Rebranding the soul
Rituals for the well-made man in market society
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Introduction

In 2003–2007 I received funding to do research in the field of ritual studies, which was an eye opener for me. Methods focusing on the process of turning a performance into a full-scale embodied experience give new ways of analyzing formalized practices. Also, the diversity of rituals opens up new exciting ways of applying ritual theories and methods in analyzing contemporary society (Bell 1997, pp. 258, 266–267; Collins 1998, p. 1; Grimes 2014, pp. 189–193). The variety of rituals allows us to find both formalized actions without commitment on the part of their participants and those with intense emotional dedication (Merton 1957, p. 131). For example, liturgical rituals can be performed as a routine, without embracing the theology embedded in them (Rappaport 1999, p. 117). Rituals may also challenge power and provide opportunities for building new identities (Grimes 1996, p. xiii). This can be done by taking part in a meaning-creating drama (Geertz 1973, p. 11). Thus rituals can play important roles in contexts that we usually do not identify as religious, which compelled me in the beginning of the 2000s to focus on a manifold of ritualized healing and coaching practices in contemporary Sweden. These practices were not performed within traditional medicine or the church.

How do we explain the emergence of these practices? And how are they to be classified? The practitioners avoided such concepts as religion, rituals and soul and preferred spirituality, techniques and ‘the inner potential.’ One explanation for the need to design new rituals can be found in the restructuring processes in society. Research and statistics (SCB 2004) on sick leave and illness in Sweden show that many do not feel particularly well, despite the Swedish welfare system. The neoliberal policy in the 1990s opened up opportunities for private entrepreneurship in education and health care which were formerly under state funding and now demanded the worker to be productive and produce profit. This resulted in stress-related problems. New public management called for the need to develop the ‘human inner capital’ in order to sell oneself as a creative, innovative worker. Restructuring of workplaces, especially in health care and schools, affected primarily the health of women who are in the majority of these sectors, and where the new requirements for efficiency are
more difficult to implement due to the nature of the work (SCB 2004; Theorell 2006, p. 19; Hornborg 2012a, p. 158). These structural changes gave birth to new practices. Firstly, entrepreneurs found niches where they marketed solutions to various problems generated in the 1990s. Employers invited these entrepreneurs to their workplaces since they offered activities that would improve results and foster a better working environment. Secondly, the practices did not challenge societal structures, but instead taught individuals to find personal ways of handling their shortcomings.

**Designing rituals for a new soul**

How are formalized practices designed and a new concept of soul introduced in order to create the well-made person in market society? Market society is a global phenomenon, in which everything is possible to convert into money and business, including buying enchanted rituals for new personas. Thus the process of ‘marketization’ also embraces everyday life, which has implications for shaping religious ideas and identities.

In analyzing the design of new, market-adapted practices, adopting methods in the field of ritual studies is useful (Hornborg 2012d). By focusing on the ‘ritual language’ and how intense emotions and feelings of transformation are created through performances, I saw similarities in how Pentecostal preachers and world-leading coaches like Anthony Robbins have consciously integrated ritual acts in their preaching. In these acts, happiness and feelings of fulfillment are highlighted, a state of mind which Abraham Maslow (1964) has described as ‘peak experience’ (Robbins markets himself as a ‘Peak Performer Strategist’). The new practices also reveal a clear secular prosperity theology with conversion narratives about a new, better life, including evangelistic messages for the salvation of people.

In the 1990s some of the lay therapists also offered life coaching that would be marketed just as coaching. The major breakthrough in Sweden for coaching was the government’s big investment in job coaching in 2009, when three billion (SEK) were allocated in three years to coach the unemployed to find jobs. Society now needed job coaches, school coaches, yoga or mindfulness instructors who would use suitable practices to lead the unemployed, the teacher, the student, or the burnt-out individual to work out different strategies to find a job, foster a better learning environment, or be more creative and self-fulfilled at work.

Clifford Geertz writes (1973, p. 11) that rituals are partly models of and for society, where the individual in the practices combines the cognitive worldview with the more ethical and emotional aspects (ethos). By dramatizing performances, participants feel engaged in the rituals. The first question thus concerns rituals analyzed here as models of society: How do they reflect society so that they feel ‘natural’ to perform? The second question concerns rituals as models for society: What visions are built into these practices to give participants hopes and intense feelings of renewal? How is branding a new concept of the soul performed?

