to produce a habituation (the installation of certain behaviors in a systematic way), ancient meditation is *deconstructive*. The reason why all this is noteworthy is understood when we look at mindfulness meditation specifically. Mindfulness is in fact conceived in a diametrically opposite key, and here Foucault helps us to understand in what sense mindfulness is not designed to free the body from habits, but rather to 'produce functional bodies'. In Foucaultian terms, therefore, mindfulness is a *process of subjectivation*.

The transformation and branching of meditation into mindfulness therefore exposes an important phenomenon of social transformation, as a change of an anthropological phenomenon parallel to social transformation. Meditation, along with the Western society that transformed it and transformed itself together with it, are therefore co-implicated in the process of transculturation. To ultimately understand this phenomenon, a series of conclusive passages are necessary, which concern the transformation of the perception of the body in Western society, and with it, of the 'mindful body'.

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The conception of bodies and corporeality in a given cultural context goes hand in hand with the development of a 'system of knowledge'. Every society inevitably equips itself with a system of knowledge to understand and organize the world. This is an anthropological process, even if it would be more correct to speak of *anthropo-poiesis*, that is, the formation of the human being as a social actor capable of acting in a society and for society. Culture as a dispositive of conception of all that is usable and endowed with meaning, necessarily constructs a discourse on what the primary social actor should be. The human being, like all things, is *corporealized*, endowed with a body. This discourse seems far from the problem of meditation, but we will soon see how things are closely related. It is by no means certain that the human being perceived himself as a body, or being-body, or even being-in-a-body, before this process of corporealization.

This problem, although it is purely anthropological, has been addressed by authors such as Nietzsche, Husserl, Foucault and Agamben in the philosophical field, and Freud in psychoanalysis. Certainly, anthropology has also been very interested in bodies, especially in the field of medical anthropology. However, this specific discipline was not only concerned with the process of corporealization: what makes a body a 'body', from which then descends any social force that imposes policies of domination on the body (biopower and biopolitics), but also before these institutions, the very possibility of incorporation, from somatopsychic to culture-bound syndromes, apart from the already corporealized bodies.

Indeed, in our brief examination we can have a fundamental anthropological guide, which is Ernesto de Martino. In the unpublished writings, de Martino proposes an anthropological conception of the body which will then be taken up again in his subsequent elaborations. De Martino postulates the 'economic dispositive' as that force which, through valorizations, gives things an identity: a value.[52] This value is then placed within society as a force capable of acting and influence masses. If it were not valorized it would not even be recognized. Ernesto de Martino does not speak explicitly of the economic process of valorization of the body, but he speaks of a dualism between "bare life", which would be human life *before* valorization, and "economic life", which would be social and economic life.[53] In this

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[52] Cfr. ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *Storia e Metastoria*, p. 106.

[53] However, de Martino invites us not to confuse the economic horizon with culture, of which the economic is nothing more than "the narrow door of access", and therefore "anyone who pretends

anthropological conception that de Martino imagines to be the dawn of culture, we recognize a lot of the conceptions of the body that have appeared throughout Western history, and which all refer to the same fundamental problem, namely that of a substantial metaphysical split. This is the prefiguration of Saint-Exupéry's conception: the essential is invisible to the eyes (*L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux*). The corporealization gives the impression that there is a double plane: the thing-in-itself as being an *essence* inside a 'body'. This essence, posed as the authentic truth of the phenomenon, is considered hidden, incorporated into things. On the one hand, the scientific view search for the 'body' as the ultimate essence, on the other hand, the essence is seen as a prisoner of the body and is obsessively sought by religions and systems of knowledge without ever being found. This process is not just about humans. The body is not in fact something that pertains only to sentient beings, but in the new-born culture, everything is corporealized, and in 'being a body' that 'contains an essence' (a law of physics, a nature, a spirit or a soul) is somehow separated from itself. Buddhism inherits from the ancient Indian conceptions precisely this vision, that the body is a prison of the human essence ("one thing is the body, another is the soul", *aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ*), but at the same time the Buddha opposes this conception (found, for example, in the Sāṃkhya dualism between *puriso* and *pakati*, as it is mentioned in the pāli canon), and in his opposition to it, he establishes a meditative practice whose purpose is not to free the essence from its prison, but to free the human itself from the cognitive habits that lead him to think so, and in this there is no materialism, as Buddhism has never reduced the human awareness to mere matter (the Buddha rejects the formula "such is the body, such is also the soul", *taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīram*), indeed, precisely because the body and the soul are not opposed to each other nor are they divided, the body is certainly *more* than we are used to thinking.

to close himself in possession of the economic, and to restrict cultural life at this simple beginning or inaugural condition of civil life, would not actually be able to maintain oneself even in one's own kingdom, which has an autonomous value only as a function of a movement that pushes to cross its borders", cfr. ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *Morte e Pianto rituale. Dal lamento funebre antico al pianto di Maria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2021); cit. p. 19.

Adiáphora, Metaphorá: the historicity of the 'body'

To understand the body of which society outlines the techniques, it is necessary to start from far away, recovering what is in some respects an old obsession of anthropologists, that is to understand what lies at the dawn of a society: the beginning after which we started to understand and organize things in a certain way. The body is the subject of the body techniques, but also of all the other techniques, as they act on the mentality, and the way of life is also essentially embodied. The techniques of subjectivation to produce docile and submissive bodies that Foucault tells us about are probably body techniques, and all forms of incorporation, embodiment, or introjection, whether of a psychological or cultural nature. As anthropologists we are therefore tempted to take for granted the presence of the body as universal in all cultures, but what I want to suggest in this case is that rather there is a moment in cultural history in which the body emerges as *thinkable*, and in this emergence produces an inevitable split between the body as an entity in-the-world and the body as the world of our being-entities *in* the world.

Bare life	Economic life

As we have seen, according to de Martino, the fundamental moment in which presence acts on the world is as a *valorizing force*. Valorization is a process in the economic order aimed at subtracting things from the horizon of mere being (*Dasein*) to bring them back to the horizon of usability (*Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*). This process, however, cannot take place without first *giving a body* to things. De Martino notices it only secondarily, but the human presence itself emerges as such from the magical world only when it 'becomes a body'. In other words, the body is not perceived until it is valorized. The main act of valorization is therefore rather a 'corporeification', a giving-body-to-the-body, which occurs by condensing the body from the being and separating it conceptually. Giving a body to the body means starting to conceive the body no longer as something that is part of the world, but as something that is in-the-world as a *presence*, and therefore can be used or used-by the world. The body as a cognitive system is anything but a spontaneous perception. Today, since the body is placed in history, we are taught right away to see ourselves as corporealized, but both in the expression 'I am a body' and 'I am

in(side) a body' there is no capacity to conceiving of being as something incorporeal. Both sentences are identical because they make a difference between me and the body. In de Martino, the bare life is what remains from the act of corporeification, but it is not what precedes it: it too is the offspring of corporeification. In fact, by making the body a 'body', not only does the distinction between body and world arise, but also everything becomes corporizable, and in so far as it is corporealised, it is something that is *given* in the world, but which in turn has lost something *of* the world. However, what is lost is not erased, and continues to be perceived as 'essence', as a pure *a priori* form of the thing. Therefore, the body, which is a body insofar as it is placed in the horizon of the usable of economic life, 'contains' or 'imprisons' an 'I', a 'bare life'. Similarly, the essence of the thing is what is spontaneously perceived when the thing is embodied. By giving body to the stone, conceiving it as a 'stone', I place the stone as a body in the horizon of the usable, where *my body* can use it as a tool. But the stone also has its own 'essence', which is what allows it to be a stone and part of the worldly organization that places it, for example, in the mineral kingdom.

