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### **THE GATHERING OF THE GURUS: SPIRITUAL CAPITAL AND THE SHAMBHALA INSTITUTE FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP**

*Cet article suggère que la notion de Jon McKenzie selon laquelle la « performance » est une nouvelle formation de pouvoir onto-historique peut nous aider à comprendre pourquoi les activités qui font appel à la spiritualité, à la performance culturelle et aux pratiques administratives à rendement élevé sont à l'avant-garde de modes de contrôle social en émergence. L'exemple du programme d'été du Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership de Halifax (Nouvelle-Écosse) sert à illustrer l'intégration de composantes qui font appel à la spiritualité, à la performance et au capital. L'auteur montre comment des modes de performance orientalisés qui ont été appropriés par l'Institute fonctionnent en conjonction avec des formes avancées de « gestion de la performance » pour justifier la présence d'un corps astral corporatif et la suppression concomitante des contradictions du capital au sein des corps situés sur des maillons inférieurs de la grande chaîne d'une entité sociale donnée.*



Corporations have neither bodies to be punished nor souls to be condemned, they therefore do as they like.

*Edward Thurlow (Lord Chancellor of Britain from 1778 to 1792)*

We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world.

*Gilles Deleuze, in 1990*

This brief inquiry begins with a riddle in the form of a double question: what does Tibetan Tantric dance have to do with selling property in Halifax County, Nova Scotia; and why, we might also ask, does such a question fit within the context of a collection of papers on theatre in Atlantic Canada? The following pages are intended as the beginnings of an answer.

In a recent study entitled *Perform or Else: from Discipline to Performance*, Jon McKenzie explores the emergence of “performance” as an “onto-historic formation of power and knowledge” (194) that operates across a broad range of academic disciplines and other sites of knowledge production:

From congressional attacks on performance artists to high performance managers to the performativity of everyday speech, performance so permeates US society that it evokes that mysterious circle of mist which Nietzsche said envelops any living thing and without which life becomes 'withered, hard, and barren.' 'Every people,' the philosopher wrote, 'even every man, who wants to become ripe needs such an enveloping madness, such a protective and veiling cloud.' (3)

McKenzie's provocative re-mobilization of a spiritually evocative phrase such as "mysterious circle of mist" can be understood to wryly foreground the quasi-ontological import of the newly-pervasive term "performance." This invocation can also serve to index another, perhaps less wry, and, if less pervasive, increasingly common use of spiritually loaded terminology within the broader performance matrix. Terms such as "spirit," "soul," and "God" have recently found increased currency in a specific institutional context with heavy investments in the enveloping madness gestured towards by McKenzie: the corporation. This structure/institution, analogous to others such as "the public" or "the nation" in their complex and irreducible possibilities of definition and association, operates in the social imaginary at a level that Charles Taylor has articulated as being between the embodied knowledge of habitus and explicit doctrine (42). Indeed, as a site of intersection for a host of performative manifestations—from the performance of achievement of organizational goals to the technological performance fueling the expansion of such institutions—the corporation in post-industrial societies is an integral component of what Herbert Marcuse described in 1955 as a society organized around the "performance principle," an "historical reality principle founded on economic alienation and repressive desublimation" (qtd. in McKenzie 3).

In an ongoing effort to apply a discursive salve to the corporation's sharp effects on workers, managers, investors, and the various environments in which it operates, over the past twenty-five years management theorists have increasingly pursued an ontologizing drive of their own, namely that of constructing the corporation as an organism, complete with not only body, but also soul or spirit (Novak; Sandelands). This actuality is in close accordance with Gilles Deleuze's argument that capitalism has metastasized away from reproducing societies of *discipline*. No longer is contemporary capitalist production to be largely characterized by

carceral factory spaces and fixed financial referents in the form of “minted money that locks gold as a numerical standard” (Deleuze). Rather we in the economic North find ourselves living in societies tending towards *control* characterized by sophisticated methods of “ultrarapid forms of free-floating control” that transform the ever-undulating corporation into “a spirit, a gas,” that operates in a matrix of “free floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies” (Deleuze).