**Models of society and new forms of secular religion**

A prerequisite for introducing layman therapy and coaching is that there must be an openness to these practices. Frank Furedi (2004) describes today’s society as a ‘therapy society’ and it has become fashionable and natural to talk about oneself. This is enhanced by media with programs hosted by Doctor Phil and Oprah Winfrey and soap operas or self-help literature which put the individual in focus. The therapeutic talks on television have an
effect on viewers who read their own problems into the life stories of others. The boundaries between private and public are dissolved. Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms further contribute to this process.

The new rituals are modelled after this therapeutic society and today’s popular mindfulness practice is one example of how an Asian tradition (sati) is disembodied from one context and globally transformed and embedded in Western therapeutic practice (Hornborg 2014). The school is an example:

Take control of your autopilot (discovering your inner freedom), Managing stress and worries ... 10 minutes a day [with mindfulness] can change your life, mindfulness in the classroom (help students to deal with stress and worries).

*fowelin.com, my translation, the target group is ‘All educational and other staff, and from preschool to high school’*

On the companies’ websites former consumers act as advertisers for the products: ‘It’s great to hear staff say that they’ve become much calmer in using the methods from the mindfulness course. Just think of how such simple methods can deliver such fast and visible results’ (ibid., stated by a principal and purchaser of the course above, my translation). Advertisements promise individual redemption by offering solutions:

You’ve lost the joy, the driving force and all the energy you had when you started working as a teacher ... We help you find a working structure and provide tools for creating frames for your teaching.

*reimer-coaching.se, my translation*

The individual shall be creative and innovative both at work and in private life. It is no longer desirable to distinguish the private from the public. The goal is to be ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine,’ but how does this reflect the values in society? Although promising the birth of the ‘authentic me,’ the question is whether these performances only design a similar personality for all. If so, it is a model of the neoliberal persona, needed to be successful in contemporary society. We will now analyze the different characteristics of the practices that rebrand the soul.

**Characteristics of the new modern rituals**

The first feature of the new rituals is that they clearly put the individual in focus. We can therefore classify them as individual-centered rituals (or performance-centered, Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p. 8), which are less regulated than the liturgical ones. Catherine Bell describes that today’s society focuses on the individual, influences the ritual style and analyzes this category of rituals as practices where ‘doctrines and ethical teaching are downplayed in favor of language that stresses highly personal processes of transformation, realization, and commitment’ (1997, pp. 189–190; see also Hornborg 2012a, p. 99, 2012b). We can see examples of this in companies’ advertisements: ‘The process is designed to suit your particular life situation’ (ninahallberg.com, my translation).

A second characteristic is that rituals should realize the inner self. The soul is under construction, which means that it has an inner potential that needs to be unlocked through rituals. Cecilie Eriksen characterizes this thought figure as ‘spiritual essentialism,’ which she defines as ‘an innate inner divine core that we should find the way to and develop’ (2007,
p. 81, my translation). Human life is seen as the result of a constant ‘fall from grace.’ From birth, a moment loaded with positive energy, the individual will further on create a ‘false self’ that causes suffering. Through introspection and guided journeys into the inner self, the individuals will find their essence for healing and defeat destructive powers. A coaching company expresses this as follows: ‘We will help you to find your inner passion and driving force that will make you reach the goal you want’ (springes.se, my translation). Indeed ‘potential’ is a constantly recurring key concept:

Developing their inner potential gives enormous power and joy in life. It also creates a sense of trust and meaning … Coaching is about development, and that the company or school invests in helping the employee to find and use his or her full potential for the benefit of the company.

(coachfalck.se, my translation)

A religious or spiritual practice or just a technique?

Branding the soul in market society as the ‘inner force,’ ‘potential,’ or ‘authentic me,’ raises an important question. Is this designing of the soul performed as a religious or spiritual practice? Or is it just as a technique? Since there has been an intense debate in Sweden whether secular events – like school exams – can be performed in churches, questions have also been raised by some as to why it is allowed to introduce Asian traditions like yoga, which might be classified as a religious ritual, in the classroom. Therefore, a group in 2012 asked the Swedish authority for schools (Skolinspektionen) to consider yoga a religious practice, and demanded that it should not be performed in the secular classroom (dagen.se 2012). But Skolinspektionen answered (2012-10-23) that this way of performing yoga was not a religious practice, but a technique that taught pupils to focus to improve their health and well-being.