In Pyrrho's philosophy the term *adiáphoron* is used to indicate the generalized condition of all the beings of the world. Today we find it hard to think that things do not contain any essence or are manifestations of an essence, but the idea of fundamental indistinction that Pyrrho proposes, and for this we borrow its term *adiáphoron*, is precisely that of indistinction between essence and substance. Things are both essence and substance, and therefore they are neither essence nor substance. Instead, what we are led to do is reduce everything to substance, and say that what has hitherto been called essence is in reality substance. This is, for example, the general tendency of neuroscience which, by removing the concept of 'mind' as an essence contained in the body, actually reduces it to the body itself: everything is substance.

Everything that is conceived as usable is therefore valorized by the fact of being a body. It goes without saying, a body is not necessarily material indeed, probably, the body is the most abstract concept that can be given in anthropology: it is a condensation of organizational instances and the effective isolation of an entity. Wittgenstein understood clearly that the problem of language lies precisely in the reiteration of concepts as physical objects, and the same 'physical objects' are nothing

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but mental objects.[54] This vicious circle begins precisely from the original corpore-ification that separates the human being and creates two distinct worlds: the world of his body, in which he places his essence as that which inhabits the body, and the body of nature, which is conceptualized as manifestation of essences separated from the human one, placed under the control of the latter.

de Martino	Bare life	Economic life
Agamben	*zōḗ*	*bíos*
Schopenhauer	*Wille*	*Vorstellung*

From the original corporeification derive all the complex conceptions of the body, including the possibility of its subjectivation by dispositives of a cultural order. What Agamben describes regarding ancient society, namely the distinction between the body of bare life and the political body endowed with civil rights, is nothing more than a subsequent elaboration born from the development of the idea of the body operated by Greek and then Roman society.

> Existence and essence, existentive being and copulative being, *zoè* and *bios* are today com-pletely pulled apart or have just as completely collapsed into one another, and the historical task of their articulation seems impossible to carry out. The Aristotelian ontological appa-ratus, which has for almost two millennia guaranteed the life and politics of the West, can no longer function as a historical a priori, to the extent to which anthropogenesis, which it sought to fix in terms of an articulation between language and being, is no longer reflected in it.[55]

Subsequent reflections on the body will not necessarily refer to the ancient model, but I believe that the most important are linked to Schopenhauer's philosophy, which placed a difference between will (*Wille*) and representation (*Vorstellung*), and which is a distinction that clearly recalls the original corporeification at the beginning of anthropopoiesis.[56] In the more modern society of which later thinkers

[54] See also MAREN WEHRLE, "Being a body and having a body. The twofold temporality of embodied intentionality", in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 19 (2020): 499-521.

[55] GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *The Use of Bodies* (Stanford University Press, 2015), cit. p. 133.

[56] See also PETER ABELSEN, "Schopenhauer and Buddhism", in *Philosophy East and West* 43.2 (1993): 255-278.

will be part, the problem that arises is rather that of understanding what remains of the body in a world that, in the words of de Martino, is totally valorized and leaves no space for inhabiting. Indeed, inspired by Schopenhauer, Freud elaborates a dichotomy between *Es*, pure instinctual will, and *Ich*, a psychological identity that lives in the world of representations. We might think that the *libido*, as an impulse to pleasure, is actually part of the *Es*, but psychoanalysis poses not such a simple dualism. The body in Freud is clearly twofold: on the one hand there is precisely the body which is not master of its own subjectivity, which experiences illness, instincts and primary impulses. But the body is also capable of speeches: the body does not 'manifest' the discomfort in a symbolic way, but it is in some way itself the discomfort that becomes speech, that becomes body in the body. A double body, therefore, which is not only an organism, but is also a life force. In fact, a short time later it was precisely the concept of life that inspired the idea of *Leib* in Husserlian phenomenology. While the *Leib* is the body of life, *Körper* is opposed to it, the body as an organism and object of scientific discourse, the body seen by other bodies, therefore a body-thing and not a subject body. We understand perfectly how over time we have distanced ourselves considerably from the ancient conception, and the idea of the body itself has shifted.

Buddha	'body *in* the body'	'body which *has* a body'
de Martino	Bare life	Economic life
Husserl	*Leib*	*Körper*

Among the ancient Buddhist texts we find a *sutta* focused on this idea of body: the *satipaṭṭhānasutta*. It so happens that this text is also the most famous reference for mindfulness meditation, being variously considered one of the most ancient attestations concerning the meditation practice. The first part of the title comes from Sanskrit *smṛti* which is equivalent to pāli *sati*. The word *paṭṭhāna* is probably derived from *pasthāna*, "foundation" or *upasthāna*, "arising". In the *sarvāstivāda* school, in fact, a *smṛtiyupasthānasūtra* is preserved, whose title would seem to be the Sanskrit variant of the theravāda *satipaṭṭhānasutta*, and also in the contents the two texts are very similar.[57]

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[57] BHIKKHU SUJATO, *A History of Mindfulness*, cit. pp. 278-288.

Since this knowledge is considered the foundation of mindfulness, we analyze in detail what the *satipaṭṭhānasutta* says. The sutta begins by giving a context to what will become the teaching of the Buddha. Here we are not interested in deepening this aspect, and so let us concentrate directly on what the Bhagavat exposes about the only vehicle (*ekayāna*). To the question of what the foundations of mindfulness are, the Buddha responds like this:

> *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ | vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ | citte cittānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ | dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ ||*

Here, mendicants, one dwells in this teaching, practicing contemplation of the body in the body, strenuous, with full understanding and awareness, having removed greed and anguish towards the world.

One stays peacefully, practicing the contemplation of sensation in sensations, strenuous, with full understanding and awareness, having removed greed and anguish towards the world.

