

Mad Men and Mindfulness

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I've got to get out of here. I choose a piece of shawl and my dirtiest suntans. I'll be back, / I'll re-emerge, defeated, from the valley; you don't want me to go where / you go, so I go where you don't want me to. It's only afternoon, there's a lot ahead. There won't be any mail / downstairs. Turning, I spit in the lock and the knob turns.

—Frank O'Hara, *Meditations
in an Emergency*

The television series *Mad Men* (created by Matthew Weiner and aired on AMC between 2007 and 2015) forms an extended reflection on the creative process. The show compels its viewer to think about thinking, to think about how ideas and images emerge in our brains, and to think about the instrumentalization of thought in advertising and other creative sectors (such as academia). *Mad Men* ends mindfully when, toward the end of its seven seasons, advertising genius and wandering soul Don Draper finds himself meditating in a hippie retreat in central California, his legs in lotus, his gaze inward, breathing out into a collective “Ohm-m-m.” It is 1970. Gone are the days of Sterling Cooper, the rookie Madison Avenue “mom-and-pop” firm where Don started his career over a decade



Figures 1, 2, and 3. *Mad Men*'s final episode, "Person to Person" (AMC, 2015).

earlier but now has been swallowed by the corporate hallways of McCann-Erickson. And Don? Don is in his own space. Having walked out of a Miller Beer meeting a few episodes earlier, he has presumably quit advertising, drifted west across the Great Plains in a cloud of anxiety dreams and marijuana, in order to *arrive*, in the sense that one arrives in a mediation class: *right here and right now*, connecting body and mind by focusing on the act of breathing. While the meditation instructor speaks the soothing words that “the new day brings new hope,” the camera zooms in on Don’s blissful face against the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean. Then the image cuts to Coca-Cola’s iconic “Perfect Harmony” commercial bubbling up in Don’s well-rested mind. The commercial (which in reality dates from 1971), shows a multicultural group of youngsters who are standing on an Italian hilltop while they sing “in perfect harmony” that they’d like to buy the world a home and a Coke and “furnish it with love.” It is on this note of bottled love that *Mad Men* leaves its viewer and concludes its eight years of some of the most captivating television ever made (Figures 1–3).

The reader familiar with meditation will recognize what has just happened in Don’s brain: It is typically those moments one lets go of thinking that the best thoughts come to mind. Half a century after Don’s retreat, this insight—that creativity requires not only focus but also relaxation of mind—has also spread widely across today’s creative industries, especially those of Silicon Valley, just north of Don’s hippie resort (which has been pegged as the Esalen Institute in Big Sur),¹ and the place where new American Dreams are made. As *Wired* reports, “across the Valley, quiet contemplation is seen as the new caffeine, the fuel that allegedly unlocks productivity and creative bursts. Classes in meditation and mindfulness—paying close, nonjudgmental attention—have become staples at many of the region’s most prominent companies.”²

The embrace of mindfulness by the tech world is somewhat paradoxical. As Evgeny Morozov observes, “in essence we are being urged to unplug, . . . so that we can resume our usual activities with even more vigor upon returning to the land of distraction.”³ This quest for mindfulness, Morozov adds, plays the same role as Buddhism: “Accept the world as it is—and simply try to find a few moments of peace in it.” Here Morozov cites Slavoj Žižek’s critique of Western Buddhism as the “new spirit of capitalism.”⁴ In agreement with Morozov and Žižek, I criticize Western adaptations of originally Zen Buddhist practices of mindfulness meditation for their ideology of a centered, *lovingkind* individual whose attention remains unperturbed by the economic seasons. At the same time, the essay also takes inspiration from the equation found in



Figures 4 and 5. “The jumping-off point.”

mindfulness discourses between attention and everyday life. In dialogue with this equation, and in dialogue with theorizations of everyday life in late capitalism as an inherently shattered category, I define attention as an ethics that creates soft yet firm boundaries between work and free time and in doing so resists, flexibly yet firmly, the attention economy’s not-so-soft colonization of everyday life. In this critique and redefinition of mindfulness, *Mad Men* serves as the *jumping-off point* (to paraphrase both Don’s Hawaii commercial in season 6 and the show’s opening credits) (Figures 4 and 5), as the show allows me to trace mindfulness’s lovingkindness to the love at the turn of the 1970s Cold War air that Don’s Coke commercial so skillfully taps into.

The Idea and the Execution of the Idea

Mad Men begins as it ends, with the birth of an idea, in an episode that pulls a semisubliminal trick on its first-time viewer. This pilot episode, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," takes us to a bustling bar in downtown Manhattan, where we are about to meet Don (Jon Hamm). Like the viewer's entrance into Rick's Saloon in *Casablanca* (1942), the camera moves from outside to inside, capturing the crowd, before it halts on the back of a man in a suit sitting by himself, sunk in thought, as the scene shifts from external to internal focalization. Don has been drinking old-fashioneds, smoking, and breaking his mind over a campaign slogan for Lucky Strike (Figure 6). It is 1960, and the Federal Trade Commission has just prohibited tobacco companies from making health claims. So, Don's challenge is how to continue advertising cigarettes now that he is no longer allowed to lie that they're safe. The camera, now in point of view, zooms in on the lipstick-stained napkin on which Don has been scribbling his thoughts, but nothing comes into focus. He still has no idea. When he asks the waiter for a light and spots the latter's choice of cigarettes, Don strikes a conversation with him: "Why Old Gold?" (Figure 7). Following a racist intervention by a colleague, the waiter responds that the Old Golds are a habit and that really nothing would get him to switch brands: "I love my Old Golds." Don insists, "But let's just say, tomorrow a tobacco weevil comes along and eats every last Old Gold on the planet. . . . Would you just stop smoking?" The waiter admits that he could probably find an alternative: "I love smoking." "*I love smoking*," Don repeats the line, "that's very good," and writes it on the napkin, this time legibly (Figure 8).

Over the course of the episode's next twenty minutes, this association between love and smoking recurs a few times in conversations Don has with his colleagues at the office and with his mistress in town: "People love smoking," "You love smoking," and "I love it." By the time Don has his meeting with the Lucky Strike delegation, the episode has thus firmly planted "I love smoking" in the viewer's mind. When cued for his strategy, however, Don remains silent. He still has no idea. Then creative lightning strikes, and Don trumps everyone including the viewer with the famous Lucky Strike slogan that in reality dates from 1917: *It's toasted*. Don's rationale teaches us a lot about advertising:

Advertising is based on one thing: happiness. And you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's



Figure 6. Don thinking.



Figure 7. "Why Old Gold?"