The new practices are rarely classified as religious among practicing entrepreneurs, but rather often as spiritual. One entrepreneur asserts that ‘for me spirituality and religion are two, sometimes totally different phenomena. Spirituality dwells everywhere and is certainly not synonymous with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or any other of our world religion’ (tommypalarsson.se, my translation).

The references to spirituality could be a way to market courses to the workplace, since spirituality is often discussed and defined by the practitioners as a universal endeavor. It unites humanity. By contrast, religions are cultural manifestations that separate people and even become a source of conflicts (Hornborg 2012a, 2012c). Since it is embedded in human nature, there is not, according to this view, any harm in performing spiritual courses at work. Spirituality is viewed as a powerful inner energy with the capability to increase working capacity, overcome stress-related problems and empower the individual.

The problem of legitimacy

The third feature of these new rituals is that leaders must demonstrate quality to legitimize their self-made business. One way of doing it is by signaling knowledge and skills through titles. These self-certified titles look similar to academic exams, but the latter cannot be used by laymen as these are protected by law (e.g. psychologist, registered psychotherapist). Diplomaed, licensed, accredited or authorized are common prefixes to coach and therapist. Many companies sell education where the buyers are offered these newly created titles that
the company uses in its marketing. Another way of asserting legitimacy is to baptize companies with names associated with existing educational institutions in society, for example Health Academy, Coach Academy, Swedish Institute of Dealing with Bereavement.

The quality of treatments must also be rooted in a reliable knowledge system. Companies usually refer to three sources on which their businesses are based. The first is tradition, which is often Asian, with roots in global religious movements in the 1960s and 1970s such as New age, hippie culture, Transcendental Movement and yoga (see McMahan 2009; Oliver 2014). Science and personal experience are the other two foundations (Hammer 2001, pp. 44, 87, 92, 122–124, 130–133, 169). Thus, when undergoing training to become a Certified Mindfulness & ACT Coach, one is exposed to references to Zen Buddhism: ‘Mindfulness originates in Buddhism, and especially Zen Buddhism’ (kjellhaglund.com, my translation). It needs to be emphasized that while the new rituals are Asian (like zen and yoga), they have been disembedded from the Asian context, spread globally and then reembedded in a market-adapted context.

References to science also play an important role to convincingly argue for a certain practice and its performative effects (Hammer 2001, pp. 202–203, 502–502; Hornborg 2012b). A trainee is thus exposed to claims such as the following:

Research shows that a number of symptoms among the participants such as pain and sleeping problems have decreased significantly. Other researchers have later demonstrated a number of other positive outcomes of the regular exercise of mindfulness: lower blood pressure, release from chronic headache, reduction of stress, improvement of fibromyalgia and increased production of the hormone melatonin. In addition, fewer symptoms could be detected in multiple sclerosis, with shorter treatment times with light treatment for patients with psoriasis and minor problems for patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

(kjellhaglund.com, my translation)

Important differences from research and traditional medicine are the entrepreneurs’ references to personal life experiences, crises or self-development (Hammer 2001, pp. 331–334, 504–505). The narrative of life stories is often ritualized in the practices and becomes part of the performance (Hornborg 2012a, pp. 159–162). On websites, entrepreneurs describe their experiences of not having fully lived their lives or having been burnt out or uninspired at work. But now, with the method they offer, they show how they have found their way ‘out of darkness.’ The significance of personal stories in healing from diseases has interested several researchers and they have classified them in different ways: as kinds of therapeutic narrative genres (Illouz 2008, pp. 152–156), curative stories (Winroth 2004, p. 140) or disease memoirs (Furedi 2004, p. 41). Illouz says that the therapeutic narrative genre emerges as an answer to the increasing therapeutic approach in society. She describes (2008, p. 172) how it consists of a brief summary with the essence of the story, an orientation that embeds the story in time and space. It also includes the participants, a series of events of significance for the process, an evaluation that includes the meaning of events and the narrator’s feelings about these, and then a solution. The path to happiness, self-development or success is reflected in the story, but the basic idea is that behind a successful life are sufferings, shortcomings or illnesses. The suffering is required for the healing to be initiated, and the narratives are part of the healing process because they are needed to reflect and rebuild the individual’s self-development, and thus inspire a certain design of therapeutic or coaching performance. The different individual preparations follow the ‘grand narrative,’ that is, the company’s own step-by-step models of walking from...
ignorance, darkness and illness, to gain insights into what opportunities are available. By following these steps, the individual takes part in the transformation of the new self that is promised by the sellers (Hornborg 2012a, pp. 114–129).

