

**Embodying *asana* in All New Places: Transformational Ethics, Yoga Tourism and Sensual Awakenings**

by

Angélique Maria Gabrielle Lalonde  
MA, University of Victoria, 2007  
BA, University of Victoria, 2002

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Anthropology

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University of Victoria

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## Supervisory Committee

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## Abstract

### Supervisory Committee

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Yoga has been an organizing feature of community for thousands of years, shaping and being shaped by the bodies, minds, spiritual worlds and social relationships of its practitioners. Over the course of the last century, it has become a global celebrity-endorsed exemplification of how to live a “good” life and been transformed from the “exotic,” grotesque menageries of ascetic “sinister yogis” and itinerant sages, to define the fit, graceful, radiant, blissful personages of American supermodels and pop-stars. Yoga has moved from the ashrams of India to gyms, church basements and specialized studios of Europe, North America and Australia, and from these centers of economic and political power, to “exotic” peripheries through the global and bodily movements of world-travelers seeking self-discovery, health, spiritual transformation, and connection with the natural world in “less developed” locales. This dissertation explores and documents the movement of yoga-motivated travelers to tourism locales with no historical connection to yoga, asking questions about 1) how yoga travelers’ activities fit in larger contexts of ethical tourism and cross-cultural consumption as yoga travels across borders, 2) the role yoga plays in practitioners’ lives, shaping health, gender, sexuality, and lifestyle, 3) outcomes of sustained contemporary yoga practice on the bodies of practitioners, including affective transformation through bodily manipulation, the expansion of sensual awareness through breath, auditory techniques, meditation and mind-body synthesis, 4) how these bodily transformations are interpreted and applied to contemporary life through syncretic adaptations of yoga ethics from classical yoga texts with contemporary ethical discourses of environmentalism and consumer choice, and 5) how yoga tourists and the owners of yoga tourism locales view, interact with, and mobilize “foreign” locals and locales through sustainable development narratives and ideas of global community and universal spirituality. I apply contemporary anthropological agendas to yoga as a means to explore different ways of being alive, paying particular attention to how sensual potentials are brought to conscious experience by relational engagement with nature and culture, thus shaping our affective worlds. This dissertation charts intimate bodily and cross-cultural human relationships played out through yoga. It considers the spiritual, economic, political and cultural impacts of globalized

yoga and yoga tourism. Close attention is paid to the experiential aspects of yoga and how yoga enlivens and relates to larger social narratives of nature sanctity under contemporary stresses of neoliberalism, including how yoga practitioners engage with the ethics of yoga and consumption to make lifestyle choices that align with political and economic concerns for viable ecological, social and cultural futures.

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## **Dedication**

Pour maman et papa, et pour la vie.

## Introduction: Floating in the river

Here, finally, lies the key to my project of restoring life to anthropology. We have, in effect, been concentrating on the banks while losing sight of the river. Yet were it not for the flow of the river there would be no banks, and no relation between them. To regain the river, **we need to shift our perspective from the transverse relation between objects and images to the longitudinal trajectories of materials and awareness.** Recall Hägerstrand's idea that everything there is, launched in the current of time, has a trajectory of becoming. The entwining of these ever-extending trajectories comprises the texture of the world. Whether our concern is to inhabit this world or to study it – and at root these are the same, since all inhabitants are students and all students inhabitants – our task is not to take stock of its contents but to *follow what is going on*, tracing the multiple trails of becoming, wherever they lead. To trace these paths is to bring anthropology back to life (Ingold 2011: 14).

My project is about following movement in at least two different senses: movement of lived body in yoga and movement of yoga across world. I attempt to float down the river to gain a perspective of the banks. What I mean by this is that from within the longitudinal trajectory of inhabiting self-awareness through yoga, I also consider how this trajectory is contained by the banks, which are not built simply of the accord of the river's movement, but by the actions and power of the forces which seek to contain it and direct its movements. I agree with Ingold that to consider what yoga means for life is to *follow what is going on*, but rivers do not freely flow, as builders and makers of social life, we are constantly redirecting rivers. Consider what Meloy, in her reflections on turquoise, has to say of the Colorado:

In the past hundred years the river has been massively reengineered to feed the thirsts of California agribusiness and the urban Southwest. The river makes the joining borders of California, Arizona, and Nevada curvy and wobbly compared to the other survey-straight lines that define them. In flow and velocity, however, the river no longer resembles its description in the 1939 Works Progress Administration guidebook to California, "a lazy-looking stream that periodically goes on a bridge-smashing rampage." From Glen Canyon Dam on the Arizona-Utah border, minus a brief hiccup of wild water through the Grand Canyon, downstream to Hoover Dam and on to what was once its delta at Mexico's Sea of Cortez, the red-brown, silt-laden Colorado River is now greenish, sometimes blue, but no longer *Colorado* nor river. It is a series of reservoirs pinched by a string of dams. One of these reservoirs will cool me off (Meloy 2002: 86-87).

In this dissertation I propose two conceptual frameworks for understanding the rapid proliferation of globalized yoga in recent decades. These frameworks are simultaneously in dialogue and sometimes in opposition (i.e. they are in relationship and influence one another). The relationship between them can be said to be one of *irresolvable contradiction* such that sometimes two seemingly opposing logics guide the lives of people who participate in contemporary yoga, and indeed could be said to describe globalized yoga culture more broadly. The two frameworks I propose are developed out of: 1) anthropological and religious studies approaches to yoga (Alter 2004, Strauss

2005), magical consciousness (Greenwood 2005), nature religion and dark green religion (Taylor 2010), that relate strongly to recent conceptions of being-in-the-world developed in sensual anthropology (Howes 2003, 2004) and anthropologies of the body and embodiment (Csordas 1994, 2012 and Mascia-Lees 2012), and 2) anthropological and broader social scientific approaches to consumption and ethical consumption under neoliberalising regimes of late capitalism (Howes 2004, Lewis and Potter 2011, Miller 2001). By analyzing the heavily commodified landscape of yoga tourism, aspects of contemporary yoga as lived practice – that is as a potentially liberating sensually embodied praxis of transformation – *and* as cultural product – “yogaworlds” or yoga culture made accessible through historical processes of colonialism and contemporary technologies heavily mediated by discourses of morality, ethics, personhood, health and citizenship – are simultaneously brought to the forefront. Yoga is positioned as a sort of ideal methodological tool for a sensually engaged anthropology, particularly because so many of its techniques involve reworkings and reengagements of the sensual body in cultural contexts in which yoga is relatively new<sup>1</sup> so that the mind-embodied human organism experientially learns to know the world differently, and by so doing supposedly live differently in the world (or transcend the world as the case may be). Does this enliven the type of magical consciousness imbued with aspects of dark green religion described by Greenwood (2005) and Taylor (2010) in relationship to other contemporary spiritual and religious social movements? How does this relate to the cultural landscape of commodity capitalism and neoliberalism more broadly? While I am loathe to propose oppositional pairings of either/or, I did observe in my global explorations of yogaworlds two strains relating more or less strongly with 1) yoga as a posthuman manifestation of magical consciousness and “dark green religion” sensibilities

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss the history of globalized/modern/contemporary yoga in Chapter 1. Although Modern Yoga or Modern Postural Yoga (according to De Michelis 2004 and Singleton 2010) were imported to the United States and England, and to other parts of the Western world from India beginning around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and gained popularity during the period between 1960-1990, up until the 1990s yoga still remained somewhat marginal. It was really from about the 1990s onward that yoga began to proliferate, with yoga studios becoming abundant in urban locales throughout Canada, the US, the UK, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and increasingly in countries ranging from Singapore, Japan and China to Turkey, Costa Rica, Argentina, United Arab Emirates, and Mexico (Singleton 2010, personal communication with yoga practitioners, teachers and tourists, and online research of yoga locales). Since the 1990s Yoga Teacher Training programs have also proliferated, giving rise to the Yoga Teacher as a professional certification and an outgrowth of professional yoga organizations (such as Yoga Alliance in the US and the British Wheel of Yoga in the UK). With the growing number of Yoga Teachers (RYTs) and the growth of yoga as an industry, a whole suite of yoga-related products, services, publications, websites, celebrities and tourist destinations have come to define the global culture of yoga: a melding of virtual and geographically situated locales, or what I refer to as “yogaworlds.” The aspect of this trend I have interrogated for this dissertation is the proliferation of yoga-travel destinations in many areas of the globe where yoga has no previous connection. Thus when I refer to cultural contexts in which yoga is relatively new, I refer basically to all cultural milieus in which yoga has emerged since its modernization, and in its modernized forms, and more specifically to cultural contexts that do not have roots in the religious traditions in which yoga has been elaborated over the course of a much longer history (between 5,000-2,000 years), specifically Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.

promoting spiritual reformulations of society towards ecological harmony envisioned through a *coevalness* of humanity and the world, and 2) yoga as aspect of green lifestyle movements that remain rooted in capitalistic logics of consumption.

I explore the questions stated above and develop my arguments for proposing these two conceptual frameworks throughout this dissertation. Chapter 1 briefly outlines the history of contemporary yoga and introduces recent anthropological approaches to studying yoga; proposing frameworks developed by scholars studying magical consciousness, nature religion and New Age religious fields for further understandings of *some* aspects observed amongst some communities and individuals involved in yoga's globalization. Chapter 2 details my methodological approach to studying yoga tourism through autoethnography and multi-sited ethnography. Chapter 3 is organized as a series of case studies of the yoga tourism sites I travelled to and participated in as yoga tourist, anthropologist, karma yogi, and volunteer. Chapter 4 is a theoretical and autoethnographic exploration of yoga through the conceptual frameworks provided by sensual anthropologies of embodiment and the body. I use these explorations to further develop my argument for what I described as "yoga as a posthuman manifestation of magical consciousness and dark green religion sensibilities promoting spiritual reformulations of society towards ecological harmony envisioned through a coevalness of humanity and the world." Chapter 5 outlines how anthropological considerations of consumerism and ethical consumerism are useful for understanding what I have termed "yoga as aspect of green lifestyle movements that remain rooted in capitalistic logics of consumption," and in conclusion, Chapter 6 offers several positions, questions, and propositions for an embodied analysis of contemporary yoga and yoga tourism.

## **Chapter 1: Anthropological Approaches to Yoga: History, New Religious Movements, Magical Consciousness and Nature**

In this chapter I review scholarly literature on modern yoga to define the field of contemporary yoga studies. I then draw on anthropological theorizations of New Age, Religion and Globalization, Nature Religion and Magic to contextualize what I see as common cosmological and material correlations between these spiritual/religious social movements and certain expressions of contemporary yoga. Outlining these correlations forms the basis for discussions I develop up in Chapters 4 and 5 about contemporary yoga as mind-body techniques oriented towards a new kind of nature, in which human subjectivity is unsettled to enliven a posthumanist ontological politics of human-animal-environment equivalence.

### **Modern Yoga Studies**

Scholarship on modern yoga<sup>2</sup> has expanded significantly since 2004<sup>3</sup>, the year in which the first two scholarly monographs on Modern Yoga were published: Alter's *Yoga in India: the Body between Science and Philosophy* and De Michelis' *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism*. These two volumes were followed closely by the publication of Strauss' *Positioning Yoga* in 2005. In addition to these books and numerous scholarly publications (which I outline below), two other edited compilations on contemporary yoga have appeared in recent years: a special volume of the journal

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this text I use the terms yoga, Yoga, modern yoga, Modern Yoga, Modern Postural Yoga and contemporary yoga somewhat interchangeably. I primarily use the terms yoga, modern yoga, contemporary yoga and globalized yoga to describe the suite of practices that have emerged from what Singleton (2010) terms Modern Yoga or transnational yoga, which he draws from De Michelis' (2004) term Modern Postural Yoga. Rather than adopt their terms (i.e. capitalized Modern Yoga as a specific thing), which have specific meanings related to cultural historical process of colonialism and modernization, I prefer to use Singleton's term of transnational alongside other descriptors such as: contemporary, globalized, modern, or just yoga to describe the practices of yoga that continue to proliferate from these forms. This ambivalence in terminology relates somewhat to ambivalence in New Age or postmodern spiritual practices more broadly (Wood 2007) which I discuss later in this chapter. For those interested in contemporary yoga's history, DeMichelis (2004, 2008) and Singleton (2010) give detailed historical accounts of the relationship between various permutations of yoga in the modern context.

<sup>3</sup> There is a long history of scholarship on yoga originating from India and from Orientalist schools of inquiry in the West. Indian philosophical, practical and religious scholarship on yoga coincides with yoga's long history (roughly 5,000-2,000 years depending on which source one consults (Feuerstein 2001, White 2012)). Early colonial scholarly works on yoga were largely interested in interpreting and describing yoga from the point of view of philosophy, theology and comparative religions with little attention paid to social and practical aspects (Eliade 1958). Scholarly studies of modern yoga are different in that they situate yoga within historical, political and cultural contexts, interrogating it as a social practice; these studies coincide with yoga's mass popularization and globalization in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Asian Medicine* (2007) edited by Alter, which focuses on yoga's "relationship to medicine, health and healing in modern and pre-modern times" (Alter 2007: i) and Singleton and Byrne's (2008) *Yoga in the Modern World*.

The contributors to Singleton and Byrne's book interrogate the divide between theoretical (academic) and practical (popular) approaches to contemporary yoga and argue against earlier academic approaches to yoga that ignored practical "expressions of yoga in favor of the purely philosophical and theoretical" (Singleton and Byrne 2008: 3). Likewise they criticize the disregard of scholarly approaches to yoga by many yoga teachers and practitioners. A disregard of scholarly methods of acquiring knowledge about yoga was apparent in the attitudes of one yoga and meditation centre in Sweden where I sought to do fieldwork. The spiritual leader of the centre refused my application because she felt it would be antithetical to my yoga studies, and perhaps damaging to the experiences of other students if I were to be conducting anthropological fieldwork during a meditation retreat. She expressed that she did not feel it was possible for me to do both at the same time, suggesting that an anthropological interest in yoga meant that my yogic seeking was not truly sincere. The contributors to the Singleton and Byrne volume largely eschew this divide, seeking instead to break down polarities between theory and practice in yoga scholarship through a recognition that scholarly inquiry often relies on experiential knowledge, and that practical pursuit of yoga is often coupled with intellectual engagement in yoga texts:

[S]upposedly "objective" theoretical and scholastic knowledge on the one hand and direct experiential knowledge on the other are both exploited (in different contexts) to construct one's authority and status as a "scholar" or as a "practitioner"... we need to be sensitive to the degree to which parties from both "sides" may have a personal or collective interest in maintaining such dichotomies (2008: 4).

Singleton and Byrne's analysis points to dimensions of power involved in the control and dissemination of *knowledge about yoga*, i.e. knowledge produced (theoretically/discursively) by scholars, and *yogic knowledge*, i.e. "realized" embodied (nondiscursive) knowledge (oftentimes in the past through secret traditions) by Yoga Teachers and practitioners. They suggest that contemporary approaches to studying yoga should incorporate yogic knowledge into analyses that produce knowledge about yoga. In this way modern yoga is understood as an embodied system of praxis – techniques of the body circulated in social and cultural milieus and therefore involved in processes of subjectivity and discourses of power. At the same time that these bodily techniques are subjectifying, they are also transformative in that they introduce practitioners to ideas about the self, the body, the mind and perhaps the sacred through experiential modes that may alter sensual fields of perception and knowing. Contemporary studies of yoga thus are often undertaken by

practitioner-scholars who produce their analyses through their own intimacies with both the bodily experiences of yoga and the scholarly fields (usually primarily understood as disembodied intellectual escapades) through which they have been disciplined.

Here I briefly summarize the foundational approaches to modern yoga scholarship that have guided my research on yoga in consumer culture and yoga tourism I then reflect on the lack of systematic clarity on yoga both in the scholarship and in wider contemporary yoga circles and offer anthropological and broader social science frameworks such as enchantment, magic, New Age studies, and nature or green spiritualities, as alternative frameworks through which to think about the ambivalence prevalent in modern elaborations of yoga.

Anthropologists Joseph Alter (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) and Sarah Strauss (2002, 2005) have both published books and numerous articles on contemporary yoga that engage with theoretical and practical expressions of yoga in contemporary Indian and transnational milieus. Alter focuses almost exclusively on yoga in India, and Strauss primarily on the transnational Sivananda School of yoga that is based in India but also boasts many ashrams worldwide. Since the publication of early volumes on modern yoga in 2004, there have been numerous studies of contemporary yoga by scholars in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and religious studies. The time period of focus in these works is the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to present day, broadly described as the period of yoga's modernization. .

Alter (2004) draws heavily on medical anthropology to examine discourses of health and science in yoga's modernization in India. Strauss (2002, 2005), following Appadurai, examines global flows in the movement of yoga transnationally, concentrating her ethnographic attention on Sivananda's first ashram in Rishikesh, India and the broader network of Sivananda ashrams worldwide and community of global practitioners that are connected to this lineage. Other anthropologists and sociologists have considered yoga as an embodiment of space and place within the context of the yoga studio (Persson 2007), the shaping of the body and personhood through the highly physical practice of Ashtanga yoga (Smith 2006, 2008), global breathing utopias of yoga and Qi Gong (Van derVeer 2009), how intellectual property rights laws have been applied to the trademarking of Bikrams yoga in the United States (Fish 2006), the return globalization of *Kriya Yoga* back to India by American guru Swami Kriyananda (Froystad 2009), the popularization of yoga among British women between 1960-1980 (Newcombe 2007), yoga, globalization and the creation of therapeutic landscapes (Hoyez 2005), and how the therapeutic applications of Iyengar yoga might be analyzed in Foucauldian terms as care of the self (Lea 2009).

Scholarship on *tantra* also helps to contextualize contemporary yoga, as tantra plays an influential role in contemporary yoga, evinced by the emergence of contemporary yoga styles such as Shiva Rea's *Prana Flow*® and Rod Stryker's *ParaYoga*, dynamic *asana* styles that are promoted as combining several aspects and forms of yoga with tantra. Although popularly referred to as the "yoga of sex," tantra is often "clarified" by Yoga Teachers as "not really being about sex, but as a way to embrace the sensuality of the body, of uniting the forces of *siva* and *sakti*" (field notes). Isaacs interprets tantrism in *Yoga Journal* as basically having to do with nonduality, leading to a *liberation in the world*, not liberation from the world:

Although most modern yogis won't get initiated into a secret lineage or practice the subtler aspects of Tantra, the essence of the philosophy remains relevant for 21st-century life. In fact, many teachers find that incorporating Tantra into their teaching is empowering and inspiring for Western students who are trying to live a spiritual life.

Tantra is not a philosophy that requires a modern-day householder to renounce the world by giving up family, job, possessions, and pleasures. Instead, it emphasizes personal experimentation and experience as a way to move forward on the path to self-realization (accessed online 2012/09/04: <http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/2240?print=1>).

*Tantric* principles are often invoked in yoga classes to explain (although not necessarily with any clarity) certain yoga techniques and anatomical principles (such as *bandhas*, *kundalini* and *nadis*). How tantric practices are incorporated into modern contexts in highly modified ways is telling of how yoga practices, which are often described by teachers as "directly descended" from ancient sources have usually been reinterpreted to fit contemporary tastes and beliefs:

When it was first discovered by European orientalist scholars in the nineteenth century, Tantrism was typically singled out as the very worst example of all the licentiousness and idolatry believed to have corrupted Indian religions in modern times. Yet in our own generation, Tantrism has often been celebrated as a much-needed affirmation of the human body, sexuality and the sacrality of the natural environment itself (Urban 2012<sup>4</sup>).

White (2009) suggests that early Orientalist scholars demonized many aspects of yoga and tantra, particularly those interpreted as grotesque, amoral or backward by Europeans (i.e. many of those having to do with sex as a means to spiritual awakening). Demonization of unseemly elements has been replaced by selective omission, in today's yoga (as in New Age religious orientations more broadly) elements of tantra that fit with contemporary agendas for the body are embraced while other elements, rather than being demonized, are simply left out (White 2009, 2000, Flood 2006, and Urban 2003, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> From Urban 2012: <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t304.e879> accessed 2012/05/05

Generally speaking there is a good deal of ambivalence among contemporary yogis about the origins of the yoga practices they are doing and how these relate historically and cosmologically to tantra, India and Hinduism. This manifests generally as a sort of innocent acceptance of information offered by Yoga Teachers, much of which is conflicting and not very informed. We were told in our Yoga Teacher Training to simply “leave out” the information we learned which might be hard for people to understand or relate to. It was suggested that we introduce spiritual elements of yoga practice slowly, so as not to turn off beginning students who might not know how to relate to the more esoteric elements of yoga (providing we ourselves had any knowledge of them). While this may vary from studio to studio and definitely differs between different yoga lineages, some of which emphasize the spiritual basis of yoga (i.e. Radha’s Hidden Language Hatha Yoga), I found that in practicing yoga with hundreds of different Yoga Teachers (both in person and through videos online), reading yoga blogs, yoga magazines, and contemporary non-scholarly yoga books, attending yoga retreats in different countries throughout the world, completing a Yoga Teacher Training program, and interviewing and talking with other yoga practitioners, that there was very little shared knowledge about yoga other than how to perform yoga *asanas*. Knowledge about alignment, where and when to muscularly engage, and how to breathe is required learning among contemporary yoga practitioners. Much less common is any kind of clarity about the history of yoga and different yoga lineages, understanding of yogic anatomy, or how to interpret the various English-language translations of Sanskrit yoga texts within these contexts.

How contemporary yogis interpret and apply the *yamas* (rules) and *niyamas*<sup>5</sup> (ethical precepts), which are often peppered into *asana* classes by Yoga Teachers, is one example of selective and sometimes confusing yoga learning. The ethical precept of *bramacharya* is a telling example. I have variously heard Yoga Teachers discuss *bramacharya* as complete abstinence, suggesting that celibacy is required for spiritual awakening; had it described as ‘restraint’ rather than ‘abstinence,’ indicating that sex should only be engaged in with a monogamous partner; and been told that *bramacharya* refers to different stages of life, during which time sex is inappropriate (i.e. adolescence), and that during adulthood it becomes part of the spiritual journey. Muktibodhananda writes of *bramacharya* (abstinence or continence):

Bramacharya was generally taken to mean abstention from sexual activity because, by refraining from sexual stimulation, sexual impulses and the production of sex hormones are reduced. Sexual abstinence may be necessary in the beginning while you are trying to gain mastery over body and mind, but once you have managed this, and you can maintain awareness of the higher reality, sexual interaction is no barrier. In fact, in tantra it is never said that sexual interactions are detrimental to spiritual awakening. On the contrary, tantra says that the sexual act can be used to

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<sup>5</sup> See Glossary for a definition of Sanskrit terms and other concepts relevant to an anthropological analysis of yoga and for an elaboration of how I am applying certain concepts such as “self” and “class.”

induce spiritual awakening... Therefore, in hatha yoga there are special techniques which aid in bramacharya by regulating hormonal secretions and the functioning of the glands. Sexual thoughts and desires are then curbed. Control of the hormones induces true bramacharya. When the bindu is retained in the brain centre, sexual urges are controlled and the mind can remain absorbed in awareness of the supreme (Muktibodhananda 2009 [1985]: 58-59).

Burley, a modern yoga scholar and contributor to Singleton and Byrne's (2008) *Yoga in the Modern World*, suggests that, "attitudes to sex and sexuality within the milieu of contemporary yoga are both confused and confusing (2008: 184). He suggests that this confusion is a "symptomatic blending of a rather superficial understanding of a diverse range of yogic traditions on the one hand, with certain cultural trends, such as commercialism, and the emphasis on desirable physicality, on the other" (ibid.) I have never been offered any of the techniques for regulating hormonal secretions, which suggests that these are not widely applicable techniques to learn in contemporary yoga milieus. I have, however, been personally offered and read about a variety of opinions on sex and yoga, ranging from claims that asana practice will revolutionize my sex life and bring me multiple orgasms by putting me in contact with my second chakra through which I can achieve real sexual union. Conversely, I have also been offered advice that suggests that the only way to truly achieve spiritual union in yoga is to remain abstinent, as sexual relations only result in the leaking of vital energies which need to be retained to raise *kundalini* (field notes).