In a recent article entitled “Irreconcilable Foes? The Discourse of Spirituality and the Discourse of Organizational Science,” Margaret Benefiel notes that dozens of books, articles and websites encouraging the integration of spirituality into the workplace have appeared in North America in the past ten years. The claims of the authors, she notes, “range from stating that spirituality in business will increase profits and improve morale to explaining that spirituality ensures stability and security in a changing economy” (383). It only follows that the individual human beings working within the corporate environment should also be “spiritualized,” further ushering notions of the corporate divine into the social imaginary, accelerating allegiance to the corporate metaphysical, as well as allowing various projects of *control* to be pursued to their fullest possible logical extent.

These integrations of spirituality with management index one of the foremost uses of the term “performance” in contemporary culture: notably, the extensive range of activities that McKenzie captures with the expression “Performance Management” (McKenzie 6). He explains that “[a]s part of their administrative practice, thousands upon thousands of organizations administer ‘performance reviews,’ formal evaluations of the work performed by their employees” (5-6) that are in evidence in “economic processes that are increasingly service-based, globally oriented, and electronically wired” (6). McKenzie juxtaposes this contemporary phenomenon with the more archaic Scientific Management or “Taylorism,” the dominant organizational and managerial mode from the early twentieth century onwards, a mode which was geared towards a “manufacturing based, nationally oriented, and highly industrialized economy” that “produced highly centralized bureaucracies whose rigid top-down management styles were—and still are—perceived by workers and managers alike as controlling, conformist and monolithic” (6).

It is important to note that McKenzie’s theorizing helps us negotiate a significant methodological pitfall haunting perform-

ance studies. Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the increasing cultural valence of the term “performance” marking a potentially epistemic shift in the broader culture, the term itself risks becoming obfuscatory in its application as a result of its very ubiquity. This is even more evidently the case when different modes of “performance,” such as a mix of “performance management” and what might be called “traditional” performance, occur in the context of a single “performance event.” Understanding the way in which “performance” is conceptualized also helps us tease apart the way in which different modes of performance can operate together in the workplace. Indeed, such terminological conflations can contribute to rather potent interpellations of worker subjectivity that can be understood to be all the more powerful as a result of the often specific attention paid to embodiment in “cultural” performance that can help entrain degrees of Deleuzian-style affective control.

A particularly thorough and vanguard manifestation of this process of spiritualization of workers, the workplace, and its vessel, the corporation, using various discourses of performance to generate effects, can be witnessed in the activities of the Buddhist-oriented Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program, held in Halifax, Nova Scotia every summer since 2001. The Institute for Authentic Leadership’s manufacture of *spiritual control capital* is, as we shall see, exquisitely emblematic of contemporary spiritual trends as a result of its ardent importation and deployment of exotic cultural capital from Buddhist spiritual practice into a Western setting. Although there exist schools of economic theorization which draw on Buddhist ethics to articulate programs of sustainable development and ethical uses of the earth’s resources geared toward increased human flourishing (Daniels), most management-oriented writing drawing on Buddhist sources emphasizes inter- and intrapersonal management of ‘self’ that aims to increase productivity by smoothing out potentially conflictual relationships between management and workers, between workers and other workers, and among workers, their organizations, and their clients (Gould; Harder, Robertson and Woodward; Hubbard; Ottaway). An examination of one of the specific psychophysical cultural performance strategies used at the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program—strategies freighted with exoticized “Eastern” significance—can go some way to understanding the controlling dynamics operating in the production of the spiritually docile corporate subjects called for in much of the new body of spiritually-inflected management publi-

cations. Indeed, as these practices set about to manufacture specific psycho-spiritual corporealities, some of their underlying techniques are surprisingly familiar to the field of theatre studies from which performance studies has historically drawn a portion of its methodological inspiration. The generation of such subjectivities, it will be suggested, is of pivotal significance to what could be understood to be a reverse transubstantiation of spirit into capital, and the generation and maintenance of a mystified libertarian and vertically integrated economic discourse at the heart of the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program.