One stays peacefully by practicing contemplation of the cognition in the cognition, strenuous, with full understanding and awareness, having removed greed and anguish towards the world.

One stays peacefully practicing the contemplation of the mental object in mental objects, strenuous, with full understanding and awareness, having removed greed and anxiety towards the world.

This whole sutta is devoted to the logical justification that will lead the practitioner to meditate on these four fundamental points: the contemplation of the body-in-the-body (*kāye kāyānupassī*), the contemplation of sensation-in-sensation (*vedanāsu vedanānupassī*), the contemplation of cognition-in-cognition (*citte cittānupassī*) and finally the contemplation of the norm-in-the-norm (*dhammesu dhammānupassī*). The first thing that catches the eye is therefore the nature of this split. Of the two entities indicated by this formula, the first of which is significantly the body, one is marked in the locative case (*kāye*, "in the body"), which therefore is situated as a sort of double imaginary, *in* the main entity. However, the Buddhist message is more complex: of the body that is *in* the body there is no image and no real one, there is no copy and no authentic, but both elements interpenetrate and are

the splitting of an original unity that has been lost and makes us think in terms of essence (content) and matter (container).

Therefore, although there are infinite referents – since in the world there cannot exist two perfectly identical objects in every single part – the human being will automatically be able to relocate each referent to its own semantic category (each *rūpa* to its own *nāma*) on the basis of prototypical similarities based on the principle of ideal type and of formal similarity. We can define what has been explained so far as a semantic-cognitive theory of Buddhist psychology.

> What we intended the semantic interpretation to be an interpretation of is the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness, the claim that all dharmas are devoid of svabhāva or intrinsic nature. The doctrine of emptiness has implications for the Abhidharma distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, so the semantic interpretation of emptiness will likewise affect how we understand that distinction. But the question with which we began is what to make of the claim that all dharmas are devoid of intrinsic nature.[58]

We therefore understand that meditation in fact, is mainly a psychological analysis and an act of awareness derived from this exercise. The study of the *nāmarūpa* problem itself is a meditative act with immediate practical implications.

As a result, the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* requires verifying the truth of a body beyond the linguistic sign of the /body/ that makes the existence of a "body" cognitively "true". This problem could be posed to any other body in the world of life.

> Language is not a delimited realm of the speakable, over against which other realms that are unspeakable might stand. Rather, language is all-encompassing. There is nothing that is fundamentally excluded from being said, to the extent that our act of meaning intends it.[59]

The doubt of the existence of a *quid* of immutable, absolute reality, an *essence* that undertook beyond the relative, pushed the creation of the dialectical instrument of the two realities: one *relative,* therefore modifiable, and contextual (the *saṃvṛti-satya),* and the other absolute, non-modifiable, which had always been such, indestructible and immanent (the *paramārtha-satya*).

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[58] MARK SIDERITS & JAY GARFIELD, "Defending the Semantic Interpretation: A Reply to Ferraro", (Springer Science Business Media Dordrecht: *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 2012), cit. p. 2.

[59] HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (University of California Press 1977), cit. p. 67.

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We can summarize this problem with a last opposition between being and self-essence (*bhāva* and *svabhāva*). What lies beyond the illusory blanket of this last opposition is easy to explain: every self-existence is only the other side of being. In the processes of construction of the norm, as we have said, the myth of an existence that is 'such in itself' is functional to subjectivation.

$$svadharma \rightarrow svabhāva \rightarrow svakarman$$

While the relative existence is the constructed fact, what is imparted is that there is an absolute norm, intrinsically present in everyone (*svadharma*), which tells the sovereign to be sovereign and the servant to be servant. The normative treaties do nothing but take this illusion and amplify it by saying that from the law of nature there must arise an essence of nature (*svabhāva*) which translates into a social behavior conforming to the norm, an *incorporated* behavior, therefore perceived as natural (*svakarman*). That *entity* or *suchness*, which we can even more easily call *ipseity* (from the Latin *ipsum* which stands for "self") that Buddhism has tried to understand by the term *yathābhūtaṃ* or *tattva* is therefore nowhere but in the things themselves, *things as they are.*

Language, therefore, is a *potential* of signification, which is experienced through the adoption of normative principles, without which language is free semantic expression devoid of any rules. In order to work, however, the language needs an objective entity on which to project the meaning. In this sense, language is never independent of cognition. The body is therefore derived from the fruition contact with an entity that is acquired, eaten (*bhoga*). This *body of the norm* would be nothing but the 'body that *embodied* the norm'.

Speaking of norms which, like the body, possess a double interpenetrating image, we come to understand how the body conforms to what Nietzsche called *morality*, and which therefore represents an essential anthropological value. Morality does not *become* a body, but is itself, in some way, the subjectivized body.

Metaphor, Metamorphosis: ideas of the body as primal cultural instance

Among the works of Nietzsche published posthumously there are fragments and early writings, and among the latter a work is of particular interest to us. Written in

1873, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*, although very short, it is full of dense content.[60]

The thesis reported in this short text, and which is interesting to analyze, can be summarized as follows. The reality of the world is populated by things (*Dinge*), which, however, are not grasped by the human being. Language (*Sprache*) proceeds by conventional abstractions (*Abstraktion*) and designations (*Bezeichnung*), that establish a habituation (*Gewöhnung*), and since it is an artifice (*Kunststücke*), the human being forgets (*Vergessen*) of the truth (*Wahrheit*), which is not in the metaphors of the language. Human consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) is like an illusionist capable of creating an entire world (*Weltschöpfung*) whose first signification is an image (*Bild*). Living in forgetfulness (*Unbewusstheit*), the human being relies on words (*Wort*) which are mere representations, reflections (*Abbildung*), and even if the human believes that on the relationship (*Relationen*) that establishes between these concepts he can found knowledge – a science (*Wissenschaft*) –, all this is actually an illusory construction (*Täuschung*).[61] The human intellect (*Intellekt*) is actually a great lie (*Lüge*) in which we all live, and so is the culture (*Kultur*) at the center of which man (*Mensch*) places himself to dominate the world (*Weltenstehung*).[62]

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[60] The contents of this early writing obviously anticipate later writings such as the Genealogy of Morality itself (*Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift*, 1887), but I wanted to quote the *Wahrheit und Lüge* for its immediacy and the ways in which the connection between culture and the foundation of systems of knowledge is clearly presented.

[61] See also chapter 2 of NIETZSCHE's book: "An dem Bau der Begriffe arbeitet ursprünglich, wie wir sehen, die Sprache, in späteren Zeiten die Wissenschaft. […] Jenes ungeheure Gebälk und Bretterwerk der Begriffe, an das sich klammernd der bedürftige Mensch sich durch das Leben rettet, ist dem freigewordenen Intellekt nur ein Gerüst und ein Spielzeug für seine verwegensten Kunststücke: und wenn er es zerschlägt, durcheinanderwirft, ironisch wieder zusammensetzt, das Fremdeste paarend und das Nächste trennend, so offenbart er, daß er jene Nothbehelfe der Bedürftigkeit nicht braucht, und daß er jetzt nicht von Begriffen sondern von Intuitionen geleitet wird".

