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Meditation in the age of its technological mimicry. A dispositif analysis of mindfulness applications

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Abstract

In recent years, mindfulness meditation has become a popular technique to reduce stress or anxiety-related problems and to enhance happiness and wellbeing. Apart from specific real-life mindfulness programs in schools, hospitals, military, and business environments, there is a strongly expanding field of digitally mediated mindfulness. From a critical psychological, 'Foucauldian' perspective, we analyse popular mindfulness apps as dispositifs of power that contribute to aligning the self-governance of individuals with the requirements of neo-liberal governance. Our analysis exposes them as sociocultural artefacts fostering exactly such forms of subjectification that fit the neoliberal state of affairs. By freely amalgamating and interweaving psychological, Buddhist, and economic 'knowledge' (their 'meditations' being inspired, apart from alleged Buddhist sources, from cognitive behavioral therapy, positive psychology, and management literature), such apps orient self-government towards competition, optimization, enhancement, and acceleration, i.e., towards a happiness conflated with productivity – probably not quite what the Buddha had in mind.

Keywords: dispositif analysis, mindfulness applications, digital health, gamification

Introduction: Our big picture

This paper is part of an ongoing quest to understand the modus operandi behind the sense of uneasiness that is growing, as we perceive it, in digital civilization and to explore pathways for a possible humanistic reclamation of the digital (Werthner, 2019). In our view, more often than not the transfer into the digital goes along with the conversion – or the

hijacking – of wishes or impulses that originally are quite alien to the neoliberal logic of accumulation, utilization, and accounting. As long as they remain outside the digital realm, they can resist this logic. However, as soon as, e.g., a wish for love and partnership (Schmid, 2013; Schmid & Slunecko, 2014), for contributing to developmental aid (Girstmair, 2010), an interest in psychotherapeutic treatment (Fochler, 2021), in becoming fitter (Müller, 2016) or more resilient (Meister, 2020) – to mention some of the fields which our (T.S.) research group has attended to – has to be articulated within a digital enframing¹, it tends to be regulated, accelerated, complicated, standardised, or reified beyond recognition. Within a few clicks along the lines of the digital decision tree it will either peter out or even be turned into its very opposite.²

Capitalism is notoriously good at re-inventing itself by appropriating concepts that originate outside of it. Even before the digital age, capitalism has demonstrated its ability to expansively appropriate entities and concepts from outside the market sphere, e.g., by turning ‘land’ into ‘real estate’. And it is not only ‘things’ that it has drawn into the dynamics of utilization; ever more aspects of the social and symbolic world have been subordinated to the market dynamic to keep the engine running (Arendt, 1951; Zuboff, 2019). In the last decades, this process of permanent appropriation has been so closely connected to digitalization that, in our view, the uneasiness in digital culture is almost inseparable from an uneasiness in contemporary capitalism. It is connected with a basic sentiment of disappointment, which has befallen us – i.e., the individuals of second modernity (Zuboff, 2019) – and has led to the degradation of a hope that had been building up for centuries: that it would finally be upon us to live a self-determined, a ‘free’ life in some accordance with our interests and talents and relatively unchallenged by governmental and economic coercions. Within half a lifespan, this promise of modernity has hit the wall, destroyed by unleashed economic forces that are directly opposed to such a self-determined life though they habitually pose as its agents. This is “the burden of second-modernity individuals” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 182) and also the context “for the introduction of an array of devices that bridge the gap between the ideal of autonomy and the reality of precarious labor, inequality, surveillance”. The devices, to which we turn to in this paper, are part of this larger picture.

By analysing a selection of smartphone apps, this report intends to provide concrete demonstration material for such rather global considerations. The choice of just these applications follows from a strong methodological credo of ours: that the irritations of our life-world carry a distinguished knowledge potential and, thus, can make an excellent starting point for scientific questioning, at least for those who accept the challenge – and

¹ With this notion we refer to Heideggers (1954/1977) term ‘Gestell’.