The organization's current activities are perhaps best understood in the context of their historical emergence. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the charismatic Tibetan-born founder of North America's first accredited Buddhist university in Boulder Colorado, as well as founder of the Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership parent organization, Shambhala International, first visited Nova Scotia in 1977. According to close friend and collaborator, poet Allen Ginsberg, Trungpa felt "some kind of affection for the Scots, there was some kind of karmic or ethnic connection that drew him" to Nova Scotia (Pederson 41). Inspired by the feel of a geographical location where one could experience, as Trungpa described it, "the cold, wet slap of the wind in your face" (Foot, "Halifax's") on a fairly regular basis, he encouraged his American followers to leave the Rockies and move East. To Halifax. Richard John, a former member of the Colorado Shambhala community and director in 2003 of the Halifax Shambhala Centre—one of 70 such centres internationally—explained recently that Trungpa "was looking for a place that had more connection with the land [than Boulder had], a place...that wasn't completely overwhelmed with materialistic values" (Foot, "An Unlikely"). According to another follower, Trungpa "also talked about the quality of the people in Atlantic Canada [...]. He thought they were unusually good and decent people. And he was right" (Foot, "An Unlikely").

Trungpa would appear to have been particularly well-positioned to discern such qualities as he was recognized, before his death in 1987, within the Tibetan *kagyū* line of Buddhism as being the eleventh Trungpa *tulku* or enlightened being who voluntarily returns to human form in order to teach others the path out of suffering (Kimber). Indeed, Melvin Mcleod, former CBC Newsworld producer and current editor of Shambhala's main publication, *Shambhala Sun*, describes the Oxford educated Trungpa as having especially appreciated, in somewhat reverse

concert of Gauguin's depiction of the Polynesians, Halifax's and Nova Scotia's "almost peasant ideal" (Scrivener G3).

In the intervening decades since Trungpa's first epiphanic visit to Canada's own unwitting Shangri La, the Shambhala organization, named after a mythological Himalayan kingdom, has become a rather visible and perhaps even occasionally eminent presence in Nova Scotian culture, education and business. The 450 American Buddhist immigrants and approximately 200 Nova Scotian-born followers have created Shambhala elementary and middle schools in Halifax, Shambhala Centres in St. Margaret's Bay, Annapolis Royal, and a full-fledged monastery called Gampo Abbey in Pleasant Bay, Cape Breton. In addition to these spiritual centres, a major locus of dissemination is the aforementioned *Shambhala Sun*, which, at a circulation of 70,000 copies per issue in the United States, is the Canadian magazine with the most significant presence south of the border. The publication has in recent years featured first-person testimonials and articles from Beat poet Philip Walen, actor Richard Gere, Vanity Fair photographer Annie Liebowitz, and artist Alex Coleville, as well as a contribution from *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* star and Shambhala practitioner Cathy Jones about the challenges of establishing the first Shambhala workshop in Newfoundland. Following a disastrous five-year episode during which Trungpa's hand-picked successor, known simply as the Regent, knowingly and fatally infected followers with the HIV virus (Kimber), composer Philip Glass and fiddler Ashley McIsaac played at the inauguration of the subsequent leader, Trungpa's son, the Earth Protector.

The list of contributors to the magazine, as well as the presence of well-known figures at various Shambhala events (former Nova Scotia Premier John Savage and several major business leaders attended Earth Protector's installation), suggests a rather integrated network of relationships between financial capital, artistic practice, politics, and spirituality within the organization and its activities. This dense matrix of associations speaks perhaps of the spirit of integration and accommodation of difference pursued by the movement's founder. In a time before the crystallization of the Shambhala organization, Trungpa had been the founder and generative force behind the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics launched in Colorado in 1974, an irregular gathering of artists which featured the participation of Ginsberg, Meredith Monk, and William Burroughs among others. Addressing the question of Trungpa's integration into North American culture, Ginsberg noted,