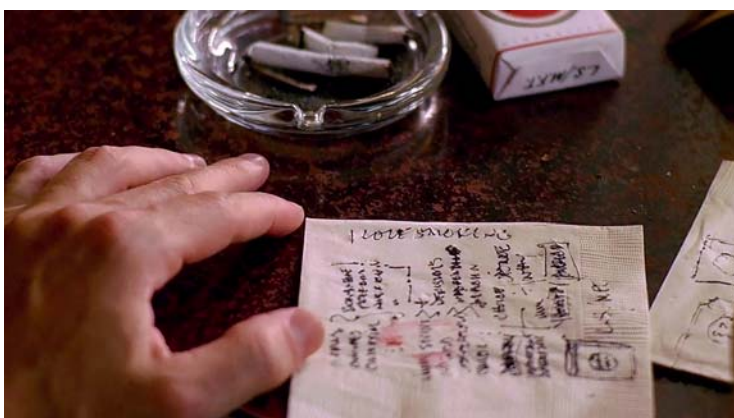


Figure 8. "I love smoking."

a billboard on the side of the road that screams with reassurance that, whatever you're doing: it's okay, you are okay.

Advertising reassures. It confirms people in the life stories they have been telling themselves, perpetuating their dreams. Don't doubt the status quo, don't judge yourself too much; it's okay, you are okay.

Mad Men is an almost Balzacian account of the 1960s American Dream industry, and in its portrayal of that industry, *Mad Men* speaks—in a free-indirect style of internal and external narration—the audiovisual language of the dream produced. As Keith Booker and Bob Batchelor write, Don and his wife Betty symbolize American prosperity in the Cold War era: “They live in an early 1960s version of a ‘McMansion’ in a New York City commuter town. Dashing out the door, Dad grabs his hat and ventures forth to the train station, while Mom stays at home with the youngsters, filling her day with television, gossipy chats with other stay-at-home moms, and a ubiquitous pack of cigarettes at the ready.”⁵ On the one hand, *Mad Men* delights in its mildly caricatural picture of the past in terms of both content and style. The film's color scheme, for example, brings us back to the warmth of 1960s advertising, billboard advertising, that is to say, because television was still black and white (like Don's Glo-Coat commercial in “Waldorf Stories,” season 4, episode 6). On the other hand, the show reminds the viewer to not be *too* nostalgic. Throughout the seasons, *Mad Men* emphasizes the fundamental sexism, racism, and homophobia of the era. Repeatedly, moreover, the show explicitly thematizes nostalgia, as in the first season's finale, “The Wheel,” when Don in a pitch for Kodak's new slide projector philosophizes about nostalgia as “a deeper bond with the product,” or as in “Time and Life” (season 7, episode 11), when Don reminisces about the olden days: “You never saw the old Sterling Cooper. It was mammoth.”

One of the studies that Matthew Weiner may have consulted in his writing of *Mad Men* is Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997). Frank writes that “if the advertising world of the 1950s was . . . an industry whose primary task was placing the whims of the client, that of the 1960s would be dominated—symbolically at least—by the eccentric creative genius, defying convention and going to the wall for his rule-breaking idea.”⁶ In many respects, Don is that new creative adman whose style often conflicts with the accounts department, but then again, he is not *that* eccentric. His character serves two functions. On the one hand, he is one of the mad men conjuring the American Dream (Figure 9). On the other hand,



Figure 9. Title card at the start of *Mad Men*.

he is that dream's quintessential male protagonist, from paperboy to millionaire, split personality included. At the surface, Don personifies the self-made man and ideal husband sold by much of 1960s advertising. At the same time, "like the soft underbelly of the United States, Draper is not what he appears to be."⁷ He cheats on his wife, he often loses his temper, and if his big secret ever came out (that he was born Dick Whitman but took a dead man's identity to get out of the Korean War), he would also be a deserter in the eyes of U.S. law.

On repeated occasions, Don's memory punctuates the narration, as in episode 1, in which we hear the battlefield sounds that haunt Don in his dreams. Or as in the opening episode of season 6, "The Doorway," in which the scene's present tense gives way seamlessly to Don's childhood. Other times the development of Don's character manifests itself in the transition between scenes, as in "Maidenform" (season 2 episode 6). Don is in a hotel room with Bobbie Barrett, with whom he has been having an affair. In the next scene he is at home in his bathroom shaving when his daughter Sally walks in. "I'm not gonna talk," she says while Don is looking at himself in the mirror. "I don't want you to cut yourself." Together with Don we're thus watching his life. "It's right there," he says later that season to Anna Draper (Melinda Page Hamilton) during the show's first venture to California. "I keep scratching at it, trying to get into it. I can't" ("The Mountain King," season 2, episode 12). Anna is the woman Don found himself married to after having switched identities with the original Don Draper. Back

in New York Don is less forthcoming with sharing his story, whether in his relation with Betty (whom he married after divorcing Anna) or in his professional life. So at the start of season 4 in the episode “Public Relations” when a reporter asks him “Who is Don Draper?,” Don’s only response is that in the Midwest where he is from “it’s not polite to talk about yourself.”

Let’s return to Don’s idea. Right after the meeting he claims to his boss Roger Sterling (John Slattery) to have pulled the idea “out of thin air,” but is that really true? In fact, the conditions of possibility for “it’s toasted” had been shaping in his head as we saw him think through the problem alone and in conversation with others. *I love smoking*. It was there that Don’s idea started to take shape. The only problem was that any direct association between “love” and “smoking” would still trigger the word “despite” and remind people of the dangers of smoking after all. Don still had to make his leap of mind to not associate “love” and “smoking” directly but to instead associate Lucky Strike with one of the many things people love *about* smoking, like the happy scent of the unlit, craftily rolled tobacco. By having Don arrive at this realization only at the very last moment, *Mad Men* overromanticizes the creative process in order to establish Don as a genius. But Don would have likely come up with the “it’s toasted”—or something equally brilliant—much earlier had he followed the advice that he later in season 1, in the episode somewhat problematically titled “Indian Summer,” offers to his secretary and soon to be junior copywriter Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss) as she is struggling with her first account. “Peggy,” Don calls her from behind his desk while she is already on the way out of his office, “just think about it deeply, then forget it, and an idea will *jump* up in your face.” Don’s advice is spot-on, because as stated it is typically the very moment one lets go of thinking that the best thoughts come to mind. In the hours leading up to the Lucky Strike meeting Don’s mind remained nebulous, however, as he couldn’t take his mind off work. Despite the bar visit, the extramarital night in the city, and a nap in his office, he couldn’t let go of the thick air of associations that prevented him from seeing new patterns in the clouds.

To stay with Peggy for a moment: at the start of season 6 the viewer encounters her in her new position as a senior copywriter at a competing agency. When two of her team members come into her office and present to her three very similar taglines, Peggy tells them that “those are three different versions of the same idea. If you can’t tell the difference between which part’s the idea and which part’s the execution of the idea, you’re of no use to me” (“The Doorway, Part 2,” season 6, episode 2). Peggy’s response gets to the

core of the rationalization of thought in the advertising business, which thinks of creativity not merely as that inexplicable “lightning in a bottle” (as Don’s copywriter Michael Ginsberg is referred to in “A Tale of Two Cities,” season 6, episode 10) but also as a process that can be channeled and broken up into discrete steps, into the idea and its execution.