² In a similar vein, McRobbie (2010) complains about a de-publication („Ent-Öffentlichung“) and de-articulation of emancipatory or critical perspectives that come with the digital instruments of the new public management. Though such instruments are often implemented with the intention to foster emancipatory concerns (e.g., gender equality), we then all too easily lose sight of these concerns given the array of checklists, performance records, obligatory documentation requirements, quality management measurements etc. through which they are supposedly to be realized in a digitally-assisted bureaucracy. Ultimately, the original concern is de-thematized in support of technical legitimization requirements, and a conflict that would require a genuine political debate is masked “behind a shroud of technologically mediated objectivity” (Kuziemski, 2020). For Klinger et al. (2013), such indirect and subtle de-thematization is constitutive for our contemporary form of depoliticization.

possible trouble – of letting their own questions reach out into social reality (Slunecko 2008, 2017, 2020). Our irritation was spawned by encountering mindfulness meditation apps and, more precisely, by the fact that our own – partly (L.C.) quite considerable – experience with traditional forms of meditation was not at all matching with their new digital articulation. The letting go of one’s ego ambitions that we had experienced in our own traditional meditative practices, felt strikingly different to these apps’ invocation of “a journey towards a happier you” or “a trend sport for the mind”.

A short note on meditation in the West

Within the scope of this paper, it is not feasible to detail the intricate pathways of reception that mindfulness practices have undergone in the ‘West’, the difficulties of comprehension, selective appropriations and reinterpretations they have met (cf. Schmidt, 2020, p. 75f.). Suffice to say that eastern traditions have consistently been secularized and discharged from philosophical or spiritual claims and undertones. In a nutshell, one might say that the goal of meditation has shifted from redemption to relief. Most European and American psychologists and therapists have no need for the ‘radical’, ‘detached-from-the-world’ aspects of meditation or yoga. Instead, they selectively access and domesticate certain elements of it and utilize it for less radical purposes and in a different epistemological frame. Probably the most influential milestone in the popularizing of mindfulness meditation for clinical psychology and psychotherapy is the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)-program developed by Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970ies (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Beyond the original program, numerous offshoots emerged, e.g., for chronic pain, relapse prevention in addiction and depression (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, MBCT), eating disorders (Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training, MBEAT) as well as for specific events or periods in life, like the Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting (MBCP) or Mindfulness-Based Elder Care (MBEC). Some meditation apps borrow elements from such specifications, relatively standardized and manualized – i.e., already prepared for digitalization from an epistemic point of view – as they are. They also sometimes refer to studies from this environment, i.e., from the field of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction-research, in efforts to furnish evidence for their scientific legitimacy.³

Corpus and method

In early 2017 we started to get a picture of some popular meditation apps – *7 Mind* (Version 2.3.2), *Aura* (2.6.8), *Calm* (4.1), *Ease* (1.0.66), *Simple Habit* (4.13.0), *Headspace* (3.2.0), *Stop, Breathe & Think* (4.4.), and *Buddhify* (4.0.4), the last two of which we then reviewed more closely.⁴ Apart from its popularity, we decided for a fine analysis of *Stop, Breathe & Think*, because it quite characteristically displays some of the main functions, as we perceive it, of contemporary meditation apps – tracking, gamification, thematic or event-driven meditations –, according to which we have structured the empirical part of this paper, too.

³ However, in the larger environment of cognitive behavioral therapy there are also less ‘domesticated’ approaches with more fundamental and more encompassing ambitions to alter the self and world relations (and not only alleviate certain circumscribed problems) through mindfulness practices, such as the Acceptance-and-Commitment-Therapy (Hayes et. al., 2012).

⁴ A detailed account of this project, including many more screenshots, can be found at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/55025/1/58215.pdf>.