Accepted lack of systematization and clarity about yoga is prevalent in contemporary yoga instruction. This can be seen at the most basic level in variations of bodily alignment in certain yoga *asanas*, and conflicting information about breathing techniques (i.e. whether one should first fill the throat and chest and then the abdomen in yogic breathing, or first fill the abdomen, then the chest and throat), whether or not one should practice sexual abstinence, and what the "benefits" of yoga actually are. This lack of coherence and accepted ambivalence also occurs in the circulation of authenticity through yoga texts (as Singleton 2008 has pointed out in terms of the *Yoga-sutra*). Most interpretations of the *Yoga-sutra* (YS) suggest that yoga begins with *yamas* and *niyamas* as ethical precepts of action (*karma*) prior to attending sequentially to the gross body through *asana*, the energetic body through *pranayama*, and the astral body through meditation (Feuerstein 1979, Iyengar 2003, Satchidananda 1990). Muktibodhananda's interpretation of the *Hatha Yoga Pradikipa* offers that the *yamas* and *niyamas* be interpreted as guideline's rather than rules, and should only be attempted once the body is already purified through the *shatkarmas* (yogic techniques of purification), followed by *asana* and *pranayama* (2009 [1985]). Muktibodhananda identifies this discrepancy as a difference between raja yoga and hatha yoga, which she suggests are not really two different systems, although they have often been interpreted that way, with raja yoga often omitting

hatha yoga. In this interpretation the *Yoga-sutra* (YS) is a raja yoga text while the *Hatha Yoga Pradikīpa* (HYP) is a hatha yoga text. Muktibodhananda suggests that “hatha yoga is the basis of raja yoga. The fact that it should be practiced until attainment in raja yoga is achieved means they are intricately connected” (2009 [1985]: 142).

In 60 to 90-minute *asana* classes there is rarely time to discuss the relationship between different systems of yoga. When they are discussed, Yoga Teachers often give conflicting interpretations and genealogies. While Yoga Teacher Training programs (YTTs) require some reading of yogic texts, most often some translation of the *Yoga-sutras* (YS) and sometimes the *Hatha Yoga Pradikīpa* (HYP), usually the study of these texts and the systems of yoga they relate to are very superficial. Therefore Yoga Teachers, unless they take on their own studies or pursue in-depth study of yogic texts beyond their YTT programs, have very little understanding of the history of yoga, different kinds of yoga systems, and the origins of the various practices that they teach. Yoga students, particularly when they first begin attending yoga classes may find it difficult to know how to evaluate their teachers’ claims and authority. This may sometimes just lead to sensible skepticism but has also resulted in problematic power-over relationships such as sexual scandals documented in various yoga communities between aspirant/students and their *gurus*<sup>6</sup>. There is a good deal of emphasis in yoga on finding one’s own path, part of which includes developing one’s own assessments about whether to believe or accept claims made about yoga, and much of which is discussed in terms of “learning the wisdom of your own body.” Basically this becomes highly individualized information navigation, both at the level of bodily-generated information about experience and at the level of how to ascribe cultural meaning to symbols, texts and knowledge conveners (i.e. Yoga Teachers, *gurus*, fellow yogis) who may or may not be seen as possessors of authoritative knowledge. As Possamai (2003) (after Jameson) suggests of New Agers, or perennists (as he terms them), one of the defining features of contemporary yoga and tantra is a selective reading of the past, and I would suggest the present as well as the future. In the following section I first discuss the construction of authenticity in contemporary yoga and then turn my attention to Wood’s (2007) suggestion of New Age ambivalence as a response to multiple non-formative authorities under neoliberalism. I explore how this relates to the construction of authenticity derived from a melding of equivalent sources of identification detached from their origins or past contexts

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<sup>6</sup> There have been many examples in various yoga communities over the course of yoga’s modernization, some of which I discuss further on in this text. The most recent example occurred over the course of 2012, when founder and *guru* of *Anusara* yoga, John Friend was ousted and then resigned from the organization after public denunciations of unethical sexual and financial control were made by several of his female students. For an overview of the controversy and a compilation of media comments, see <http://bayshakti.com/anusara-controversy-overview-and-timeline> accessed: 19/11/2012.

of meaning and practice. One example of this construction of authenticity and “cleansing out” of the unseemly is demonstrated in contemporary yoga’s focus on enlivening desired energetic states in the gross physical body through *asana*, while generally omitting related practices such as preliminary purification through the internal cleansing techniques (*shatkarmas*), for example those of *moola shodhana* (rectal cleansing by inserting a turmeric root or middle finger into the anus) or *vastra dhauti* (abdominal cleansing by swallowing and then extracting through the mouth, a long thin length of cotton cloth) (Muktibodhananda 2009 [1985]: 186).

### **Ambivalence, Authenticity and Various Interpretations of the Past in Contemporary Yoga**

Singleton’s work focuses on how yoga has been reformulated in the modern period through the incorporation of techniques, philosophies and beliefs from a variety of western-influenced physical practices and alternative religious movements. His works, and particularly his book *Yoga Body* (2010), appeal widely to yoga practitioners as well as scholars. The popularity of his work amongst yoga practitioners likely has much to do with the authority he has as a scholar and yoga practitioner, and because he clarifies the often muddy history of the social and cultural contexts within which contemporary yoga practice originated. Singleton argues that contemporary physical yoga practice (*asana*), breathing techniques (*pranyama*) and meditation, which he terms “modern postural orthopraxis,” do not “really resemble the forms of yoga from which [they claim] to derive” (2010: 21). He traces what he terms the “‘prehistory’ of the international *asana* revolution” (2010: 4) to forms of physical culture popular in the US and Europe in the nineteenth century:

Quasi-religious forms of physical culture swept Europe during the nineteenth century and found their way to India, where they informed and infiltrated popular new interpretations of nationalist Hinduism. Experiments to define the particular nature of *Indian* physical culture led to the reinvention of *asana* practices, developed in India, subsequently found their way (back) to the West, where they became identified and merged with forms of “esoteric gymnastics,” which had grown popular in Europe and America from the mid-nineteenth century (independent of any contact with yoga traditions). Posture-based yoga as we know it today is the result of a dialogical exchange between para-religious, modern body culture techniques developed in the West and the various discourses of “modern” Hindu yoga that emerged from the time of Vivekenanda onward. Although it routinely appeals to the tradition of Indian *hattha* yoga, contemporary posture-based yoga cannot really be considered a direct successor to this tradition (2010: 5).

According to Singleton, the body techniques of “esoteric gymnastics” highly emphasize muscle control. He suggests that it is from this lineage of “New Thought-influenced bodybuilding in the traditions of Jules Payot and Frank Channing Haddock” (2007: 65), and not *hattha* yoga, that the yoga *asanas* of contemporary yoga are derived. While outwardly, *hattha* yoga *asanas* may resemble

contemporary yoga *asanas*, and many contemporary *asanas* bear Sanskrit names, the experiences that arise from the performance of these *asanas* today are interpreted through frameworks that descend from esoteric-influenced body-mind-world discourses, and not the Hindu cosmology that underlies *batha yoga*. Singleton defines New Thought as primarily concerned with “health and healing – whether it be of the body, the psyche or the bank balance” (2007: 66). He suggests that New Thought was related to unchurched Protestant religiosity known as ‘harmonial religion,’ and that these emergent religious forms at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century “did much to revolutionise the religious life of urban America, and to a lesser extent Britain” (ibid).

According to Singleton, this revolutionizing occurred through the union of New Thought beliefs that “spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well being are understood to flow from a person’s rapport with the cosmos,” with techniques adapted from European forms of physical culture to “render this metaphysical conviction into practical technique” (2007: 66). Thus Singleton argues, what are put forward as ancient *batha yoga* techniques derived from ancient Indian sources in contemporary yoga are really derived from Western esoteric movements that emphasize mind-body health through affirmation, relaxation and muscle control. Singleton identifies William Walker Atkinson as one of the primary purveyors of New Thought beliefs. “In his view,” writes Singleton:

Health, wealth and happiness...have ceased to be the privilege of the few, and have become the birthright of all. However, it is worth noting that New Thought was largely an urban revolution among white, Anglo-Saxon, upper middle-class Protestants (mainly women) seeking relief from the psychosomatic blights of city living. It was the same demographic cross-section, indeed, which embraced neo-yoga, probably for similar reasons (Singleton 2007: 67).

Singleton suggests that “[i]n this bright new world, suffering, sacrifice and guilt are eradicated as the divinised individual manufactures her own ontological analgesia from the inexhaustible font of happiness that is the True Self” (Singleton 2007: 68). This understanding of one’s place in the world continues to be promulgated by contemporary yoga practitioners and forms a central component of the mind body relationship envisioned in contemporary yoga philosophies. A view, Singleton argues, which is quite at odds with earlier Indian soteriological impulses in which the goal of yoga is liberation from a material world which should be understood as suffering and not a more ideal embodiment of personal qualities of success and wellbeing. This highlights how yoga was selectively reinterpreted through New Thought frameworks such that elements that fit with a world-view of personal happiness, power and what I think often manifests in contemporary yoga as *betterness* (which I describe in more detail in Chapter 4) were embraced and the less tasteful elements of *batha yoga* were simply omitted as irrelevant for modern day (as DeMichelis (2004) argues was the

case with Vivekenanda's *Raja Yoga*).

Singleton likens this process to a synthesis of spiritual goods into marketable and consumable forms:

I would argue that from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, popular modern yoga has tended to function like a free market economy, in which spiritual goods are exchanged and synthesised, and in which the 'trade barriers' of insular, secretive traditions are lifted. New Thought was instrumental in furthering this process of spiritual 'deregulation' (Singleton 2007: 72).

This critique of modern yoga as a marketable commodity in which certain elements of other cultures' religious practices (often those of colonized peoples) are adopted and others rejected that do not fit with ideals of self betterment defined in New Thought (and later New Age) frameworks, has been leveled at yoga from a variety of scholarly as well as mainstream sources. Although Singleton does not make the connection explicit, Albanese (2007) makes the connection between New Thought and what have variously been described as New Age approaches to religiosity that gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s counterculture, particularly in the US and Britain. Singleton elucidates the historical connection between New Thought and contemporary forms of yoga, but as a historian he does not delve into how these beliefs, techniques and practices serve to structure the lifeworlds of the people (primarily middle and upper class urban women, he suggests) who take them up.

Singleton (2005) does discuss how the "interpretive frameworks" of New Age Religion have influenced the way that contemporary yoga has come to have a "salvific function" through relaxationism that is characteristic of other forms of esotericism in the UK. However he does little to define what he means by New Age Religion, devoting only one sentence in his article to Hanegraaff's characterization of New Age as a "blend of biomedicine, psychology, and esoterica" (Singleton 2005: 289). Singleton's argument is that the relaxation techniques of modern yoga leading to divine connection in the form of "harmony with the world around us," resemble more the "this-worldly" aims of esoteric relaxation than "the other-worldly discourse of liberation from suffering and ignorance codified in Patanjali's seminal Yoga Sutras" (2005: 300). His goal is to show how heavily influenced modern yoga has been by esoteric practices that have been widely summed up under the banner of New Age; in other words, as Samuel puts it, "that yoga in the West was adopted for reasons, and used in ways, that derived their logic from western society, not from India" (2007: 178).

I turn to anthropological literatures about practices and belief systems that have been described as New Age to delve more deeply into what this logic is understood to be and how it might be helpful in understanding what these practices have become in their own right as they have undergone mass proliferation to move from what Singleton (2005) terms the eclectic margins of the middle class in the early part of the 20th Century to the mainstream at the turn of the 21st Century. The aim is to explore in greater detail the connotations of universal spirituality promulgated by practitioners of contemporary yoga that align with the lifestyles and worldviews characteristic of New Age religious fields which have proliferated under neoliberalism. This will allow for a consideration of how the teachings of modern yoga relate to broader political and economic changes and emergent religious movements during the period of globalized yoga's vast popularization; one aspect of which can be observed in the proliferation of yoga tourism destinations in regions with no previous connection to yoga such as Bulgaria, Turkey, Iceland and rural British Columbia. The time period of focus for these developments is basically from the 1990s onward, when yoga-spaces began to proliferate in "virtually every city in the Western world, as well as, increasingly, in the Middle East, Asia, South and Central America, and Australasia... [and] among affluent urban populations in India" (Singleton 2010: 1).

### **Choices for the Self in New [Age] Markets**

My goal is not to develop working definitions of what constitutes religion or spirituality, to define whether yoga qualifies as being religious or irreligious, as Alter (2006) does. Instead I prefer to draw on what Greenwood (2010) terms *magical consciousness* as a sort of less theoretically complex motif for the experiential and emotive aspects enlivened by the techniques of yoga as they are interpreted through (post)modern frameworks of knowledge which can be characterized as highly ambivalent. In the world of modern yoga, as it is understood, practiced, modified and marketed, yoga is and is not religious, is and is not spiritual, and is and is not a fitness regime geared towards better health. The proliferation of yoga forms, styles, types and locations of access have made "choice" a prevalent feature of contemporary yoga, it has become not only highly profitable, but also almost unquestionably a "good" thing to be doing for self-development, stress-management and self-care.

I agree with Csordas (2004) that for the case of yoga, religious experience is grounded in the body and the sensate knowing of the world through perception and experience. I draw on Greenwood (2010) to demonstrate how consciousness is invigorated throughout the yoga body in

contemporary yoga in ways that can be understood as akin to the type of magical experiences Greenwood observes in New Age spiritual practices. In the discussion that follows, I first outline Wood's (2007) approach to the New Age, in which he defines ambiguity as the primary feature of a wide range of spiritualist practices that both relate to and maintain distance from other religious forms. It is not my intent to say that yoga *is* a New Age practice, but to say that it *relates* to other modes of spiritual undertaking in contemporary consumer societies with prevalent secularization, and that the manner in which the New Age has been theorized anthropologically (particularly by Wood (2007)) can be usefully extended to understanding some aspects of yoga's prevalence, popularity and ambiguity. Likewise anthropological considerations about what constitutes knowledge can be usefully applied to understanding the ambiguous knowledge about the self and the world produced through body-generated yogic knowledge in cultural contexts where "truth" is defined as rational objective knowledge and skepticism about spiritual or magical experiences is prevalent.

The terms New Age, nature spirituality and nature religion are used somewhat interchangeably by scholars to describe contemporary "alternative" religious forms prevalent in the US and UK (but also in other globalized milieus). New Age (Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1996, Prince and Riches 2000, Sutcliffe 2003, Wood 2007, York 2001) is the older, and more prevalent term, although in recent years there has been a growing body of literature about nature religion, nature spirituality (Albanese 1990, Greenwood 2005), green religion, or what Taylor (2010) calls "dark green religion," each of which are elaborated somewhat differently by the scholars who develop and apply them. Taylor (2010) believes that the terminological distinctions are important and spends a good deal of time differentiating between the terms spirituality and religion and different forms of green religion and dark green religion in his book. While his distinctions are important for a cultural history of green religious movements, I do not wish to elaborate on them here. Rather, I am interested in pointing out the connecting features between these alternative or "countercultural" (as Taylor calls them) spiritual practices and how they relate more broadly to New Age practices that historians have demonstrated have heavily influenced contemporary yoga. What I find most pertinent for my arguments here are how certain green, dark green, and nature religious orientations articulate the embeddedness of human beings within nature, particularly the felt unity and empathy for it.

As Taylor (2010) points out, this is a worldview broadly prevalent in environmentalist movements, that I will argue in Chapter 5, have been heavily taken up in the mainstreaming of yoga, becoming articulated through visions of lifestyles of ethical being through consumption. I am

interested in how the syncretic and sometimes contradictory adaptations of the ethics of yoga through the the ethics of environmentalist visions of consumption are couched in nature reverence and the ways in which the body becomes naturalized and reinterpreted as an authentic site of knowledge production through these processes. I associate yoga and environmentalism as features of a globalized humanity interested in both self and environmental care in line with what Csordas (2009b) suggests is a “simultaneous pull toward universal culture and postmodern cultural fragmentation that characterizes the global condition of religion” (2009b: 78). Throughout this dissertation I discuss various visions of transformational ethics that emerge through the practices of contemporary yoga in different milieus, including an intentional yoga community with a prominent environmentalist mandate at the Yasodhara Ashram in the Kootenays, a “sustainable living project” organized through permaculture visions in Costa Rica, yoga bloggers’ contentions and critiques of the commodification of yoga, the relationship between a yoga activist’s detoxifying yoga flow and an eco-conscious yoga marketplace at the Vancouver Yoga Conference, and my own embodied transformations and attempts to understand the various ethical encounters at play in yoga tourism and emergent experiences of unity through yoga.

Taylor suggests that:

*Nature religion* is most commonly used as an umbrella term to mean religious perceptions and practices that are characterized by a reverence for nature and that consider its destruction a desecrating act. Adherents often describe feelings of belonging and connection to the earth - of being bound to and dependent upon the earth’s living systems (Taylor 2010: 5).

He suggests that nature religion has a long history, associated at times with primitivism, such as by E.B. Tylor, and at other times as “spiritually perceptive and ecologically beneficent” (ibid). Rousseau was a foundational figure in the formation of dark green religion, espousing views that included:

a critique of materialism as a distraction from what makes people truly content or happy, namely, intimate contact with and open-hearted contemplation of nature... a belief that indigenous peoples lived closer to nature and were thus socially and ecologically superior to “civilized” peoples and from whom civilized people had much to learn; a conviction that people in the state of nature and uncorrupted by society have a natural predisposition toward sympathy and compassion for all creatures and a corresponding conviction that a good society would cultivate and not destroy such affections; and finally, a belief in an expansive self in which one’s own identity includes the rest of nature and a felt unity with and empathy for it (Taylor 2010: 6).

Taylor further delineates dark green religion as “deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable... apart from the usefulness to human beings” (2010: 13). Taylor identifies environmentalist proponents of dark green religion with the practice of cultural *bricolage*, a feature described by Possamai (2003) for New Agers more broadly.

Taylor suggests that “there is a global environmentalist milieu in which shared ideas incubate, cross-fertilize, and spread” and that these “worldviews and narratives... are believed to cohere with science - but they are also often grounded in mystical or intuitive knowledge that is beyond the reach of the scientific method” (2010: 14). Taylor distinguishes between green religion and dark green religion by suggesting that in green religion “environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation” while in dark green religion, “nature is sacred, has intrinsic value, and is therefore due reverent care” (2010: 10).

I first outline Wood’s (2007) definition of New Age, with a cursory summary of the wider field of New Age studies, and then delve into Greenwood’s (2005) approach to nature religion and magical consciousness to draw out some distinctions between the categories of New Age, nature spirituality and green and dark green religion. I draw on Taylor (2004, 2009, 2010) to contextualize these social trends within broader trends related to the relationship envisioned in these spiritual movements between society and nature, which Taylor observes as the sacralization of nature in scientific circles and in environmental discourses more broadly. Throughout I will contextualize how and why these analyses can be useful for understanding the ambivalence and proliferation of forms observed in contemporary yoga.

DeMichelis’ (2004) and Singleton’s (2008, 2010) scholarship highlights the relationship between Modern Yoga and earlier Western esoteric and fitness regimes from about the 1890s to the 1960s. Here I continue to explore how the recent global growth in yoga’s popularity relates to other emergent cultural configurations of religion that Wood characterizes as alternative (although they may be highly popular and prevalent) by virtue of “non-formative” conceptualizations of authority under neoliberalism.

Wood suggests that an emphasis on self-authority is the defining feature of the New Age:

The pre-eminence of self-authority is taken to accord with the nature of social life in a postmodernized, privatized, individualized or globalized world... Indeed, this form is taken to be so unique that the term ‘religion’ is no longer applicable, instead, the New Age is seen as a ‘spirituality’... Clearly, the emphasis on self-authority and rejection of external authority, at least in the last resort, are seen as central components to New Age discourse (Wood 2007: 36).

Wood’s aim is to develop an understanding of what he calls New Age networks based on a sociological understanding of power that takes up and then provides a critique of Foucault and Bourdieu in terms of how self and authority are contextualized in New Age beliefs and practices:

[T]he importance of Bourdieuan and Foucauldian approaches lies in moving beyond theory that distinguishes between external-authority and inner-authority or self-authority. Rather than viewing the self as constituted either through inward impulses that are overwhelmed by external authorities

or through expressing itself by making use of external authorities, these approaches are interested in how **social authorities are woven into the very fabric of subjectivity** such that the most private, intimate thoughts and actions are *inextricably and inseparably* bound up with social structures. Subjective experiences of freedom and autonomy are *constituted through* (not merely *grounded or expressed in*) social authorities (Wood 2007: 60 italics in original, bold emphasis mine).

Wood suggests that many scholarly approaches to the New Age mistakenly overlook the social contexts within which self-authority, based on subjective expression of will or choice, is inextricably bound up within the larger social structures of neoliberalism. Thus in probing the social structures within which “New Agers” live their daily lives, and the manners in which New Age *practices and beliefs* both inform and are informed by New Agers’ subjective experiences, Wood suggests we are better able to interpret what New Age religious phenomena actually are. By moving deeper into questions about what religious authority is, how it functions, and how it relates to and is interpreted in terms of other forms of social authority, larger political economies that delimit choice and define social power are demonstrated to be interwoven into the spiritual practices and beliefs of some members of society undergoing processes of neoliberalization.

Wood (2007) suggests three points of inquiry in terms of: 1) what kinds of self are produced and lived through New Age practices, 2) the kinds of authorities that are invoked and interpreted in these practices, and 3) whether in fact these authorities do mark a transformation from earlier religious forms. He suggests that the fieldwork needed to explore these questions requires a methodological orientation towards *practice* rather than belief – information which is gathered ethnographically through participant observation, but is difficult to collect and contextualize when paying attention only to what people say or think. An orientation towards practice aligns with what Singleton and Byrne (2008) identify as the primary feature of modern yoga, in which “Truth” is found in self-generated experiential knowledge rather than externally imposed authoritative interpretations, even though “authoritative” interpretations of ancient yogic texts such as the *Yoga-sutra* are drawn on to lend authenticity to experience (Singleton 2005).

Wood suggests that the “ambiguity of authority in nonformative regions of the religious field is matched by ambiguous identities” (2007: 160) and that the term New Age, while prevalent in scholarly discourse and in the media, is rarely identified with by people met in the field. Indeed, Wood remarks that the term itself is primarily a marketing term rather than a widespread social identity (2007: 161). Although I use scholarly analyses of New Age spiritual practices to think about yoga, and although yoga is associated with broader New Age trends in the popular imagination, few yogis I met identified as New Agers. In fact, many yoga practitioners actively distance themselves

from aspects of yoga that are seen as New Age, instead focusing on the “more authentic” aspects of yoga as an “ancient” Indian system through texts such as the YS and HYP.

Yet the category of New Age is useful for looking at connections between “alternative” forms of spiritualized religious practice in consumer milieus. It allows us to consider how these divergent forms relate to one another and to broader social processes. Yoga, as DeMichelis (2004) and Singleton (2008), have demonstrated has roots in the esoteric traditions that gave rise to other prominent New Age belief systems. Rather than simply equating New Age practices with shopping for spirituality in a spiritual marketplace (as do scholars like Dumit 2001, and Carrette and King 2005), Wood asks how social power acts in religious fields defined by marketization. Akin to how Miller (2001) considers the shopping practices of North London consumers within the larger political economy that shapes and defines the consumer field, Wood suggests that rather than being open fields of choice which consumers freely navigate according to desire and will, that “markets involve proliferations of authorities, one potential consequence of which is individualization as different individuals become involved with different authorities” (2007: 162). For Wood, questions of motivation are key in understanding people’s involvement with what he calls the multiple authorities of nonformative religious fields. He suggests that in many cases people involved with nonformative religions have life experiences in which formative religious traditions (particularly Christianity) played a definitive role. Rejection of these formative authorities, he suggests, rather than leading to a secularization in which religion disappears, leads to a “relativization” of religious authority, resulting into what he calls “personal secularization,” wherein religious authority becomes weakened and more ambiguous, while still remaining individualistically active (Wood 2007: 162). People therefore still identify as religious, or more commonly as spiritual, but “without a *specific* religious identity” (Wood 2007: 163).

This was a common position among the subjects of my study, who identified as spiritual but not necessarily religious, and is demonstrated in the way that modern yoga is promoted as a universal spiritual practice that does not supplant other religious authorities but rather supports spiritual expression no matter the belief system. Most of my informants were women raised with Christianity as a feature of their upbringing, meaning that they identified with some aspects of Christianity as part of their cultural heritage, but did not feel that it had been a defining point of reference for their identity. Most had ambivalent feelings about Christianity, particularly because of what they saw as the both positive and negative aspects of organized religion. Popular media (if not direct personal experience) made most of my informants highly sensitive to the negative impacts of Christianity in the colonial contexts of Canada and the US, such as the abuse of Indigenous peoples

in Residential Schools, the sexual abuse of children by priests, and the general misogyny and sexual discrimination of many Christian religious organizations. However, many of these women also identified positive aspects to Christianity in terms of community, spiritual well-being and the positive benefits of ritual in providing meaning in everyday life.