What actually is an idea? An idea is a tendency of mind. It is a sense of direction for further association, an intuitive way of knowing where to go that wasn’t there before. In artistic discourse, that sense of direction and the road one ends up traveling are in continuous dialogue. In art, there ultimately is no distinction between an idea and its execution, between content and form. In advertising, in contrast, the creative process is more streamlined and instrumental to sales. At the end of the day, the agency needs to convince its critical clients that its strategy will solicit response from a critical mass of consumers. In advertising, the *idea* is always also a marketing strategy. Or, as Don puts it, in advertising “creative [is] the least important most important thing there is” (“Blowing Smoke,” season 4, episode 12). The art of advertising is to conceal the strategy in its deceptively simple execution and have consumers forget that the ad is an ad and to make them forget that they are being interpellated as consumers. Or as both Don and Peggy put it throughout the seasons, “Every good ad tells a story.” That story is not merely a story about the product advertised; it is also a life story, the promise of a happy life, craftily branded into the product: “It’s okay. You are okay.”

A Zen-Like Focus

Even though Don has a lot on his mind, he is also the kind of man who from one moment to the next can sidetrack his anxiety, walk into a meeting, and *don* his open face and irresistible smile, spell-binding the room. At such moments Don is the textbook example of what cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin calls “HSPs,” “highly successful persons” who above all excel at managing their attention, allowing them to “take their time, make eye contact [and to be] really *there* with whomever they’re talking to.”⁸ Don doesn’t do it alone, though. He is at the center of an entire structure that functions as an extension of his brain, including a creative staff that feeds him ideas and a personal secretary who narrows his attentional filter. Levitin writes in *The Organized Mind*, a combination of popular neuroscience and self-help:

Successful persons have many of the daily distractions of life handled for them, allowing them to devote all of their attention to whatever is immediately before them. They seem to live completely in the moment. Their staff handle correspondence, make appointments, interrupt those appointments when a more important one is waiting, and help to plan their days for maximum efficiency (including naps!). . . . Their ultimate prize if it all works? A Zen-like focus.⁹

The Organized Mind promises the reader practical insight into the architecture of the attentional system. Attention, Levitin explains, is a limited-capacity resource. When there are too many things going on at once, the brain gets overloaded and starts to miss seemingly obvious things. His solution to this inattentive blindness is to “shift the burden of organizing from our brains to the external world.”¹⁰ And here his book offers some tips and tricks to externalize information, from task piles to key hooks.

The Organized Mind also makes an offhand reference to mindfulness meditation as a way to train our *inner* worlds so as to reach a Zen-like focus.¹¹ Mindfulness, in the Westernized sense of the term, refers to a set of meditation practices oriented toward making their practitioners better able to cope with pain or stress. As Daniel Anderson writes, to be “mindful” involves “attending to the present moment, without reference to past or future, and without judgment.”¹² A key figure in the Western domestication of Zen Buddhist mindfulness practices is Jon Kabat-Zinn, a medical scientist who in 1979 initiated the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts. Kabat-Zinn’s eight-week program integrates elements of Eastern religion and Western science to create an allegedly secular practice. Originally the program was targeted at people who suffer from chronic pain, but in subsequent years Kabat-Zinn and others have also offered the program to people suffering from stress. In his book *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (1990), Kabat-Zinn refers to MBSR as a form of “behavioral medicine” that rests on the belief that “mental and emotional factors, the ways in which we think and behave, can have a significant effect, for better or worse, on our physical health and on our capacity to recover from illness and injury.”¹³

At the start of *Full Catastrophe Living* Kabat-Zinn briefly acknowledges his Eastern influences, labeling “the systematic cultivation of mindfulness” as “the heart of Buddhist tradition.”¹⁴ Lifting that heart out of its Buddhist origins, he then posits mindfulness as a universal practice that is not defined by any specific

cultural or religious context. “Mindfulness,” he writes, “is basically just a particular way of paying attention. . . . For this reason it can be learned and practiced, as we do in the stress clinic, without appealing to Oriental culture of Buddhist authority to enrich it or authenticate it. . . . In fact one of its major strengths is that it is not dependent on any belief system or ideology.”¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn further emphasizes that mindfulness is not a replacement for medical treatment but is a vitally important complement to it. This claim seems to find support in controlled scientific studies, which suggest that the MBSR program may have beneficial effects on stress reduction, relaxation, and quality of life among patients with a chronic illness (where it should be noted that these studies only consider short-run effects).¹⁶ Following its initial successes, the MBSR program has trained over a thousand instructors who teach all across the United States and the rest of the world, often in designated centers where students are referred to as “patients.” In recent years, MBSR and its spin-offs have also spread far beyond the clinic. Or from a more dialectical perspective, the mindfulness wildfire is part of a larger tendency in which the clinic is increasingly integrated into the wider social infrastructure, turning each and every person into a potential patient. The diagnosis: everyday life in late capitalism.

The largest creator and consumer of mindfulness trends is the United States. As Jeff Wilson writes in *Mindful America* (2014), in the United States mindfulness has reached into nearly every institution of society, from churches to schools, from prisons to the military, from Wall Street to Silicon Valley.¹⁷ Other than Kabat-Zinn, the major influences in the “mindful transformation of American Buddhism” have been the Theravada tradition and the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh. Wilson writes that this new American Buddhism, which is especially popular among a white middle-class lay demographic, defines Buddhism as inherently based on mindfulness meditation, a shift “not only from historic Buddhist tradition but also from most American Buddhist history.”¹⁸ Americans on the whole, he continues, “are disinclined to look to Buddhist magical items and ritual services for their benefits—instead they turn to Buddhist meditation, which more easily fits into prevailing scientific worldviews.”¹⁹ In other words, Wilson (who dedicates his book to “all who suffer in America and who seek solutions through mindfulness”) signals that in American mindfulness the technique of mindfulness meditation is isolated from the larger cultural-religious set of practices and worldview in which it originated.²⁰ Mindfulness is “thus transformed so that it delivers cultural benefits desired by Americans.”²¹

A typical mindfulness course integrates various formal and informal meditation practices, including a “body scan” and yoga. For the body scan, practitioners lie down, their eyes closed, while they guide their attention through their body “simply noticing what’s present.”²² Other meditations are done in a seated position and invite—rather than instruct—the practitioner to allow themselves to “just [be] attentive to what is happening in [their] own awareness, right here and right now” and then, “as [they] sit,” to become aware of “the sensations of breathing.” And of course, the mind may wander, as the mind tends to do, away from the breath into fantasies, worries, work, and grocery lists. Yet whenever that happens, the practitioner, “without giving [themselves] a hard time . . . just gently but firmly bring[s] [their] awareness back to the sensations of breathing.” Here the *without giving yourself a hard time* is crucial, because the basic principle of mindfulness is its nonjudgmental nature. To be mindful is to notice sensations and thoughts without passing judgment on them, this in contrast to Christian forms of meditation in which the practitioner *does* judge their thoughts.