For *Stop, Breathe & Think* we also documented some changes of the user interface, which were implemented through quite frequent updates during our observation period (until June 2018). We highly recommend this strategy for the analysis of software applications. It is exactly such changes from one version to the next that often exemplify, in a nutshell, where the developers of the app – at least implicitly – are oriented toward and what they are eager to leave behind, e.g., by integrating unforeseen user practices. In our analysis, for example, we could find an endeavour to extend the user’s availability for the app (e.g., through daily reminders), to reduce complexity in decision-making (through suggesting meditations and through rearranging basic functions in the app’s architecture) while at the same time highlighting the user’s individuality and agency (through new wording and implementing options for personalization). We come back to this towards the end of this paper.

Analysing apps from a critical psychological, ‘Foucauldian’ perspective – i.e., as micro apparatus or micro dispositifs (Schaupp, 2017) – is not yet fully charted territory. It definitely poses new methodological challenges and we cannot enter in discussing them here. Suffice to say that we see our research stance as moving back and forth between two principal modes: At times it resembles a kind of immersive fieldwork based on performing, experiencing – and perhaps suffering from – the phenomenon under scrutiny.⁵ In this mode, our empirical access is quite similar to what Light et al. (2018) have suggested as “walkthrough method” for the study of apps. I.e., in our own walkthroughs or surfthoroughs through the apps, we not only document our own being affected but also collect a foundational corpus of data in the form of screenshots and records of functionality. In a separate step and without being immersed in the immediate experience anymore, we then analyse this material in the much slower pace that is characteristic for discourse or picture analysis.

Self-tracking and gamification

Given the ubiquity of tracking and self-tracking features in the latest generation of smart objects, it was no big surprise to find self-tracking features in almost every mindfulness app. Self-tracking, also known as life-logging, refers to a practice of collecting data of oneself on a regular basis, in order to draw conclusions about one’s behavior or health in form of statistics and figures. Self-Tracking is commonly practiced within the context of physical health and fitness, e.g., in the form of monitoring heart and breathing rates, blood pressure, or sleeping rhythms. *Stop, Breathe & Think* and *Buddhify* automatically track the time spent in meditation, favorite meditations, and the regularity of meditation. *Stop, Breathe & Think* comes with a streak count, which is indicating the continuous number of days with at least one meditation. This is a practice well known from social media, most notoriously employed in the *Snapchat* platform (Hristova et al., 2019), aimed at capturing and ‘short-circuiting’ the user’s availability and attention for the app. In a society in which attention is a scarce and precious good, the more or less hidden agenda of many devices (and *Stop, Breathe & Think* is no exception) is to increase our availability for them. The more time we spend on an app, the more data we create, i.e., we leave traces of our behavior and choices, from which future behavior and choices as well as personality traits that underlie them can be deduced. To borrow two core metaphors from Zuboff (2019): this is the “digital dust”, from

⁵ The research presented here lacks the bodily embeddedness that is characteristic for enactive ethnography (Waquant, 2015) – an approach that we endorse for the study of apps, though.

which the “surveillance capitalists” derive their dividends. We did not research whether the digital traces of our meditations within the *Stop, Breathe & Think*-cosmos are monetarized in a similar way as it is done with the traces we leave on Facebook, Amazon, Google and the like; neither do we claim that it is the case. What we assert, though, is that the app’s construction in principle fits seamlessly into such a format.