In many ways yoga offers my informants a fresh start, many of them see it as an authentic practice with no cultural baggage other than a sense of exotic mysticism tied to the natural potential of the human body that has been obscured by damaging religious and biomedical authorities, a potential hope for feeling better in terms of self-discovery. Yoga is something which the majority of Western women who practice it have no negative feelings about, offered as a spirituality free from the violent and authoritative histories of religious institutions<sup>7</sup>, and likewise Newcombe (2008) suggests for British women who practiced yoga between 1960-1980, freeing from male-dominated medical discourses about the female body. De Michelis (2004) highlights that Vivekenanda's message of universal spirituality made yoga highly attractive at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, and Strauss (2005) discusses how Sivananda's promotion of yoga as a path towards achieving universal brotherhood and World Peace appealed to many Westerners following World War II and the threat of nuclear war. Yoga continues to be associated in the global cultural imaginary as a peaceful practice of self-discovery, a discipline based on non-harming that as Singleton (2008) suggests, offers the potential for "incarnate transcendence" of the mundane aspects of the world to arrive at a blissful existence of incorruptible happiness.

The incarnate transcendence described as the goal of modern yoga by Singleton (2008) both resembles and differs from the type of spirit possession described by Wood (2007) in his ethnographic study of New Age groups, yet I believe his focus on status ambiguity under neoliberalism can also be applied to understanding desire for the type of self-transformation offered by yoga. In yoga the goal is to embody one's true inner spirit by transcending an externally imposed social identity, while in many New Age practices, channelers and shamans seek to become possessed by an external spiritual entity (Wood 2007):

My argument is that the people I studied tended to experience a relatively high degree of status ambiguity in terms of their class positions, an ambiguity corresponding to practices of possession. This status ambiguity can be linked to shifts in Euro-American class structures, whereby certain fractions of the working-class in recent decades have experienced greater education, opportunities,

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<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to suggest that this is actually the case, but that this is the way that it is often interpreted, again an example of selective omission of parts of history and or context to fit the desired aims of yoga consumers. Alter (2004) and Singleton (2010) have both discussed how yoga has been employed as a symbol for Hindu nationalism and as a means through which to cultivate strong, fit, Indian male bodies in the strengthening of the Indian nation.

and professionalization similar to that enjoyed by the middle-class, but only alongside the continued insecurities common to the working class.

*This is experienced primarily in workplace relationships, where expectations of being able to exercise authority remain unfulfilled or frustrated...* [F]or many Euro-Americans this situation will bear little correspondence to religious practice. But for the religious, this situation corresponds to religious practice, especially through the enhanced significance of possession... For these people, the significance of possession lies not only in its legitimating role within these regions, but also *in the practical manner by which it addresses status ambiguity...* (Wood 2007: 167, emphasis mine).

Wood suggests that New Age practices in Britain and the United States relate directly to the shifting nature of authority in neoliberalizing societies, which he describes in terms of decreased state control, loss of strength in labour movements, increased professionalization and restructuring markets that transfer manufacturing to poorer countries with increased managerial and service sector jobs (2007: 171). These changes in labour structure have been coupled with shifts from production to consumption economies where class boundaries, particularly between middle and working classes, may become blurred in terms of “the status and material reward associated with the middle-class” (Wood 2007: 170) but not in terms of social power for working class people. Social processes such as these, suggests Wood (2007) contribute to a high degree of ambiguity in social status, authority, and identity. I suggest, in line with Newcombe (2008), in her study of the popularity of yoga among British women in the 1960s-1980s, that this may also be the case for majority of women who practice yoga today. While women may feel they have more social authority in 2012 than they had prior to the political push for gender equity (among other things) by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, this status still remains highly ambiguous, as do shifting models of gender identity and sexuality that are frustrated by simultaneous discourses of restriction and choice. The fact that women may feel yoga offers a means to “choose” to mold their bodies towards ideals of feminine power, and thus embody that power, may also be one of the reasons it is so appealing (as I discuss in Chapter 5). What has been characterized by some scholars as a ‘proliferation of choice’ and increased expression of self-authority in advanced capitalism, should be seen, Wood argues, in terms of new forms of social authority expressed through neoliberalism:

This proliferation and individualization is associated with the formative shaping of selves and practices, in other words to the formation of a neoliberalized class habitus across various social fields, so that working-class as well as middle-class individuals bear class distinctions in terms of aspirations, tastes, and senses of self. This *neoliberalization involves new technologies of the self through which people become involved with social authorities, rather than the clearing of social authority to provide space for the expression of individual's selves* (2007: 171, italics mine).

What exactly does Wood mean by possession and how does this relate to yoga? In my reading of Wood (2007), the type of spirit possession enlivened by some forms of contemporary yoga are precisely as Singleton (2005) describes in terms of the acquisition of desired states of embodied

social being through New Thought techniques of harmonial gymnastics. Namely, that “spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well being are understood to flow from a person’s rapport with the cosmos,” (Singleton 2007:66). In this conception, the techniques of modern yoga could be described as spiritual possession of one’s mind and body through which one learns to execute individualized embodiments of neoliberalized social authority, in which freedom for the body, mind and ultimately self become interpreted through frameworks of *conscious choice*. Yoga could then be interpreted as a form of self-possession which guides practitioners towards *better* choices in fields of ambiguous authority that offer little guidance to spiritually-motivated seekers. In Chapter 5 I will demonstrate that some manifestations of contemporary yoga seem to follow this logic without critique, while other forms directly challenge this position by virtue of a new type of ontological politics that rejects individualized subjectivity as the basis for articulating choice.

Wood (2007) draws on Rose (1999) to suggest that the way choice operates in marketplace consumption requires a type of ethics in which people are “*obliged to be free* to understand and enact their lives... and where choices are seen as realizations and expressions of the individual, leading to a ‘new ethic of self conduct’ [Rose 1999: 87] (Wood 2007: 53). Wood draws on Bourdieu to characterize these choices within fields requiring different kinds of capital, in which class habitus is expressed through relational engagements defined by operations of power that actively shape the types of choices people make.

Yoga has become commonplace in mainstream discussions of lifestyle choices about health, stress, fitness and beauty, coupled with a billion dollar industry in United States. This 2009 *Reuters* article documents a continued growth in consumer commitment to yoga during economic recession in which other industries may be declining, thus directly tying increased choices for yoga to status ambiguity under neoliberalization:

"The economy may have taken a downturn, but attendance in our yoga classes has grown," said Jess Gronholm, National Yoga Coordinator for the Crunch health club chain.

"A yoga practice becomes a refuge from the negativity of an economic recession, and the studio becomes the sanctuary," said Gronholm, whose employer has over 100,000 gym members in five U.S. states....Gronholm believes the 5,000-year-old practice is just the ticket in these belt-tightening, nail-biting times, when banks aren't lending, consumers aren't buying, and experts are calling the latest economic numbers terrifying.

"At the very least members can come in and 'take a break' from whatever else may be going on in their lives. And at the very most, a practice can become a transformational experience that reenergizes and rejuvenates you" (Internicola

2009: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/01/12/us-fitness-yoga-idUSTRE50B2HN20090112> accessed: 19/09/2011).

Most of the yoga practitioners I have talked to over the course of this study, an increasing number of people who work as professional Yoga Teachers, and many people who blog about yoga on the web have indeed transformed their entire lives to embody the ideals of a yogic lifestyle (which are open to much creative interpretation). The idea of “taking a break” from the potentially depressing aspects of daily life is a central theme in creating “sacred spaces” such as the yoga studio, where one can “let go of responsibility and flow in the current of one’s own sacred life force” (quotes from Yoga Teachers recorded in field notes).

The *Yoga in Australia Survey* (YAS) collected information from yoga practitioners concerning the question “Can yoga change your life?” They reported that the answer from practitioners was an “emphatic “yes”” (YAS Summary 2006: 5). Some of the answers they collected from yoga practitioners in response to this question are quoted here:

*-Generally I am a happier, much more emotionally stable person, which is a change from how I was before yoga.*

*-Yoga has been the best thing I have ever done for myself! My self-esteem, fitness, flexibility, general health and well-being has improved dramatically. It has created a calmness and clarity within myself which I had been searching for.*

*-Practising yoga increases my quality of life tenfold. I am calmer, more balanced and more in tune with my physical and spiritual self, making me a better friend, lover and mother (Quotes from Yoga in Australia Survey Summary 2006: 4)*

In conversations with people who practice yoga, it is more common than not to hear about yoga as a basis for life transformation, particularly for people who have suffered from dissatisfaction, alienation, and chronic pain for whom the physical relief garnered through new physical habits developed in yoga has often meant spiritual as well as physical renewal, thus allowing them to be as the last quote suggests, “a better friend, lover and mother.” Several of the people I met who engage in yoga travel and practice yoga regularly talked to me about how yoga had transformed their lives. What these transformations are and what they are about is the subject of this dissertation. For the instant I wish to delineate that although yoga has been highly selectively repackaged (Carette and King 2005) in its modernization, the repackaged forms it takes cannot so easily be reduced to exploited simulacra of a ‘real thing’ that either no longer exists or is not available to the modern aspirant (Singleton and Byrne 2008). Alter (2004) makes this critique when discussing how Western forms of yoga, what Singleton refers to as “modern postural orthopraxis,” (2010: 21) or the “international *asana* revolution” (2010: 4) are often interpreted as a misunderstanding of Indian traditions.

Singleton and Byrne argue that in dismissing modern yoga as an inauthentic rendition of supposedly uncorrupted Indian traditions

the incense-burning, mantra chanting, “stretch-and-relax” Western yogi is doomed to inhabit an empty, second-order world of simulacra and pastiche, remaining forever in thrall to the narcissistic imperatives of postmodern culture and terminally disconnected from the core of Indian traditions (2008: 4-5).

Rather than dismiss yoga as a simulacra of authentic Indian forms of physical and spiritual culture, I am concerned with the massive proliferation of yoga under neoliberalism and how this relates to what Wood describes as “new technologies of the self through which people become involved with social authorities, rather than the clearing of social authority to provide space for the expression of individual’s selves” (2007:171). Here Wood seems to suggest that while people who practice things like spirit possession and channeling in settings he defines as New Age (or Euro-American) may feel they are expressing their individual spirituality, that from a social vantage, these practices are actually negotiations of new forms of social authority, thus equating with what Foucault describes as technologies of the self that have to do with circulating regimes of power.

If we accept this suggestion, then the question is raised as to what new forms of social authority are reflected in the drive towards the acquisition of self-knowledge in yoga? According to Foucault, knowledge about the self, produced through authoritative discourses (such as medicine, law and religion) should be historically situated through the concept of “truth games.” By seeing the origins of truth as play, Foucault is able draw attention to the techniques of understanding through which we as humans produce knowledge about ourselves. Using the term *techniques* or *technologies* highlights that truth and knowledge are products of human invention that have particular uses and effects, as much as mechanical devices or technologies have particular uses and effects. For Foucault, there are four types of these “technologies,” which rarely function in isolation, and which are involved in different modes of domination:

(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, and objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to *transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality* (Foucault 1988: 17-18, italics mine).

Foucault suggests that each of these categories “implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes (*ibid*).

Jennifer Lea, a human geographer at Loughborough University, takes up Foucault’s techniques of the self through a Deleuzian framework to explore the question of whether or not “Iyengar yoga offers possibilities for freedom and liberation, or whether it is just another practice of control and management” (2009: 71). Lea equates yoga with ‘New Age’ practices defined by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) as “a turn away from life lived in terms of external or “objective” roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one’s own subjective experiences (Lea 2009: 71). She argues however, using Foucault’s “examination of Ancient forms of subjective life in...*The Hermeneutics of the Subject*...that these are not new modes of life”, but rather that these practices of the self might instead be a “return to a *self-constituting* subjective relation of more Ancient forms that existed prior to the *constituted* subject prevalent in Christian moral systems” (2009: 72). Lea’s goal is to find out whether Iyengar<sup>8</sup> yoga, one of the most prevalent forms of transnational yoga in which there is an almost obsessive concern with minute adjustments to the alignment of the body, shows a return to what Foucault identifies as a self-constituting subjective relation and whether this might offer as Deleuze suggests, a potential for forms of subjectivity “that are no longer bound to ‘old [Christian] beliefs which we no longer believe’ (Deleuze, 1988: 107)” (Lea 2009: 72).

Basically, Lea is asking whether modern forms of yoga such as Iyengar, in the context of Foucault’s conceptualization of techniques of the self, offer a potential for liberation from forms of subjectivity constituted by salvation as self-renunciation in favour of an ethics of self-care. The suggestion is that the mode through which techniques of the self operate, in which individuals “transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988: 18) is undergoing a transformation from a Christian moral system of self-renunciation to one of self relation. These self-transformations, however, are not just about attaining desired states for the self in terms of “happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, immortality” (*ibid*), but may also be oriented to attaining these states in order to manifest them as new truths in the world. I believe Lea does not push the question far enough and that to understand how ethics of self-care function in contemporary yoga one must move beyond Foucault’s focus on the self as a human subject by drawing on emergent posthumanist critiques of neoliberalism (Wolfe 2010). I suggest that in some forms of contemporary yoga, transcendence of the subjective self

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<sup>8</sup> See DeMichelis (2004) for a history of the Iyengar yoga system.

becomes a means towards creating a new type of ontological politics of human-nature equivalence. I also suggest that this a response to to new forms of social authority under neoliberalism in which ethical consumption, undertaken at the level of individual choice, but manifest as a social consciousness, is seen as a potential for enacting political change by harnessing economic power towards social aims. In Chapter 5 I discuss ethical consumption in greater detail and how the type of subjectivities required of ethical consumers who see their consumer actions as constitutive of social relations and environmental care, relates to emergent posthuman theories that attempt to combat neoliberalism by positing new forms of subjectivity beyond/in opposition to the individualized human subject required of neoliberalism.

Referring back to Singleton's (2007) work on early modern Euro-American esotericisms, and particularly the growth of the New Thought movement out of unchurched Protestant religiosity, we can see how spiritual trends that began in the margins in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seem to have shifted, been renamed and reinterpreted, and moved to the mainstream in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Carrette and King (2005), in line with other critics of New Age religion, place the widespread popularization of yoga in line with other cultural trends prevalent in what they call the "contemporary New Age marketplace of religions" in which:

the wisdom of diverse ancient civilisations becomes commodified in order to serve the eclectic interests of 'spiritual consumers' in the contemporary New Age marketplace of religions. This fragmentation becomes a key part of the marketing strategy for contemporary forms of 'spirituality'. Historically rich and complex traditions are exploited by a selective re-packaging of the tradition, which is then sold as the 'real thing' (Carrette and King 2005: 87).

Although aspects of what Carrette and King (2005) write can be observed (and have been highly criticized in the *yoga blogosphere*<sup>9</sup>) in the world of modern yoga, one thing they overlook is that whether or not consumers are buying the 'real thing' of ancient teachings, they *are* buying and potentially *buying into* something that has real and often profound effects on their lives, and through which social and material landscapes are being creatively transformed. Anthropologists have demonstrated that habits, logics and enactments of consumption in vastly different contexts shape people's experiences of others, themselves and objects (including services, romantic encounters, and kinship relations) (Carrier 1995, Miller 2001, Frank 2002). Recent social theories about consumption are useful in thinking about how commodified yoga practices shape bodies, persons and lifeworlds *in line with* the type of spiritual worldview that may be coupled with consumer engagements in commodity regimes

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<sup>9</sup> I discuss the yoga blogosphere in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5.

of value. Greater and greater numbers of people are accessing yoga<sup>10</sup> through its marketization, and through this practice learning techniques of the body that have the potential to transform people's lives, including the social and material worlds they inhabit in unprecedented ways. These transformations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, in which I discuss the yoga travel locations where I conducted fieldwork, and how yoga has come to transform pathways of travel and local landscapes through market-driven narratives of self-realization. In Chapter 4 I will shift the discussion to the transformations of the body in yoga, and in Chapter 5 reflect on the potential and limitations for yoga to act as a point of coherent transformation of neoliberalized political and social realms.

### **Magical Consciousness, Self-transformation, and the Sacralization of the Body/World as Nature**

To go back to the question of what a better self through yoga is for, I ask what is the self relating to in these new expressions of spirituality? Csordas (2004) invokes alterity as the phenomenological kernel of religious experience, but in contemporary yoga what is invoked, as I suggested previously, is not a sense of self as separate from the world, i.e. world as "other," but rather self as world, other as self. I believe that recent scholarly work by anthropologists and religious scholars on magical consciousness (Greenwood 2009), religion and globalization (Csordas 2009) and nature religion (Taylor 2010) that aligns with posthuman conceptions of the relationship between humans and the worlds they not only inhabit but are constituted by, may help contextualize the new kinds of self/world-relation enlivened by yoga in terms of a sacralization of the body as nature.

The sacralization of the body and nature in contemporary yoga is reflected in Religious Studies scholar Chapple's translation and interpretation of ancient Sanskrit texts such as the *YS* through an environmentalist lens. He suggests that the entire philosophical premise of Patanjali's yoga system is one that is geared towards the realization of oneself as undifferentiated from nature, in which nature is not envisioned as a Divine other, but as a complex ecological system of relations that may be imbued with shared consciousness. His work exemplifies attitudes amongst many contemporary yoga practitioners that nature is sacred and the body as nature is the means through

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<sup>10</sup> According to a *Yoga Journal* survey, in 2008 15.8 million people in the US practice yoga with an estimated 9.4 million more say they will "definitely try it in the next year." The *Yoga in Australia Survey* echoes this trend with results showing that yoga was the 13<sup>th</sup> most popular physical activity in Australia in 2006. Yoga's popularity was expected to rise as more GPs were recommending yoga for therapeutic uses.

which to gain this experiential knowledge through the eightfold path of yoga. He describes each of these stages in line with current environmental ethics, the third stage, *asana* – which by far dominates the types of yoga practiced today – he interprets as demonstrating alignment with nature through the embodiment of animal forms since so many of the yoga *asanas* are named after animals. Here the body is shaped into the form of animals, thus supposedly embodying spiritual aspects of the animals themselves, which Chapple describes through reference to “shamanic aspects of animal mimesis” (Chapple 2012<sup>11</sup>). Ecologically speaking, Chapple suggests, animal mimesis teaches us to be “empathetic and connected from our experience of and relationship with animals... Yoga heightens our senses and brings us into visceral relationship with the nonhuman realm, our own sense of worth, well-being and connectedness becomes enhanced” (2012: see footnote 9).

Chapple demonstrates one reading of how yoga connects us, through our bodies, with the natural world. Alter (2004) suggests that the modernization of yoga in India led to its reformulation through discourses of health, and its physical techniques as methods for expanding the potential of the human body. Mimetically embodying the essence of animals and thus enhancing our capacity for movement and connection with the natural world, according to Chapple (2012), is one such potential. There are also other ideals for the body prevalent in Western esoteric systems such as theosophy and New Thought (Singleton 2008), in which the rooting of the body in nature is interpreted through scientific terms rather than shamanistic principles and in which sacredness manifests as acquisition of wellbeing rather than union with nature. In these ideals, the fit, healthy, optimal, vital body expresses the qualities of the inner spiritual qualities of the person through sacred terms manifested in emotional states of happiness, wellbeing and, Singleton (2008) suggests, economic prosperity. Both of these conceptualization of yoga, 1) as a system of nature worship through the body, and 2) as a lifestyle choice of self care, fit into what Taylor (2000) describes as nature religion. The second, which I discuss more fully in Chapter 5 is ensconced in the marketized aspects of new religions through emergent forms of ethical consumption in which choices for self-fulfillment align with environmentalist politics. The sacralization of the body in yoga relates to the sacralization of nature more generally in New Age circles and growing environmental sensibilities in the middle and upper middle classes. Taylor argues that this sacralization of nature is a view that is also shared by many scientists, particularly those with a connection to ecology.

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<sup>11</sup> This is an online resource located at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t304.e981> and accessed on: 05/05/2012. I reference the author and date to avoid having to include the lengthy url in the body of the text when I cite particular sections of this work).

What I wish to draw out of Taylor's discussion of earth, green, or nature religion, is precisely his focus on the emergence of a shared view of nature as sacred from a variety of religious and scientific viewpoints. In contemporary yoga this emerges through two primary discourses: the "body as temple," as one of the women I interviewed said, and the yogi as ethical or green consumer, both of which are oriented towards intentionally transforming the body to enact desired transformations in the world. The body as sacred in contemporary yoga, I would argue, derives not so much from an idea of the body as the source of union with the divine, but from the body as part of nature, and therefore sacred. This body is understood as precultural and premodern, and this is important, because it informs the ideology that in caring for one's own body one is caring for nature, and therefore to the betterment not only of self, but of world. Caring for the body then is akin to caring for the environment. This care becomes extended primarily in terms of ethical or green consumer choices, in which what one eats and puts on the body should also be drawn from an ethics of nature care. In this model, our impoverished (modern) bodies are symbols for the degraded (industrial) earth, both inherited from previous generations. Though we may discount and despise the inheritance of impoverished body and a degraded earth, strangely enough, we continue to attempt to re-enliven what we understand as lost sacredness through commodity regimes rooted in capitalistic economies of value. In these economies, both people and nature are resources from which value is extracted as materials or labour, thus alienating ourselves from ourselves and from the places we inhabit. Contemporary yoga can therefore be read as a range of contradictory methods for reclaiming the body for the self, with the *idea* of in so doing of reclaiming nature for the world.

Scholarship on modern yoga seeks to uncover the meanings and realities that emerge from modern innovations to yoga, and in so doing, to question: 1) categories of tradition and authenticity, and 2) the motivations and claims made about yoga by individuals, schools, governments, practitioners, and scholars. Again, Singleton and Byrne point out that for most modern practitioners, what is at stake is not necessarily the authenticity of the practices themselves, but practitioners' "own authenticity with regard to themselves and their place and purpose in the world" (2008: 6). The relationship to Wood's (2007) characterization of the emergence of new forms of self-authority, here with regards to authenticity, is obvious. What yoga provides for many of these practitioners is "a privileged site of an authenticity otherwise unavailable or deficient in their daily experience, a more "authentic" way of being" (ibid). I suggest that this more "authentic" way of being relates to a belief that nature is sacred and that by caring for the body through yoga, one begins to enliven a relationship with the world in which new types of experiential knowledge

about nature and the self invigorate *magical consciousness* (Greenwood 2009) leading to a what Csordas (2009a and b) refers to as a reenchantment of the world, a renewed emergence of religion and spirituality under globalization. This reenchantment, according to Csordas, contradicts predictions made in the early 20th century that modernism and scientific rationalism would lead to the abandonment of mysticism and religion.

Csordas' edited volume on religion and globalization brings together a number of essays that explore "the existence of modalities of religious intersubjectivity that are both experientially compelling and transcend cultural borders and boundaries" (2009: 1). Transcendence in this volume thus applies both to movement across geospatial borders and motivations towards moving beyond mundane worldly existence towards the realization of divinity. Csordas suggests that:

[t]hese modalities of intersubjectivity are explicitly religious, but precisely because they are immersed in the political and economic, social and cultural, institutional and ideological they partake of and contribute to an emergent global social imaginary that may amount to the re-enchantment of the world (2009a: 1-2).

Csordas suggests (after Kürti 2001) that we consider processes of religious change through the term "cultic milieu" rather than "spiritual marketplace." He suggests, as do Greenwood (2009) and Taylor (2010), that this allows for more in-depth analyses and understandings about subjective and intersubjective experiences of religious phenomena, such as mystical or sacred experience, rather than relying on economic reductionism as the sole factor in the globalization of religion. "It is more productive," Csordas suggests:

to understand globalization from the outset as a multidimensional process, with religion, popular culture, politics, and economics as necessarily coeval and intimately intertwined, as they are in the lives of actors responsible for bringing about globalization in the first place (2009a: 3)

In the remainder of this dissertation I focus on spiritual transformation, economics and embodiment in my discussion of yoga, as all are salient in understanding the contexts and affects of its contemporary expression. Greenwood's ideas about *magical consciousness* as a "pan-human phenomena" expressed through varying cultural formations aligns with Csordas' (2009a, 2009b) intent to pay anthropological attention to the relationships between religion and globalization, what

he identifies as the multiple features of a (re)enchanted world<sup>12</sup>. The work of these anthropologists offer useful analogies for thinking about the type of global consciousness invoked through yogic methods of self-transcendence and how these relate to economic, political, social, and cultural processes of globalization more broadly, particularly the impetus towards universalism and the type of cultural fragmentation historians of modern yoga have described (Singleton 2010, De Michelis 2004) as yoga has undergone globalization. Greenwood cites recent anthropological works to demonstrate significant growth in the interest of how magic is practiced in Western cultures, associating this growth with processes of modernity (as do other scholars with yoga (Alter 2004, De Michelis 2004, Singleton 2010)). “*Magic* covers a repertoire of related terms and has versatility and plasticity,” Greenwood suggests, and it “is now increasingly being employed as a counterpoint to liberal understandings of modernity’s rational progress” (Greenwood 2009: 2). Magic, offers Greenwood, may be a way for practitioners to think and act beyond humanism and overarching neoliberal regimes of rationalization.