As far as the informal meditations are concerned, in these the practitioner is asked to bring a mindful mind-set to daily activities such as walking, eating, or doing the dishes. Mindfulness thus posits itself as a state of attention and attentiveness that integrates itself with day-to-day life and even goes as far as equating mindfulness and the everyday. Therefore, where the MBSR course ends, mindfulness proper begins, and in Week 8 the practitioner is invited to consider the question “How will you continue practicing mindfulness in your daily life, on your own?”

Love Is in the Air (Person to Person)

I am the least difficult of men. All I want is boundless love.

—Frank O’Hara, *Meditations in an Emergency*

Let’s have a closer look at the formal meditations, some of which also include an element of visualization. The “mountain meditation,” for example, asks its practitioner to let “an image form in the mind’s eye of the most magnificent . . . mountain” and then see if they can internalize the mountain “so that [their] body and the mountain in [their] mind’s eye become one.” Next, as they sit there the practitioner imagines the change of weather and seasons while they remain unperturbed by that change, because “none of this matters to the mountain, which remains at all times

its essential self.” (The meditation is a de-poeticized adaptation of Dogen’s “Mountains and Waters” sutra, which ends on the wisdom that “There are mountains hidden in mountains. There are mountains hidden in hiddenness. . . . Therefore investigate mountains thoroughly.”)²³ Or to give another example, in Week 7 there is the “Lovingkindness Meditation,” which asks practitioners to picture a person who “evokes feelings of warmth and love,” to wish that person love, to imagine wishing returning that love, and to let the feeling of pure love wash over them and radiate into the world. Our guide continues:

And, if this is possible, remember the circle that began with yourself and the persons you loved the most, family and friends, extending the circle to include all the many people you don’t know who live far away, in other countries or cultures, saying:

May you be happy and healthy,
 May you have peace and ease.
 May you have love and warmth in your life.

Let me interrupt the lovingkindness here and assure the reader skeptical of mindfulness’s claim to be a secular practice that I share that skepticism. For now, though, I wish to hold off on a critique of the mindful narrative of a centered, loving individual who remains unperturbed by the seasons and first trace its appearance in contemporary popular culture to the love in the air of 1970s popular discourse.

This also means back to Don as he is meditating in the series’ finale a few hundred miles south of the Bay Area. The Coke commercial that appears to his inner eye ends his seven-season quest for the basic principle of advertising. Don thought about it deeply, then he forgot about it, and now the million-dollar idea has jumped into his face. As stated, in this commercial, which was actually created by McCann-Erickson (the company with which Don is technically still under contract), we see a Benetton-like group of youngsters standing on an Italian hilltop mindfully holding a bottle of Coke and singing that they think to know “the real thing the world wants today.” That “real thing” is love itself, a love that goes beyond the mere happiness at the turn of the 1960s American Dream where Don started his quest. Now, ten years later with “the TV . . . always on, Vietnam playing in the background” (as says Peggy in “Waterloo,” season 7, episode 7), and while “everything matrimonial feels Paleolithic” (as says Don in “The Doorway,” season 6, episode 1), now people are ready for “this great message” about “what holds people together.” I cite here from Don’s amphetamine-induced

ramble to Peggy and Ginsberg in “The Crash” (season 6, episode 8). Don continues his reflection on the 1960s attention economy:

I keep thinking about the basic principle of advertising. There’s entertainment and you stick the ad in the middle of the entertainment, like a little respite. It’s a bargain. They’re getting the entertainment for free. All they have to do is listen to the message. But what if they don’t take the bargain at all? What if they’re suddenly bored of the entertainment? What if they don’t—what if they turn off the TV?

That night in his office Don lost his train of thought, but now, sitting at the Californian coast, he sees it all very clearly: *Love*. Not love as “a big lightning bolt to the heart, where you can’t eat and you can’t work and you just run off,” because that is the kind of love “invented by guys like [him] to sell nylons” (as Don says in episode 1 to Rachel Menken, a client and his second extramarital lover whom the viewer meets before his wife). Nor is it love *for something*, because Don says that with all the love in the air he prefers to “trade on the word ‘love’ as something substantial” rather than contribute to the “trivialization of the word” (season 6, episode 1) (Figure 10). It is also not the free sexually emancipated love in the sense of “it’s cool, it’s California, everybody shares” (as Don imagines his second wife Megan saying during a hashish trip in “A Tale of Two Cities,” season 6, episode 10). For that Don’s structure of desire remains too patriarchal. No, the love that Don’s Coke commercial puts its finger on is the same love expressed by mindfulness, a humanist love as a *true connection* between people, a love that binds people all across the globe into a single humanity. It is that longing for community that Don grasps out of 1970s air and bottles into a new lovingkind sharing-is-caring American Dream, branded in California.

While *Mad Men* thus resolves Don’s quest for the basic principle of advertising, it leaves open his personal quest for romantic union. Someone who *does* find love in the old-fashioned sense is Peggy. Peggy’s coupling up with the friendly Stan is a real tear-jerker and the melodramatic climax of “Person to Person,” *Mad Men*’s finale. Their love was in the air since the introduction of Stan’s character in season 4 (in an episode that should have been titled “Puns on Pencils”). Although any other ending to Peggy’s story line would have been hard to fathom, *Mad Men* also somewhat reattaches her female struggle in a sexist world to the heteronormative logic of melodrama in which, as Teresa de Lauretis writes, the female protagonist usually makes a journey, inward or outward, in order to reach the place where “a modern Oedipus



Figure 10. “As much as I love joining all the ads making fun of the ubiquitous San Francisco hippie, let’s try to trade on the word ‘love’ as something substantial.”

will find her and fulfill the promise of his (off-screen) journey.”²⁴ My main critique of *Mad Men* is thus that the show’s plot progressions largely depend on male quest motifs as old-fashioned as the world it depicts. Despite its awareness of the patriarchal structures of the time, *Mad Men* shows itself as a product of those same structures’ persistence in the era it was created. As Arielle Bernstein argues, *Mad Men* fits within a wave of TV shows from the past decade (*Breaking Bad*, *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*) that feature “a white, male antihero who [ultimately] finds some kind of redemption—steely, hard eyed, with an emotionally soft core.”²⁵ Don indeed has a soft core, and in the final episode he breaks down a number of times. First he pours his heart out during a cross-country person-to-person phone call with Peggy. Next, he gets emotional during a group-sharing session when he is moved to tears by the depressed Leonard, a man-without-qualities who neatly fits the Miller beer drinker profile sketched to Don a few episodes earlier in the meeting he walked out of before embarking on his drift west. By having Don open up a few times, *Mad Men* redeems him as a human being but only in order to reaffirm him, through the Coke ad, as a creative genius, much like in the opening episode through the conversation Don has with the waiter, which establishes him as a friendly person before the “It’s toasted” affirms him as a genius. The difference between then and now is that whereas in 1960 Don simply took a nap when he needed to clear his mind, in 1970 he takes recourse to meditation. Maybe Don isn’t as old-fashioned after all; he is far ahead of his time.