Fig. 1: Assessment of physical and mental state (Screenshot from *Stop, Breathe & Think*)

Stop, Breathe & Think additionally employs self-assessment scales of the physical, mental and emotional state (this tripartite structure is a pre-set) before and after meditation. The rise and fall of the physical and mental states is visualized on a five-step scale (from ‘great’ to ‘good’ to ‘meh’ to ‘poor’ and finally to ‘rough’) in the course of days and weeks (cf. fig 1). This fosters a quantification of oneself and frames mindfulness as a tool for self-improvement. Always under the heading ‘my progress’ (top of fig. 1), the presentation of the self-assessment results invites and induces intra-individual comparison – either as a ‘before vs. after meditation’-comparison or as a ‘present vs. all-time best score’-comparison. By consenting to a willing self-surveillance (Whitson, 2014) of one’s physical, mental and emotional states, the user enters a realm of limitless self-competition, mostly without reference to a social world (only in one of the apps, *Simple Habit*, one can challenge fellow meditators in regard to the length of daily streaks). Such transfer of the logic of competition into the inner world of the subjects is a core stratagem of neoliberal governance, but probably not quite what the Buddha had in mind with meditation.

Similarly, gamification is a ubiquitous feature of apps in general and just so of meditations apps. What is hijacked – and turned into a resource for economic utilization – with gamification is the genuinely human capacity and, perhaps, need to play. In *Stop, Breathe & Think*, gamification is present in the form of stickers with comic-like appearances and funny, or rather half-witted, titles like e.g. ‘gaining insight’, ‘master of mindfulness’, ‘tick tock of presence’, or ‘flag of follow through’ which are rewarded whenever certain – often very low-level – ‘goals’ are met. As in many other applications in the realm of fitness or resilience building, these achievements not only refer to the practice itself (here: of mindfulness), but also extend to the self-tracking or other, often quite basic functions of the

app, e.g., to creating an account, completing the self-assessments, choosing a certain number of emotions (see below), and – most prominently – sharing meditations (there are different stickers for 5, 10, 20 and 40 such sharings) or rating the app in the app store. Again, we here see the strong self-referentiality and ‘short-circuiting’ of the user’s attention at work that we have already discussed with the streak count function. In this regard, *Stop, Breathe & Think* seems to be fully embedded into the logic of digital capitalism which is increasingly built on the capture and exploitation of attention (Till, 2019, p.4.), with gamification being an important means for that end. In his analysis of the interlocking of gamification and capitalism, Rey (2014, p.291) has put this in a nutshell: “In short, we [the users] collect the points and the capitalists collect the dollars”. And whereas play is about freedom, gamification is about control of a behavior that still appears as voluntary. It is through such paradoxes that power in late capitalism unfolds – not in the traditional forms of coercion and constraint, but as enticement to want what the gamifiers want us to want. It is from such paradoxes that the uneasiness in digital culture is spawned.

Gamified gratifications for sharing the meditations or rating the app in the app store point to the immediate commercial interests of the app. As is the case with many apps, most meditation apps come as freemium versions, which at some point confront users with gated functions that can be made accessible only with a monthly or annual (“50% off if you go yearly!”) subscription. In *Stop, Breathe & Think*, the ability to unlock these desired functions (i.e. access to more meditations, videos, and options for customization) by becoming a “premium member” is framed as ‘empowerment’ – and what is empowered is obviously the brain:



Fig. 2: Visualization of Empowerment (Screenshot from *Stop, Breathe & Think*)

Empowerment for money and for premium members, “recurring billing”, “cancel anytime” – it is in such wording and framing that the apps interweaving with the world of management is most tangible.

Due to their strong reliance on intertwined self-tracking and gamification mechanisms, mindfulness apps can be seen as part of what Lupton (2016) calls “self-tracking cultures”, thereby indicating that self-tracking is not just a private, purely personal option, but part of

an over-arching governance techniques to align the user's self-interest with the interests of the neoliberal state: we are enticed to develop agency and resilience, while being surveilled, measured and quantified. With Foucault (1988), we understand apps as dispositifs of power that entangle self-governance with the governance of neoliberal societies. In such societies, Foucault holds, power is not exercised through suppression, but rather through the interpellation of particular forms of selves, like the entrepreneurial self, i.e. by conducting subjects to autonomously conduct themselves as responsible, active citizens, constantly striving for self-actualization. Such interpellation pervades the whole discursive apparatus; it trickles down, so to speak, to the micro levels of the life-world, where subjectification is shaped and reformulated, and to the apps that have become so prominent in them.