[62] "Der Intellekt, als ein Mittel zur Erhaltung des Individuums, entfaltet seine Hauptkräfte in der Vercheren, weniger robusten Individuen sich erhalten, als welchen einen Kampf um die Existenz mit Hörnern oder scharfem Raubthier-Gebiss zu führen versagt ist. […] Sie sind tief eingetaucht in Illusionen und Traumbilder, ihr Auge gleitet nur auf der Oberfläche der Dinge herum und sieht «Formen», ihre Empfindung führt nirgends in die Wahrheit, sondern begnügt sich Reize zu empfangen und gleichsam ein tastendes Spiel auf dem Rücken der Dinge zu spielen".

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The contrast between truth and falsehood arises within linguistic boundaries. Indeed, at the dawn of culture, human beings find themselves having to find an agreement to avoid constantly waging war on each other. Now, although this agreement does not work perfectly between different cultures, it is enough for a shared consensus to be established about what must be unanimously considered "true" within a specific culture.[63]

With the foundation of a shared truth, problems also arise about its monopoly. Today, thanks to Foucault and Greimas, we talk about the process of *veridiction*, and whoever holds the possibility of telling-the-truth (*véridicité*) holds enormous power over society, as capable of constructing "discourses of truth", formulations that Nietzsche would have defined as "moral". In fact, with truth come the laws of truth (*der Sprache gibt auch die ersten Gesetze der Wahrheit*), which cannot act culturally if not based on a contrast with falsehood (*hier zum ersten Male der Contrast von Wahrheit und Lüge*). And on the basis of this established dualism of society's conjurers, who are in fact clever liars, they control others using "*valid* designations", because they are perceived as such by the collectivity, whereas the word "makes the unreal appear as real" (*die Worte, um das Unwirkliche als wirklich erscheinen zu machen*).

At this point Nietzsche asks himself, rhetorically, if language is an adequate expression of every truth, as in fact every form of knowledge that develops in a culture, not least modern Western science, believes. Specialized language is of the same nature as common language, that is, it inhabits the convention: "but how do things stand in relation to the conventions of language? Are they perhaps products of knowledge, of the sense of truth: the designations and things overlap each other? Is language an adequate expression of every reality?" (*wie steht es mit jenen Conventionen der Sprache? Sind sie vielleicht Erzeugnisse der Erkenntniß, des Wahrheitssinnes: decken sich die Bezeichnungen und die Dinge? Ist die Sprache der adäquate Ausdruck aller Realitäten*).

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[63] "Jetzt wird nämlich das fixirt, was von nun an «Wahrheit» sein soll d. h. es wird eine gleichmäßig gültige und verbindliche Bezeichnung der Dinge erfunden und die Gesetzgebung der Sprache giebt auch die ersten Gesetze der Wahrheit: denn es entsteht hier zum ersten Male der Contrast von Wahrheit und Lüge: der Lügner gebraucht die gültigen Bezeichnungen, die Worte, um das Unwirkliche als wirklich erscheinen zu machen; er sagt z. B. ich bin reich, während für diesen Zustand gerade «arm» die richtige Bezeichnung wäre. Er mißbraucht die festen Conventionen durch beliebige Vertauschungen oder gar Umkehrungen der Namen".

We are thus approaching the heart of our discourse on the problem of perception and of culture as perception. Nietzsche mocks[64] the arbitrary nature of grammatical categories or genders (*theilen Dinge nach Geschlechtern ein*) which thus distance us from the canon of certainty (*über den Canon der Gewissheit*).

The different languages placed side by side show that with words neither the truth nor an adequate expression are reached, because otherwise there would not be so many languages. The "thing-in-itself" (this would be the pure truth without consequences) is completely incomprehensible even to one who makes a language and is not worth the effort at all.[65]

The process that leads from the oblivion of truth to the creation of a language is, according to Nietzsche, a *metaphorical process*, that is, a set of subsequent metaphors. For example: the contact between the "thing" and our perception produces a nervous stimulus (*Nervenreiz*) which leads to the elaboration of an image (*Bild*). The image is therefore the first metaphor (*erste Metapher*), the first displacement. Then when it is necessary to describe what one sees, not being able to make the same image appear, one arrives at the convention of a sound reproduction (*wieder nachgeformt in einen Laut*). Thus, passing from metaphor to metaphor, the human forgets the sense of truth and rather replaces it with *concepts*. Each word is immediately conceptualized (*jedes Wort wird sofort dadurch Begriff*). Conceptualization is, for Nietzsche, a relational process that "equals the same to the different" (*Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen*). To explain better: it is evident that every 'thing' in the world is a unique and unrepeatable one. Yet we group things based on a perceived essence. The leaves for us are all just "leaves" even if it is not possible to find two identical leaves in the world. Each will have a particularity, even minimal, such as to be unique and different from the others. What we are persuaded to see with conceptualization is an "essence" that unites all the "leaves" and therefore allows us to say that, despite appearances, they are the same thing. In spite of the belief, however, we cannot say whether there is something in nature that connects all the leaves in a single essence or in a proto-form (*Urform*).

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[64] "…welche willkürlichen Übertragungen!"

[65] "Die verschiedenen Sprachen neben einander gestellt zeigen, daß es bei den Worten nie auf die Wahrheit, nie auf einen adäquaten Ausdruck ankommt: denn sonst gäbe es nicht so viele Sprachen. Das «Ding an sich» (das würde eben die reine folgenlose Wahrheit sein) ist auch dem Sprachbildner ganz unfaßlich und ganz und gar nicht erstrebenswerth".

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Nietzsche therefore defines truth as an army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms that populate human relationships and are conceptually elevated to be culturally fixed and believed as immovable laws of nature.[66]

Finally, it is very interesting to understand how Nietzsche conceives metaphorical behavior, which we have now understood to be at the center of the foundation of a culture through language. The foundation of a separation between subject and object, where the first is the perceiver and the second is perceived, finds no foundation for Nietzsche, if not an aesthetic behavior (*ästhetisches Verhalten*).