He was able to tune into the nature of things and present them in a very simple way. He was a master of spoken language and that of course aided [his integration] a great deal as well as, I think [the fact that he also] absorbed high culture at Oxford, philosophy, and religion and hippie culture and beat culture and grunge culture and punk culture. But Trungpa took on the whole gamut of Americans—whether upper middle class, three-piece suit types or wild acid-heads—and he was able to talk to them. ("Nirvana in Nova Scotia")

A fan of live performance, but dismayed by what he perceived to be a lack of ability in North American actors, Trungpa also introduced remedial Tantric movement practices to members of the Open Theatre, Joseph Chaikin and, it is alleged, English director Peter Brook. Despite the countercultural cachet of his collaborators, Trungpa explained that in order to make a spiritual impact in North American society Shambhala followers must "cut off [their] long hair, put on neckties and re-enter the mainstream of American institutions and attempt to exert a wholesome influence from within." ("Nirvana in Nova Scotia")

It is perhaps important to note at this juncture that convincing scholarship on cultural consumerism in late capitalism suggests that the religious "global popular" is particularly difficult to historicize as a result of "the fragmentary and transcommunal nature of cosmopolitan religious thematics and dispositions" (Aravamudan 28). Given this challenge, certain rather gratuitous investigative strategies can become available to the commentator. Harvesting ironies resulting from the confluence of potentially superficial versions of Eastern religious practice, on one hand, and some of the more visibly hedonistic behaviors associated with an individualism run amok, on the other, can be as easy as shooting semiotized ducks in a barrel of discourse. Indeed, the risks of perpetuating Orientalist tropes of the "authoritarian, world-negating, [and] brainwashing" spiritual leader are significant in a scholarly climate where, as observers have noted, there exists an institutional prejudice against the "particularly evanescent and socially disruptive forms of group affiliation" that can arise from such encounters. It is clear from the literature surrounding the Shambhala movement that Trungpa's followers—and many others who came into contact with him—knew him to be an engaging, genuine, and profoundly caring individual. More relevant to the discussion at hand, however, than Trungpa's personal qualities is

an examination of what has flowed from his organization on the level of the integration of spirituality, performance, and capital.

In a CBC television episode of *Man Alive* aired in 1995 entitled “Nirvana in Nova Scotia,” David Swick, author of a history of the Nova Scotian Shambhala community, explained, speaking of Halifax, that “the best cafe in town is Buddhist-owned, the best bakery, a couple of the best restaurants.” This somewhat surprisingly worldly pursuit of matters pecuniary at the heart of what St. Mary’s University (Halifax) professor and Shambhala practitioner Julia Sagebien describes as “a giant detox centre for materialism” (Aravamudan 26) has taken a significant leap over the past years with the founding of the Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership, in 2001. This now annual gathering devoted to productively fusing spiritual and management practices counted 360 participants during its inaugural summer session at Halifax’s King’s College. The week, at a cost of \$5000 per participant (how can we forget self-help guru Deepak Chopra’s assertion that “poverty is a reflection of an impoverished soul”? [qtd. in Aravamudan 39]), featured keynote addresses from top North American management specialists such as Dr. Margaret Wheatley, author of the bestselling *Leadership and the New Science: Discerning Order in a Chaotic World*, and David Isaacs, co-convenor of the MIT’s Organizational Learning Centre’s Strategic Dialogue on Large Scale Systems Change. Most sessions featured Buddhist-inflected topics, such as a presentation by New York University’s Art Kleiner based on work he developed for Royal Dutch Shell to help corporations deal with the inevitabilities of change in a world of indeterminacy and flux and how managers can best identify and plan for “various possible futures” (Szostak). Numerous events featured both speakers and participants sitting on meditation cushions in gymnasiums and other venues converted into meditation halls by the event’s organizers.