Mood-tracking, reified emotions, emotional self-care



Fig. 3: List of emotions (screenshot from *Stop, Breathe & Think*)

Mindfulness apps often want to keep track of user's self-report of emotions. Such mood-tracking then is the basis for suggesting specific meditations, by which users are meant to react to these emotions, in order to replace unwanted emotional states with more pleasant ones. *Stop, Breathe & Think* is particularly focused on emotions. Whereas its assessment of the user's physical and mental state is quite general and gets by with a simple 5-point scale (cf. fig. 1), the emotional assessment seems to warrant a much more detailed examination: in an assessment run, at least five emotions have to be chosen from quite extensive lists. As with the tripartite structure of mental, physical and emotional states, it is equally unclear where this list of emotions and their pre-classification into five categories (cf. fig. 3) comes from. It is only clear that it is a given, not something the user may provide or unfold.

From figure 3 it is quite obvious that these five categories (and the emotion lists that are spawned by them, respectively) are not equally appreciated. There is a vertical hierarchy running from ‘grateful, joyful, encouraged’ down to ‘angry, judgmental, jealous’. To assess emotions as either unwanted or wanted fundamentally runs counter to the traditional conception of meditation, in which there is no such good and bad in regard to specific emotions – but only a general plea for observing their coming, their changing, and their going. In *Stop, Breathe & Think*, however, unwanted emotions (e.g., feelings of anxiety or stress) are to be “tamed” or “slayed” (this is the app’s wording) and replaced by positive emotions like happiness, joy, or gratefulness. The app’s invocation is, thus, not at all about freeing one’s affects or freeing oneself from affects (like in the old days), but about cultivating particular emotions – those which happen to enable a productive social and work life.

Such treatment of emotions can be understood in terms of human capital theory, according to which effective management of one’s emotions is essential for becoming a successful entrepreneur of the self. In this sense, positive emotions are “to be regarded as scarce resources requiring investment in order to be developed, maintained and increased” (Bröckling, 2016, p. 51). Apps like *Stop, Breathe & Think* are part of an array of affective media constructing emotions as selectable and improvable goods that can be invested in. For that aim, emotions have to be conceptualized as something reified and decontextualized (cf. Schmid & Slunecko, 2014; Przyborski & Slunecko, 2009) and such conceptualization is strongly fostered by the fact that the emotions appear as a given and finite set. In other words, emotions have to become ‘objective things’ that can be calculated with and that prompt specific further action – here: meditations. Only such decontextualized and reified emotions fit into to the phantasm of technical manipulation. With Pritz (2016), we regard such coupling of rationality and emotionality, such technical and often also numerical self-addressing of one’s emotional life as a particularly characteristic feature of contemporary societies. Insofar, the meditation apps’ rational accessing of emotions fits nicely into a consumer culture centered as it is on the coproduction of emotions and commodities, i.e., where commodities produce emotions and emotions are converted in commodities or “emodities”, to borrow a notion from Illouz (2019).

It goes without much saying that such decontextualized approach to one’s emotional life disguises structural societal problems that may be the main causes for ‘unwanted’ emotions. In this regard, the thematizing of emotional self-care in meditating apps is no different from that of burnout and self-help guidebooks: positive emotions are something you can fashion and control; and if not, you are – at least implicitly – responsible for your unhappiness and your inability to successfully self-care. Add to that the possible production of ‘unwanted emotions’ and stress that comes with the app’s invoking of self-comparison, i.e., with the introduction of yet another element of competition (with oneself) in one’s daily life. Honni soit qui mal y pense.