Section 3: What is a 'technique': Mindfulness as a 'dispositive' for a subjectivized presence

Meta-morphosis, Meta-physics: the loss of essence

In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein states that ethics is transcendental and coincides with aesthetics (§6.421): "*Es ist klar, dass sich die Ethik nicht aussprechen lässt. Die Ethik ist transcendental*". This statement by Wittgenstein has enormous anthropological importance. Only in 1979 with the release of Bourdieu's book "*La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*", anthropology did discover the very close connection between the perception of moral norms and internal taste. Morality is therefore not an abstract fact or something mental separate from the material corporeality. The body does not react to morality, we must reject this idea of an embodied morality, and I believe rather that Bourdieu's work highlights that the body itself *is* morality, and therefore perceives the presence or absence of morality as bad taste or disgust.

As the ethics of a culture or individual subjectivity change, the person will perceive with genuine 'disgust' what he deems to be immoral, not because disgust interprets morality, but rather because taste and immorality are *one and the same*.

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[66] "Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, kurz eine Summe von menschlichen Relationen, die, poetisch und rhetorisch gesteigert übertragen, geschmückt wurden, und die nach langem Gebrauch einem Volke fest, canonisch und verbindlich dünken: die Wahrheiten sind Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, daß sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind, Münzen, die ihr Bild verloren haben und nun als Metall, nicht mehr als Münzen in Betracht kommen".

Similarly, Wittgenstein lets us know that ethics and aesthetics coincide. In Greek, the term *aisthētikós* indicates "the perception of the senses" (*aisthánomai*), and therefore since ancient times it was clear that beauty is something perceived, and not something absolute. Wittgenstein returns to this origin, but brings it back to *ēthikḗ*, that is, to behavior, to what de Martino also calls *êthos*. Aesthetics is therefore *ethological*, but it is necessary to clarify to what extent. This is a case in which, having two terms to indicate the same entity, our mind struggles to understand how effectively there is no ethics and aesthetics at all, but an *etho-aesthetic unity*. In this sense, a work of art is itself ethics, and a cultural behavior (an ethos) is itself aesthetic. It is *not* correct to say that ethics "becomes body" in aesthetics, it is not true that the work of art "represents" ethics, just as it is not correct to say that human behavior "follows" a cultural aesthetics. The work of art is the same as behavior, there is *no* dimension of representation, there is *no* essence distinct from a body and there is *no* body distinct from essence. In this sense, Buddhist meditation, inviting us to reflect on the "body that is in the body", on "cognition in cognition", on "sensation in sensation" and finally on "norm within norm", is precisely telling us that Meditation intends transcend the *etho-aesthetic*.[67]

Therefore, since disgust is the aesthetics of what we call the body, but which is life in a much more complex form than simple materiality, it is clear how society, which first imparts pedagogy through the institution of values, changes. It changes and transforms itself through an *etho-aesthetic* variation, which is then experienced as a variation of taste. This process of social change is parallel to subjectivation.

First a corporealization of the things of society is carried out, which leads to a traction of the essence (extraction of the essence from the body of valorized nature). Subsequently the essence, as an archetype of mechanical phenomena, takes on a practical value: it is the functioning principle of nature, reduced therefore to a machinic executor of the essential laws, where technical knowledge becomes the basis of theoretical knowledge, and society becomes renewed on a model of the extracted

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[67] This fact was also intuited by NIETZSCHE who writes how the transformation of taste, rather than that of opinions, represents the spirit of a society. Individuals "taste" differently as their condition changes. Cfr. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Book I, par. 39 (*Veränderter Geschmack*): "Die Veränderung des allgemeinen Geschmackes ist wichtiger, als die der Meinungen; Meinungen mit allen Beweisen, Widerlegungen und der ganzen intellectuellen Maskerade sind nur Symptome des veränderten Geschmacks und ganz gewiss gerade Das nicht, wofür man sie noch so häufig anspricht, dessen Ursachen. Wie verändert sich der allgemeine Geschmack?"

essence (concretization of mathematical models with the mechanical realization of technical theorems). The question at this point is: can an ethics be made starting from mathematical models?

In fact, this brings us back to the initial problem of meditation. Actually, if meditation was born as a form of de-subjectivation, for which the meditator operates a form of etho-aesthetic dis-habituation (that is, it removes any form of education or habituation of an etho-aesthetic nature in order to be able to determine himself independently), it is not compatible with psychological techniques whose purpose, as Foucault demonstrates, is to cure the 'dysfunctional' mechanisms that prevent the individual from docilely being part of that same society in which etho-aesthetics dominates. Psychoanalysis is partially exempt from this mechanism as it seeks in the individual those profound discomforts which, upon careful investigation by the psychoanalyst, cannot but reveal themselves to be caused by society. Therefore, if on the one hand psychoanalysis is partly exempt from the mechanism of power and control typical of other psychologies, Foucault recognizes also that psychoanalysis makes use of an investigative form of the individual's psyche that follows the model of confession (*exagóreysis*), which is a Christian habit. This mechanism of power needs that the 'sins', or more generally the intimacy and the interiority, of the individual become 'exposed', brought to light, because only in this way can the mechanism of subjectivation work. In addition to the mechanism of confession, there is also that of public declaration or exposure (*exomologḗsis*). However, it was not psychoanalysis that became the psychological basin for the elaboration of Mindfulness, which was instead absorbed by cognitive-behavioral psychology. At this point Meditation, becoming Mindfulness, can only undergo a process of transculturation which is nothing more than a reshaping of the device in question in a valorizing key, that is, a device of subjectivation.

Mindfulness, Mental Presence, Crisis

The transformation of Meditation into Mindfulness and its almost total integration into the Euro-Atlantic cultural world therefore requires us to reconsider it as a new social phenomenon, perfectly implanted into modern reality. In this sense, sociologists and anthropologists must look at Mindfulness without thinking of having a different form of meditation in front of them, but being aware that it is a new socio-

cultural phenomenon, which however cannot be understood outside the inter-cultural relationship of interaction between different worlds, where the fascination for the exotic certainly intervenes and a certain 'orientalizing' idea attracts 'Western' subjects to Mindfulness, seen on the one hand as a representative of that fascinating and exotic world that allows one who is interested in spiritualism or diverse cultural habits to see in Indian philosophy a way out of the dusty Western culture, now perceived as decadent and in the midst of crisis. On the other hand, however, Mindfulness appears as a comforting phenomenon, because it is not a total otherness, but appears integrated into the scientific system and therefore 'protected' by the faith of contemporary metaphysics. Ernesto de Martino foresees in his anthropological theory the possibility that there are techniques capable of producing a "suspended presence", which would seem to be the case of Meditation.

> The magical techniques to weaken the unitary presence do not have the aim of totally suppressing the presence: although being-there may, in the condition of *trance*, recede, attenuate, and restrict, nevertheless there must be enough to maintain the *trance* without causing it to precipitate into uncontrolled possession, and to adapt the activity of the "spirits" to the concrete needs that occur in the session.[68]

We must therefore ask ourselves, if this is the case with Meditation, what is the purpose of the suspension of presence. Since we have said that 'mental presence' (*sati*) implies that the meditator has overcome the constraints of habituating his body to the etho-aesthetic unity, then my theory is that Meditation does not aim at a simple suspension of presence, but rather it points to its total transcendence. From the *ethos of transcendence* (valorizing cultural force), Buddhism passes to a *transcendent presence*.