In addition to guided meditation and visualizations on such topics as organizational change and the successful negotiation of ethical conundrums arising from downsizing, those attending the inaugural Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program in 2001 engaged in “intense physical postures, sensory awareness exercises, and other practices involving movement, and design” (“Mudra: The Active Principle”) initially transmitted by Trungpa and gathered under the heading of “Mudra Space Awareness.” According to the instructor for the sessions, Dr. Craig Warren Smith, Mudra Space Awareness, which aimed at challenging his students “to extend the principles of meditation into ordinary



everyday situations” (Shambhala International), had been developed by Trungpa between 1972 and 1976 and involved elements of Tibetan monastic dance and aspects of the contemporary Western theatre experiments of Grotowski, Brook, and Chaikin, as well as meditation-in-action. Concerning the development of Mudra Space Awareness, Smith, who had been part of a Berkeley-based Mudra group in the 1970s, notes that,

Apart from an historic theatre workshop held in Colorado in 1972 and other informal gatherings held afterward, [Trungpa] never presented his teachings on Mudra in public settings. Very little was recorded. He gave out exercises to small practice groups in Boulder, Berkeley and New York City. They met as often as three times per week and occasionally held public performances. After being invited periodically to observe practice sessions, [Trungpa] offered comments and responded to questions. This commentary, over time, resulted in a body of work that only much later seemed to constitute a coherent set of teachings. (Smith)

Smith notes elsewhere that the Mudra work was “radical and raw,” “briefly our community’s left wing” (“Rethinking Mudra”), and that “when it was introduced, those of us who loved Mudra Space Awareness couldn’t have told you why. Presented without a logical framework, it blew apart our concepts, stopped our minds, and left us... just *there*” (“Rethinking Mudra”). Smith, a former Visiting Professor at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, a meditation teacher, and entrepreneur who describes his career-long focus to be “enlightened self-interest” (Smith, Personal Interview) explains that, at their root,

[t]he space awareness exercises can give us direct experience into seeing, hearing, touching, tasting. They convey a vocabulary for speaking about the peculiar interplay of forms and space that takes place in each of the sense fields. This knowledge is the first step towards developing a new sensibility. The exercises show us how to release the sense fields rather than hold them in a tight and mean-spirited grip. (Shambhala International)

The exercises, also offered by Smith as “First Person Science” training (“First Person”), are geared towards increased sensory awareness, include guided sitting meditation, “intensifications,” group work, and poses. The intensifications involve,

[...] drawing upon your own imagination to conceive of space crowding in around your body and your body mounting opposition. The body tenses all muscles. Psychologically as well as physically, one develops total engagement until there is seamless, nonfluctuating experience of total solidity, thus 'intensification'. Generally, this experience is worked up from the feet through to the head. (Smith)

Such a renegotiation of one's relationship to full sensory experience, with periods of relaxation often following the intensification ("Rethinking Mudra"), can then, Smith asserts, result in increased freedom and creativity:

Those who are skillful in improvisation or dance say their actions are merely dictated by the structure of their experience. Space awareness shows us that the same is true for ordinary experience. Spontaneity is not wildness. It is taking responsibility for what is already there. It means making gestures that reflect the up-to-date sensory content of each moment. (Smith)

Physical stances, group interaction, and accompanying side-coaching are intended to provoke strong psycho-physiological responses in the form of intense and or difficult emotions. These feelings must be then attended to and accepted with the objective of generating what could be most accurately described in shorthand Buddhist parlance as an attitude of non-attachment to unproductive reactive emotional responses. Analogous to aspects of the *via negativa* work that Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski developed to allow acting trainees to witness and experience the physical and psycho-physiological manifestations of psychic and physical blocks in their own and their colleagues' bodies, the Mudra Space Awareness exercises taught at the first Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program were designed to allow participants to come to terms with potentially restrictive ways of identifying themselves, and one another. The intensifications, relaxations, and ensuing unblocking demand "that practitioners rouse the totality of their body/mind/emotions and then make a wrenching leap into boundless space" ("Rethinking Mudra"). Smith is quick to note that,