I suggest that Greenwood’s description of magical consciousness relates to processes involved in the development of contemporary yoga, particularly in the ways it may help practitioners combat the embodied anxieties of neoliberalism within a global economic regime that seems totalizing (Bourdieu 1998), which I discuss more fully in Chapters 4 and 5. This relates to what Wood (2007) observes in how New Age believers relate to their own status ambiguity under neoliberalism. It should not be surprising that as yoga has proliferated and undergone globalization through the spread of yoga online, processes of mediatization (Csordas 2009a) and a massive expansion in yoga studios worldwide and the growth of global yoga tourism, that it has come to be

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<sup>12</sup> Csordas suggests that the first half of the 20th Century was characterized by “an anticipation that enlightened rationalism and sober secularism would render religion obsolete,” while the second half was marked by “a resurgence of religious sensibility and a revitalized appeal of the transcendent” (2009a: 1). In the introduction to his edited volume on religion and globalization, he writes:

the present global situation calls into question an understanding that the world is undergoing a progressive and irreversible secularization (Asad 2003) or disenchantment (Gauchet 1997). The sleeping giant of religion, whose perpetual dream is our collective dream as a species, has never died, and it is now in the process of at least rolling over and at most leaping to its feet. Yet in one of the most vital contemporary arenas of scholarly debate in the human sciences - that having to do with world systems, transnationalism, and globalization - the role of religion remains understudied and undertheorized (Csordas 2009a: 1).

Csordas goes on to suggest that there is a global emergence of forms of religious intersubjectivity and that this “transnational transcendence,” points to the convergence of “traversing boundaries [as] an aspiration to the universal... [and] the intersubjectivity forged among adherents [as] an aspiration to the sacred” (ibid). He suggests that this resurgence in forms of globalized religiosity and impetus towards transcendence or aspirations to the sacred point to “an emergent social imaginary that may amount to a reenchantment of the world” (Csordas 2009a: 2). It is Csordas’ contention that in this reenchantment, previous manifestations of globalized religions that may have been characterized by a divide between immanence and transcendence, are being formulated in terms of alterity (I am not going to take up Csordas’ arguments about alterity here, see Csordas 2004 for an elaboration of alterity).

reformulated. Singleton (2008) has suggested that early adaptations of yoga in the UK and the US were developed in Western esoteric circles as syncretic adaptations of detraditionalized Protestantism. “Magic,” Greenwood writes, “is also highlighted in a detraditionalisation of mainstream religions, whereby people turn from more orthodox practices and explore the direct experience of alternative spiritualities such as versions of esoteric Judaism and Christianity as well as various forms of paganism” (2009: 2).

Greenwood takes this argument further, writing that:

It is [the] commonality of magic as a cosmological world view that enables us to make the comparisons between what might, on the surface, seem to be completely different practices of magic. A recent anthropological example that demonstrates this approach has compared African witchdoctors with Western political spin-doctors... While the spin-doctors might not be consciously working with magic *per se*, they are using emotional processes of mind that work in a magical or occult (hidden) fashion. Magical processes of mind are fuelled through emotion. By connecting with the desires of the voting public, these politicians try to ensure their own popularity and the popularity of their political agendas [i.e. they manipulate emotions to gain power] (Greenwood 2009: 3-4).

Anthropologists have long been interested in talk in shared aspects of religious experiences and knowledge *across cultures*. This trend is reflected today in an increasing anthropological focus on the importance of understanding points of connection in an age of globalization when contact between peoples through various flows of ideas, images, technologies, and actual migrations are resulting in the need for new approaches to understanding religious/sacred/spiritual experience and interstices of power. Greenwood claims that a universalist focus allows for “an orientation towards what connects, rather than what divides, us human beings” (2009: 5). She suggests that magic must be understood on the macro as well as micro levels, both universal and particular, in order to make connections between phenomena (such as yoga, nature religion and magic as an aspect of consciousness) that might not at first seem to be connected, and in this manner looking at ourselves as well as others.

Greenwood suggests that one of the reasons magic in Western societies has not been examined more closely by anthropologists is because of the threat magic has come to symbolize particularly in its practice, represented in the word *maleficium*. There is a connection here with the perception of magic in the Indian context as relates to yoga and the abhorrence for yoga’s physical forms amongst Indian householders and early European colonists that I referred to earlier. White (2009) describes what he calls the *sinister yogi*, in all his physical grotesqueries as menacing and potentially dangerous in his acquisition and use of yogic powers to take over other people’s bodies

and influence their minds. In the *Yoga-sutras* (YS), there is an entire chapter devoted to the acquisition of these powers (*siddhis*), which can be attained by the yogic adept once he has achieved mastery over the lower rungs of the eightfold path. The YS also reminds us that these powers are not the goal of yoga, but steps along the path and that there is a danger of over-identifying with these powers and losing touch with the real goal of *samadhi* (union) outlined in the YS.

“Magic,” Greenwood writes,

is an art that stems from a universal process of mind that has been systematically undermined and undervalued in Western cultures. Western cultural understandings have influenced the way in which Westerners view magic, and we therefore often find it difficult to write about magical [or in the case of yoga what are usually described as mystical] experiences (2009: 8).

As I suggested previously, Greenwood’s approach to understanding magic and magical consciousness ties in well with Csordas’ vision of a reenchantment of the world, and both of these approaches are useful for understanding the global popularization of yoga, particularly in terms of its connection with forms of green tourism that have emerged in recent decades, and the mystical or “magical” experiences that arise in yoga. Connecting with nature through green tourism, discovering the self in yoga, and better yet discovering the self *and* connecting with nature through yoga tourism, should be understood both as 1) social practices embedded in fields and discourses of power, *and* 2) embodied transformational phenomena for which practitioners seek to find meaning in the rationalized secular social milieus they normally inhabit. Does yoga’s proliferation mark an increased concern with spirituality among practitioners? While I did not address this question directly in my research, there does seem to be a marked interest in spirituality among yoga practitioners. The credo of yoga as good for body/mind/spirit, is prevalent in contemporary yoga circles. Caring for the body in yoga is also expressed through wider spiritual goals of caring for all life by doing no harm, a position frequently brought up by Yoga Teachers drawing on the principle of *ahimsa* (non-harming), the first of *Patanjali’s* five *yamas*, as described in the *Yoga-sutras*. As Singleton and Byrne (2008) suggest, yoga provides meaning for practitioners, although the meaning of yoga varies, a concern with spiritual wellbeing is interwoven with the drive towards healthier bodies and calmer minds as described benefits of yoga practice.

One important point raised by scholars and critics of nature spiritualities is the complex issue of cultural “borrowing” that characterize some of these movements. This critique has also been leveled at yoga in terms of how the legacies of British colonialism in India and Indian nationalist agendas have shaped the transformation of yoga in its modernization (Alter 2004, De Michelis 2004, Strauss 2005). Indigenous peoples and anthropologists are highly critical of some forms of cultural appropriation by New Age religious practitioners. However, there is also the need

for critical analyses of the cultural, political and economic conditions under which cultural “borrowing” takes place and how these processes are implicated in wider global processes:

Pagans generally express affinity with what they perceive to be the nature-beneficent spiritualities and lifeways of indigenous peoples, viewing these as kindred to their own religious outlooks. Some try to draw on such spiritualities in their own religious lives (as do many New Age practitioners). However, controversial this may be, it is clear that apart from the predominantly Caucasian populations involved in contemporary, Euro-American Paganism, there has also been a stunning revival of indigenous cultures and spiritualities purporting to consider nature sacred and promoting ethics of kinship toward all creatures.... The trope of the ecological Indian, at least if religiously and culturally traditional, has broken out widely in western culture.... Even if sometimes simplistic and romantic, western popular culture has increasingly responded with positive affirmations of the perceived “nature-as-sacred” spiritualities of indigenous peoples (Taylor 2004: 996).

Taylor identifies these processes more broadly as the greening of the world’s religions, whether emergent in the ‘major’ world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Shintoism, etc. or in New Religious Movements such as New Age, with which the link to yoga has already been demonstrated. Aware of the problematics of cultural “borrowing” of “nature-as-sacred” spirituality from Indigenous traditions, Taylor is nonetheless interested in both the ecological origins and potential ecological implications of these processes:

Many New Age and New Religious Movements, environmentalism itself, and mainstream religions as well, have attempted to learn, borrow, appropriate, or steal (depending on one’s ethical evaluation of such phenomena or the specific example of it at hand) from indigenous religions. While New Age religion has a reputation for otherworldliness and inattention to politics, viewing consciousness change as the prerequisite to positive social change and reharmonizing life on earth, some of its proponents view environmental protection and restoration as important to the process, for healthy ecosystems contribute critically important energies to the envisioned and needed consciousness transformations. James Redfield’s series of books on the “*Celestine Prophecy*” provide one example. These books and ethnographic fieldwork show that under the “cultic milieu” of oppositional religious subcultures there is substantial cross-fertilization. This helps to explain the greening of the New Age movement as well as aspects of New Age worldviews and practices permeating contemporary environmental movements (Taylor 2004: 997).

Greenwood (2005) suggests that as anthropologists we need to look more deeply into the lives of the people who take up practices such as yoga or neo-shamanism and the regimes of value within which they are located. She argues that if we desire to develop an understanding of how practitioners take up and experience new religious practices that may be “borrowed” from other cultures, what we need is an anthropology of consciousness that considers how consciousness is altered and experienced through these practices:

Vitebsky, in a comparison of Sora shamanism in tribal India and ethnic revival shamanism in Arctic Siberia, claims that indigenous knowledge loses its holistic world-view when appropriated by New Age neo-shamanists; when transplanted it becomes global rather than local cosmological knowledge (2003: 295-296). An alternative approach is to see nature religion not as a counter-cultural movement [as in some yoga circles], or as an expression of a form of global

knowledge [Alter, Strauss], but as an expanded form of consciousness that is common to all humans. I shall argue that if nature religion is studied in terms of magical consciousness then holism, a central defining feature of indigenous knowledge, is not lost but just expressed in a different cultural and physical context (Greenwood 2005: 4).

Recent approaches to Nature Religion and magical consciousness consider the consciousness aspects of what experiential forms of new religious practices provide for those who practice them, rather than discounting these new religious forms as simply cultural appropriation because they tend to be trends emergent amongst white middle class consumers. In Chapter 4 I shall discuss this in terms of how yoga operates in the body and how this relates to consciousness through affect. This is not a means to negate the political and economic circumstances under which the “borrowing” of Indigenous spiritualities, or yoga from Indian traditions has occurred through complex forces of colonialism and imperialism, but rather to ask what happens to these practices and to the people who practice them in new cultural contexts.

In conclusion to this chapter, in which I have explored and brought into focus, different scholarly approaches to yoga, religion, globalization, magic and nature, I offer that what was often expressed by my subjects who saw yoga as part of their larger life practice was a desire for embodying the inner spirit through transcendence of the social self as an ethical imperative to create a better self and by so doing to create a better world. Power is acquired and expressed through actions and choices on and for the self and demonstrated in responses of the body and the mind to these intentions. New modes of (positive) thought are created such that the fabric of the body as moldable through conscious intention becomes a symbol for the malleability of the fabric of the world. One weaves the self into a more ideal self by molding the body not just to more ideal outward forms, but better feeling inner forms (physically as well as emotionally) and thus learns by bodily-generated experience of pleasure, relaxation and wellbeing that the world may also be thus molded. Here the world may entail different features, including nature, society, culture, family, economy, basically any features which are seen to exist beyond the boundaries of the body, but for which the body acts as metaphor. The body is nature, nature is the world, and the socially constructed self is seen as a barrier to accessing that spiritual connection that is the “true” nature of body and world. In the following chapters I explore these themes more closely, narrating different paths of yogic journeying and possible ways of understanding these within wider social and cultural contexts.

## Chapter 2 Methodology: Autoethnography of the body, Multi-siting Yoga Tourism, and Virtually doing Yoga Online

In this chapter I describe the methods and methodologies that framed this research project. I draw on various anthropological approaches to: 1) autoethnography, 2) multi-sited participant observation, and 3) anthropology online. In correspondence to the above three categories, three primary sources of “data” inform this research project. These sources include 1) my own embodied experience of yoga, 2) information drawn from participant observation and interviews with yoga practitioners and enactors of yoga tourism, and 3) visual and textual data produced through technologies involved in the global production of yoga.

To answer questions about yoga tourism I employed both multi-sited ethnography and online research of yoga tourism media. My interlocutors, *the enactors of yoga tourism*, include yoga tourists (the consumers), owners and organizers of yoga retreats (the producers), staff employed to fulfill the needs of travelers (the workers), and teachers required to transmit the practices (the knowledge-transmitters). To answer questions about yoga and to add depth of engagement to the transient field of yoga tourism, I used my own embodied experiences of learning to practice yoga and training to become a Yoga Teacher, a process that has been ongoing since 2005.

The online research portion of the study, which I characterize as the *technologies of the global production of yoga*, also brought me into contact with other kinds of producers with whom interlocution took a one-way form, namely I consumed the information provided by producers of yoga and yoga tourism websites. Materials gathered online form an integral part of the data for both contemporary yoga and yoga tourism. I consider online research as a distinct undertaking from both the multi-sited participant observation I employed at yoga tourism destinations and the autoethnography I employed in my exploration of *the embodied self in contemporary yoga* (which also includes yoga tourism). I make this distinction because of the embodied nature of my research in which I pay primary attention to the role of the body in the research of yoga. Accessing knowledge about yoga through practice and under the supervision of a teacher is a different embodied experience than sitting at a computer and typing words into a search engine to locate information about potential experiences one might have through yoga. Phenomenologically speaking, there are important differences between practicing yoga at home (usually alone), with guidance from a video recording or video-stream than practicing with others in a social space specifically delimited for yoga (Persson 2007). The distinctions I am referring to include the phenomenology of space and place in terms of the yoga studio or classroom being marked symbolically and ritualistically as a

“sacred” practice space, and from a yogic perspective, the shared energy that passes between practitioners’ bodies as they breathe the same air, move their bodies in unison, and generate heat or *tapas* together. The degree to which these distinctions matter may shift over time and with the engagements one has with her yoga practice. Or they may not even be consciously marked, as online yoga practices are produced to simulate “studio class” or “yoga in nature,” experiences and promote the idea of a connected community through user profiles, teacher blogs and comments so that one feels her practice is connected to other people even when it is undertaken alone. Practitioners may also, as yoga websites suggest, “create a sacred practice space at home,” or simply “see their yoga mat as a sacred space, no matter where they place it” (field notes).

Despite these experiential distinctions, contemporary practices of yoga and particularly yoga tourism exist in current manifestations largely because of the widespread access to information about yoga available to potential consumers online. These sites include the websites of yoga tourism locations, yoga blogs, practice pages and other yoga-oriented websites<sup>13</sup> that can be accessed via computers and increasingly by hand-held devices such as smart phones. Internet data heavily inform my analysis of both contemporary yoga and yoga tourism. I argue, following Singleton’s (2010) analysis of visuality and imaging technologies and print in the history of contemporary yoga, that the role of the Internet in contemporary yoga and yoga tourism cannot be underestimated. The online yoga “community” functions as the primary venue for enlivening acts of potential consumption in which consumers are drawn into the fantasy worlds of yoga and tourism. Through what is referred to as the “*yoga blogosphere*,” or “*bloga*” it also functions as a site of critique, contestation and self-study of contemporary yoga worlds. Yoga websites with a marketing component create online simulated experiential desires of wellbeing and self-transformation, enlivened through images, texts, and interactive technologies to awaken instances of future becoming for the embodied self. Yoga Teachers and practitioners both consume and contest these images and texts through interactive technologies thus continuously reshaping how yoga is understood and undertaken by practitioner/consumers.

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<sup>13</sup> I go into detail about yoga online in Chapter 5, in which I discuss the contemporary yoga scene.

## **My Body as Field [and] Site of Experiential Knowledge**

For we can compare the yogic process to aligning all the “lenses” of our personality, so that the arrangement produces a highly focused laser beam: our single-minded intent to transcend the ego and thereby awaken to our true nature – the ultimate Reality. In light of this, it is perhaps best to speak of Yoga as the intentional discipline of spiritual realization, or liberation (Feuerstein 2007: 40).

In this section I detail my methodological approach to studying yoga experientially through the medium of my body. I take up autoethnography as a means of exploring my own experiences within the (sometimes ambiguous, contradictory and vague) frameworks of knowledge transmitted through the teachings of contemporary yoga, characterized by White as “a commodity,” which “about 16 million Americans practice yoga every year.” White suggests that contemporary yoga:

means going to a yoga center with yoga mats, yoga clothes, and yoga accessories, and practicing in groups under the guidance of a yoga teacher or trainer. Here, yoga practice comprises a regimen of postures (*asanas*) – sometimes held for long periods of time, sometimes executed in rapid sequence – often together with techniques of breath control (*pranayama*) (White 2012: 1).

As I outlined in Chapter 1, my research on contemporary yoga tourism aligns with the contributors to Singleton and Byrne’s (2008) volume, in which research about yoga also consists of a dedicated yoga practice, such that the researcher’s body becomes a site of knowledge production about the “regimen of postures” and techniques of breath control learned through yoga. Like other autoethnographic approaches, this methodological orientation assumes “that we are always already part of the social and material world, as bodies among bodies, shot through with meaning” (Roth 2005: 8) and that these meanings have implications in structuring our perceptions of the world. What kinds of meanings are shot through the bodies of practitioner/consumers of yogic knowledge in the social and material worlds of contemporary yoga? In addition to participant observation, discussions, interviews and reading through yoga practitioners’ blogs, online commentaries and books, my approach to this question also considers how knowledge is produced in yoga through my own experiences.

In order to do this I must necessarily adopt two different methodological approaches: autoethnography and yoga. The methods of yoga are themselves a complex methodological approach to acquiring knowledge about the self and the nature of reality. In line with contemporary yoga scholars (Alter 2004, Singleton 2008, 2010 DeMichelis 2004, Smith 2008, Strauss 2005), I emphasize the importance of contextualizing the methods and techniques of yoga learned in contemporary settings within larger social, political, economic and historic frameworks. Contemporary channels of yogic education define these frameworks, as do the locations where yoga

classes take place and the suite of commodities that accompany yoga practice. Rather than uncritically accept these teachings and the experiences they produce as ancient “truth” (as they are often presented) I employ an autoethnographic lens to interrogate the claims made in contemporary yoga discourses about the nature of body, being, experience and reality. Here yoga is understood as a method within its own framework and logic. As Alter (2004) argues in his study of yoga in Modern India, yoga is a sophisticated set of practices based on theories about the nature of what it means to be an embodied sentient being as well as an ethics of being which concerns the nature of interrelationship with the world.

While there certainly is no widespread agreement about what the goal of yoga actually is, as I discuss throughout this dissertation, the most widely circulated authenticating text for contemporary yoga is the *Yoga-sutras* (YS) (Singleton 2008). The YS is often interpreted as a practical path through which to transcend the mundane levels of human experience which produce suffering in order to achieve spiritual liberation or union. According to this path, spiritual liberation arises only through direct experience of Reality unencumbered by identification with the individual ego (*ahamkara*) (<http://www.swamij.com/fourfunctionsmind.htm>: 10/01/2011). Yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein (2007) (and many other yoga scholars who write about yoga in English), equates the limited perspective of the individualized self as the source of suffering. This individualized self is often interpreted through the analogy of the ego defined in Western psychological models, hence pursuits that occur at the level of satisfying the desires of individualized identity are termed *egoic* (Stone 2011), and are seen as barriers to experiencing *samadhi*, the state of non-fluctuating consciousness or union. However, the goals of yoga in popular culture might also be broadly said to be (as *Moksa Yoga*, a franchise of “Hot Yoga” studios, coins it) “Fit Body, Calm Mind, Inspired Life.” It is not my goal in this dissertation to analyze the yoga system from the point of view of one engaged in yoga terminology, such as a Sanskritist, philosopher or Religious Studies scholar (i.e. Feuerstein 1980, 1990, 1998, Chapple 2003, 2008, Whicher 1998, White 2012). I do not read Sanskrit nor have I embodied the teachings of yoga with enough mastery or total commitment to practice to argue between different terms, and I am not a philosopher. I am an anthropologically-trained practitioner of contemporary yoga. My goal as an ethnographer interested in contemporary yoga practice and yoga tourism is to show how some of the concepts of yoga are used in popular writing intended for yoga practitioners who live as members of industrialized consumer societies and incorporate yoga as practice into lives that would have no experience of yoga outside of its popularization. What I am more interested in from translations of texts such as the *Yoga-sutra* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, are the interpretations made by Yoga Teachers and instructors attempting to transmit the “ancient

wisdom” of the texts to modern audiences, and how these audiences then understand and engage with these texts in their lives. This is what I mean when I talk about the logic and framework of yoga. It is by all means a hybrid and in many ways contradictory and ambiguous domain that is in continuous flux and shares a number of elements with wider systems of self-practice that some scholars call New Age, as I discussed in Chapter 1 (Wood 2007).

How yoga, as a practice rooted in Indian cultural history, is taken up as an inspiration and tool for self-betterment is one of the questions asked in this research project. This aligns with other anthropological approaches to cultural “borrowing,” of religious systems such as Muir’s research on how Aboriginal Australian cultural practices are taken up “as an inspiration and tool for “New Age” self-expression” (Muir 2004:185). A difference between Muir’s study of cultural borrowing of Aboriginal Australian practices by New Agers and the borrowing and transformation of yoga in contemporary consumer milieus, is the presence of a well-developed academic field already devoted to the study of yoga outside of anthropology. In the case of yoga it is not just anthropologists, “New Agers,” and “natives” (i.e. Australian Aboriginals or Indian yogis) involved in negotiating and producing knowledge, but also Indologists and Religious Studies scholars, who have been studying yoga from the point of view of comparative religions and Eastern philosophy since early colonialism (Singleton 2010). While these studies are imperative for understanding yoga philosophy as one of the six major *darsanas* or orthodox Indian philosophical systems, and therefore for providing interpretations and translations of yoga texts such as the *Yoga-sutras* that heavily influence and in particular, lend authenticity to yoga practice today (Singleton 2008), they are not on their own necessarily helpful for understanding contemporary globalized yoga.

An autoethnographic exploration of yoga as the “intentional discipline,” described by Feuerstein in the opening quote to this section, arises from the point of view of a practitioner reflexively situated in a range of pre-existing identifications (i.e. a social as well as spiritual-physiological being). In my embodiment of yoga I reflect and explore the dimensions of experience revealed through my own yoga practice. I go beyond this by using an anthropological lens to consider my experiences of yoga as culturally situated occurrences. My body is not meant to stand in for all bodies, but is used as a means to search “for understanding of others (culture/society) through self” (Chang 2008:49). Autoethnography forms one component of my research process, albeit a fundamental one: by reflecting on my own yogic unfolding, I explore process as I produce text. As Chang writes:

[T]hree aspects make autoethnography similar to and different from other ethnographies. First, like ethnographers, autoethnographers follow a similar ethnographic research process by systematically collecting data, “field texts”... analyzing and interpreting them, and producing scholarly reports.... Second, like ethnographers, autoethnographers attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation... [wherein] self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture... The last aspect of autoethnography sets it apart from other ethnographic inquiries. Autoethnographers use their personal experience as primary data... Yet, individual stories are framed in the context of the bigger story, a story of the society, to make autoethnography ethnographic (Chang 2008 48-49).

Chapter four of this dissertation considers in greater detail the story of yoga as an embodied system of praxis and how I understand this through my own embodiment. In the current chapter I elaborate on how autoethnography enriches potential gaps in multi-sited ethnography and describe the types of “data” that inform my autoethnographic process. In addition to addressing some of the self-reflexive gaps and lack of deep exposure that critics of multi-sited ethnography have identified (Falzon 2009, Muir 2003), the autoethnographic aspect of my research suffuses the research project with a sense of ongoing time that would be absent if I relied only on participant observation at short-stay yoga retreats<sup>14</sup>.

Roth argues that “auto/biography<sup>15</sup> and auto/ethnography are legitimate ways of establishing intersubjectivity that escape the false dichotomy opposing objectivism and subjectivism,” he suggests that “[a]uto/biography, auto/ethnography, and other first-person methods enacted together with radical doubt are important aspects in making rigorous any disciplinary method” (2005: 6-7). Through autoethnography, paired with radical doubt, the researcher engages critically with both the production of knowledge as an academic and, in this case yogic undertaking, casting reflective light on both the subject of study and the methodological processes that inform embodied anthropological research on yoga. This process bears striking

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<sup>14</sup> Research for the yoga tourism portion of this dissertation took place over roughly 7 months, and included stays at 6 yoga tourism destinations for between 1 week and 1 month. I describe each location in Chapter 3 and compare each site to the wider yoga tourism landscape. Of importance in delimiting the amount of time I spent in the field was the high cost of yoga tourism, which limited both the amount of time I was able to stay at certain locations, and the total number of locations I was able to visit.