Version comparison

Like many other apps, also meditation apps can be quite adaptive. They have their biographies⁶, so to speak, and one can learn a lot from their twists and turns. By closely

⁶ Burgess and Baym (2020) recently provided a detailed account of the forces that have shaped the biography of Twitter.

observing updates for *Stop, Breathe & Think* over a time frame of 18 months, we were able to document some changes that were quite salient for our overall interpretation. Most software updates were heading towards what we understand as an appeal for agency. This transition is perhaps best captured in the following comparison between version 3.2. and version 4.4:

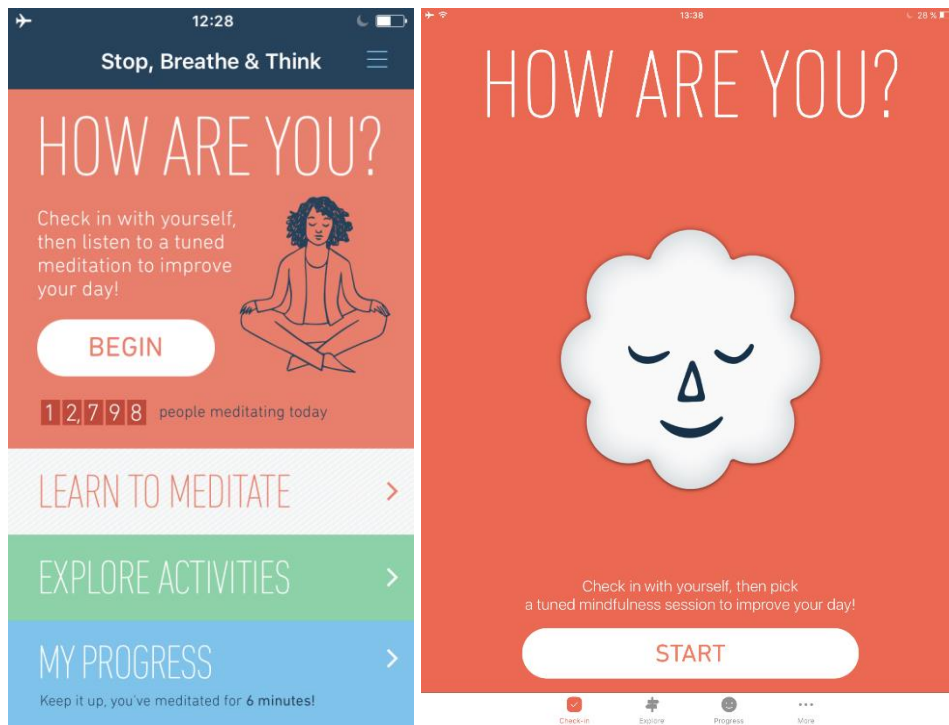


Fig.4: Start pages of version 3.2 and 4.4 (screenshots from *Stop, Breathe & Think*)

Whereas version 3.2. (left) invites the user to “check in with yourself, then *listen* to a tuned *meditation* to improve your day!” (our italics), version 4.4 wants you to “check in with yourself, then *pick* a tuned *mindfulness session* to improve your day!” (again our italics). What is kept is the rather business-like invitation to “check in with yourself”. But what happens, if we put the two alterations on the semantic fine scale? The word “listen” that belongs to the auditive realm and thus has a rather passive connotation is exchanged for “pick” – a term with much more active connotation and one that strongly emphasizes the freedom of choice. And the traditional term “meditation” is replaced by the much more technical term “mindfulness session” (in a similar vein, the traditional lotus posture of meditation gives way to a culturally neutral face).