By appearance, Mudra is not remarkable: a series of experiential exercises, performed in a sequence. [...] These are similar to any number of body-work methods,

sensory awareness programs, or theatre training techniques that you see advertised on the telephone pole flyers of university towns everywhere. No big deal. (“Rethinking Mudra”)

Ultimately, the experience of Mudra, according to Smith, revolves around it being “a secular method for investigating the nondual nature of mind” (“Rethinking Mudra”), and this is the key to the efficacy of the integrated movement approach:

What is a big deal is that Trungpa found a way of presenting reinforcing the idea of a separate self. That’s quite a feat because, as we know from [his] teachings, the logic that ego uses to confirm its own selfhood runs deep, not only in our thoughts, but also in the way our senses function. Beyond that, ego also shapes a distorted idea of the body, as if it were a nesting ground for something called *me*. (“Rethinking Mudra”)

This “authentic” perception of nonduality is discussed by event organizers and participants in the Mudra training. In his opening address to the second annual Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program, Micheal Chender explained that “this training works with areas of being and knowing and community that are essential and that are often ignored” in management training, and he asserted that “it is impossible to integrate our vision and our own manifestation without actually working with the principles of authenticity on the level of perception and body” (Shambhala Institute). Following the first day of Mudra exercises at Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program, John Roy, resident of Falmouth, Nova Scotia and, in 2001, CEO of Summit Real Estate Trust, a group that managed over one billion dollars in assets at the time, explained that, “I am impressed by the whole communication I see here. You come to a diverse group of three hundred people who are total strangers and you became very aware of how many biases and prejudices you have based on totally visual cues. If you are open and receptive, you see those biases melt and disappear” (Shambhala Institute). This disappearance of bias, based on a recognition of “who people ‘really’ are, and what is really” (Shambhala Institute) occurring in the room and in the participant’s body, is intended to permit perception of, and appreciation for, the present moment. This dehistoricizing immediatism is alleged to allow for people’s authentic values to surface, for

authentic relationships between participants to emerge and to create the space for the “authentic integrity and value” of one’s business work to emerge (Shambhala Institute).

The importance accorded to the experience of nonduality has specific roots. According to Lee Worley, former Open Theatre member and current professor of Theatre at the Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado, the Mudra practice, and its earlier manifestation, Mudra Space Awareness, ultimately derive from Tibetan theatre and Vajrayana Tantric dance practiced at the Surmang monastery where Trungpa was chief abbot before his flight to the West as part of the Tibetan diaspora following the invasion by the Chinese army in 1959 (Ahmed; Attisani; Pearlman; Worley). Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey explains,

the aim of the Tantric Vajrayana adept [is] to become conscious of the identity between Vajra-sattva [the undualized fusion of voidness and compassion, or Nirvana][...] and his [or her] ‘own’ empty ‘nature,’ so as to ‘become’ such a ‘being’. To do this [is] to gain enlightenment, or *siddhi*, ‘success.’ (135)

The means of accession to this state involves extensive and varied bodily practices including dance, meditation, and rights of purification. Attention is first paid to creating the ground for an identificatory fusion with an archetypal figure in the form of a deity representing one of the family of human emotions. Through the recognition of the contingency of that apparition, and by extension the contingency of all phenomena, the experience of Nirvana may be achieved. Performance specialist Syed Jamil Ahmed, who has studied Tantric techniques in Kathmandu, asserts that without the underlying practices, the techniques may be “exquisite, exotic, and whatever else that you may wish to add,” but the absence of extensive preparatory psychophysical training will not permit one “the freedom to attempt to probe into experiencing [...] nonduality” (178).