Following the ethnographic work focused on Buddhist-inspired meditation practice in modern times,[69] some aspects have emerged that shed new light on the phenomenon of transculturation that affects Buddhist meditation in its relationship with

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[68] ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *Il Mondo Magico. Prolegomeni a una storia del Magismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2022), cit. p.92.

[69] Published in FEDERICO DIVINO, *Meditazione e terapia. Dalle origini della pratica meditativa buddhista, all'indagine in etnopsichiatria sulle sue applicazioni cliniche* (Padua: Diodati 2021). See also on the same subject YOCHAI ATARIA, "Mindfulness and trauma: Some striking similarities", in *Anthropology of Consciousness* 29.1 (2018): 44-56.

clinical mindfulness, and also it allows us to ask essential questions about the transformations that meditation is undergoing, but also about those it is inducing in contemporary society.

The analysis develops from this observation: most of the subjects interviewed found in the meditative experience a profound phase of anguish, described as the fall of the world, of loss of semanticity, or more specifically a sense of emptying linked to feelings of disorientation, in a way that can only be described as *Unheimlich*. This phenomenon has characterized both traditional meditation practitioners and those who have used the Mindfulness protocol, but the diffusion of the phenomenon caught my attention as it was much more widespread than appears from the ethnographic interviews selected for the publication.

The first degree of bewilderment derives from the fact that in the Buddhist exposition, although we can accept a certain measure of emptying as physiological in meditative practice, it should be noted that in no case the Buddha in the Pāli canon, or in any other text even not bearing the words of the Buddha, mentions a similar feeling of disorientation or distress.

Traditionally, the eighth phase of meditation (*jhāna*) is brought back to a totally desemantized stage "neither perception nor non-perception" (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*), but the attainment never involves unpleasant sensations, rather a stage of bliss and stillness that it is neither worldly pleasure derived from attachment, nor it can be traced back to the type of disorientation described by the ethnographic testimonies.

One might think that this phase can be traced back to the previous stage, that is the "sphere of absolute nothingness" (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), which in this case would refer to a sort of nihilistic anxiety. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Buddha placed his philosophy in equal distance both from existentialism (*sassatavādā*) and from nihilism (*ucchedavādā*), and it would therefore be logical to assume that a phase perceived as annihilation is not desirable from the median way (*majjhimā-patipadā*) preached by the Buddha. However, there is no explicit reference in the Pāli canon to the anguish that should derive from any meditative phase. Rather, what is carefully repeated is to warn the meditator of the danger inherent in dwelling excessively on the worldly sensations of pleasantness or unpleasantness arising from the thought that can creep during the course of the practice. Every form of attachment is opposed in order to deconstruct the apparatus of semantic preju-

dices that characterize common thinking, as Buddhist meditation is nearly a technique of *nimitta*, that is, of semantic emptying. The final stage of liberation is by no means traced back to a state of apathy nor of potential anguish but, on the contrary, of supreme joy (*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*, Dhammapada 204).

So how to resolve this apparent contradiction that a method created to counteract discomfort (*dukkha*) can reveal itself as a potential carrier of anguish and disorientation is a problem that calls to answer at least two fundamental questions: the first is whether the meditation practiced today is the same proposal by the Buddha, since only in this circumstance would the experience of the subjects appear contradictory with respect to the written sources. Secondly, we must ask ourselves if anthropology or the history of religions can tell us something about such a feeling, because understanding a similar vision could also help us solve this enigma. What appears clear is that there is a possible answer to this second question, and this was given by the work of Ernesto de Martino.

Culturalizing Mindfulness

If India ever wanted to change the collective perception that one has of Mindfulness to provide a different vision, it could not do it, because the Mindfulness game must be within the rules that modern capitalism and allopathic biomedicine has imposed on it. Cultural dominance has reached such a level that meditation can now be learned with the guidance of technological forehead bands.[70]

A proof that Purser was right, and that Mindfulness is being used to fuel the strength of capitalist culture, comes in surprising news from 2021, when Amazon introduces "AmaZen": booths for its employees in which over-stressed workers can withdraw for a few minutes to meditate. This would seem almost irony or a mockery, yet it is a paradoxical cultural reality in which a company that is perhaps the maximum expression of values antithetical to those of the original Buddhism, proposes to its employees to meditate so as not to let their productivity.

As I said at the beginning, the problem in this case is that the West wants to avoid the identity crisis that seems imminent due to its contradictions, from the end of the planet's resources to the imminent environmental catastrophes, but from the

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[70] CAROLINE STOCKMAN, "Can a Technology Teach Meditation? Experiencing the EEG Headband InteraXon Muse as a Meditation Guide", in *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning* 15.8 (iJET, 2020): 83-99.

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cultural point of view what it experiences is not it is the real crisis, but rather just a simulated crises, which serves on the one hand to keep the alert alive, and on the other, hiding the fact that cultural hegemony is not at all at its end. The crisis of presence of which de Martino spoke has been replaced by the crisis of "mental presence" a "Mindful Crisis".

I refer to the Early Buddhist meditation as a technique of "mental presence".[71] The presence or the idea of 'being-present' is, however, different from that of 'living the present moment', but modern studies on mindfulness tend to confuse the plane of mindfulness with a temporal reading.[72]

This presentialist reading, however, was criticized by Purser, who accuses mindfulness of focusing on the 'here and now' due to a Western egocentric cultural influence, while Buddhism would promote the idea of non-identity (*anattā*). This centrality of the present can also be linked to the trends of modern consumerism which requires an ever-greater usability of goods and rapidity in consumption and work.

> Therapeutic mindfulness urges us to "live in the present moment" and to try to live mindfully, by "being here now". However, this heavy emphasis on locatedness subtly reinforces an achievement and self-orientation, as we are constantly in a mode of self-surveillance, checking up on our selves, gauging our progress and ability (or, more often than not, inability) to "be present".[73]

No real crisis on the horizon. The crisis is functional, you can put it where you most need it. Every thesis that wants to give itself a slightly sensationalistic tone uses the crisis to reach its goals, listing a series of problems presented as the definitive degeneration of a system that has come to collapse. In the West we tell ourselves that we have been in bankruptcy and crisis for too long, but the truth is that there is no crisis on the horizon, and this constant state of siege and terror that we continue to experience is nothing more than a dispositive cultural function to exorcise the crisis.