More precisely, Don is *at once* old-fashioned while his time far ahead. In *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (2004), Alan Liu writes (in dialogue with Frank's *The Conquest of Cool*) about the death of the "Madison Avenue' adman dressed all in gray" and the birth of "the new stereotype of the hip advertizing or art director with his hair in a ponytail."²⁶ Don doesn't resemble either of those figures. His gaze is at once timeless and of his time. Or in narratological terms, his character at once functions as an external focalizer through whom *Mad Men's* realism represents and reflects on the ad world and as an internal focalizer through which we are submerged in the dynamics and discourses of that ad world. With Don, we thus travel in and out of the American Dream as that dream itself travels through the 1960s.

Think Different

In his analysis of the emergence of knowledge work as the reigning corporate paradigm, Liu discusses the ad world as one of the two sites in the 1960s where the countercultural ethos was co-opted from within that ethos itself. Liu writes (still with reference to Frank) that "even before counterculture became the darling of the media in the mid-1960s, it had already infiltrated the workplace culture of the advertising agencies that wrote the script for consumer culture" (a development that is present in *Mad Men*, for example, through the character of Stan).²⁷ The second site in which Liu sees counterculture co-opted in the workplace is early hacker culture in Silicon Valley, only a two-and-a-half-hour drive north of Don's hippie retreat and around the corner of Haight-Ashbury, the epicenter of counterculture. A half century after 1967's Summer of Love, the countercultural heritage is still felt in Silicon Valley, in particular in its integration of mindfulness discourses and practices. At the Google campus, for example, there is a Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute that teaches the "Google meditation method" (Figure 11), while in 2013 some seventeen hundred people attended a Wisdom 2.0 conference in San Francisco that featured top executives, or "HSPs" in Levitin's terminology, from LinkedIn, Cisco, and Ford. The *Wired* article from which I quoted earlier continues:

These companies are doing more than simply seizing on Buddhist practices. Entrepreneurs and engineers are taking millennia-old traditions and reshaping them to fit the Valley's goal-oriented, data-driven, largely atheistic culture. Forget past lives; never mind nirvana. The technology



Figure 11. Google Search Inside Yourself.

community of Northern California wants return on its investment in meditation. “All the woo-woo mystical stuff, that’s really retrograde,” says Kenneth Folk, an influential meditation teacher in San Francisco. “This is about training the brain and stirring up the chemical soup inside.”²⁸

The roots of the marriage between tech culture and meditation lie in the mad men era. In *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (2006), Fred Turner outlines that American youths of the 1960s developed two fairly distinct social movements: the New Left (which grew out of the civil rights and free speech movements) and a countercultural movement inspired by Zen Buddhism and avant-garde aesthetics (including action painting and Beat poetry). Whereas the former turned outward toward political protest, the latter turned inward toward experiments with consciousness and intimacy, freeing the mind through drugs, freeing love from patriarchy, and, more generally, positing the transformation of unconsciousness as the basis for the reformation of social structures. Turner stresses that for many of these new communalists, the expansion of consciousness and exploration of alternative interpersonal connections was not an end in itself. They saw their escapades as a means to imagine alternative, more egalitarian communities both within and outside the countercultural urban centers, such as the hippie commune in upstate New York that Roger seeks to save his daughter from in season 7, episode 4, “The Monolith” (though not before having taken a toke and having himself tasted the hippie life a few times in earlier episodes, dabbling in free love and dropping acid) (Figure 12). While the new communalists sought alternative ways of relating to themselves and others, they did not necessarily turn their backs on the world they grew up in. Turner writes that even as “they set out for the rural frontier, the communards of the back-to-the-land movement often embraced the collaborative



Figure 12. Roger Sterling smoking marijuana in upstate California.

social practices, the celebration of technology, and the cybernetic rhetoric of mainstream military-industrial-academic research.”²⁹ In other words, while the New Left challenged the established order and its technological bureaucracy, the new communalists and much of the counterculture at large found an alternative to the status quo in a world vision built “around looping circuits of energy and information.”³⁰

This cybernetic utopia could be specified further as a state of *technê-zen*. In “*Technê-Zen and the Spirit of Late Capitalism*” (2011), John Williams defines *technê-zen* as “a discourse premised on the supposed commensurability and mutual determination of Zen Buddhism . . . and the possibilities of an organic and holistic form of rationalist technocracy.”³¹ Williams develops the concept primarily in relation to Robert Pirsig’s book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), a spiritual road trip from Minnesota to northern California in which the narrator reminds the reader that “technology, *technê*, originally, meant ‘art.’”³² Other than Pirsig’s postcountercultural classic, Williams references the poem “Machines of Loving Grace” as a quintessential literary celebration of technology’s facilitation of new paths of collective consciousness. This poem, also cited at length by Turner, was handed out by its author, Richard Brautigan, in the streets of Haight-Ashbury. The first stanza reads as an inspiration for Coke’s “Hilltop” commercial:

I like to think (and
the sooner the better!)
of a cybernetic meadow

where mammals and computers
 live together in mutually
 programming harmony
 like pure water
 touching clear sky.

According to Turner, Brautigan's poem suggests that by the end of the 1960s parts of the counterculture (and in particular the new communalists) had started to embrace the world vision that circulated in the Cold War research world. Turner asks how these worlds came together: "How is it that the communitarian ideals of the counterculture should have become melded to computers and computer networks in such a way that thirty years later, the Internet could appear to so many an emblem of a youthful revolution reborn?"³³ Turner addresses this question through the figure of Stewart Brand, who between 1968 and 1972 (and sporadically thereafter) published the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a magazine on self-sufficiency, ecology, and do-it-yourself technology. The magazine, subtitled *Access to Tools*, soon became a source of inspiration for the new communalist utopia of the marriage of computing technology and the ideal of humanity also pictured in "Machines of Loving Grace" (which was reprinted several times in the *Whole Earth Catalogue*). Over a quarter century after *Whole Earth*, Brand claimed in a *Time* article titled "We Owe It All to the Hippies" (1995) that the counterculture's real legacy has been the personal computer and Internet revolution. Turner only partly agrees:

Like many myths, this one contains several grains of truth. The 1970s did in fact witness the rise of a new form of computing, and Bay area programmers, many with countercultural leanings, played an important part in that process. And as they were distributed, some of the new computers—particularly the 1984 Apple Macintosh—were explicitly marketed as devices one could use to tear down bureaucracies and achieve individual intellectual freedom. Yet, the notion that the counterculture gave rise to personal computing and computer networking obscures the breadth and complexity of the actual encounter between the two worlds. As Stewart Brand's migrations across the 1960s suggest, New Communalist visions of consciousness and community had become entangled with the cybernetic theories and interdisciplinary practices of high-technology research long before computers were miniaturized or widely interlinked.³⁴

At this point Turner references Apple and its self-positioning as a company inspired by the countercultural antiestablishment zeal. In fact Apple, certainly in the periods when Steve Jobs was involved,

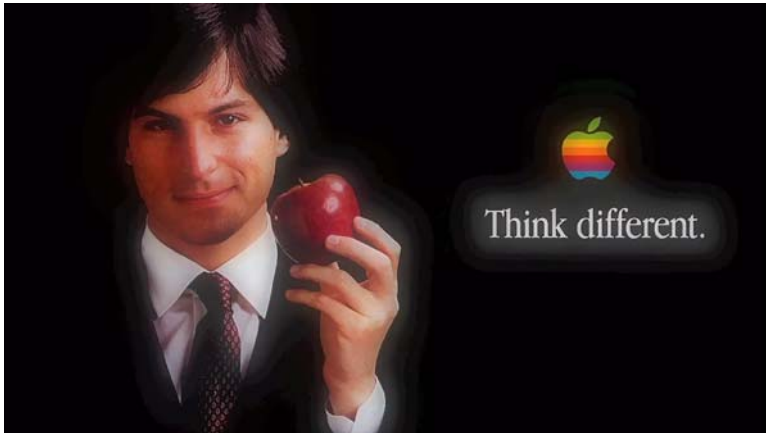


Figure 13. Apple's 1997 "Think Different" campaign.