This therapeutic genre often lives in a symbiotic relationship with conversion stories and includes both retrospective and prospective dimensions. The restraint lies in the fact that the past is still haunting the daily life of the individual, but a promise of a new life is also embedded in the narrative. With increased insight into the past and the search for the inner self, the individual achieves a reconciliation to find a better being-in-the-world. This includes regaining good health and better self-confidence, without being lost in the past as a prisoner. The individual is redeemed, but it is also the responsibility of the individual to take full control of the new orientation (Illouz 2008, p. 184; Hornborg 2012a, pp. 188–124). These conversion stories of describing major transformation into a new self also become the driving force to be a missionary for others:

Today my life is far from being perfect, but I’m more in touch with my inner, true self, I feel better, feel less stressed and enjoy much more of my life ... I want to inspire and support you to get closer to yourself.

(vipassanalivscoach.se, my translation)

The ambition is important, and there is a very normative and political dimension in the stories. The ‘converted’ or healed make their life stories into a role model for others to follow, since they consider that this method has changed their condition of realizing their authentic selves (Winroth 2004, p. 140; Hornborg 2012a, pp. 118–119). The importance of personal experiences can be used as a mark against the power of traditional school medicine and its practitioners. Medical conversations can be described as being a holdback to the ‘authentic’ encounter. The boundary between the private and public roles becomes fluid and in the exercises it can even be presented as undesirable and an obstacle when the inner ‘human capital’ is to be stimulated and highlighted by the coach or therapist (Hornborg 2012a, pp. 84–86). A coach’s role in the conversation can be described as follows:

Who am I claiming myself to be that I can teach you all this? Am I a person who is always happy and without any trouble? No, I am not. But I have used the techniques which I teach in the course over and over again in my life to constantly renew and improve different parts.

(enkeltochroligt.se, my translation)

Quick-fix and adapted to market society

The fourth feature of the new rituals is that they quickly want to awaken intense emotions of renewal. Failure to achieve the desired effects makes these rituals vulnerable. In addition to failed performances, the consumer has also invested time and money on a product that promised emancipation. Therefore, the buyer wants a guarantee for the item they will consume. Companies are aware of this, hence the promise of immediate effects:

In a simple way, in just a few hours, reaching the innermost potential and clearing all blockages in a much faster, deeper and more effective way than any other existing method, was a fantastic experience.

(resanterapi.com, my translation)
The new rituals are market-adapted to attract buyers, both private individuals and employers. The human ‘being’ becomes a product that can be sold and bought in a marketplace and as such it fits well into the market society (Carrette and King 2008 [2005]; Hornborg 2013). ‘About us,’ ‘prices,’ ‘contact us,’ reminds website visitors where and how material goods are sold. In many cases companies follow current trends and in my research I could follow how they have quickly transformed and been recreated to better adapt to changes in the market (sometimes with the same founder but using a new company name).

Models for society: what visions are created for the new soul?

To exemplify how rituals are performed in designing visions of finding the ‘inner self,’ I have chosen two individual-centered practices that have spread globally and also found their way into Swedish society. The first is a layman therapy (The Journey) and the second is performed by the above-mentioned coach, Anthony Robbins, who is often referred to in coaching practices.