Other newly introduced features have to do with customization. In *Buddhify*, this pertains to new meditations for specific life situations (e.g., “at the gym”, “while eating”, “at the bus stop”, or “at home”) or specific moods (e.g., “Mindful Ninja“, “Social Animal”, “Working Hard”, “Tough Times”) that can be arranged into favorite collections (specific “wheels”) on the display. In *Stop, Breathe & Think*, new meditations were added between version 3.2. and version 4.4., too: meditations for specific groups (e.g. students or pregnant women) or for special occasions (e.g., “sleep well”, “athletic prep”, “traveler’s toolkit”, or “beauty

secret”)⁷ – more choice, thus, which compels the user to pick the right meditation for each and every situation. To speak with Nietzsche’s (1885/2005, p. 26) Zarathustra, this is meditation for the last man, i.e. for the consumer with his “little pleasures for the day, and [...] little pleasures for the night”. The newly available options allow the user to choose meditations with more varied durations and select the voice that is guiding them. So instead of the traditional conceptualizing of meditation as a tool to eliminate the root cause of suffering – i.e., the ego and its affectedness by ambitions, desires, and fears – here the ego is invoked and has a lot to choose from, by this very choosing expresses individuality and – this is the shadow side of choosing – can be made responsible for the proper conduct of self-actualization and of its failure, respectively. To put it in a nutshell: All such ‘little freedoms’, all such choices of relatively minor importance (as, e.g., which voice to guide my meditation) within a pre-given technological frame, just simulate freedom, while they, in essence, deprive us of the freedom that the Buddha was talking about and, instead, help to put a leash on us – a gamified leash, of course, nonetheless an effective one.

Conclusion

Already more than 20 years ago, Rose described, as a sign of the time, a regime of subjectification “in which subjects are not merely ‘free to choose’, but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destiny” (Rose, 1996, p. 17). It is within this overall picture that the digital reformatting of mindfulness practice has to be understood, too. To live the life of an autonomous individual, Rose (*ibid.*) asserted, “you must learn new techniques for understanding and practicing upon yourself” – techniques that nowadays more and more include the self-monitoring of one’s emotions. These techniques – and the form of governance that goes along with them – are closely connected to the psy-disciplines (psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy) which supply the necessary practices, vocabularies, and narratives for our understanding of emotions (Rose, 1989). The role of the psy-disciplines in the network of contemporary power – transmitting the ideology and ethos of autonomous selfhood while, in essence, ever more diminishing it – must not be underestimated.

In meditation apps an (alleged) expert knowledge from the psy-disciplines is amalgamated with an (alleged) expertise in Buddhism. In this embrace, meditation becomes a transformational operation to cope with the stress and challenges of urban daily life. The resulting narrative is not about alleviating the suffering of humankind, but about better performing in one’s study, work, or family environment by cultivating greater inner control and resilience. It is a narrative geared towards a happiness conflated with productivity. This way, mindfulness turns into a tool of the “self-controlling self” of neoliberalism that “calculates about itself and ... works upon itself to better itself” (Rose, 1996, p. 164), and that takes responsibility for how it feels, so to become a happier, more resilient, more powerful and more productive upgraded version of itself – “a pig in a cage on antibiotics”, as Radiohead’s (1997) famous song *Fitter, happier* has it.

⁷ Later, in version 5.94, more zeitgeisty meditations such as “calm coronavirus anxiety – feel safe, centered and connected” (<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/coronavirus-anxiety-ways-to-manage/>) or for ‘managing’ feelings around climate anxiety were added. In 2020, *Stop, Breathe & Think* has altogether been re-branded as *MyLife*.

In this regard, our research confirms the critique of mindfulness-based interventions that has already been uttered by authors like Arthington (2016), Purser et al. (2016), Niebel et al. (2019), or Schmidt (2020). Proprietary, commercial meditation apps such as the ones in our research have to be understood as part of the neoliberal dispositif to frame problems as individual, not societal affairs. Its practices of reifying, calculating, gaming, and controlling aspects of the self convey a strong sense of decontextualisation, individualization, responsabilization and isolation of the individual from its environment (cf. fig. 5).