Figure 14. Steve Jobs introduces the iPad 2 in 2011.

has always branded itself as *more* than a company, as a company that is also a *philosophy*. Following its famous "1984" ad, in which Macintosh redeems the world from IBM grayness, Apple launched a new campaign developed by the Los Angeles-based agency TBWA\Chiat\Day (with backslashes) that compelled people to "think different." (with the period) (Figure 13). Understood as a noun in the sense that a color can be a noun, this *different* results from and perhaps even is synonymous to the synergy between technology and the humanities that Jobs was after (Figure 14).

In an interview Jobs once described Apple's "spirit" as the constellation under which the computer is "the medium best capable of transmitting some feeling that you have, that you want to share

with other people.”³⁵ That spirit, or “DNA,”³⁶ is the same posthuman code that animates Brautigan’s poem and also animated Brand’s vision of technology as a means of expression and liberation. Jobs, who is one of the “mad men” of this essay, was a big fan of *Whole Earth*. As his biographer Walter Isaacson writes, Jobs was particularly charmed with the magazine’s final regular issue, the back cover of which shows a country road disappearing into the horizon, above it the words “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish” (which Jobs would cite a quarter of a century later at a Stanford commencement address). Brand, on his turn, reciprocated the admiration, calling Jobs an embodiment of the *Whole Earth* philosophy. “Steve is right at the nexus of the counterculture and technology,” Brand said. “He got the notion of tools for human use.”³⁷

Jobs was not a new communalist. “Communal economics were not for him.” Nevertheless, in the early 1970s Jobs did spend some time at the All One apple farm community, run by his mentor Robert Friedland close to Portland. The experience left a lasting mark on Jobs: Seated in the car next to his partner Steve Wozniack, who had picked him up from the airport following a visit to the farm, Jobs proposed the name “Apple Computer” for their company. “It sounded fun, spirited, and not intimidating. Apple took the edge off the word ‘computer.’”³⁸

Attention and the Art of Everyday Life

Besides early hacker culture and LSD, another inspiration in Jobs’s ambition these years to *think different* was Zen Buddhism, which made him “realize that an intuitive understanding and consciousness was more significant than abstract thinking and logical analysis.”³⁹ Jobs meditated and traveled the hippie trail, and back in the United States he joined the San Francisco Zen Center, where he found a teacher in Kobun Chino Otogowa, who also taught a class at Esalen around the time of Don’s visit.⁴⁰ The thing is, Don and Jobs could have crossed paths at the Pacific coast! The Zen Center had been found in 1962 by Shunryu Suzuki, a Soto Zen monk who, alongside figures such as D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts, has played a crucial role in the popularization of Buddhism in the United States. Suzuki’s classic *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (1970), a series of “informal talks,” allows me to investigate whether “mindfulness” lives up to its name when it is transformed to deliver the “cultural benefits desired by Americans” that Wilson refers to in *Mindful America*. As Wilson also observes, Suzuki did not typically use the word “mindfulness,” but the few times he did so are instructive.

In the section “Readiness, mindfulness” Suzuki refers to “mindfulness” as “wisdom,” not “some particular faculty or philosophy” but the “readiness of mind” itself. Suzuki also calls mindfulness “impermeable thinking,” a kind of thinking that is “always stable” and that happens “when our thinking is soft,” this in difference from a thinking that “is divided in many ways” and that “is not true thinking.” He continues: “Concentration should be present in our thinking. This is mindfulness. Whether you have an object or not, your mind should be stable and your mind should not be divided. This is zazen.”⁴¹ So, mindfulness is soft, unscattered activity of mind. Mindfulness is zazen, the practice of Zen. Strictly understood, zazen is the sitting meditation practice, but for Suzuki it is also synonymous with everyday life:

Zazen practice and everyday activity are one thing. We call zazen everyday life, and everyday life zazen. But usually we think, “Now zazen is over, and we will go about our everyday activity.” But this is not the right understanding. They are the same thing. We have nowhere to escape. So in activity there should be calmness, and in calmness there should be activity. Calmness and activity are not different.⁴²

Now “everyday life,” as I agree with theorists of the concept from Henri Lefebvre to Rita Felski, is a distinctively modern invention that emerged in conjunction with the differentiation between private and public life, between work and consumption. Felski points out that, of course, elements of people’s day-to-day existence have entered representations from ancient times onward, but it was only in the nineteenth century, under the impact of capitalism’s spatialization of time, that the everyday became a category of critical reflection.⁴³ In the modern industrial era this division between public and private life took the predominant form of clearly demarcated workweeks and workdays. In late capitalism, in contrast, in which labor is increasingly immaterial and project-based, the everyday is increasingly shattered, while especially for those who work in creative sectors bursts of productivity alternate pockets of “free” time to the extent that one is no longer able to distinguish between work and life. As Jonathan Crary writes in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), late capitalism “announces a time without time, a time extracted from any material of identifiable demarcations, a time without sequences or recurrence.”⁴⁴

Is it possible to square this understanding of everyday life in late capitalism as an inherently shattered category with Suzuki’s insistence on everyday life as a practice of mind that is undivided, perhaps even whole? If it is, the answer lies along the following

lines: mindfulness understood as everyday life in a market economy involves a calm yet active negotiation of the physical and discursive structures that prevent one from being calm and active. Mindfulness thus understood is an ethics that creates soft yet firm boundaries between work and free time while acknowledging that especially for what Maurizio Lazzarato calls the “intellectual proletariat,”⁴⁵ the two can never be fully curbed. Mindfulness thus understood is an ethics also that is driven by an intuitive, nonteleological process of becoming-conscious of the structural factors one is acted upon and that cause stress, whether those factors are internal or external to one’s body and mind. Finally, in this reconceptualization mindfulness is a nonnormative ethics of soft control, an ethics that resists, flexibly yet firmly, the attention economy’s not-so-soft colonization of everyday life.