‘Deep inside a huge potential beckons’

The quotation in the headline is from Brandon Bays’ book of layman therapy The Journey ([2008] 1999, p. v). The book provides guidelines on how a Journey therapy can be designed. The Journey is richly represented in many countries, including Sweden, and might also offer coaching, since this market has grown. Bays’ layman therapy emerges from her personal experience and describes how she suffered in 1992 from a cancer tumor, as big as a basketball in the stomach, but by means of an inner journey she cured herself miraculously in six weeks (Bays 2008 [1999], pp. 39–40). This is what Bays now offers others (2003, p. xi) – a method of rapid healing from both physical and psychological shortcomings like ‘depression, jealousy … low self-esteem … anxiety … allergies, acute asthma, eczema, cancer of many kinds, Crohn’s disease … arthritis, migraines and even the common cold.’

During her inner journey, Bays has intense experiences of getting in touch with the ‘Source,’ which in her descriptions assumes religious dimensions. Bays also uses the term ‘flow’ for this ecstatic state (2008 [1999], p. 63). She describes the ‘Source’ (Bays.youtube) as a ‘huge potential’ which can create all opportunities for the individual. But this potential can be blocked. Therefore, the Journey method is designed and performed in such a way that the individual can reconnect with the inner power: ‘I’d found a way to have sustained direct experience of the infinite intelligence, Source’ (2008 [1999], p. 64).

Bays explains healing in a science-like way and refers to Indian doctor Deepak Chopra’s theories that strong pressure can block cells so the individual gets sick (Chopra left traditional school medicine for alternative treatments like Ayurveda). According to Chopra, cell memories can be reprogrammed by internal influence so that healing occurs. Bays is critical of traditional medicine and the doctor she first met when she was ill: ‘was not a doctor who wanted the whole picture, the real facts, which included the emotional side of things. She wanted her idea of what the facts were’ (2008 [1999], p. 31).

In the Journey ritual, the therapist talks with the client in a way that awakens intense emotions. Focus is given to painful childhood experiences, which should be vented and ended with a process of forgiveness. This happens with visualization exercises and in different ‘steps,’ similar to ritual acts. In these acts, the client visualizes a trip through the body in a spaceship together with a chosen mentor. The spaceship’s fuel is ‘powered by your own body wisdom, by the part of you that makes your heart beat and your hair grow’
(Bays 2003, p. 177) and goes firstly to the place that is affected by illness. The client and mentor then enter a campfire where the client as a child is waiting. Now the perpetrator is revealed as the one who causes all the pain and illness. The adult hugs the child, a forgiveness process begins, the adult leaves the fire together with the mentor on the spaceship, which begins the healing process. The Journey therapist then wakes up the client from the session and convinces the participant that the healing process will continue on its own ‘and your cells will replicate without you even thinking about it’ (Bays 2008 [1999], p. 189).

The ritual can be finished with a hug or a glass of water (Hornborg 2012d, p. 412). There is also a moment of reflexivity and evaluation that takes place after the performance. Ronald Grimes (2014, pp. 72–73) discusses the evaluation of rituals under the term ‘ritual criticism.’ In this case the therapist and the client discuss what has happened in the various stages of the Journey and evaluate the performance. This opens up for the therapist, together with the client, to further correct the client’s experiences and focus on his or her needs. The post-processing of the ritual experience may create feelings of transformation that the ‘client’ did not encounter in the ritual process itself. The framing of the ritual, with a clear beginning and end, is thus more open in these individual-centered rituals as far as the end is concerned, unlike the liturgical ones that are more strictly regulated and framed.

The Journey treatment can be specifically designed for children to use in the public sector as well. Liberating Kids’ Shining Potential offers training for ‘schoolteachers, school counsellors, and children’s therapists ... in addiction treatment centers, by abuse groups, children’s support organizations and social service organizations ... priests, nuns, ministers, rabbis, monks, pastors and swamis from a wide range of spiritual traditions’ (Bays 2003, p. vii).

Unleash the power within!

Market society demands that workers should not only use their inner potential to be more productive at work, but they should also use it for creative leadership and developing ‘human capital.’ On YouTube, we can see a clip of how coach Anthony Robbins stages his performance during one of his many public events, using color, lighting and music. His dazzling white shirt against a blue background and victory gestures give Robbins a powerful appearance and charismatic aura. He is introduced alongside the world’s various leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton, whom he says he has met, emphasizing his authority as a source of inspiration. People testify to his ability to change people’s lives and a newspaper article states that ‘the world cannot get enough of Robbins.’ The question is asked what character Robbins inherits and the answer is: ‘He’s got the edge – and he gets results.’