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[71] The conception of "presence" and "mental presence" (from which the *mindfulness* expression is related) has always been a way to describe Buddhist meditation in Western languages. See BHIKKHU BODHI, "What does mindfulness really mean? A canonical perspective", p. 25.

[72] Actually, the temporal interpretation is quite popular in modern mindfulness studies. See BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO, "The Emphasis on the Present Moment in the Cultivation of Mindfulness", in *Mindfulness* (2018). Also, MOJAN NAISANI SAMANI & MICHAEL BUSSERI, "Examining the Link Between Mindfulness and Temporal Perspective", in *Mindfulness* (2019).

[73] RONALD PURSER, "The Myth of the Present Moment", in *Mindfulness* 6 (Springer, 2015): 680-686; cit. p. 682.

The crisis would manifest itself if indeed a certain social, cultural, economic, or religious model, together with the convictions of an era and a given model of living and thinking about life were at risk of disappearing. But there is no invasion or conquest which could undermine modern technology. The cultures that the West elevates to fetishes to mythologize an enemy are functional to its internal struggle, to promote the constant state of emergency, but in reality, the 'other' cultures are now as technical as the West itself, and if they conquered it, they would certainly not put an end to the domination of technology. This fundamental aspect, which tells us that we do not live in a state of crisis but rather in an internal struggle in which one will to technical power tries to impose itself on another (which will only result in the strengthening of the technique itself) had already been intuited by Emanuele Severino.[74]

Ernesto de Martino understood the religious aspect with which power uses the crisis and the terror of the 'end of the world'[75] to strengthen its dominance, but he was still the son of his time, in the shadow of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918), a product of a historical era in which he authentically believed that the West was setting, and he too was partly convinced of it, or perhaps he hoped so.

> It seems to me that this scientific ideal of considering humans like ants transforms itself into the prophetic message that humanity reduces itself inevitably into a sort of anthill: that is, the message that humanity inevitably advances towards an apocalypse without eschaton, towards the total ruin of what is human. This then is not even any longer a prophetic message but a cold scientific prediction, which already dictates that we should adapt to the event just as it is necessary to adjust oneself in the autumn for the following and inevitable winter.[76]

I therefore conclude with these final words of de Martino who, as a cultural scholar and crisis theorist, accompanied my reasoning in which I tried to apply his theory on the crisis of the presence to modernity of a cultural (and transculturated) phenomenon that, ironically, uses "mental presence (mindfulness)" to address the crisis of the contemporary world.

[74] EMANUELE SEVERINO & SANTO PETTINATO, "Technics, Nihilism, Truth", in *Annali d'Italianistica* 29 (Italian Critical Theory, 2011): 107-122.

[75] CARLO GINZBURG, "On Ernesto de Martino's ˮThe End of the Worldˮ and Its Genesis", in *Chicago Review* 60/61.4/1 (2017): 77-91.

[76] ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *La Fine del Mondo. Contributo all'Analisi delle Apocalissi Culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019), cit. p. 363, translated by FLAVIO GEISSHUESLER in *The Life and Work of Ernesto De Martino* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 81.

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The problem of personal identity

According to Epstein, "mindfulness is not a means of forgetting the ego; it is a method of using the ego to observe its own manifestations".[77] Even modern mindfulness is essentially not interested in undermining the position of the Ego in the psychological sphere. In many cases it stands outside the problem, but in others it would seem to want to strengthen its qualities or reach a condition of "quiet Ego" or even aim at the fortification of self-esteem.[78] In Buddhist psychology, on the other hand, the concept of non-self (*anattā*) dominates, which is sometimes rejected as being considered nihilistic, since it would promote a vision of the "non-existence" of the Ego.

The question of the existence or non-existence of a certain entity is a matter that pertains more to ontology than to psychology. However, it must be said that Buddhism never clearly separates psycho-anthropological questions from philosophical ones, least of all physics. What we must remember is that in early Buddhist psychology there is no independence between materiality and mind, but rather a "reciprocal dependence".[79]

It seems quite evident that Buddhism encompasses the functioning of physical, social, and psychological facts in a single theory. Just as principles of functioning (*dhamma*) are found in society, they are also found in the physical and in the individual world, but all of them follow the same logic and principles.

The question concerns the famous Buddhist concept of non-self (*anattā*), which has been confused with a nihilistic idea. We will see that affirming the non-substantiality of the self, that is, the inconsistency of an independent identity of things, does not mean affirming the non-existence of either the thing nor the idea of the thing.

For ancient Buddhist psychology, worldly experience is nothing but a bundle of elaborate subsequent perceptions. Cognition is often referred to with the technical jargon of "process-cognition" (*vīthi-citta*). Cognition is therefore not the simple

[77] MARK EPSTEIN, "The deconstruction of the self: Ego and "egolessness" in Buddhist insight meditation", in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 20.1 (1988): 61-69; cit. p. 67.

[78] HEIDI WAYMENT et al., "Doing and being: Mindfulness, health, and quiet ego characteristics among Buddhist practitioners", *Journal of Happiness Studies* 12.4 (2011): 575-589.

[79] KARUNADASA, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, p 55.

side effect resulting from the contact between the sense organ and the object, instead: "it is the cumulative result of a continuum of cognitive events".[80] The mind freed from the cognitive process is called *vīthi-mutta*. It is also possible that the Buddha's intent was not to dismantle cognition, but to reach a cognition that was not procedural, thus re-knowing the emptiness of its elements. In ancient Buddhism, the term *suñña* simply indicates the lack of an independent identity. In this sense it is a synonym of *anattā*. But also, Nāgārjuna, who bases his own philosophy on the idea of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) will understand it in this way, and therefore will see the truth in the emptiness.

What we are witnessing with modern mindfulness is certainly an exceptional phenomenon: trans-cultural and innovative. Unfortunately, its transcultural nature is the very substance of a great internal contradiction: the same contradiction that Jacques Lacan found in the psychoanalysis of his time, that is, the fundamental egoic tendency which, far from being beneficial for the individual, only increases the problem. Psychological suffering is identified precisely in the insubstantiality of the Ego, therefore the psychoanalytic therapeutic practice had to be aimed at its deconstruction, and meditation wants to do the same thing. Mindfulness, on the other hand, focuses on the benefits of a much lighter practice to develop calm, inner peace and security. These are certainly proven benefits for the practitioner. However, this practice does not go deep into the psychological problem of the Ego, neither into those philosophical reflections that instead would like to give a definitive answer to this problem. Similarly, psychoanalysis, despite recognizing an unconscious very similar to that of Buddhism, misunderstands it in some fundamental points. Even Freud ultimately misunderstands Buddhism, associating the concept of *nibbāna* with that of Thanatos (death instinct)[81]. We can clearly see this misinterpretation as soon as we look back to the ancient Buddhist idea that *nibbāna*. It represents the highest level of knowledge, which "is described by a number of terms: "wisdom" (*paññā*), "accurate or exact knowledge" (*pariññā*), "gnosis" (*aññā*), "higher knowledge" (*abhiññā*), and "insight" (*vipassanā*)".[82] This exact knowledge which is represented by *nibbāna* and can be attained through meditation is nothing more than the knowledge of "things as they are" (*yathābhūtañāṇa*). This

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[80] Yautpitage Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma. Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019), p. 169.