The attention economy is inherent to capitalism’s interpellation of people as consumers, but as *Mad Men* demonstrates, it took a flight in the 1960s when television increasingly breached the demarcations between public and private life that define everyday life in its modern understanding. “One of the many innovations of television,” Crary writes, “was its imposition of homogeneous and habitual behaviors on spheres of life that had previously been subject to less direct forms of control. At the same time, it was the setting in place of conditions which would subsequently be essential for the 24/7 ‘attention economy’ of the twenty-first century.”⁴⁶ That attention economy, as I agree with Michael Goldhaber, is the natural economy of the Internet, a system that revolves around “what is most intrinsically limited and not replaceable by anything else, namely the attention of other human beings.”⁴⁷ Goldhaber writes that “no-one can really define attention,” but let me have a stab at it anyway. I understand attention to be applied, focused consciousness. Attention is the physical and mental investment in and the ability to be present with tasks, things, others, and oneself. Attention affirms these entities in their particular existence and, to a degree, creates them as particulars in the first place as it isolates them from the material and discursive continuities they are part of. Crucially, I understand attention to be a modulation of rather than the opposite of distraction, understood as unapplied, decentered, unconscious life. In other words, I take attention to be a particular form of distraction, a mind-set that to a certain degree sees itself in control of the decentered life it unfolds from. Redefined as such, mindfulness, or attention, becomes an immanent ethics for life in the attention economy, a commitment to gaining insight in—or at least an intuitive sense of—one’s affects, the affects of body and mind. A nonnormative ethics doesn’t prescribe

any form of attention. At most, a nonnormative ethics incites shattered subjects to find their own mode of being attentive to their fundamentally distracted existence, to become conscious of the material and discursive structures they are affected by, including the habits and stories that they develop in order to imagine themselves as somewhat stable beings who exercise a degree of control over their everyday lives.

I would argue that Suzuki's teachings allow for, or at least inspire, such an immanentist interpretation of mindfulness according to which mindfulness is a practice that guides the practitioner to renounce ideas of a stable self-identity. Suzuki writes, for example, that "in the thinking realm there is a difference between oneness and variety," while "in actual experience, variety and unity are the same," an understanding of experience that bears resonance with what Spinoza in his *Ethics* refers to as intuition, understood as embodied reason, or affect of mind.⁴⁸ However, in its Western adaptations as shaped by Kabat-Zinn, among others, mindfulness has become a very individualized practice that embeds itself in an ideology of the centered subject. Western mindfulness does so first of all by embedding that ideology in its meditations itself, such as in the mountain meditation and its ministry of an unperturbed wanderer, or as in the lovingkindness meditation, in which practitioners picture themselves as a radiating center of an abstract, disembodied "love" void of any actual emotional or material investment, a love also that obscures rather than enlightens the structures of exploitation and segregation in which people's everyday lives are implicated. And in fact, that ideology of the centered subject is even present in the most minimal of meditation prompts, which invite "patients" to focus their attention on the breath and to picture the breath as the centered life stream between body and mind.

In themselves, these brief narratives are not even a problem per se. The problem with Western mindfulness discourses is that after first isolating the practice of mindfulness (or zazen) from the Buddhist worldview in which that practice originated, they then posit that practice as a new worldview, an ethics of everyday life in which the mindful subject pretends to be a centered subject who, in Kabat-Zinn's words, only has "moments to live":

We practice mindfulness by remembering to be present in all our waking moment. We can practice taking out the garbage mindfully, eating mindfully, driving mindfully. . . . We learn to be aware of our fears and our pain, yet at the same time stabilized and empowered by a connection to something deeper within ourselves, a discerning wisdom that helps

to penetrate and transcend the fear and the pain, and to discover some peace and hope within our situation *as it is*.⁴⁹

Kabat-Zinn's understanding of mindfulness may seem similar to Suzuki's, but it is quite different. Whereas Suzuki, in an almost but not quite tautological fashion, defines mindfulness *as* everyday life without prescribing a quality of attention with which that everyday should be lived, Kabat-Zinn develops a mindfulness *for* everyday life that tells its practitioners "to be present" in all their waking moments. In Kabat-Zinn's discourse, mindfulness thus becomes a state of attention that one *brings to* activities such as taking out the trash or doing the dishes *in order to* transcend the fear and the pain.

In difference with Kabat-Zinn, I would argue that late capitalist subjects are only able to negotiate their fear and pain as long as they acknowledge themselves as decentered beings who are, per definition, unable to be attentive in all their waking life and who, rather than penetrating and transcending fear and pain, seek to develop an understanding of what causes those affects, investing in the possibility of change such as by reconsidering their position as producers and consumers. Kabat-Zinn further writes that "in the meditative context practice means 'being in the present on purpose,'" while he adds that the "means and the end of meditation are really the same."⁵⁰ It is precisely in this turn of argument that he goes wrong. Meditation is a means, perhaps even a means to an end (say, the reduction of fear and pain), but is not an end in itself, because to transform a means into an end is to fetishize it, deluding oneself with a mystified sense of self-control.

A True Connection

ANNA: "The only thing keeping you from being happy is the belief that you are alone."

DON: "What if that's true?"

ANNA: "Then you can change."

DON: "People don't change."

ANNA: "I think she [the tarot card of the World] stands for wisdom. As you live, you learn things."

—"The Mountain King," season 2, episode 12

Looking at the new American Dream as it is constructed by corporations such as Google, Airbnb, and OkCupid, one sees subjects in control: in control of their lives and their diligently profiled

self-images, of the way those self-narratives are mediated by the new platform technologies, and in control of their attention. This ideal image of an attentive-centered subject contrasts starkly with the material and discursive reality of a more scattered, networked subject—if “subject” is still the right word—for whom the distinction between public and private life increasingly vanishes and whose multiple identities don’t really add up to one story. This scattered subject is what becomes of the inherently split yet indivisible individual, a product of modern urban society in which everyday life is technologically mediated to the extent that the individual becomes something else, say a “dividual,”⁵¹ whose identity is spread out over a network of flexible attachments. And still, somehow (and at the risk of minimally buying into mindfulness’s essentialist understanding of identity after all) that scattered subject remains attached to a sensing and thinking body-mind. It is to that body-mind, to its sensing and its thinking, that mindfulness, understood as an immanent nonnormative ethics, asks practitioners to direct their nonjudgmental attention. So far, so good.

However, mindfulness in its recent Western and self-declared secular manifestations goes further. In those manifestations, mindfulness also involves the promise that its practitioners are on the way to becoming centered subjects who experience a true connection with the world and themselves. Mindfulness, then, above all becomes an exercise in being alone, and even when people come together for mindfulness practice, as in a yoga class, they do so in order to be alone even though it is always possible, of course, that community happens in spite of the official liturgy. (In this respect, it is no coincidence that commercial yoga studios and Apple stores feel so much alike.) In the instrumentalized sense of the term, mindfulness is an ideology, an ideology 2.0 if one wishes, that exactly, like the more old-fashioned ideologies, sustains the material relations of production and consumption in which its story is implicated and also creates people as docile bodies. Mindfulness is a mind-set, or a survival technique, for precarious atomized existence in late capitalism that lets people believe they have a *true connection* with the world even though their job and housing contracts tell a different story.