Robbins begins his event by saying that there is a moment in life when we can make a decision to pursue radical change. This can be done quickly on a weekend by performing a practice called ‘Unleash the Power Within.’ Robbins’ performance can be divided into four important acts, which can be analyzed as a ritual manual that step by step will reveal how the inner force is found and released.

The first step – or ritual act – The Firewalk Experience, tells that the participant can walk on glowing coals just to show that everything is possible if there is a strong enough will. In the next act, Power of Momentum, the participant must develop a strategy for change. It is followed by act three, Breakthrough and Transformation, and the final step is Power of Pure
**Energy.** Robbins says that energy is the foundation for everything and nothing is impossible with the help of this force. He allows several witnesses to express the major changes that have occurred with the new strategic tools he has given them. People tell about their past lives; their business was bad, their marriage was bad. But after the encounter with Robbins, they have fulfilled their lives and are successful both at work (the money flows in) and in the family. Rechaud Bell, who had stuttered from childhood, now testifies how quickly he was released from this problem. His message is powerfully expressed: ‘I was a stutterer – but now I’m Rechaud!’ His inner true self – the real Rechaud – was not a stutterer. Robbins question to the audience is: ‘Are you ready for a new start?’ The audience’s answer is ‘Yes!’ He also uses a big water gun to spray (baptize?) the audience while they lift their hands and express rebirth and joy.

**What if the inner potential is not found?**

There is no doubt that modern rituals have structural similarities with revival movements and conversions to a new life. The strong focus on the individual reflects today’s therapeutic society and also modernity that embeds people more in abstract rather than local identities. But what happens if the ritual fails with respect to its performative effects?

Robbins clearly points out that it is the individual who is to blame. The market looks the same yesterday as today, the finances as well as the family situation, but a new flow changes the conditions for the individual. It is the individual’s moral responsibility to address the personal problems. Sin will not unleash the power within. Societal criticism transforms into self-criticism and the responsibility lies in the individual, as depicted in this description about being a job coach:

*You have one sole responsibility as a coach and it is to ensure that the dialogue is productive, that it goes forward so that the person is given the opportunity to create the results he or she wants. The one you are coaching is responsible for everything else: the job search project, his or her life, family situation, the finances and the dog.*

*It’s not you as coach who delivers or produces anything.*

*It is the jobseeker’s own responsibility to achieve the goal, regardless of the circumstances. If the labor market is not favorable, the person needs to take even greater responsibility. Waiting and hoping that the conditions will be better is to become a victim of the circumstances.*

*(haeu.se, my translation and italics)*

**Conclusion**

By using Swedish society as a case study, this chapter has discussed how the market society has affected religious language and ritual design and created a kind of secular religion with structural similarities with revival movements. New formalized therapeutic or coaching practices offered by companies or entrepreneurs have been introduced with a focus on self-development and healing, which respond to the new needs for the individual both in private life and at work.

The courses and treatments in focus in this chapter have been classified and analyzed as individual-centered rituals. These rituals are specifically designed to deal with illness and foster a vision for a better life. Although religion has been kept out of workplaces in secularized Sweden, these practices have gained traction in rebranding the soul and engendering a new concept of the person. Religion and soul as orienting ideas are
abandoned, and spirituality and inner potential are preferred concepts. Legitimacy for the practices refer to religious traditions (mostly Asian, adapted to global/Western society), science and personal experience. If a tradition is chosen with religious roots (for example, yoga), the practices are redefined as spiritual or a technique. Authenticity is a buzz word, referring to the pursuit of the inner self more than adherence to tradition. But a careful analysis of the ‘authentic me’ also reveals more about designing a personhood that would better fit market society, than displaying a unique or specific personality. Narratives of the practices include intense emotional transformation, which has similarities with conversion stories, including missionary ambitions to redeem others from not being released.

Layman therapy and coaching activities thus reflect Swedish society’s secularization process, global influences, the therapeutic turn and structural changes in the 1990s. The process remains relevant given neoliberalism. As such these practices are models of society. The rituals also become models for the individual and society in creating and incorporating images and visions by rebranding the soul to fulfill the ‘inner self,’ which longs for redemption to become a well-made person.

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