<sup>15</sup> Roth uses the slashes in writing auto/biography and auto/ethnography to forefront the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, wherein each always exists in relation to the other. He suggests through this relationship that auto/biography is always also “biography, a pattern of life history not only of an other but also of a generalized other; [and that] auto/ethnography therefore always also is ethnography, the exploration of culture in general, whether it is someone else’s, or, because of transference and countertransference in the research process, one’s own” (2005: 4-5). While I agree with Roth on this point, that autoethnography is also ethnography, using the self as the means through which to generalize about the other, I do not employ the slash in my writing, assuming that the dialectical relationship between self and other, individual and society, is implicitly suggested by the pairing of the terms auto and ethnography in the first place.

resemblance to Alter's (2004) elaboration of mimetic skepticism as an anthropological means to theorizing yoga.

In Alter's approach to yoga the researcher must take seriously yoga's claims about the nature of Reality while at the same time remaining skeptical about them. This skepticism places the researcher in a position that considers yoga as a societal story and cultural product, *an invention articulated and enlivened by human beings*. This distinction is important when considering yoga as an embodied system of praxis because yoga itself (theoretically<sup>16</sup>) is methodologically grounded in a different ontological order than both anthropology and science (even though science is often used to substantiate yoga's claims (Alter 2004, Maxwell 2009, Moadal et al 2007, Monteiro de Barros et al 2008, Watts 2000)). This is because yoga articulates ultimate claims about the nature of Reality in which the social order and individual identification of embodied selfhood is ultimately an illusion. In order to reach this level of yogic knowledge, that is, in order to become liberated, as Feuerstein describes above, one must transcend social and material reality, and this can only be done experientially, by moving beyond the ego (*ahamkara*) and breaking attachment to dialectically generated thought as "true" information about reality. From a perspective grounded in yoga, anthropology can offer no insights into the reality of yogic experience since anthropology is grounded in an ontological presupposition that material and social worlds are real, and foundational to the production of knowledge. I will not elaborate on this theoretical crux here, exploring it in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but simply introduce it here as a theme of irresolvable

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<sup>16</sup> Scholars who study contemporary yoga (Alter 2004, Singleton 2010, Sjoman 1996, White 2012) make clear that the physical systems of contemporary yoga (coined Modern Postural Yoga by DeMichelis 2004) are only tenuously descended from the various permutations of ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Jain yoga systems and what has been termed as the "Classical" yoga of the *Yoga-sutra* (YS). This means that my claim that yoga is grounded in a different ontological order than anthropology and science can only partially be considered to be valid since, as Alter (2004) argues, contemporary yoga, in both India and its globalized manifestations, has been heavily influenced by modern scientific discourses, particularly medicine. However, I wish to tease through this partiality because I believe it can shed light on some of the contradictions of contemporary yoga – the irresolvable cruxes – in the commodification of yoga and the types of experiences that result when seemingly contradictory fields of commodity, spirituality, and "ancient truth" are mixed. There has been a growing tendency among contemporary yoga practitioners and teachers to refer to Patañjali's *Yoga-sutra* as the bible of yoga (personal experience in yoga classes), and to attempt to infuse modern *asana* classes with wisdom from the *Yoga-sutra* as though these modern elaborations of yoga are direct descendents of the logic of liberation outlined in this text of "Classical" yoga. Singleton argues, "that Patañjali has been co-opted by modern yoga practitioners seeking to authenticate their own practice" (2008: 10). I raise this point here because although the story of contemporary yoga as the progeny of Patañjali's "Classical" text is untenable from a historical perspective that considers the multitude of forces responsible for yoga's transformation in the two-thousand years since the *YS* was written, the use of this text as an authenticating philosophical treatise for transmitting yogic knowledge continues to be prevalent in contemporary yoga. How the ontology of liberation in the *YS* interacts with a highly materialistic framework of consumption in contemporary yoga to produce embodied experiences that are meant to reveal to the practitioner the True nature of being is one aspect I am concerned with exploring through autoethnography.

contradiction that emerges when one engages phenomenologically and critically with the nature of experience in contemporary yoga.

Roth writes, “the very condition of having experiences at all is that as body among bodies” (2005: 8). Following Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, Roth suggests that, “without our material bodies, no cognition would be possible... [h]aving a body that moves about the world is a precondition of all perception” (2005: 8). In both yoga and phenomenologically grounded autoethnography, experience produces knowledge, even though the nature of experience is understood to arise from different ontological planes. My embodied yogic transformations, minor liberations and conflicts, situated within the context of my own doubts and skepticism are thus reflexively lit to expose both the becoming of my yogic body and potentially other yogic bodies, and the embodied situatedness of myself as an “observing organism that has its history” (Roth 2005: 8).

The history of my subjective self, disciplinarily grounded in anthropology and culturally located in a gendered, sexed, and generationally situated Métis/French-Canadian working class background of identifications emerges in the autoethnography through instances of specific generalization in which self colludes with other to produce the intersubjective me. Later on I will introduce the consumer frameworks of interaction that bind me and potential other me’s in yogic worlds of being that emerge through *newly created* yogic markets. How systematic forces of a globalizing neoliberal<sup>17</sup> world have created yoga as a market, and how this new market acts to

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<sup>17</sup> When I talk about neoliberalism and the neoliberal state or the state, I am referring to the suite of effects and transformations in the nature and role of the state under current globalizing regimes that embrace and deploy the political economic practices of neoliberalism. I rely on David Harvey’s definition:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (Harvey, 2005: 2).

Particularly I am also interested in aspects of neoliberalism such as audit cultures that some anthropologists (Dunn 2000, Kipnis 2008) suggest are actually about the transformation of specific types of persons needed for neoliberal economies to flourish. The language of the model neoliberal citizen and the yogic adept is in some ways markedly similar: a highly flexible, self-aware individual who is able to “go with the flow” of the ever-changing (market) conditions of unpredictable circumstances of life (under flexible capitalism). In a lot of respects contemporary yoga is about gaining fitness to transform oneself into a more successful version of oneself, which in the current instant requires adaptation to the progressive development of markets where hitherto none existed.

produce me and potential other *me's* as a community of practitioners united through the embodiment (and consumption) of contemporary yoga are the framing vectors that guide the autoethnographic journey. Yoga changes the body and the relationship of mind to body. Through yoga practices one reworks muscles, envisions nerve pathways and surrenders resistance to breath. Through yoga practice one begins to feel and know oneself differently. My yogic body is not the same body I inhabited the world through prior to beginning this practice. I sense and know myself differently, I sense and know others differently. That yoga is increasingly imagined and made available to new audiences through the apparatus of the marketplace begs the question of whether market-driven yoga is about new forms of neoliberal subjectivity? How does the language of liberation outlined in *ancient* yogic texts help to support these newly emergent visions of liberated selfhood? What do freedom, ethics and liberation come to mean in these contexts?

While being and acting as a consumer both forefronts and (re)creates my subjective identifications with objects and persons, being a yogi/ni<sup>18</sup> is articulated philosophically as a soteriological path through which to loosen and efface identifications with social identity towards the “attainment of release from suffering existence and the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*)” (White 2012: 6). What kind of persons do these contradictions produce? Who and what am I when I engage with the liberatory practices of yoga through acts of choice enlivened by consumer frameworks? What does my body become as it moves, performs and embodies yoga practices and discourses? Does the nature of knowledge change as the connections between mind and body are refined through subtle physiological exercises? How much can my experiences stand in for those of others? What criteria do I then use to measure the closeness and distance between self and other? These are the primary research questions that I seek to address through this autoethnography.

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<sup>18</sup> In popular yoga discourse *yogi* refers to the male yoga practitioner, while *yogini* refers to the female practitioner (usually of hatha yoga). This use of terminology in and of itself provides a good example of the reinterpretation of terms through contemporary gender/sex understandings wherein yoga practitioners are basically understood as having bodies that are mostly physiologically the same whether male or female with differing reproductive/sexual biological systems that are not necessarily important to the performance of yoga postures. Most yoga *asanas* are described and undertaken through the kinesthetic action of the alignment of muscles and bones, as well as energetic forces (such as the harnessing of gravity) so that male and female bodies may equally perform them (although with different “challenges” based on degrees of strength and flexibility). Generally speaking there is little difference made in contemporary yoga classes between men and women, and while both men and women may refer to themselves as “yogis” only women would refer to themselves as “yoginis.” This usage of the term *yogini* to unproblematically describe a female yoga practitioner seems quite unconnected to how White (2012) defines the term as used in the ninth-century *Netra-Tantra* to describe “a process that involves superhuman female predators, called *yoginis*, who eat people!” (White 2012: 2). By eating people (usually through the consumption of the semen of yogis) these “*yoginis* consume the sins of the body that would otherwise bind them to suffering rebirth, and so allow for the “union” (*yoga*) of their purified souls with the supreme god Siva, a union that is tantamount to salvation” (*ibid*).

Autoethnography is also employed here as a feminist means of critiquing disembodied approaches to embodiment that leave veiled the role of subjective experience in ethnographic practice and the production of anthropological knowledge. How does yoga play out in the highly gendered terrain of bodily experiences and how does this play into the shaping of subjectivity under late capitalism? Does yoga, with its emphasis on connecting with your “true nature” and listening to the “wisdom of your body” reveal anything about gender? What kind of gendered realities are promulgated by an inward expanding consciousness in which the dialectical mind moves into hitherto consciously unmarked areas of the internalized body to enliven internalized expressions of pleasure experienced only by and for the self? Does “knowing your body better” afford greater self-agency and health or do the mind and body resemble the neoliberal arrangement where the mind as expanding market moves into previously unconscious/uncommodified terrain in the body thus revealing evermore parts to watchful scrutiny?

In keeping with the question of whether contemporary yoga practice in neoliberal contexts is about the opening up of new terrains of the body to surveillance and correction, I chose to study yoga tourism outside of India to extend this question outward from the actions of yoga on the body to the actual opening of new yoga tourism markets in otherwise *unyogified* locales. Through this research I build on the work of other anthropologists who have studied yoga in India, using their analyses to question how the enactors of yoga tourism authenticated and justified importing yoga to regions with no history of yoga<sup>19</sup>. Did the enactors of globalized yoga tourism see their activities as missionization (Csordas 2009a)? Did they even think about the effects of participating in the spread of a foreign spiritual system to new cultural areas through their activities or did they understand their actions as benign through their own beliefs that yoga increases health and wellbeing and is therefore good for *every-body*? For the most part I found that very few of the people even thought about these questions but when pressed mostly saw their activities as benign and thought that all people should practice yoga, which they saw as primarily a therapeutic practice. I discuss this in

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<sup>19</sup> Strauss to some degree discusses yoga tourism to India by Westerners, particularly Germans in her case study of the DLS ashram. It would be interesting to look at how yoga tourism by foreigners to India over the course of the last few decades has changed to yoga landscape there. Froystad (2009) discusses a case of reverse globalization in which an American yoga organization has gone back to India to open branches there, but her work focuses on how middle class Indians take up this new form of yoga, not on the demands and experiences of Western yoga tourists. Smith (2006) writes about his experiences as a yoga tourist to Mysore to study with the late Pattabi Jois. His focus is more on the embodied practice of Ashtanga yoga and less on the tourist industry that supports the influx of Western students to Mysore.

Chapter 3 in respect to different yoga tourism locales and in greater detail in Chapter 5 when I discuss ethical consumption.

Whether or not the distinction between yoga in India and yoga outside of India is an important distinction to draw is not elaborated in this dissertation because all of my study locations were outside of India<sup>20</sup>. The enactors of yoga in these new locations could claim no ownership over yoga or a naturalized relationship between the psychically, physiologically, and spiritually (read Hindu) strong (male) yogic body and the health of the nation (Alter 2004, Singleton 2010). I raise these points here because while the connection between yoga, Hindu nationalism and modernity in India has been the subject of anthropological inquiry and explication, these connections are specific to India because of yoga's history there. A nationalist claim to Indian spiritual and moral superiority through yoga cannot easily be transferred to non-Indian practitioners. For non-Indian practitioners to claim yoga a whole suite of authenticating practices must be undertaken, and because of the history of the West's encounter with yoga through esotericism (De Michelis 2004), there remains a certain degree of romantic mysticism around connections with authentic Indian yoga in contemporary yoga circles (see Singleton 2008). How the Indian Nation uses and benefits from yoga, and how proponents of yoga contribute to Indian nationalism has been well documented (Alter 2004, Singleton 2010), why yoga has been so widely embraced across the globe, outside of yoga proponents' claims that it is because yoga is the universal spiritual and health system inclusive and of benefit to all, has yet to be anthropologically elaborated. This study on yoga tourism through multi-sited analysis that spans across transnational space is a step into this terrain.

By examining multiple geographical locations related to one another only through the presence of yoga tourism venues and shared cyberspace connections revealed through the medium of a search engine or directory's working of words such as "yoga tourism," "yoga holiday," "yoga vacation," "yoga retreat," "yoga ashram," and by then following some of these linkages to create an anthropological "field" in geospatial time, I hope to make forays into explaining yoga's global popularity in terms of wider global processes. These forays form the multi-sited ethnographic component of this research project.

At the same time that I use ethnographic inquiry to consider these global processes, the yoga I encounter and practice in these locations provides an innate means for autoethnographic practice; a means of integrating the body into scholarship while assessing the limits of the scholarly, personal,

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<sup>20</sup> While I had identified two locations in India in which to conduct fieldwork, both the high cost of attending yoga tourism venues and gaps in funding prevented me from actually traveling to these locations.

political and spiritual. As Spry writes, “in seeking to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life, I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated” (2001: 708). The techniques of contemporary yoga are written into the very fabric of the body: performed, enacted, embodied, enlivened through movements of the body in time and space that are meant to rearticulate a supposedly lost communion between body, spirit and mind. Many people have taken up yoga as a means of addressing the disembodied nature of subjectivity in industrial capitalist knowledge regimes (or what Yoga Teachers often refer to as the Western mind (Farhi 2001)). As cover model for the February 2011 issue of *Yoga Journal*, Amy Ippoliti says in an online interview:

*What keeps me on the [yoga] mat is the feeling in my body, the feeling that I will be nicer to be around, that people will enjoy being around me more, that I can rub off some of the energy, some of the shakti<sup>21</sup> that I've cultivated in my practice. If I can serve through helping myself feel more whole and more connected and more alive, then I will continue to get on the mat as often as I can (<http://www.yogajournal.com/livemag/lmcontent/38>: accessed 01/20/2011).*

For many people, particularly women, yoga is a project of reclaiming the body and by so doing reclaiming the self, of realizing the gendered goals they have for themselves as moral and social beings. As Ippoliti states, she wants to be “nicer to be around,” and to share this positive energy with others. By caring for herself she feels more caring towards others and more connected with her aliveness. In this research I examine this process contextually, consistently and poetically, through a critical reflexivity that seeks to ‘elaborate my embeddedness’ (Moss and Matywchuk 2000) in both yoga and anthropology. By autoethnographically considering myself as the “epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (Spry 2001: 711), my yoga (and research) practice coincides with the people I practice yoga with and study. Here my

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<sup>21</sup> *Shakti* or *sakti* is a Sanskrit word that refers to the personification of feminine divine power. *Shakti* is also *Siva's* consort. In contemporary yoga circles that refer to the *Kundalini* system of energetic anatomy, *shakti* is present in all humans, male or female, and dwells in the base of the spine as pure energy. In this system the goal of the physical practice of yoga (*asana*) is to awaken *shakti* so that *shakti*, the creative force will rise through the spine to unite with *siva* at the crown of the head, the masculine personification of pure consciousness. Different practitioners of yoga interpret this process somewhat differently, but as Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati (author of [swamij.com](http://www.swamij.com)), disciple of Swami Rama of the Himalayan Tradition writes:

The journey of Tantra and Kundalini Yoga leads to Kundalini Awakening and to the realization of the Absolute, where these two apparently different aspects of manifestation are experienced in their original union. Yoga means union, or joining, and this union of the static and the dynamic is the meaning of Yoga (<http://www.swamij.com/kundalini-awakening.htm>: accessed on 01/20/2011).

In contemporary yoga circles *shakti* is embraced as the feminine element. Here, Ippoliti is suggesting that by awakening her own divine feminine she is more aware and empowered to share that inner divinity with others. As the energy flows through her, also it has the potential to flow outwards towards others. The benefits brought to the self through yoga as a means of serving others is something that women often refer to as reasons for practicing yoga.

experiences do not stand in for the experiences of all women who practice yoga, but my practice places me in relation to them through critical reflexivity:

[c]ritical reflexivity involves "those introspective aspects of thought that are self-critical and self-consciously analytical..." This means that we must not take our own positioning for granted, and that we need to place ourselves in relationship to other people, including bonds that tie us together as well as differences that keep us separate. Elaborating embeddedness entails questioning and questioning how positionings are linked to and are part of a wider context. This strategy is useful in demonstrating how power is deployed through our very locations and in finding both similarities and differences in how power is wielded. (Moss and Matwychuk 2000: 84).

I suggest that the wielding of power in contemporary yoga is often obscured because of: 1) how authority operates in the transmission of knowledge through the problematic position of the *guru* in non-Indian yogic milieus<sup>22</sup> and the Yoga Teacher as a "qualified professional" with a marketable skill-set in contemporary yoga, 2) the nature of consumer capitalism as a system which

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<sup>22</sup> There have been several instances of Indian *gurus* (revered spiritual masters) of yoga in the US who have been accused of or implicated in "falls from grace" because of abuses of power, often, sexual power, in relationship to their disciples. As I write this dissertation one such controversy is unfolding in the world of Anusara® Yoga, through the supposed sexual and financial misconduct of celebrity founder John Friend. Another such case involving Swami Rama was written about in a *Yoga Journal* article from 1990:

Within a sect the guru's authority is often absolute: He rules from the pinnacle of the institutional hierarchy. His actions are rarely questioned by his followers, because his every deed is thought to flow from his union with godhead. As an enlightened being, he is thought to be beyond the judgment of ordinary mortals, their laws and morality... Sexual contact between gurus and their American disciples is not a new or rare phenomenon. Over the past 15 or 20 years, numerous spiritual teachers have admitted to, or been charged with, having sexually exploitative relationships with their female students. But the followers of such "enlightened" men are usually reluctant to find fault with them, since to do so could invalidate the students' own years of study and devotion. Instead they deny the experience of the "unenlightened" women who are the guru's victims. The victim's confusion and loss of trust are compounded when her community refuses to acknowledge her suffering (Webster 1990:95 [http://books.google.ca/books?id=iekDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA62&ots=00xt2uCtCJ&dq=yoga\\_gurus\\_and\\_sexual\\_exploitation&pg=PA66-v=onepage&q=yoga\\_gurus\\_and\\_sexual\\_exploitation&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=iekDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA62&ots=00xt2uCtCJ&dq=yoga_gurus_and_sexual_exploitation&pg=PA66-v=onepage&q=yoga_gurus_and_sexual_exploitation&f=false); accessed: 2011/01/19).

The most famous of such cases concerns the founder of what is now the Kripalu Centre in Massachusetts originally founded by Indian-born *guru* Amrit Desai. Desai started Kripalu first as a gathering of disciples in Philadelphia in the 1960s who together (in 1983) eventually purchased the property in Massachusetts where Kripalu is still located. The residential community at Kripalu grew from 1983-1994 to include up to 350 residents and 2200 associated members. While permanent residents of Kripalu were taking vows of celibacy to become monks and nuns (swamis in the yogic tradition), it came to light in 1994 that several of the female residents of the ashram were and had been engaged in sexual relationships with Desai. Desai was asked to resign and lawsuits were filed against him. Since that time Kripalu has transformed itself from an ashram to a lifestyle centre (see: [http://www.kripalu.org/about\\_us/491/](http://www.kripalu.org/about_us/491/); accessed 2011/01/19). Instances such as this within the yoga community outside of India have contributed to conversations about the nature of the disciple-guru or student-teacher relationship, topics which are covered in some Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) programs. There is a growing movement towards developing a standard code of ethics for training yoga teachers and for teaching yoga among professional organizations representing yoga in Canada, Australia, the UK and the US (for a synopsis of the Toronto yoga community's discussion of some of these topics see: <http://itsallyogababy.com/2010/10/09/ytt-standards-sustainability-integrity-the-yoga-toronto-community-conversation/>; accessed: 2011/01/19). I discuss YTT standards in greater detail in Chapter 5.

structurally obscures power relations (in accordance with Foucault's notion of governmentality<sup>23</sup> and Bourdieu's (1977) notion of objective (indirect) modes of domination) and 3) because of the legacy of the separation of religious belief from political life in secular society (Peterson and Walhof 2002), so that metaphysical, religious or spiritual power is seen to operate primarily on an individual level in the form of personal belief, rather than being considered political. In relation to the last point, people continue to see spiritual life as separate from other modes of personal engagement with the world, as personal belief, and therefore both apolitical and in certain respects, because of the private nature of spiritual belief, asocial. In a secular society founded on acceptance of religious pluralism, Peterson and Walhof (2002) suggest, personal belief should not affect societal roles.

Yoga sits in a complicated position in relation to religiosity in terms of its historical embeddedness in Indian religio-spiritual systems and its contemporary popularization as a form of self-spirituality under globalization. While there are definitely different viewpoints on whether or not yoga is spiritual, religious, psychological, scientific, or simply a good form of exercise, one cannot fully sever yoga from religious analysis considering its genesis in Hinduism and the elaboration of its forms in other Indian religions such as Buddhism and Jainism (White 2009), and the role of esotericists in its modernization (DeMichelis 2004, Singleton 2010). It is hoped that my reflexive embodiment of yoga will lead to a greater understanding of how power circulates to create particular meanings out of the multiple interpretive possibilities that arise out of metaphysical and emotional experiences in yoga that can sometimes be both overwhelming and unsettling. How such experiences can be understood anthropologically is a question I have returned to again and again in my yoga practice. My own experiences of such phenomena emerge in often-conflicting ways that ultimately may be irresolvable in anthropologically discursive terms. These irresolvable tensions may prove fruitful (auto) ethnographical terrain, or may remain analytically problematic, rife with forays too far into the personal to provide acceptable anthropological theorizations about the nature of culture, experience and self in contemporary yoga.

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<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested by scholars who take up Foucault's governmentality under late capitalism that governmentality is increasingly located in the individual (Dunn 2009)—that individuals are increasingly tasked with governing themselves, and the self, thus as Martin (1992) suggested, heralding a new type of flexible body. If this is accepted to be true then developing every more subtle control over the body, the emotions, and the fluctuations of the mind in yoga could be seen as perhaps one of the best possible techniques of self-governance. In yoga's history, the powers gained through self-control/governance have varied and have been interpreted differently under different social circumstances. In *Sinister Yogis* Gordon White (2009) suggests that the *siddhis* or supernatural powers gained through yoga were often depicted as sinister rather than desirable, directed towards the yogis own corrupt ends, and not to the benefit of regular folk. In the current instant yoga is increasingly seen as a cure-all for physical, mental, and emotional ailments, a means to take responsibility for and self-correct that which limits oneself from achieving one's desired successes in the world, which may be one reason for yoga's extreme popularity among middle class professionals, celebrities, and athletes.

## **“Data”**

In the previous section I discussed how autoethnography has informed my research practice, I now turn to the specific methods employed to obtain the “data” for the three streams of this research: multi-sited ethnography, autoethnography and online research. Data were derived from participant observation recorded in field notes, interviews with yoga tourists and teachers, reflective yoga practice embodied in an everyday engagement with the world, parts of which are recorded in a yoga journal, and visual textual data retrieved online. The field notes are bounded both geographically and temporally in terms of the active time I spent “in the field” at sites delineated as yoga tourism research sites. The yoga journal has been an ongoing endeavour, used as a reflective forum in my yoga practice over the last seven years. The yoga journal records my physical, emotional and mental experiences, struggles, questions, reflections, and in some cases dreams related to my yoga practice. It also records experiences during my immersion in a Yoga Alliance certified 250 hour Yoga Teacher Training program, for which I gained the certification of Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT-200hr). Also recorded in the yoga journal are observations of yoga classes in an urban yoga studio as part of the fulfillment of the training program, and experiences teaching yoga.