Don seems to find such a sense of a true connection in his mindfulness practice at the end of season 7, a sense he immediately commercializes. Financially, his life may not be precarious; emotionally, it definitely is. Finally, Don gets what Anna meant when she told him that “the only thing keeping you from being happy is the belief that you are alone” (“The Mountain King,” season 2, episode 12). While Don feels the pull of the ocean, Anna reads



Figure 15. “This is the one. . . . She says you are part of the world.”

Don’s cards. “This is the one,” Anna points at the card that represents the world (Figure 15). “She is the soul of the world. She is in a very important spot here. . . . She says you are part of the world. Air, water, everything is connected to you.” “That’s a nice thought,” Don replies.

Just before the Tarot reading Don picks up a copy of Frank O’Hara’s collection of poems *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957). “Did you read it?” Don asks. “I did,” Anna responds. “it reminded me of New York. It made me worry about you.” O’Hara takes us back to the first episode of season 2, “For Those Who Think Young.” It is lunch break, and like so often Don is in a bar in Manhattan where he strikes up a conversation with a stranger, this time with a man who is reading O’Hara’s *Meditations*. “Is it good?” Don asks. The man, judging Don on his corporate attire, responds, “I don’t think you’d like it.” You can’t always judge a book by its cover. That night we find Don in his home office reading O’Hara’s poems. While Don finishes the book, puts it in an envelope, and walks to the mailbox to send it to an unrevealed recipient, and with the camera moving from close-up to bird’s-eye view and from internal to external focalization (Figures 16–18), Don’s voice reads out loud in interior monologue the last stanzas of the collection’s final poem, “Mayakovsky” (Figures 19–21):

Now I am quietly waiting for
 the catastrophe of my personality
 to seem beautiful again,
 and interesting, and modern.

The country is grey and
brown and white in trees,
snows and skies of laughter
always diminishing, less funny
not just darker, not just grey.

It may be the coldest day of
the year, what does he think of
that? I mean, what do I? And if I do,
perhaps I am myself again.

The words clearly resonate with Don, who recognizes in O'Hara's identity crisis and struggles with homosexuality his own split existence, his desire to *perhaps* coincide with himself again, and his yearning for a true connection with the world. *Meditations in an Emergency* functions as the touchstone of season 2 and is also the title of its finale. We are in 1962; all there is on the news is the missile crisis while Sterling Cooper is under corporate attack.⁵² And Don? Don has decided to go back to New York, to Betty, to try to save their marriage and their American Dream. For a while that works out, and he experiences again the promise of the happy life he sells. Fast-forward eight years later: One American Dream has made way for another, but the basic principle has remained the same. Seated in lotus, enveloped by love, Don knows that he is not alone and instead is part of the world.

But say it is true that mindfulness allows people to feel more connected and less alone; to extend "love" to the world doesn't necessarily make that world a better place. Meditation is a tool, a technique of self-care. One sits down and closes the eyes, and thoughts come to mind. And as one sits there, and as thoughts come to mind (image thoughts, word thoughts), one observes these thoughts without evaluating them, without judging, and without holding on to them, allowing them to sink back into the clouds they came from while gently yet firmly bringing one's awareness back to the breath, in and out. And even if the thoughts are too many or if thoughts are ugly or painful, even then one tells oneself not to worry or to judge, to judge oneself, because to speak with Don, "It's okay. You are okay." The question is, though, what one does once one has again opened the eyes. What does one do with the rejuvenated attention? Meditation might indeed make one more productive and alleviate stress and pain, but this doesn't necessarily generate insight into the catastrophe of one's personality, to paraphrase both O'Hara and Kabat-Zinn. Meditation also doesn't necessarily make a person more open, despite the lovingkindness. While meditation may



Figure 16. "Now I'm quietly waiting for the catastrophe of my personality to seem beautiful again."

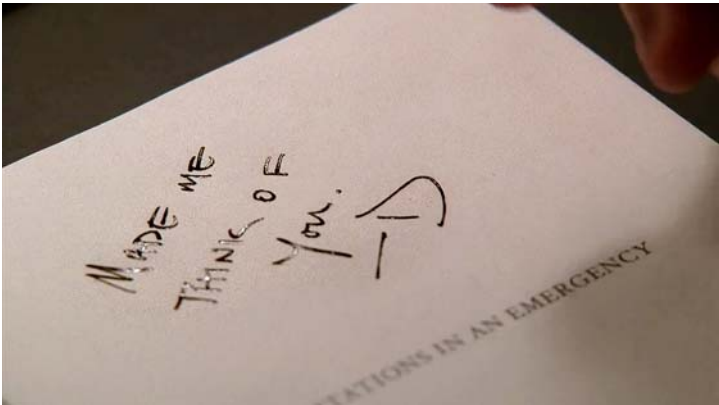


Figure 17. Don mailing *Meditations in an Emergency* to Anna.



Figure 18. "The country is grey and / brown and white in trees."



Figure 19. "It may be the coldest day of / the year."



Figure 20. "what does he think of / that? I mean, what do I?"



Figure 21. "And if I do, / perhaps I am myself again."



Figure 22. Peggy and Stan in front of McCann-Erickson's credo "Truth well told."

indeed generate insight into the functioning of one's mind, so can other practices, such as drug use or reading poetry. And meditation may indeed make one more creative, again like drugs or art, allowing one to *think different* (to speak with Apple) or young (to speak with *Mad Men's* season 2 start), but it doesn't necessarily make one more critical, as illustrated by the Silicon Valley executives who, following their morning meditation, hop onto the Google bus or the Caltrain and speed by the tent cities so ubiquitous in the Bay Area in order to develop even more efficient structures to mine people's minds—or as illustrated by each and every one of us, sending love into our hearts and out into a world in which most messages are mediated by technologies implicated in a production chain that involves blood minerals and precarious labor. Or as illustrated by Don, who under McCann-Erickson's unintentionally ironic credo of "Truth well told" (Figure 22) goes on selling lies to the world, in this case that a particular brand of sugared water brings that world together.

Don's retreat from his era's attention economy illustrates, moreover, the dialectics of retreat in the attention economy. The attention economy seems to have experienced a bit of a backlash recently, not in the last place in Silicon Valley, as there is a small yet noticeable tendency of people becoming more conscious of their media habits, detaching themselves from their screens, and expressing the desire to reclaim their attention. That claim to an undivided attention and attentiveness and, in particular, the mindfulness paradigm in Western culture may appear in tension with the attention economy, but it is not. The wish to retreat from

the attention economy is a product of that same economy, if only because that economy still needs individuals who keep an open, flexible mind. Retreat is not to be confused with resistance. To resist the attention economy—as a posthuman individual and as a individual multitude—is to face its reality, to examine its discourses and practices, and to explore alternatives (offline *and* online) for the fundamentally undemocratic corporate infrastructures that so rapidly infiltrate the everyday. To do so mindfully is to define attention as an immanent ethics for a shattered life.

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