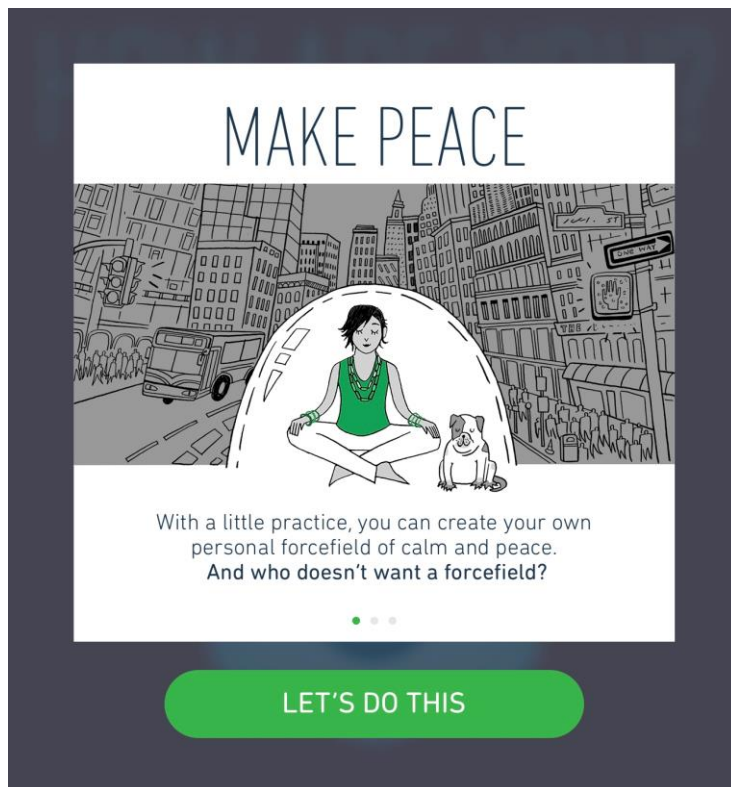


Fig 5: Force field (screenshot from *Stop, Breathe & Think*)

Users of such apps are interpellated as autonomous subjects responsible for calibrating their emotions, alleviating their symptoms of stress and pursuing well-being, happiness, and good relationships rather than addressing systems change. The result is “perverse amalgam of empowerment inextricably layered with diminishment” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 56) and a misappropriation of some of the core claims and hopes of modernity. i.e., empowerment and individualization. For Zuboff, the neoliberal paradigm “has been aimed at containing, rechanneling, and reversing the secular wave of second-modernity claims to self-determination and the habitats, in which those claims can thrive” (Zuboff, 2019, p.41). Along these lines, one can understand meditation apps as part of an overarching dispositif to mediate the still upheld ideal of autonomy with a reality in which we are more and more put on a leash, so to speak.

With the rechanneling of traditional mindfulness into the surrogates of mindfulness applications, one of the last habitats for existential retreat and for recovery from the impositions of neoliberalism is subsumed to the latter’s logic of utilization. This reformatting of the traditional ambitions of mindfulness meditation is played out in a temporal dimension as well. In the temporal realm, the contradiction with traditional

meditative practice is striking, as most of the apps' guided meditations last only a few minutes or even less. And the autonomy so ostensibly aimed at is in effect undermined in temporal matters as well. For example, the app *Aura* prompted us to "come back whenever you need" (reinforcing autonomy in temporal matters as it is); this, however, was immediately followed by the suggestion to install a daily reminder to bring us (obviously not-so-autonomous users) back to the app the next day.

Altogether, the apps' temporal logic is one of acceleration and not of deceleration. The majority of the guided meditations last for only a few minutes, suitable for waiting at the bus stop ('bus stop' being indeed a meditation designation that we encountered in our research). They shift mindfulness practice from a kairological register (in which the subject neither measures nor masters time) to a chronological register. The result is a meditation devoid of aura (Benjamin, 1935/1969), a meditation *en passant*. Such meditation does not lead into an extended present, but into an ever more fragmented temporality, one that does not threaten to run counter to the requirements of the economic state of affairs but kowtows to its imperatives.

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