The yoga journal provides insight into the very personal nature of yoga practice through the motif of experience. By reflecting on yoga as an ongoing process in my body, a practice highly encouraged in some modern yoga methods (Radha 2006) information about personal experience that is difficult to obtain through interviews and participant observation becomes woven into the story I tell about yoga (see Wacquant 2003 for a similar approach to boxing). This type of yoga practice is particularly well suited to the type of sensuous scholarship outlined by anthropologists (Stoller 1997 and Howes 2003) in drawing attention to how bodily experience are culturally conditioned through habituated modes of being in the world (Csordas 1994). This is particularly important in the case of yoga because the major reason that yoga is said to be both healthful and liberative is that it transforms the practitioner into a more healthful *and* expanded state of awareness through physical practices that foster a mind body connection popularly said to be missing from Western society (Lock and Farquhar 2010) (i.e. it acts through the body to change the mind, and in so doing to transform the self):

For what purpose had we come so far simply to sit and look at a mountain? It took many years before I understood the message he wished to impart that early-spring day: You are this vastness... This vista you see, this grandeur, this enduring strength – if you go deeply enough inside yourself, you will find not something small but something immensely spacious. This is the essence of the human spirit. This message, imparted so simply and yet ineffably etched into my experience of

myself and the world, had an enormous influence in shaping what I came to see as the purpose of yoga – to reconnect to the original vastness and silence of the mind.

In the early sixties, when yoga became popular through the work of Richard Hittleman and other such luminaries, the teachers of that time had to find a way to make an Eastern science and art palatable to a Western mind. This was no easy task. Most presented yoga's tangible forms – the postures and the more pragmatic breathing exercises. These forms the Western mind could easily grasp (Farhi 2000: xiv).

The above quote is from a book by internationally renowned yoga teacher, Donna Farhi. Farhi describes a memory, traced back through time in which she was shown a mountain by one of her teachers, a mountain which signified an external vastness, and the many years of practice of the formal forms of yoga (*asana*, physical exercises, and *pranayama*, breathing practices) before she realized that the vastness she was seeing was also within the stillness of the mind. She talks about the dialectic opposition between Eastern spirituality and Western pragmatism, an opposition that is popularly invoked in yoga discourses. The “Western mind” is often talked about as a barrier to experiencing the true essence of yoga, which is far vaster than what the limited intellect can grasp. In Farhi's approach, the tangible, that is bodily-performed forms of yoga – *asana* and *pranayama* – are taught as a means through which to “work with the body in the service of regenerating the connection to spirit” (Farhi 2000: xv). She writes that:

[t]his reunification with nature lies at the heart of the true healing power of yoga practice. Through that practice we can become peaceful, we can experience ease with ourselves and others, and ultimately we can create a society that values such things. Then as we advance in our yoga practice, we will realize that however far we go, we are always in the process of returning to this natural self (Farhi 2000: xv).

Rather than engage with contemporary yoga teachings such as these in a purely discursive way, as texts to be deconstructed and their internal logic splayed (although there will be some component of that), I chose to also phenomenologically engage in the practices indicated by texts and teachings. To ask, “what of it?” Anthropologically this is not so transgressive, after all, how much of a departure is this from the *participant* aspect of participant observation? Yet I suggest there are two main differences, the first, following Alter's (2006) characterization of contemporary yoga's textual history as “pulp non-fiction,” is that yoga is highly culturally constituted by its dissemination in modern print, imaging, and increasingly, virtual media, which in some ways poses problems for the anthropologist who relies strictly on participant observation as method. This brings me to the second difference, which is an emphasis on the participant aspect in my study of the bodily techniques of yoga. While ethnographers often employ participant observation, they do not necessarily place emphasis on becoming skilled in the practices they are studying (although there has been a greater turn towards this type of ethnographic engagement in recent years (O'Connor 2007,

Wacquant 2003), and as mentioned, scholars of contemporary yoga insist that it is necessary aspect of producing knowledge about yoga (Singleton and Byrne 2008, Strauss 2005). How people engage bodily with technologies in enlivening the texts of yoga is a process that might be best explained through profound sensual engagement in conceptualizing experience of the “natural self” through yoga. How do online yoga classes and 360 degree 3-D mappings of popular yoga poses help the Western mind to formally develop an awareness of the expansive internal nature of the natural self? Can I experience greater ease and peace with myself and others by performing the exercises in a book? What does this mean if the project of practitioners is to create a society where justice is envisioned as individual people connected to their own inner vastness and therefore at greater peace and at ease with their inner nature and with others? Following questions such as these, the anthropologist becomes participant observer of cultural practices, enlivened in the texts of “pulp non-fiction” that frame the ethos of contemporary yoga. Because so many of these texts (including books, DVDs, websites and blogs) are testaments to a particular individual’s yogic journey, thoughts and feelings, and often formulated as instruction manuals to guide aspirants along the way, these texts provide a rich source about the nature of personal experience in yoga and thus a vital component of ethnographic data. My autoethnographic journey through these texts is an anthropological compass point that inserts my body as medium of research into the textual manifestations of other yogis’ personal embodiments of yoga.

### **Multi-sited Research: the Flowing Field of Yoga Tourism**

The multi-sited field is either conventionally a map of a process in various senses, but a map that is already understood and relied on by being expressed in some scholarly or academic literature (for example, economic or sociological models of migration, Marxist conceptions of the flow of global capital, or the proliferation of neo-liberal markets), or this field is found in the field itself... (Marcus 2009: 187).

Every field, regardless of its location and degree of boundedness, inevitably presents specific opportunities and limitations that will determine what is possible or useful (Muir 2004: 197)

In this section I elaborate how I have taken up anthropological discussions of multi-sited research in studying yoga tourism. I visited a total of seven yoga tourism sites for this research project, each of which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3. Locations included: Costa Rica, Italy, Bulgaria, France, Turkey, and two in Canada. At each of these locations<sup>24</sup>, I undertook participant observation and

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<sup>24</sup> At the two sites in Canada I undertook participant observation only as I did not have permission to conduct interviews onsite.

conducted open-ended interviews with informants. These informants included yoga tourists, yoga teachers, and yoga retreat organizers.

When I began to think about how I would study contemporary yoga ethnographically, tourism did not come first to mind. Once I began to look into a “field site” for my research, however, it became quickly clear that yoga is *everywhere* and almost *anywhere* (Pink 2000) and that its geographical spread is heavily related to touristic practices of yoga consumers<sup>25</sup>. It became clear (as it probably always is when one sets out to study global phenomena) that wherever I chose to study, I would be delimiting the perspectives I hoped to gain about yoga’s proliferation. It was less clear, following Marcus (2009), how to map or follow the map of yoga’s global flow as ethnographic terrain in ways that would be useful for understanding the forces at play in this movement.

So how did I set limits around my project? A subject of study that is *everywhere* in the sense that locations and means to access, learn about, perform, study and teach yoga have proliferated extensively in consumer landscapes and popular media worldwide. A practice that appears *anywhere* in the sense that the startling growth in yoga tourism ventures under the rubrics of eco/health/wellness tourism means that it is difficult to catalogue the constantly growing number of yoga studios and tourism locations even locally, let alone predict where yoga studios and holidays will pop

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<sup>25</sup> I draw distinctions between different types of yoga tourism destinations and different identities adopted by yoga tourists in relation to traveling to do yoga, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3. Of particular significance was the difference between yoga-motivated travel by aspirants to places where yoga forms an aspect of intentional community, and holiday-motivated yoga travel by vacationers, in which yoga forms one aspect of a holiday itinerary oriented primarily towards leisure. Despite these distinctions, there is still a shared overarching relationship between tourism infrastructure (commercial airlines, travel agencies and online discount travel sites, hotels, rental cars, etc.) and consumer practices in tourism that create the possibility for these various sites to exist and for the people who run them to profit, or at least support their own travel and residence abroad through them. Whether or not yoga vacations, ashrams, or centers see themselves as involved in the business of selling yoga, they are all to some degree perpetrators of yoga’s commercialization inasmuch as they advertise their services and make use of technologies (such as websites, online booking platforms and listserves as well as printed media) to disseminate information, respond to or create the public’s supposed desire for yoga and draw people in to participate in their programs.

up next in global and local landscapes<sup>26</sup>. In some ways it seems the more obscure the location the more interesting to draw tourists in: *to practice yoga where no (wo)man has practiced before!*<sup>27</sup>

While there are definitely particular locales where one can find yoga communities, each of these communities (unless they are connected by lineage as the Sivananda ashram is to other Sivananda ashrams and to the ashrams of Sivananda's disciples) is in some ways idiosyncratic to its own goals and delineations of the purposes (and/or profitability) of yoga. It is how a yoga

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<sup>26</sup> Although yoga vacations are *anywhere*, there are definitely trends and locations where there is a higher probability that yoga will appear than others. Places of desired tourist leisure with other features to attract the tourist being the most likely. I discuss this in Chapter 3. The point here relates to yoga's widespread proliferation, an example of which can be seen in observations of the changing yoga scene in Victoria. I began practicing yoga in Greater Victoria in 2005, an urban area of roughly 300,000 people on Vancouver Island off the West Coast of Canada. In 2005 there were 5 studios devoted exclusively to different styles of yoga, only one of which offered a teacher training program (YTT), and roughly 9 public or private gyms and community centers where one had access to yoga classes. There were probably other venues to access yoga as well, including smaller private group settings, private teachers who offered a variety of classes as well other locations and classes that were not locally advertised or visible from public locations. Since that time two yoga directories for the urban area, hosted at [yogavictoria.ca](http://yogavictoria.ca) and [yellowyogi.com](http://yellowyogi.com) have been developed. As of November 2012, [yogavictoria.ca](http://yogavictoria.ca) lists 26 yoga studios (most that host large drop-in classes, but a few that are only private registered or small group yoga sessions offered by private teachers), and there are at least five other major studios not listed on this directory, for a conservative estimate of 30 yoga-exclusive studio locations, three alone which opened in the first month of 2011, and an additional 4 over the course of 2012. In addition there are at least 11 yoga teacher-training programs located in Greater Victoria plus others run by Victoria teachers taught abroad in various touristic locations. While the number of gyms and community centers offering yoga has not changed so drastically, there has been a huge increase in the number and type of yoga classes offered at these venues over the last six years. While it could be argued that yoga in Victoria is particularly popular and that this trend is unique to this city, these figures are echoed in *Yoga Journal's* latest "Yoga in America" survey, conducted in 2008:

The 2008 study indicates that 6.9 percent of U.S. adults, or 15.8 million people, practice yoga. (In the previous study [published in 2004], that number was 16.5 million). Of current non-practitioners, nearly 8 percent, or 18.3 million Americans, say they are very or extremely interested in yoga, triple the number from the 2004 study. And 4.1 percent of non-practitioners, or about 9.4 million people, say they will definitely try yoga within the next year ([http://www.yogajournal.com/media/originals/YJ\\_PR\\_YogaAmerica.pdf](http://www.yogajournal.com/media/originals/YJ_PR_YogaAmerica.pdf); accessed 01/26/2011).

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) article from 2007 suggests that cities are not the only landscapes that have been marked by yoga's arrival:

Yoga centres have mushroomed in strip malls in Toronto's far-flung suburbs, nestled in between all-day breakfast restaurants, grocery chains and nail salons. It's not just a big city phenomenon either — you can find anything from moksha and hatha to shanti yoga in Elora, Ont., Iqaluit and Whitehorse ([http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/exercise\\_fitness/yoga.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/exercise_fitness/yoga.html); accessed 01/26/2011).

While the *Yoga Journal* "Yoga in America" survey shows a decrease in the number of people who practice yoga from 2004 to 2008, it shows a vast increase in the number of people who are very or extremely interested in yoga from 2004 to 2008, indicating that the situation in Greater Victoria mirrors yoga trends across both the US and Canada. There are also larger sociological processes at play in terms of differences between various places and different populations who practice yoga. From my own observations in Greater Victoria and at yoga tourism destinations white women are by far the most numerous practitioners of yoga (*Yoga Journal* reports that of people who practice yoga, 72.2% are women and 27.8 % are men, they do not report on whiteness). I take up these issues in other parts of this dissertation.

<sup>27</sup> A reference to the opening of the *Star Trek Original Series* television program in which we hear Captain Kirk (William Shatner) exclaim the mission of the intrepid space explorers on the Federation's Starship Enterprise to venture forth and encounter new worlds, to go "where no man has gone before!"

community is imagined by such emblematic forums as *Yoga Journal*, *itsallyogababy.com*<sup>28</sup>, and the multitude of one week yoga holiday packages and urban studios that offer self transformation through yoga – that is – in popularized non-segregated forms not united by shared adherence to yoga lineage or intentional community, whose “style” of imagining I was most interested in for this research project. Here I take to heart Anderson’s designation that “[i]n fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 2006: 6).

Anderson’s idea of imagined communities is particularly important point for yoga, which Singleton (2010), De Michelis (2004) and Alter (2004) suggest has been subject to highly innovative and influential imaginings over the course of the last century. This reimagining of yoga, White suggests, is not unique to the last 150 year history defined by colonial and postcolonial processes, but rather “is a process that has been ongoing for at least two thousand years [in which] every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga” (White 2012: 2). One of the most recent reimaginings of yoga, as I suggested in Chapter 1, is a vilification of “Western” (consumer) forms of yoga as inauthentic appropriations of India’s “classical” heritage:

Over the course of the past century not only has Yoga been radically transformed; the very radical nature of this transformation has influenced the way in which “classical” Yoga is understood. In turn this understanding has directly influenced the way in which Indian culture is thought to be linked – at least in the popular imagination – almost exclusively to the transcendental nature of “classical” Yoga, whereas “modernized” physical Yoga is thought to be a product of Western “misunderstanding.” In other words, the very idea of Indian spirituality and contemplative mysticism – its Orientalist albatross, one might say – is, in some sense, a derivative of the way in which Yoga as “physical culture” is thought to be the product of Western perversion and misunderstanding. In fact... things are much more complicated and interesting than that (Alter 2004: 9).

In my consideration of yoga as a worldwide lifestyle movement, I follow Anderson’s suggestion to distinguish (yoga) “communities” based on their “style of imagination” rather than their falsity or genuineness. This position aligns with Alter’s (2004) assertion that “modernized” physical yoga is thought (and therefore imagined) to be a misunderstanding. Unlike many who dismiss contemporary yoga for its commodified aspects – and thereby make claims to an

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<sup>28</sup> One of the Yoga blogs which I read extensively throughout the course of preparing this dissertation is located at [www.itsallyogababy.com](http://www.itsallyogababy.com). The writer of this blog started the site as a venue “to question, provoke thought and shine a critical light on yoga culture ~ but also to celebrate community, service, creativity, the independent spirit and good ol’ fun,” (<http://itsallyogababy.com/about/> : accessed 02/11/2011). The titling of this site is a tongue in cheek way for the author to discuss all aspects of life in relation to yoga. The author was former editor of *Ascent Magazine*, a publication that was published by the Yasodhara Ashram, whose last issue, published in 2009 was entitled *It’s All Yoga*.

authenticity which exists prior to or somehow beyond (Alter 2004, Singleton 2008, 2010) – it is particularly how this commodified imagining is produced and lived in relation to the knowledge produced by embodying yoga methods that I seek to chart in my research. As yoga moves through technocratic visual fields of cultural imagining and takes on lives of its own (features which I discuss in my Chapter 5), “local” yoga communities (as Alter suggests) are also reconfigured in relation. From my perspective the most interesting aspect of this reconfiguring is how “local” yoga communities take up and use the technologies of imagining yoga tourism and lifestyle yoga to concretize or elaborate their own, oftentimes-critical imaginings (yoga blogs such as *itsallyogababy.com* are particularly illustrative here).

I discuss some of the features of yoga communities in Chapter 3, but more broadly for this project the dynamic I was interested in looking at was the translocal practitioner, and how *lifestyle choices* made by individual people en masse link seemingly unconnected places, persons, histories and activities in the promise of self-realization through yoga. In other words this research project in some ways is primarily about providing an ethnographic account of what I describe in Chapter 3 as yoga tourism master narratives (Bruner 2005).

While for the sake of intellectual rigor I would like to say that there was a methodologically sound reason for my selection of field sites, the reality was much more related to the economics of studying a topic such as this and the chance offerings online research brought to my screen through yoga browsing than an ability to delineate whether a particular yoga vacation or retreat was more important to include than another. This relates to what Amit writes about studying mobile individuals and dispersed networks:

In seeking to expand their research scope to include the study of mobile individuals, dispersed and/or fragmented social networks, anthropologists may no longer be able to rely on a concept that traditionally has been as, if not more crucial than place for locating their field: the habitus of collectivity (Amit 2000: 14).

This research project on yoga tourism took place at several locations where groups of individuals gathered for short periods. What I found at these locations were groups of individuals inhabiting the same place for short periods of time, united through the common embodied experiences of eating, drinking, in some cases working, shopping, sightseeing, and most prominently, imagining how their life might be better through yoga. The degree to which yoga was highlighted as a uniting feature between people depended highly on the location, the teacher’s motives, and I would suspect on the motivations of people present on any given time in a given place (a suspicion confirmed by several of the Yoga Teachers). These are points I return to in

Chapter 3, for the current instant I raise them to highlight that this was less a study of groups of people or a group of people than a study of sites around which individuals cohere for individually held purposes that on the surface may appear to constitute collectivity in the way they relate to a shared imagination for betterment. Despite the strong emphasis on individuality, there were some commonalities in who these individuals were and where they came from. The most salient features being gender (most yoga tourists were women), age (most yoga tourists were between the ages of 20-50) and access to the economic capital required for yoga tourism (this varied somewhat based on location, but almost exclusively yoga tourists at the locations I visited were from industrialized nations and could be characterized as middle class<sup>29</sup>).

Despite my disclaimer that I had no sound methodological basis for site selection, I was guided by a desire to gather comparative data by visiting different kinds of yoga holiday/vacations/centers in different parts of the globe. Logistically the time periods I was able to get away from obligations at home, the availability of flights or other forms of transportation between sites and the places where I knew people that could in some way support parts of my travel, coupled with the financial constraints of my budget and the locations and schedules of yoga holidays, determined the yoga tourism locales that I visited.

Through extensive online research of yoga retreats, holidays, ashrams and centers, I originally identified seven potential fieldwork locations in: France, Wales, Sweden, Nepal, India, Peru and Canada. My goal was to compare different programs offered at the different locations to build upon the work of other anthropologists studying yoga, who had primarily focused on yoga in India (Alter 2004, and Strauss 2005). While Strauss (2005) writes about the transnational networks that exist between the Sivananda ashram she studied at in India and other Sivananda centers in Germany, the US and Canada, her primary focus on one lineage, and particularly a lineage that retains direct ties to India, did not explain much of what I was witnessing in contemporary yoga circles that are not connected to Indian origins through formal networks. Particularly I was interested in yoga as a

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<sup>29</sup> There are definitely yoga holidays for the wealthy, but because of the high cost of these I was not able to attend one as a yoga tourist/anthropologist. See Table 3.2 in Chapter 3 for an example of a yoga holiday with celebrity yoga teacher Rodney Yee at a 5-star hotel on a private Caribbean Island which cost \$6077 US for one week plus airfare, an amount of money which equals roughly half my annual income as a working PhD student. This type of yoga holiday would be well out of the price range of most of the yoga tourists I met while traveling. I also discuss Karma yoga and work-stay yoga programs at some ashrams and yoga centers in Chapter 3, some of which are offered at no cost or for low cost and could be accessible to lower income yoga travelers, providing they had the means to arrive at these locations and the time and finances to spend 2 weeks to 1 month at a yoga retreat.

growing trend, fad and lifestyle choice, one glamorized and popularized by Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow, embodied in the stunning physiques of the sculpted women who gloss the cover pages of *Yoga Journal* magazine. How does this embodiment of yoga relate to depictions of an overweight sage in orange robes by the side of the Ganges? Or to the grotesque and sinister depictions of *batha* yogis and *fakirs* depicted in colonial accounts (Singleton 2010, White 2009)? And finally, how has the changing figure of the yogi changed the way yoga moves around the globe and the concurrent ideas and ideologies that go with it?

I took up the trope of the tourist and decided that rather than embed myself in one location to look deeply at the workings of one community and using that to branch out, as Strauss (2005) had done, that I would instead follow the random branches that moved yoga, embodying the experiences of yoga tourist along the way. There is a certain cache to this project in the contemporary yoga world. Over and over, people I met in my travels in Canada, Costa Rica, Bulgaria, Italy, France, and Turkey exclaimed, “this is the best project in the world, I wish I had thought of it.” It is certainly not original in scope from the point of view of popular culture, after all Julia Roberts as heroine of the film adaptation of Elizabeth Gilbert’s hugely successful memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* spends one third of her year of travel and self-discovery in an ashram in Northern India scrubbing floors as a route to her inner self, finally becoming poised for true love after meditating on happiness in Bali. Anthropologically, however, claiming the title of tourist is uncomfortable terrain. Anthropologists studying pilgrimage have referred to the discomfort that exists for anthropologists between the categories of tourist, traveler, pilgrim and anthropologist discussing how the anthropologist sets himself apart from other travelers by virtue of his/her sacred quest for expert knowledge (Cohen 1992, Turnbull 1992). Yet traveling yogis also seek expert knowledge of a different kind, and yoga tourism locations are marketed as special spaces of self-discovery and larger connection that traveling yogis may not feel they can access at home.

This project then became wide (but not as wide as I would have liked) in breadth, and certainly lacked ethnographic depth. I can by no means claim expertise in terms of the locations I visited, their history or political and economic connections outside of the cursory information I was able to gain from owners, managers and staff of some of these retreats. And while I can claim a certain amount of proficiency and understanding of the requirements and realities of yoga travel, there are many people out there who have much more experience than I do in this field, many of who have been traveling to do yoga for many years.

The fact that I was unable to secure funding for the second phase of my research project meant that the locations I planned to visit in South America, India and Nepal became inaccessible to me, while I instead visited sites in Italy, Bulgaria, France and Turkey which I had not originally intended to. In total, I visited six yoga tourism destinations and resided at each one from one week to a month. I also participated in a seventh field site at a Yoga Conference in Vancouver. As I discuss further in Chapter 3, yoga vacations and centers for the most part are very costly to visit. Aside from the travel costs associated with moving between home and destination, the tuition costs are usually quite high. At some centers and ashrams exchanging work for residency and participation in daily programming can offset tuition, accommodation, and meal costs. These types of programs, called karma yoga or work-study programs usually require an extensive application process and a longer commitment of time (between 2 weeks to 3 months in most cases). Two of the sites I visited fall within this range, one a yoga community located in British Columbia, and the other an organic farm/yoga destination in Costa Rica. I also attempted to do fieldwork at a yoga centre and holistic wellness centre in British Columbia, but was unable to be accepted into the programs based on the times when I was available. Because work-study programs at these locations do provide access to yoga and longer periods of time spent in retreat, which is highly desirable as a yoga practitioner, competition for the few spots available is quite high and reservations for them must be made up to a year in advance of when one intends to travel.

While “in residence” at the various locales I visited, my participant role was that of yoga tourist, or in two cases, work-study participant. None of the sites would have had me onsite in another role than those scripted by the organizing body. Two of the locations I contacted were adamant that they did not offer work exchange programs and none objected to my participation as long as I was paying regular fees. One spiritual centre in Sweden that I contacted refused my participation on the grounds that I would not be fully awakened and attentive to spiritual experience while conducting an anthropologically oriented research project and would therefore negatively impact the experiences of other guests. One condition of my participation was that yoga retreat organizers, teachers, and other tourists be made aware of my dual intent as retreat participant and anthropologist. I found that talking to other participants about my project often initiated rapport since many yoga tourists desired, as I was doing, to travel to multiple yoga retreats and holidays for an extended period of time.

The approximate number of people I talked to through participant observation at the various locations I visited was 105<sup>30</sup>, including guests, yoga teachers, retreat owners, community inhabitants and staff. I conducted only seven formal interviews with 6 guests and one yoga teacher of these 105. I had originally intended to conduct more interviews, but found formal interviewing impractical at short-stay yoga retreats. Because of the short amount of time yoga tourists had on retreat for free time outside of the yoga, eating and excursion itineraries they usually wished to be at leisure or socializing during non-scheduled activities. The general nature of yoga holidays, organized around building self-awareness in yoga, sharing meals and relaxing in nature meant that a good deal of conversation was to be had simply by participating as a yoga tourist in these activities. I found that simply being a part of conversations with people was usually more welcome and less disruptive than trying to set time apart for formal interviews. I was often able to ask questions in regular conversation in group or one-to-one settings with yoga tourists that I would have asked in interview situations.