In a bid to avoid any prelapsarian elevation of the “original” Tibetan Tantric work, it is important to remember that, despite the attempts to accede to non-dual states, the family of Vajrayana Tantric techniques being practiced in Asia were and still are in cases themselves embedded in a hierarchical and gendered social context very frequently organized around regimes of exclusion based, ironically perhaps, on dualist categorizations with very material implications (i.e. no women practitioners, secret elite mystery cults, etc.) (178). In other words, Nirvana is not neces-

sarily in Tibet either. Nonetheless, taken in the context of the complexity and commitment necessary to engage with the Vajrayana practices as they continue to be performed in, for example, Kathmandu, assertions from Authentic Leadership attendees of having reached a state of nonduality after a momentary engagement with a westernized form of the practice, begin, if they had not already, to sound like Tantric snake oil.

It is no surprise, considering both current and historical hegemonic efforts dedicated to naturalizing capitalist activity by appeals to metaphorical relationships between the corporation and the human body, as well as between the corporation and other “natural” systems, that bestselling management consultant Peter Senge has been involved with the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program. Senge’s presence at the Authentic Leadership Institute can be understood to be an integral part of the discursive arrangements produced and maintained at the 2001 gathering and serve as a useful frame within which to contextualize the efficacy of the Mudra Space Awareness work. Senge’s bestselling writing and highly sought-after consulting (*The Journal of Business* has named Senge as one of the 24 most influential management theorists of the twentieth century) is marked by what could generously be called a mock sophisticated—and even almost camp—spiritualized discourse of organismic organization related to the corporation. In a 2001 interview reprinted on the *Shambhala Sun* website, Senge pays homage to “ancient” notions that any organization of human beings “are living phenomena in a very real sense and they were appreciated in that spirit for a very long time” (McLeod). He juxtaposes this “ancient wisdom” with a more modern culprit: “Western Science,” which has reduced us, sadly, to conceiving of corporations as “machines.” The rest of his argument follows a predictable path, contributing to the mystification of the mechanisms of capital by calling, amongst other things, for a return to a conception of the corporation characterized by the seemingly and unproblematically trans-historical notion of what he calls the “institutional body” (McLeod). He erases any critical differentiations to be made between corporations and other organizations by suggesting that “schools and non-profit organizations” are also at fault: “There’s no one set of culprits. It’s all institutions.” Of course, change for the better, he specifies, putting the sophist back into theosophy, “must be both personal and institutional” (McLeod). This clearly is where the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program can contribute to his and others’ emerging corporate cosmology: by helping individuals accede to,

and ecstatically fuse with, that ultimate reality, Senge's implicit belief in the corporation's voluptuous and manifold astral body.

In discussion with the very genial instructor Craig Smith, it would seem that he is unaware of the extent of the risk of hegemonic recuperation of using the Mudra practice in a corporate-oriented setting. Smith is a long-time meditation practitioner and instructor; he encourages the use of Mudra practice for the contemporary warrior wishing to "face discord directly and 'create enlightened society,'" and also asserts that "Mudra exercises rip us from our *dharmic* comfort zones and give us the zest we need to take on the forces of materialism that are leading us rapidly into a dark age" ("Rethinking Mudra"). He believes that bringing the work directly to the corporate leaders is an important part of his project and, as a contemporary warrior, sets his form of cultural performance as a challenge against the high performance managers he works with. "You can always fail," he explained; "I worked with Bill Gates for a while and I didn't get where I needed to with him" (Smith, Personal Interview), although current work with a Scandinavian communications giant on issues around spiritual computing are apparently looking promising. When asked to discuss the contradictions of big karma for big profits, Smith explained that participants of the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program were not entirely prepared to engage with the deeper aspects of the Mudra Space Awareness work that allow one to "develop an appetite and lust for changing overbearing economic systems from within" by allowing an individual to "develop the skills to go beyond the fear of upsetting the apple cart." As a serious and committed practitioner, it would seem that Smith takes failures upon his own shoulders, rather than accepting that overbearing discursive determinants are working against the success of his unique and far-sighted challenge.