[81] De Silva, *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology*, p. 122.

[82] Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, p. 127.

knowledge represents exactly what we have seen so far: the real ephemeral and non-identity nature of nominal entities and, ultimately, of one's own Ego, which therefore in this sense meditation intends to deconstruct and not to preserve.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to demonstrate how Mindfulness can be considered as an authentic 'new' cultural phenomenon, now totally different from Buddhist meditation. We have seen how Mindfulness provides a mythopotietic narration of itself that starts from Buddhist meditation and then proposes an 'evolution' assisted by modern (western) science, and we have seen how these discourses are actually functional to make Mindfulness an instrument for the protection of Western cultural identity, defended by the hypothetical crisis of its values and its sciences.

In this sense, transculturation is reinterpreted as a phenomenon that goes beyond the birth of a new cultural form through the mutual exchange and interaction of two different cultures, but is, in the case of Mindfulness, a one-way transformation of a very specific cultural phenomenon, as Buddhist Meditation is totally re-founded in the image and likeness of cognitive-behavioral psychology and then reimposed as the identity brand of the West.

Mindfulness, thus, on the one hand protects Euroatlantism, and what Purser identifies as the *neoliberal culture*, from the crisis that a real impact with Indian culture would have entailed. On the other hand, Mindfulness can be used as a form of *biopower* in the Foucaultian sense, for which it provides a precise and one-to-one narrative of what the body and identity are, re-proposing the biomedical combination of health and disease that is absolutely not questioned (Kabat-Zinn himself speaks of stress as an "*illness of thought*", thus not questioning the foundations of European biomedicine). Finally, Mindfulness is also an instrument of identity colonialism, which modifies the collective perception of meditation, and requires a re-reading of Buddhism in a Western key.

Although he has never dealt with Indology except indirectly, Ernesto de Martino has profoundly developed the problem of the crisis as well as related phenomena such as trance and body techniques to induce altered states of consciousness.[83]

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[83] GEISSHUESLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

However, de Martino's elaboration is also closely interconnected with the fundamental question of presence, a theme borrowed and reworked starting from Heidegger's *Dasein*, but with not indifferent consequences on the anthropological level. When, overwhelmed by circumstances, the presence feels incapable of being able to 'be' in any possible cultural world, it falls into the grip of nihilistic terror, victim of the "crisis of presence".

The crisis in Demartinian terms must therefore be understood as the foreshadowing of a primordial anguish that reappears because the cultural devices (the ritual, the myth, the certainties of language and social laws) and the subjectivation (the sense of self, identity and belonging) which had been established precisely as a barrier against the disorientation of the 'totally other', are posed under threat. The 'totally other' (Lacan's *Autre*) is not a nothing, but because of its incommensurability is understood as such and, being uncontrolled, constitutes a 'permanent anthropological risk'.

Returning therefore to Buddhism and Mindfulness, we must ask ourselves whether it is possible to reconstruct a theory of presence analogous to the Demartinian one. Certainly, this term (*presence*) is very reminiscent of mindfulness, often used to translate the Pāli term *sati*, and which in English has been rendered exactly as 'mindfulness'. This consonance is obviously not a guarantee of a possible comparison, since it is a translated term. The presence in de Martino takes on the meaning of "ability to be present in history", as opposed to those subjects whose presence is kept out of history as subordinate classes. On the contrary, the Buddhist presence does not have to do with a presentism or an ability to be present in history, but rather the ability to be present to oneself, for the human being is not really aware of himself, and lives by identifying himself with that psychological construction which is the *attā*, and which is an impermanent fruit of the mechanism of appropriation of external cognitive elements. Given the impermanent nature of identity, therefore, Buddhism is consonant with the statements of de Martino, for which the loss of language coincides with the loss of relationship with the world, and therefore reaches the crisis of presence.[84] Conversely, Mindfulness proposes an inessential presentism, an attachment to the *hic et nunc* which is functional to the need to 'pro-

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[84] DE MARTINO, *La fine del Mondo*, p. 535.

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duce bodies' in the classic modalities of subjectivation of cognitive-behavioral psychology which is currently the psychological school of mindfulness that holds, so to speak, the copyright.

In this context, it appears to us that Mindfulness is not simply a modern device to stem the crisis and protect the subjectivation, but is itself a *product* of the modern crisis. We could not have understood this without referring to de Martino's anthropological theory,[85] but it is essential to take into consideration how modernity is facing a lasting crisis, anticipated by the work of Nietzsche that de Martino makes no secret of knowing. This modern nihilism has no dealing only with what Nietzsche defines as "devaluation of values" (while keeping in mind the importance of valorization in de Martino),[86] but also with the evidence that the old models of management of society are losing effectiveness: the mechanisms of subjectivation have been weakened by relativism, which shakes the belief in an absolute and unshakable truth, and even if that door remains open for the scientific world, which still boasts the concept of naturalness and laws of physics, it appears clear how mechanisms of subjectivation must be replaced by techniques of presence, the purpose of which is to provide *presence* in potential crisis the adaptive tools to 'dwell' in a state that would normally be perceived as intolerable, adapting and conforming to the situation; at least this is what emerged from the research carried out on Mindfulness, and which of course turns out to be a total reversal of purposes of ancient Meditation, which instead wanted to face the crisis. The hope of this article is that in the ever-growing interest in Anthropological and Sociological studies for the actuality of the crisis, included in the category of the Anthropocene, there will be appropriate space to analyze the modern 'techniques of presence' such as Mindfulness.

[85] Although he does not speak primarily of Buddhism, among the first authors to apply de Martino's theories to the analysis of the cultural dispositives of the Indian world, the work of BRUNO LO TURCO, "Il sacrificio della satī e la «crisi della presenza»", in *Anantaratnaprabhava: Studi in onore di Giuliano Boccali* (Milan: Ledizioni, 2017): 309-320.

[86] That of devaluation of values is a typical definition of Nietzsche's nihilism, but we find it also expressed as "trans-valorization" (*Umwerthung aller Werthe*), while de Martino explicitly cites Nietzschean philosophy and the problem of nihilism when he speaks of "eternal return of the identical" (mentioned countless times in *La Fine del Mondo*), using an expression that explicitly clarifies Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal return and which, moreover, demonstrates that he has understood it not in the form, in which it is often misunderstood, of cyclical time.

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