### **Virtually “doing” Yoga: Online Yoga Sites, blogs, Practice Pages**

The third and final component of my “dataset” is derived from online yoga communities, a relatively recent development in the cultural life of yoga, whose emergent features I describe in Chapter 5. At the time of writing this dissertation I identify five major categories of online yoga sites: 1) yoga megasites, the most prominent of which is yogajournal.com (the *Yoga Journal* site), a category which also includes subscription practice sites such as myyogaonline.com, 2) yoga blogs and personal pages, which are usually the work or viewpoint of one or a few individuals who blog about yoga or provide information about yoga from their own individual perspectives and experiences, 3) yoga search directories, in which category I include directories devoted to particular locales, such as Yoga Victoria ([www.yogavictoria.ca](http://www.yogavictoria.ca)) and Yellow Yogi ([www.yellowyogi.com](http://www.yellowyogi.com)) both of which provide information about accessing yoga in my home location of GreaterVictoria, BC, and directories such as abc-of-yoga.com which hosts (among other things) a Yoga Travel Directory for locating yoga holidays by geographical region, 4) yoga location/teacher pages which are pages that correspond to an actual physical space, including studios, ashrams, retreat centers, and holidays where people can go to practice yoga, or pages that are developed by Yoga Teachers to advertise their services either at a particular location or for private classes, and finally 5) yoga information pages which I use as a

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<sup>30</sup> See Table 3.3. for a synopsis of guests at each retreat.

broad category to include yoga-related pages that do not necessarily fit in any of the other categories.

Although I identify different categories of sites, one site, such as yogajournal.com, can be categorized in more than one category. For instance, as a mega-site, yogajournal.com hosts blogs by various prominent Yoga Teachers, provides a subscription service whereby subscribers can access the print version of the magazine as well as videos online, a yoga directory and yoga travel directory, as well as various free e-newsletter feeds that are delivered via email offering “wisdom” in various areas such as “eating wisely”, advice for home practice, advice for Yoga Teachers by mentor teachers, yoga conference connections and “daily insights”. I discuss the online yogaworld in greater detail in Chapter 5, here I outline my ethnographic approach to this particular “field”, a process which I experience as emergent discovery, baffled contradiction, informative exchange and often boredom.

I approach the online yoga world as naive ethnographer, following threads and links and recording what I find, or perhaps more appropriately, what finds me, taking an approach, as Reed does to blogs (following Gell) towards an “interpretation of text ‘as if’ it were an object with a practical mediatory role (and not just a form of symbolic communication” (2005: 224). What is the practical mediatory role of yoga blogs in the creation and elaboration of yogaworlds and lifestyle yoga? What styles of imaginings exist in the relationships, roles, and models elaborated in online yoga texts? Who makes use of these pages and who contributes to them? The trope of the tourist is expanded here within the context of what Paasonen calls *cyberdiscourse*, which she claims, “is hardly novel in its articulations, but links to a Eurocentric history of tourism, control, and mastery, imperial travel and voyeurism” (2005: 72). She goes on to argue that, “the clear-cut categories of “us” and “them” in Internet advertisements address the first-world user as a tourist [quoting Nakamura] “whose position on the network will allow him to metaphorically go wherever he likes”,” thus making it possible to “experience travel in various parts of the world while staying at home and maintaining a sense of control” (Paasonen 2005: 72-73). The connection here between how Paasonen characterizes the type of personhood involved in *cyberdiscourse* and how Strauss (2005) describes *cosmopolitanism* in yoga bears remarkable similarity.

If one accepts this argument, then yoga tourism extends far beyond the geographical locations that tourists leave home for to practice yoga, it indeed involves the whole set of practices of discovery and planning that lead up to the voyage, the majority of which is carried on online and planned well in advance of the travel date. More than one participant told me that the primary reason she felt safe traveling abroad alone for a yoga vacation, was because she was able to do

research and planning online at home. In this way, the idea of maintaining a sense of control while “traveling” the Internet at home can be extended to the physical reality of traveling, in which many unexpected elements of travel are tamed by the tying of disparate instances of movement away from home into a progressive string of anticipated arrival. Although not all yoga tourists planned their trips to yoga sites abroad in this way, most did, particularly those who both found excitement in and experienced anxiety about foreign travel. The planning of my entire research program took place within the pre-travel touristscape of the Internet; online “travel” experiences through which imaginations of yoga tourism flourished in the framing of potential practice. Indeed the online elaboration of yoga tourism provides rich ethnographic detail for comparison across sites, allowing a much broader picture of yoga tourism than I could have hoped to gain from the financial and temporal limitations of visiting a limited number of sites in person. At all but one of the sites I visited, where the majority of guests personally knew the owners of the retreat, planning for and setting up a yoga tourism excursion was done by guests exclusively online. Documenting the features of yoga tourism at home through yoga tourism online thus forms an essential component of this research project.

Beyond the aspects of online yoga tourism tied up in anticipated yoga travel, there are also other features to these online yoga worlds. As I engaged with these yoga worlds, I became overwhelmed with information and contradictions and lost interest in the material I was reading, wondering how to identify yoga within this stream of words on a screen. I subscribed to practice pages and practiced online watching the voice-over videos of close-mouthed teachers go through series of poses in well-lit rooms alone on a yoga mat, demonstrating ideal versions of the poses I was trying to emulate while attempting to create my own “sacred” space at home. I read the arguments and engagements in the yoga blogosphere and wondered how and if anthropology provided any insight on yoga that these commentators were not already providing, wondering about how to reconcile people I have never talked to as “informants” that provided more information and reflexive insight into contemporary yoga and the yoga world than I could “get” from a few weeks of daily interaction and scanty interviews with yoga holiday participants. I traced geographical mappings of emergent tourism sites and tried to draw connections between them, making semiotic linkages out of which imaginaries were formed. As a potential yoga consumer/tourist I perused the list of products and destinations for how they corresponded to my yoga-self visions and lifestyle desires, making notes along the way.

## **Conclusion**

In this Chapter I outlined a threefold methodological approach that bounds this research on contemporary yoga within three types of sites: 1) the embodied self, 2) transnational yoga tourism locations, and 3) yogaworlds online. Each of these sites required different methods, some of which overlapped between locations, such as participant observation, and others of which were used for gathering information primarily within one locale, such as interviews with guests at yoga retreats and visual textual analysis of online spheres of yoga enactment. In Chapter 3 I look more closely at the growing field of Yoga tourism, turning a more descriptive lens on the various locales I visited and the people populating these locations.

### **Chapter 3 Case Studies: What does yoga tourism outside of India look like?**

*It was an international ashram so you found people from all over the world there, which is an amazing sign of the times that there are people all over the world searching for this kind of knowledge, growth and experience. And I started to think of the world as a different way of knowing for every person that walks, but there seem to be paths you can choose in general, and in the yogi world it's like every retreat or ashram or studio for practicing yoga is like a flower blooming in a garden. That's the way I see it, and they're all over the world, and if you're Christian it's churches, if you're Hindu it's different temples, or if you're Sikh. But for me it is yoga places which are the type of flowers that I like to visit, and I see them rising up all over the world. And it just makes me see that all these people that visit them are like the hungry butterflies in the garden building bridges as they seek out one blooming flower after another, and this network of shared knowledge and consciousness gets wrapped around the world and people come home with their stories and inspire others to go to those places. Just bridge building, consciousness, shared knowledge and experience and building on that is very exciting. —Ariel, 37 from Canada*

#### **Introduction**

Throughout the course of this research I visited seven different yoga tourism programs in six countries. One of my goals was to ethnographically trace the yoga tourism landscape outside of India, thus adding a dimension to the work of anthropologists such as Alter (2004) and Strauss (2005) who have written about modern yoga in India. I took up Bruner's (2005) approach in *Ethnographies of Travel* to follow touristic flows paying attention to travelers' lived experiences on tour. In this Chapter I describe how yoga as a cultural practice taken up by primarily Anglophone white professional women, moves around and interacts with new places and peoples by focusing on seven Case Studies, corresponding to the sites where I conducted fieldwork.

Yoga travel has been written about historically as a move out of India to the West, a product of India's modernity and the colonial encounter (DeMichelis 2004, Alter 2005 and Strauss 2002 and 2005, van der Veer 2009). More recently, Froystad (2009) has written about how yoga is now traveling back to India from America for postmodern Indian middle class consumers. My project looks specifically at how yoga is traveling to other areas of the globe through international Anglophone tourism based primarily out of North America and Britain. This chapter in particular looks closely at the intersection of yoga and contemporary tourism through a lens similar to Bruner's:

My aim was to write tourism as others were writing culture and to apply a radically reflexive ethnography to tourism research. This was a good fit. Contemporary tourism involves travel, however temporary and fleeting, by Western peoples on a *massive scale* to the margins of empire and to the peripheries of modernity; it is one of the greatest population movements of all time. In response, Third World people, with tour agents and local producers, actively strive to understand tourists' desires. Throughout the world they remake their indigenous cultures to construct new emergent cultures specifically for tourist audiences. Tourist performances represent new culture in that they have been modified to fit the tourist master narrative, have been shortened to fit the tour schedule, have been edited so as to be comprehensible to a visiting audience, and are performed regularly at set times and usually on stage (Bruner 2005: 9-10, italics mine).

Applying Bruner’s “radically reflexive ethnography” to yoga tourism fits well with the autoethnographic approach of an experientially embodied anthropological examination of yoga that I introduced in Chapter 2 and explore in more detail in Chapter 4. Thus in this project attention is paid to: 1) the way yoga as a cultural practice that emerged in India through processes of colonialism and modernity (Chapter 1) has continued its global expansion through more recent touristic practices (this Chapter); and 2) the shifts in experience and perception that come about through embodying the teachings of commodified globalized yoga (Chapter 4 looks at experience and perception and Chapter 5 more closely at the technologies of commodified globalized yoga).

### **Where is Yoga Tourism Located?**

Searching “yoga tourism/vacation/holiday/retreat” in any online search engine reveals that there are thousands of yoga tourism venues located throughout the world, with more appearing (and some disappearing) on a yearly basis. A few are permanent venues that have been established for decades while others happen only once through the whim of a Yoga Teacher, business-minded enthusiast, or dedicated practitioner inspired to practice yoga at a particular, usually exotic, and often described as “sacred” site. *Willka T’ika*, in Peru is one such “sacred” location:

*Willka T’ika* has already established an enviable reputation as a unique and prime center for Yoga teachers and leaders to conduct retreats. Carol, herself, a long time yoga practitioner, realized that the synergistic combination of Andean culture and cosmology with the philosophy and spirituality underlying yoga, could expand peoples' horizons as well as their yoga practice, and so, from the start of the development of *Willka T’ika*, one of her prime aims was to create a center which would be a healing and spiritual place for yoga teachers to come and teach yoga (<http://www.willkatika.com/>: 5/4/2011).

In Chapter 1 I outlined how this version of sacredness ties into ideas of universal spirituality which were foundational in the development of modern yoga through the work of Swami Vivekenanda and Western Esotericists (DeMichelis 2004), New Thought groups in Britain and the US (Singleton 2008), Swami Sivananada (Strauss 2005), and are now reflected in other contemporary spiritual orientations broadly described as New Age (Wood 2005). In that Chapter I also described how nature spirituality (Taylor 2010) has come to define recent manifestations of universal spirituality, and as Albanese (1990) has documented, how this nature spirituality also identifies strongly (through cultural “borrowing” or appropriation) Indigenous religious practices and beliefs. It is not at all uncommon to find yoga retreats appealing to potential yoga travelers online through reference to “other” cultures’ spiritual capital, suggesting a maximization of spiritual awakening by covering as many bases as possible in the search for self-discovery. Here Carol’s “enviable” discoveries of

synergy between Andean cosmology and yoga philosophy are offered to the seeker: a unique experience of oneself through expanded yoga practice and horizons, vestiges recuperated from the premodern wisdom of colonized people worldwide.

Like Bruner (2005) I chose to become a tourist myself in studying yoga tourism. Thus rather than stay in one location and observe the flows of people coming through, as did Strauss (2005) at the DLS ashram in Rishikesh, I chose instead to design the project with the goal in mind of visiting as many yoga locations as I could, and writing about the touristic process itself. This involved paying ethnographic attention to all the details of planning the fieldwork, from deciding which places to visit through online research (taking into consideration how marketing, photographs and descriptions enliven tourist desire and which aspects draw the tourist in), booking, inquiries and exchanges with retreat organizers and international travel up to actually being at the retreat, meeting other travelers and teachers, practicing yoga with them for a very short time, and then parting ways, exchanging contact information and often becoming “friends” on *facebook*, before going home.

This chapter is constructed as a series of *Case Studies* rather than as an overarching analysis of yoga tourism, although I do draw conclusions from the case studies to make claims about yoga tourism. It is hoped that the descriptions of each site will provide the necessary background information to foster the generalized analyses I will put forward. Due to privacy considerations, I cannot provide the websites of the locations I visited, although all of them have websites they rely on to draw tourists in and complete bookings. I have changed the names of all the yoga tourism locations and people I met in my travels except for the ashram I visited in Western Canada, and the founder of that ashram, for reasons I explain further on.

I repeatedly draw attention to the online “shopping” portion of planning a yoga retreat so that this aspect of yoga tourism can also be made visible. This shopping aspect is important because almost unequivocally, people who attended yoga retreats spent a good deal of time doing their own online research of several sites prior to ever traveling to one. In this manner, the process of the yoga retreat extends far beyond the one week to several months that people spend at the actual retreat, a good deal of which is enlivened in the imagination as desired experience. Focusing on case studies allows for the particular to lend substance to generalizations I later make about the globalized nature of yoga and the trends that have produced circumstances for yoga tourism to ripen so prolifically. For the final count, the locations I visited included preliminary research at an

ashram in Canada<sup>31</sup>, and formal research at: a spiritual retreat centre and private residence in Italy, a sustainable living project in Costa Rica, a hotel-based yoga holiday in Turkey, two private residences where part of the premises are used to host yoga holidays in France and Bulgaria, and one Yoga Conference in Vancouver. In addition to the formal yoga tourism experiences I accrued through this research, I also draw on the experiences of a longtime yoga practice and *asana* classes at several studio, gym and community locations in Victoria, New York, San Francisco, Istanbul, Montreal, Stockholm, Fernie, and many other locations I have travelled to in Canada over the last seven years. During the formative phases of developing this research project, I also undertook a Yoga Alliance Certified 250hr Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) program at Moksana Yoga Studio in Victoria and was certified as a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT-200). I have taught yoga classes at the yoga studio where I did my teacher training, in Costa Rica where I did my field research, and at various other community locations in Victoria<sup>32</sup>. These cumulative experiences have served to extend the

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<sup>31</sup> The research at the ashram was preliminary in the sense that I was not certain exactly what my research program would be when I attended the ashram for personal reasons. As such I did not have permission to interview people or to collect data while I was there. Nonetheless, the experiences I had there framed the design of my research project and also formed an essential component of my experiential yoga practice, which is why I felt it was important to include it. I will focus only broadly on aspects of the ashram's organization as a basis for comparison with the other yoga travel sites I visited. The community of the ashram in and of itself could have been an entire ethnography. Although I frame this ashram in particular and other ashrams more generally within the tourism framework, I also make distinctions between ashrams and yoga centres and other types of yoga holidays which I describe further on.

<sup>32</sup> I found that undertaking this anthropological research on yoga made it very difficult for me to actually teach yoga based on the training I received in my YTT program. Although I learned the skills necessary to lead studio-based *asana* classes, I also became acutely aware that I was unable to subscribe to the narratives of authenticity required of me to lead yoga classes in a way that was satisfying to students and marketable to studio owners. This had something to do with the role of the Yoga Teacher in yoga as a person who is supposed to authentically embody the teachings, a model person displaying her embodied expertise of the postures and guiding students in an intuitive, confident, able and knowledgeable way through their own bodies towards realization of their inner selves. As I struggled to learn about yoga anthropologically while simultaneously becoming skilled in yogic practice, I came up against critical intellectual barriers that often prevented me from being able to break through the yogic discourse into undifferentiated experience. From a yogic point of view drawing on the *Yoga-sutras*, this is because I was trying to use the intellect (*buddhi*) to understand the nature of existence, which it does not have the capacity to do. Alter (2005) has written about the limits of anthropology in understanding yoga because from a yogic point of view any intellectually-based analysis can only give insight into a limited scope of human experience. The goal in yoga is to go beyond analysis into what I term for the instant, *unbridled embodiment*. While I have often experienced this kind of yogic experience in my own practice, devising language to guide others towards this experience has often felt fraught for me because my mind becomes immediately involved with anthropological analyses of the cultural and social aspects of the yoga classroom. I see the social make-up of the students, the spatial hierarchy and commodification of the studio, and on an ethical level I became uncomfortable because it is difficult for me not to see the students I am supposed to be teaching yoga to as anthropological subjects of inquiry. It therefore felt inauthentic for me as an anthropologist studying yoga to teach yoga because I felt from a yogic perspective that there was no real way for me to incorporate a critical reflexive analysis into my teaching prior to writing this dissertation. The 60 to 90 minute *asana* class is a place students go expecting a certain kind of experience. I could not guide them in that experience because I was questioning that experience at the same time as I was myself experiencing it.

temporal depth and geographical breadth of my “field,” so that I have been able to observe trends across time and space in globalized yoga over the last several years.

This chapter is primarily descriptive in nature. I briefly describe each location through a socially oriented gaze. While I do not spend a lot of time focusing directly on yoga tourists, I highlight that the consumers of yoga tourism tend to have a good deal in common with each other in terms of gender, race, age, sexuality, and to some degree class. For the most part, although there were notable exceptions, the yoga tourists I met were primarily heterosexual white women between the ages of 23-84 with enough disposable income to afford international travel and yoga retreat tuition rates. Although my mother is Métis, my father is white; I look white, and therefore fit in as a member of my research group, not just because I practice yoga, but also because I look like a white woman (the default normative category for yoga tourists). The only time my whiteness was questioned by fellow tourists (but not usually by locals when I was traveling with the other yoga tourists) was in the hotter climates I visited, such as Costa Rica, Bulgaria and Turkey where my skin turned a darker brown than was acceptably tanned white skin. Other white tourists expressed how lucky I was to be able to tan so quickly. Although these women desired darker skin through tanning— perhaps as a way to show they had been on vacation when they returned home – my darkened skin was a subject of curiosity to them and I was often asked to give an explanation as to why this was so, thus prompting me to have to explain that I am not “really” white<sup>33</sup>.

### **Ethnographies of Travel**

I argue against a fixed, static model that sees producers as in control, natives as exploited, and tourists as dupes. The research studies in this book analyze tourist sites and performances as evolving and historical – or to put it more simply, as alive.

On the other hand, to view tourism solely within the frame of interaction among the various actors is too narrow. A site is not fully described from the actor’s perspective, but must be seen in its larger political and economic context as mediating between the local and the global (Bruner 2005: 12).

Following Bruner’s approach to studying tourists, most of my data come from the basic methods of ethnography, being part of a tourist group at each yoga retreat and paying attention to

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<sup>33</sup> My skin colour is not something I thought about in relationship to this project, but it was something that emerged as a topic of conversation over and over again during this research. Women were always commenting how “lucky” I was that my skin tanned so brown. This hit home further when I arrived in Turkey and was picked up by my friend’s Turkish husband who later told me he was surprised when he saw me because he thought I would be white. I mention this here only because race is not something that is often mentioned in research on yoga. Yoga statistics, such as those published by *Yoga Journal* and the *Yoga in Australia* survey, do not mention race, although they do mention gender, education, household income and age. Whiteness is a big part of the yoga scene, and young, fit white women definitely dominate the yoga media.

how tourists represented both their tourist and yoga experiences to one another and to me while on a yoga retreat:

The anthropologist may interview tourists before, during and after they travel, or use questionnaires or do focus groups en route, and these are worthwhile methods that I have used. There is still no substitute, however, for being within the group as they travel, so that the investigator can observe, participate and engage in informal conversations and listen to their travel stories, which are their own representations of their tourist experience. Essentially I use the basic methods of ethnography as they enable me to learn how tourists travel, how they interpret their travel experience as well as the destination culture, and how all this varies by gender, class, age and nationality... If the objects of anthropological inquiry are mobile, then the anthropologist must be mobile (Bruner 2005: 16).

I conducted “formal” interviews with six yoga tourists, one Yoga Teacher and one retreat organizer, but for the most part my data consists of informal conversations with people and my own observations in the field (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3 for summaries of the number and gender of tourists, teachers, organizers and staff at each retreat). When I first began my research I intended to conduct many more interviews, but I found that yoga tourists were usually uninterested in being interviewed while they were on vacation, particularly at shorter stay yoga retreats (which usually run between 6-7 days). Yoga retreat organizers also expressed concern to me prior to granting me permission to conduct research during retreats that I be unobtrusive in conducting my research. One meditation centre I intended to conduct research at in Sweden refused my request to conduct research there because they believed that I would negatively affect other participants’ experiences and be inattentive to my own spiritual journey if I was conducting research as well as undertaking yogic study (which in retrospect they were likely right about). A few yoga travelers who were interested in the project were enthusiastic about being interviewed, particularly in Costa Rica, where I spent one month, but for the most part while people willingly shared their experiences about traveling and yoga during informal conversation, the idea of taking a few hours out of a one or two week holiday to be interviewed was not appealing to them. Several yoga tourists said that while they were happy to talk about yoga that they did not want to have to schedule anything in their free time while they were on holiday. As one of the conditions of my being allowed to do research at yoga retreats was a request by yoga retreat organizers that I not negatively impact the yoga retreat experiences of other guests through my research, I found that the most fruitful way to conduct the research was, as Bruner suggests above, through the informal conversations that occur naturally during the course of the yoga retreats, namely during mealtimes, yoga practice and free-time. Being an unobtrusive participant/researcher at yoga retreats as a condition to conducting research relates to Bruner’s experience of tourism operators being concerned with maintaining a certain narrative of

tourism for tourists. Unlike Bruner (2005) who suggests that he was researching tourists as a tour guide without their knowledge of his observing them, I was transparent about my dual role as yoga practitioner and anthropologist interested in yoga tourism, which included an interest in the tourists themselves. Usually people found this fascinating, as they did not think that their touristic practices were worthy of anthropological interest, but some tourists found it unnerving and would avoid personal conversations with me, making comments about my analyzing everything they said. In respect of people's privacy I did not take many photographs of yoga retreat participants during my research. I did find, however, that many people I met during my travels as a yoga tourist wanted to maintain connections following the end of the yoga retreat, primarily through the social networking site *facebook*, but also through email. Several people I met later sent me photographs, and many created public albums online that friends and family could view as testaments to their having travelled somewhere exotic to practice yoga. While these people were comfortable making these images public through their own self-representations on social networking sites, they did not grant me permission to use these images in my representations of them, which is why these images do not appear in my dissertation.

Being *friends* with my subjects on *facebook* in many ways extended the field: temporally, spatially and personally. It allowed me to have access to some aspects of yoga tourists' pre and post touristic lives while creating some tension in the privacy I was trying to maintain for my subjects. People were often insistent that we connect with one another online, and I believed that for maintaining rapport and relationships that it was important that I do so. This caused me some discomfort as my "subjects" of research also became my friends and became clearly identifiable to my other "friends" on *facebook* while also having access to my "personal" online life. This discomfort was never resolved; although some privacy features of *facebook* allowed me to manage my posts and photographs in ways that I felt "protected" subjects' privacy. In general yoga tourists were keen to show off their travel photographs, sharing them widely with those they met traveling and through forums such as *facebook*, with their wider social networks.

## What is the Difference between a Yoga Holiday and a Yoga Retreat?

*Angelique: So I guess part of the thing I am interested in is how yoga travels, and the retreat. Why is it that we are attracted to these retreats as an idea of a yoga place. I know there are movements such as “Off the Mat and Into the World<sup>34</sup>,” and trying to keep that up in your day-to-day life. But what appeals about a yoga retreat? For you, coming to a place like this that is set outside [of daily life]?*

*Ariel<sup>35</sup>: To create space between your regular daily life and your spiritual life. No, it brings the two together; your daily life and your spiritual life, and you have the privilege of diving deep that way without having to have to go to work or taking care of your family, or your problems with daily life at home. So retreats, and the ashram, it's just a privilege to be able to take away the distractions and let your boundary between yourself and the world soften a little, to just go deeper or expand a little. But it's a special environment that allows for a deeper experience of yourself. And it's a sad thing that it's so hard to take that home into your daily life. But it's kind of like there's always your mat, you know. You have your experience at the retreat and maybe you get the deeper *samskāras*<sup>36</sup> of a way of life written in your mind and it's like a practice that gets written in your soul and you can take that home, and there's always your mat that you can build on. It doesn't stop when you leave the retreat, but it's really hard to have the experience of a retreat in your daily life, you can't. But for me, I've got a mom at home that's not doing well, and sisters that are struggling to get by, and I told them I kind of needed to go away for awhile and get my own spirit strong, and they totally understand that because I have been the main caretaker for four years, and my sister understands that. I am trying to integrate my reality at home but I keep close with me my mom's suffering, and stressed out family matters. I am trying to establish thought patterns here that I can take home with me to deal with that situation better. It's not the boundary between the two, they're integrated. But a lot of what I am doing here is establishing a foundation for when I go back that will keep me strong.*

I will return to address some of the ideas raised in Ariel's comments later, but for now let them stand on without analyses as a description of why she and a good deal of other women (and some men<sup>37</sup>) travel to practice yoga. For Ariel the yoga retreat is a way to realign herself with her ideas, to step out of her daily life *in order to be able to return to it transformed*. For Ariel and for many other women, this is very much about transforming themselves so that they can give and care for others. The yoga retreat offers a place to regenerate, to build energy that becomes depleted when there is

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<sup>34</sup> The Off the Mat, into the World (OTM) Mission is roughly about “bridging yoga and activism...to use the power of yoga to inspire conscious, sustainable activism and ignite grassroots social change”. OTM describes yoga as a “powerful path of personal transformation... [that] expands our awareness of self creating space for balance and deep change in our lives”. OTM is about “expanding the sphere of change outward to local and global communities”. Their work, primarily consisting of leadership trainings and service projects, focuses on three areas: 1) training leaders to form Yoga Action Groups, 2) building community by building a global network of OTM leaders, and 3) initiating local and international service projects “Seva Challenges,” that “offer you the chance to contribute to the well being of others while transforming your own life” ([www.offthematintotheworld.org/](http://www.offthematintotheworld.org/) accessed 2012/09/01).