Whatever the intentions of the leaders, participants, and organizers of the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program, the Mudra Space Awareness cultural performance work undertaken there in 2001 was discursively approved by the naturalized tradition of "'maggie' raids on Eastern religious bodily practices," part of the "frantic assemblage of fragments of Wisdom from Eastern religious traditions in our culture [that] so often serves a wholly unquestioned narcissistic quest for gratification and pleasure, or a more insidious and pervasive 'denial of death'" (Coakley 2). Practiced in this context, in such a small amount over a short period of time, the Mudra work provides a locus of authentication of the body's responses to difficult circumstances.

Without the opportunity to ripen in a practitioner over an extended period of time, it creates a pseudo-sacred environment which serves to both release and contain affective states, a psycho-spiritual technology for the outing and subsequent re-internalization, sublimation, and ultimate repression of difficulties arising from the fusion of the bodily imaginary with the myth of the ethereal corporate supra-organism.

Satire emerges as a familiar, if unscholarly response: “Having a hard time firing your staff? Feeling guilty about outsourcing to those underpaid workers overseas? Hey, feel it *really intensely*, then just let it go.” This generation and simultaneous subjection of spiritual activity can also lead—as we have seen in performance scholarship around the release and subjection of energies associated with “blackness” in minstrelsy (See Lott)—to an excess of that which is to be contained escaping from the embodied and discursive containment to which hegemonic operations would have it relegated. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the very awareness tools used in the Mudra Space Awareness work could permit workshop participants to recognize the socio-historically contingent nature of the apparently “universal” character of the organizational frameworks and entities being communed with. Smith himself explains that “currently, the culture of meditation tends to privilege people who put their heads in the sand and gravitate towards gentler kinder systems,” although “certain other people, a more rare kind, who develop a relationship with meditation find themselves turned off from an environment that clearly promotes materialism” (Smith, Personal Interview). If the types of activity evidenced at the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program—ones which conflate and recuperate cultural performance and the performance of spirituality into the discourse of performance management—continue to gain in popularity, let us hope that many participants will avail themselves of the latter karmic escape hatch. For those whose reigning hegemonized assumptions are simply amplified and consolidated by the Mudra practice and other similar work, the quality of potential trajectories would appear to be rather evident.

Unlike the current globally significant practice gathered under the rubric of “socially engaged Buddhism” first articulated in 1963 by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Queen, Prebish, and Keon 2), in which affective and ideological resistance to various hegemonic formations can be channeled into direct compassion-in-action activity, the opportunist Authentic Leadership work acts to suppress, with a *patois* spiritual laminate, the contradictions of late

capitalism back into those bodies most likely to endure them: those of the wealthy. Their moneyed souls are thereby released into engagement with a new product: a Gnostic experience of a morally sanctioned corporate transcendentalism. They return from their trances armed with evasive strategies with which to fortify their illiberal convictions about an acolyte's entitlement to wealth ("it's not about the profit," explains CEO John Roy, "it's about the connections" [Shambhala Institute]) and seemingly oracular insight into the unpredictability of the corporate divine: "The organism," says Margaret Wheatley of the ethereal corporation, "chooses whether to notice something, then it chooses whether or not to be disturbed. If the organism chooses to be disturbed, it still retains the fundamental freedom to decide how it will respond. Obedience is not a natural life process" (McLeod).

These fundamentally *laissez faire* principles would appear to further the emancipation of all bodies from their earthly states—a perversely paradoxical emancipation considering the embodied nature of the Mudra Space Awareness training discussed above—and lubricate the would-be inexorable rise of quasi-mystical corporate superstructures connected by luminous rhizomatic digital information networks. In the words of the authors of "Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age," "The central event of the 20th century is the overthrow of matter. In technology, economics and the politics of nations, wealth—in the form of physical resources—has been losing value and significance. The powers of mind are everywhere ascendant over the brute force of things" (Progress and Freedom Foundation).

What are the implications, we might ask, of such an assertion and, by association, the implications of the activities of the Shambhala Authentic Leadership Summer Program? What are the implications for the bodies of the exploited ever so far down the karmic chain of corporate being? What does Tibetan Tantric dance have to do with selling property in Halifax county?

My short answer to all three riddles: Everything. ❁



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