<sup>35</sup> Ariel is a woman in her late 30s who lives on the West Coast of Canada.

<sup>36</sup> The definition of *samskāra*, according to Feuerstein is: *Samskāra* (“activator”) — the subconscious impression left behind by each act of volition, which, in turn, leads to renewed psychomental activity; the countless *samskāras* hidden in the depth of the mind are ultimately eliminated only in *asamprajñāta-samādhi* [absorptive meditation] (from <http://www.traditionalyogastudies.com/glossary1.html> : accessed 08/03/11). Ariel refers more or less to this meaning when she uses *samskāra*. As she explains after, she is talking about how yoga practices can be used to rewrite the impressions of habitual life (*samskāras*) on your soul.

<sup>37</sup> See table 3.3 for gender make-up of various retreats.

not enough time to care for the self in daily life. The retreat figures prominently in many spiritual disciplines and has been written about extensively both in *Yoga Journal* and other yoga publications and by anthropologists concerned with pilgrimage (Morinis 1992), spiritual travel (Badone and Roseman 2004), and religion more broadly, which is one of the reasons I chose to study yoga through the location of the retreat. While I draw a distinction between retreat and holiday styles of yoga travel, which I elaborate on momentarily, both types rely on similar language and online technologies to talk about the experiences one can expect to have through traveling to participate in yoga-centered itineraries, and in this sense both types participate in the consumer frameworks of advertisement and marketing in a competitive yoga tourism market. It was hinted at, though perhaps not fully elaborated in Chapter 2, that there seem to be two emergent yet fundamentally different goals for different “types” of yoga tourists, the first being transformation and the second being escape. Roughly, the different yoga venues correspond to the desires of the aspirant (who wants to transform) or vacationer (who wants to escape), although I will also suggest that the lines are not as clear cut as that, and that certain people might both seek to transform through yoga or escape for a while with yoga at various points in their lives.

I describe separate field sites in a similar way to Keane’s “scenes of encounter” (described in Hayden 2009) where particular relationships between people and other people, environments, the non-human world, and spiritual life are heightened:

The concept of scenes of encounter foregrounds the interactive nature of the self theorized by symbolic interactionists... and phenomenology. In scenes of encounter, participants enact or perform the person they are or wish to be in relationship to others... They also perform the relationship between participants and construct collective forms of identity, including the locus of agency (Hayden 2009: 93).

For Ariel, but certainly not for all yoga tourists, the primary relationship she wishes to enact at this yoga retreat is a spiritual relationship enlivened through her embodied self by yoga. Here yoga is a spiritual discipline that is lived everyday, a total way of being in the world which Ariel strives towards but has to compromise when she is at home living her daily life where she is the primary support to a suffering mother. In this sense, Ariel views herself as an aspirant, seeking the yoga retreat as a point of transformation and deeper connection with self that she can bring home to hopefully engage with the difficulties of her roles in life with greater awareness, presence and empathy. Later in the interview with Ariel, she expressed to me that she desired to live in a yoga community and often felt a tension between her responsibilities towards caring for her mother and her desire to live at an ashram or yoga centre more permanently.

I was not able to know the motivations of all the travelers I met during my yoga sojourns, but many did describe their hopes or more often, their frustrations. These conversations provided glimpses into tourists' expectations and desires. Frustrations and satisfactions figured prominently in conversations that took place at yoga tourism venues circulating around what yoga travelers hoped to gain from yoga travel, what they expected based on the way each site was advertised online, and why they chose to travel to practice yoga in the first place. Some of these insights help to contextualize each locale both in its uniqueness and in its similarities to other yoga travel destinations, as many yoga travelers either had or wished to travel to other yoga tourism locations, and they often compared their past experiences to the one they were having when I met them, or used their current experience as a base from which to try to design the next experience they would wish to have. I hope that the particular locale of each retreat will emerge from my writing, but I also wish to highlight the relationships between them, a task which I take up in two stages. The first stage is set in the following Tables: in Table 3.1 through a summary of the most often found words used in yoga websites describing/marketing yoga retreats of various kinds, and in Table 3.2 which provides a summary of the different types of yoga retreat/holidays I identified<sup>38</sup> and a comparison of some of their features. The second stage is elaborated in descriptions of each site provided in the *Case Studies*, so that the reader is given a sense of each locale included in the multi-sited ethnography from which theorization expounds.

### **Yoga Tourism and the Comforts of “home” in *unique* Places**

Bruner (2005) describes tourism through the motif of a diurnal rhythm, a vacillation between the exotic and home:

There is a diurnal rhythm to touring. Typically, the tourists are housed in a hotel or similar accommodation in the evening, and it is during the day that they go sightseeing to the places on the tour itinerary. Thus within the larger frame of the entire journey, there is an internal daily fluctuation of being in the hotel, their temporary home, during the evening, and out sightseeing each day. Tourist brochures and advertising emphasize this division. They contrast the luxury of the accommodations they provide – the spacious rooms, gourmet food, swimming pools, excellent service, comfort, and safety like that of home – with the uniqueness of the sights to be seen in such foreign places as Indonesia or Kenya during the day. Thus the tour is not all “away”; it is also home because it oscillates between the two within the larger frame of the vacation (Bruner 2005:13).

This diurnal interplay between home and away is congruous on some level with anthropological analyses of travel as sacred journeying, but also demonstrates a more nuanced analysis of the

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<sup>38</sup> The examples included in this chart are not places I visited myself, although some of the places I visited, except for the luxury hotel with celebrity yoga teacher, which was far beyond my financial means, correspond to the categories identified here. I will make note of this when I describe each locale.

position put forth by Graburn (1977) and Turner (1969) of tourism as sacred journeying *away* from home with travel being the liminal stage in between. Bruner (2005) instead suggests that in much modern tourism, liminality occurs as an oscillation between recurrent feelings of being home and away in how tourism operators create the “comforts of home” in foreign locales. This oscillation of liminality, I found, is also evident in the process of traveling itself, whereby “comforts of home,” or familiarities while traveling are built into the travel experience through figures such as flight attendants and objects such as televisions, pillows, blankets, individual seats and meals on airplanes. These comforts contrast sensually with the harshness of air travel security and the anxiety of crossing international borders and having your luggage searched or potentially lost in transit. Travel often oscillates between points of anxiety, momentary comfort, and discovery, a process which begins prior to leaving home during trip planning, continues en route, and once you arrive at your final destination. Bruner (2005: 13) suggests that the tour is also home within the vacation, I suggest that through the use of online “shopping” for a yoga retreat, that in the planning of the vacation, “home” is also made *away* through imaginative acts of exploring the yoga tourism field. These imaginative acts include deciding where one may go and envisioning the types of experiences one hopes to have on vacation through yoga tourism discourses, particularly online, but also in print (see Taschen 2010) and by talking to other travelers.

My approach to contextualizing yoga tourism maintains some consistencies with anthropologies of pilgrimage (Morinis 1992, Badone and Roseman 2004, Turnbull 1992) that see travel as ritual experience (particularly in the case of yoga travel to ashrams and yoga centres), while recognizing the “oscillation” that takes place between home and away *throughout* the journey, including how tourism producers capitalize on tourists’ dual desires for safety and comfort with titillating experiences of the exotic. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the most frequent words used on yoga tourism websites to describe yoga retreats to potential tourists. This play between home and away described by Bruner is demonstrated in descriptions of tourist experiences that will be *unique, transformative, beautiful, exotic, relaxing, deepening the connection with self on a spiritual level through authentic spiritual traditions* passed on near *oceans* and *volcanoes* replete with *local history* and *local culture*, while at the same time providing *healthy organic food, massage, therapeutic services, pools, luxury, comfort, relaxation* and *retreat* in a *stress-free* environment with *experienced teachers* and staff: all the comforts of home taken care of by someone else, allowing you to relax to the full experience of an exotic place openly awaiting your impressions.

The emphasis on health and wellbeing in yoga tourism cannot be understated. Even in the case of spiritually motivated yoga tourism, there are elements of self-betterment involved, which I

discuss in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5. As I said previously, although I think there are distinctions to be made between yoga travel for spiritual transformation and yoga travel for vacation purposes, I remain reluctant to draw the line between them too clearly, particularly because the demographic of travelers is roughly the same, and also because in this dissertation I seek to resist classifying “Westernized” yoga practices (such as those offered in yoga vacations) as inauthentic compared to those that retain strong ties to India (such yogic lifestyle teachings offered in retreat courses at ashrams). In most cases, yoga tourism is about making a consumer choice for health, whether that is envisioned as physical or spiritual. Many times this consumer focus on health is also coupled with a focus on environment, such that moral discourses of self-care and environment care are enlivened in the marketing of ethical tourism to potential travelers. Yoga vacations are vacations you can feel good about. They are a way to demonstrate your interest in taking care of yourself and the world. I will discuss the implications of ethical consumption and tourism as it applies to yoga in greater detail in Chapter 5.

**Table 3.1 Occurrence of frequently used words describing yoga retreats<sup>39</sup>**

Word/term	#of sites using word	Word/term	#of sites using word
adventure	9	magical	8
ancient	10	<b>massage</b>	<b>13</b>
authentic spiritual traditions	8	<b>meditation</b>	<b>23</b>
awaken	4	mountains	11
ayurveda	5	<b>natural/nature</b>	<b>17</b>
balance	12	nurture	5
beaches	10	paradise	7
<b>beautiful</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>peace/peaceful</b>	<b>13</b>
bliss/blissful	5	pool	8
<b>body/mind/soul (body/mind/spirit)</b>	<b>23</b>	power/powerful	9
bodywork	3	<b>pranayama</b>	<b>13</b>
therapeutic services		pristine	5
breath	15	rejuvenate	7
calm mind	10	<b>relaxation /relax</b>	<b>21</b>
comfortable	7	renewal	6
community	7	<b>retreat</b>	<b>18</b>
contentment	3		
<b>deepen connection with self/yoga</b>	<b>14</b>	revitalize	4
<b>deepen connection with earth</b>		sacred	7
detox	4	sea/ocean	12
discover	9	<b>self--discovery/awareness self--growth</b>	<b>14</b>
dream	6	spa	7
eco	5	spectacular surroundings	6
energizing	11	<b>spirituality/spiritual</b>	<b>13</b>
enjoy	5	stress---free/de---stress/release	5
escape	5	sun	10
exotic	6	sustainable	5
<b>experienced teachers</b>	<b>14</b>	tradition	9
explore local culture	12	transformation	9
explore history	6	unique	7
fit/fitness	4	unspoilt location	4
heart opening	4	vegetarian	9
happier/happiness	5	volcanoes	7
<b>healing</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>wellness</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>health</b>		wildlife	5
<b>healthy organic food</b>	<b>18</b>	wisdom	6
<b>gourmet/delicious cuisine</b>		<b>yoga</b>	<b>30</b>
harmony	7		
holistic	4		
inspiring/inspiration	10		
life---changing	5		
love	8		
luxury/luxurious	8		

<sup>39</sup> Hundreds of websites were reviewed for this project, this chart includes a sample of 30 sites selected randomly from the Yoga Journal travel directory ([http://www.yogajournal.com/directory/?action=custom&yj=directory\\_search&category=3](http://www.yogajournal.com/directory/?action=custom&yj=directory_search&category=3) accessed 15/03/11).

Prior to delving into the individual *Case Studies* of yoga tourism, I offer some comparative analyses of terms and concepts I use and draw on in my descriptions. Table 3.2 compares different types of yoga tourism venues, detailing the cost, length of stay, hours of yoga, hours of work, accommodation, facilities, and whether or not there are permanent residents living at the venue (i.e. whether there is a community of yoga practitioners). Information comes from the websites of yoga tourism venues that identify as 1) an Ashram, 2) a Holistic Center, 3) a Yoga Holiday, and 4) a Yoga Holiday at a 5-star resort with a celebrity Yoga Teacher<sup>40</sup>. The examples given in Table 3.2 were not locations that I visited in my fieldwork, but the categories are representative of the sites I visited (aside from the 5 star resort with celebrity Yoga Teacher which was well beyond my means) as well as the numerous sites I researched online. I will refer to various aspects of Table 3.2 throughout my descriptions of various field sites, particularly when I compare costs and the different ways that yoga retreats are structured in terms of time and work, and particularly the differences between yoga travel as vacation (a temporary escape from a home one plans to return to) and yoga travel as spiritually-motivated pursuit (a desire for transformation which one seeks to bring home).

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<sup>40</sup> There are a number of celebrity Yoga Teachers who are primarily from the US. These names are known amongst yoga practitioners as experts of particular styles of yoga and invoked as both professional criteria and markers of status in yoga circles. They are somewhat akin to the Indian *guru*, but with a particular Americanized flare. When I write celebrity Yoga Teacher, I refer to someone who has gained celebrity status in the yoga world and not to a celebrity who thereafter became a Yoga Teacher. Celebrity Yoga Teachers often appear at major Yoga Conferences and Festivals, drawing scores of yoga fans to their classes. I will write about this more in the Case Study of the Yoga Conference later in this chapter.

Table 3.2 Comparative Chart of Different “Types” of Yoga Retreats

	Ashram		Holistic Centre		Yoga Holiday	Yoga Holiday with celebrity teacher at 5-star hotel
	Karma Yoga	Retreat	Work Study	Retreat		
<b>cost</b>	\$1019 USD	\$514 USD	\$975 US	\$511US	\$1075 US	\$6077US
<b>length of stay</b>	1 month	2 nights, 3 days	3 months	2 nights, 3 days	6 days, 5 nights	1 week (6 nights)
<b>type of food</b>	vegetarian, 3 meals/day		vegetarian, 3 meals/day		“cordon blue chef” prepared meals, 3 meals/day	gourmet vegetarian, 3 meals/day
<b>Prohibitions/ requirements</b>	celibacy, caffeine at extra cost, no: pets, children, alcohol, drugs, or tobacco		no children, no pets, no alcohol, drugs, or tobacco		none, beverages and therapies extra, probably no pets, and children extra	none, beverages and therapies extra, children would be extra and would have to find own care
<b>work hours</b>	48 hours/ week	1 hour/day	26 hours/week	0	0	0
<b>hours of yoga</b>	1 hour/day yoga, 8 hours karma yoga, ½ hour reflection, 1 hour Satsang	1 hour/day yoga, 1 hour karma yoga, 3 hours philosophy, 1 hour Satsang	1 hour/day of yoga (asana, pranayama, mantra, meditation), 2--5 hours karma yoga	5 hours /day yoga and workshops	2--4 hours per day yoga	5 hours of yoga per day, mostly asana but including pranayama and meditation prep
<b>accommodation</b>	shared, indoor dorms with 3--4 people per room	generally shared for 2, possible private indoor	indoor, single		luxury tents, cabins or indoor rooms, single or double occupancy	single or double occupancy in beach cabins on private island, many with private pools
<b># of residents</b>	7--10 permanent and 2--20 rotating = 9--30		70 permanent and 20--30 rotating = 80--100		0, this is a resort	0, this is a resort
<b>facilities and location</b>	130 acres of mostly forested land in a valley surrounded by mountains on a lake with 5 acre organic farm and orchard, USA		69 acres of cedar forest and meadows with restored farmhouse and large organic garden, USA		Resort near large city on private grounds with pool and self--contained leisure opportunities, excursions to local sites of interest extra, Costa Rica	“1000 unspoilt acres” on a private island in Caribbean with 1 mile of sand beach, excursions to local sites included in price

To give a summary of my field sites in relationship to the categories identified in Table 3.2, Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 summarize different aspects of the yoga tourism venues I visited. Table 3.3 details the players comprising the scene at each of my field sites while Table 3.4 compares my field work sites in terms of cost, food, accommodation, type and amount of yoga practiced, and extra amenities and or activities offered at each location.

Table 3.3 Yoga retreat locations visited and Players Comprising the Scene

	Ashram Canada	Eco Retreat Cost Rica	Holistic Centre Italy	Yoga Villa Bulgaria	Hotel Yoga Turkey	Maison Yoga France
<b>Duration of stay</b>	2 weeks	1 month	1 week	2 weeks	1 week	1 week
<b>Total number of guests</b>	work--study program: 16 retreat: 13 (Total: 29)	work exchange: 15 holiday: 10 (Total: 25)	holiday: 19	holiday: 11	holiday: 6	holiday: 10
<b>Total number of female guests: (% women)</b>	work study program: 11 organized retreat: 11 (22 =76%)	work exchange: 10 holiday: 8 (18= 72%)	holiday: 19 (19=100%)	holiday: 9 (9=82%)	holiday: 5 (5=83%)	holiday: 9 (9=90%)
<b>Total number of male guests: (% men)</b>	work study: 5 organized retreat: 2 (7=24%)	work exchange: 5 holiday: 2 (7=28%)	0 (0=0%)	holiday: 2 (2=18%)	holiday: 1 (17%)	holiday: 1 (1=10%)
<b>Owners</b>	Ashram owned by spiritual community.	Austrian owner. Managers of retreat a young couple from U.S who live in at retreat for dry season and U.S. for wet season. Retreat started by Canadian Yoga teacher.	Man and woman couple from England with 2 sons, living in separate house on same grounds as Centre.	Man and woman couple from England living part--time in Bulgaria at Villa, making transition to retirement and living there year--round.	Man and woman couple with 2 young children, recently relocated to Turkey from England. Husband is Turkish and holiday is in his hometown. Wife British.	Man and woman couple from England retired to Villa in France. Live in old Manour house and guest quarters are converted barns and outbuildings.
<b>Residents</b>	7--20	2	4	2	0	2
<b>Yoga Teacher(s)</b>	7 rotating teachers from resident community (varying in ages 30--65, 6 of whom were women, one man)	2 teachers: 1 in first two weeks, 2 <sup>nd</sup> in last two. 60 year--old man from Florida 30 year--old woman from Canada I also taught one class while staying here.	Teachers rotate on weekly basis. For my week yoga teacher was from New Zealand but now living in US. Woman in her early 30s.	Wife of couple, woman in mid 30s is yoga teacher. Guest pilates teacher, British woman in her 50s, exchanged teaching pilates for accommodation and food.	Teachers rotate on bi--weekly basis. For my week yoga teacher, young British woman of Indian descent, early 30s. 1 year--old daughter and father were with her.	Wife of couple, woman in early 60s.
<b>Staff</b>	7--8 salaried staff in areas of administration, cooking, publishing, facilities.	4, local couple cooks, cleans and works on property, and managers.	4--5, administration, management, chef and cleaners.	0, owners do all cooking, maintenance, admin and cleaning.	Owners rent space in hotel, there is much staff at large hotel, but yoga holiday run by couple.	1, live--in housekeeper. Self--catered so no cooking. Husband and wife keep grounds.

**Table 3.4 Comparing Yoga Travel Experiences: Yoga, Accommodation, Food**

	<b>Ashram Canada</b>	<b>Eco Retreat Cost Rica</b>	<b>Holistic Centre Italy</b>	<b>Yoga Villa Bulgaria</b>	<b>Hotel and Yoga Deck Turkey</b>	<b>Yoga Villa France</b>
<b>tuition (US\$)</b>	0 (Young Adult Program)	500/month	1270/1 week	850 / 2 weeks	650/ week	750 / week
<b>yoga practices</b>	--1 hour asana at 6:30 am, -- 8 hours karma yoga (work/service), -- 1 hour satsang 8 pm (chanting, spiritual gathering) -- 3 meals eaten in silence, -- ongoing speech mindfulness and mantra repetition, --half hour reflective sharing afternoon	1.5 hours asana daily except Sundays, alternating between 6:30am and 3:30 pm --work exchange not formally elaborated as yoga practice, but considered by some to be spiritual service	--two 2 hour asana classes/day for 5 days (ten total): morning class: 10am--noon afternoon class: 4--6pm	--ten 1.5 hour asana classes, 8:30--10am --eight 1 hour pilates classes, 5:30--6:30pm --most days there were 2 classes/day, although some days there was only a morning class, and 2 days/week no classes	--two, 1.5 hour asana classes for 5 days (ten total): morning class: 6:30--8am afternoon class: 5--6:30pm	--two 1 hour asana classes for 5 days (ten total): morning class: 9:30--10:30 afternoon class: 5--6pm 2, 1 hour guided meditations 9--10pm
<b>food</b>	3 vegetarian meals daily, prepared by chefs in kitchen. Working farm provides much local produce. All meals are eaten in silence with recorded mantras chanted by guru in dining room. Volunteers clean and wash dishes after meals.	3 vegetarian meals daily, eaten communally. Breakfast and lunch prepared by Lila, dinners prepared by volunteers and managers on alternating schedule. Produce from garden and fruit trees when available. Volunteers clean after meals.	3 vegetarian meals daily, eaten communally. World--class chef prepares gourmet Italian--inspired vegetarian cuisine. Hired staff serve food buffet style and clean after meals.	2 meals daily, eaten communally. Breakfast of toasts, cereals, teas and coffees and more elaborate dinners, often including meat although vegetarian options are available. Meals prepared by husband and cleaning done by owners.	2 meals daily, eaten at restaurant in hotel. Breakfast buffet and set meals for dinner with limited vegetarian options . Prepared by cooks in hotel and served by waiters in dining room shared with non--yoga hotel guests. Sometimes eaten communally, often not.	Self--catered with shared kitchens available for guests to prepare their own meals. Meals usually eaten alone or with one or two other guests who share communal kitchen.
<b>accommodation</b>	Shared dorm rooms in several buildings segregated by gender with 3--4 guests per room. Residents of ashram have private rooms.	Dormitory style rooms in main house with 4--10 mixed gender guests per room, one private room, extra cost.	Shared dorm rooms with 2--3 guests per room in converted farmhouse, 2 private rooms extra cost.	Some private rooms, some 2--4 person rooms in villa, which is also owners' home.	Hotel rooms in all--inclusive hotel resort, some shared, some private.	Private rooms in converted barns with shared kitchens.

## Case Study 1 Eco Yoga Retreat Costa Rica



Image 3.1 Clotheslines, fire pit and fruit orchard, EYC Costa Rica

### **Snapshot provided by website:**

**1. Key words:** *rustic, “sustainable living project”, beautiful tropical rainforest, reconnect with mind, body and nature*

**2. Images:** snapshots of yoga deck and surrounding jungle with yoga mats and no people, images of local wildlife, including spider monkeys and sloths, photos of local children and surfers down on the beach, a video of the managers surfing the local break

### **A bit of background about the Eco Yoga Retreat**

The Eco Yoga Retreat (EYR) is set on a steep hill on low coastal mountains in Southern Costa Rica and is surrounded by rainforest and a few nearby properties, including a large private eco-tourism reserve, owned mostly by foreigners. There is a small village at the base of the hill inhabited primarily by Spanish descent Costa Ricans (Ticos) and expatriate Americans, and another small village about half an hour’s walk higher up in the hills inhabited primarily by Ticos, where the couple who staff the retreat, Lila and Paulo, travel to and from on a daily basis. Paulo and Lila have lived in the nearby village their entire lives, and Paulo’s family owns several parcels of ranching and farmland in the surrounding area. Paulo is indispensable in managing the land and facilities at the EYR. He provides expertise in rainwater collection, erosion control, water systems, fruit tree maintenance and care, building with and collecting local materials, identifying and controlling poisonous snakes and scorpions, as well as providing horses for hauling food and supplies from the village. Paulo is also an important local contact, he helps the EYR managers navigate local laws and create working relationships with other locals.

Lila walks the half hour journey downhill to the EYR six days a week to perform her duties of cooking breakfast and lunch, laundry and cleaning. Paolo sometimes accompanies her on foot, but usually rides a horse and brings along another one as the horses are the primary means of transporting goods and material to the EYR. At the time of my visit the EYR did not own a vehicle, and if they had it would have been of little use to them since the road washed out in a landslide two years previous. During the time of my visit 4x4 vehicles could get within 1km of the EYR, but most often goods were hauled from the village by horseback or on foot. In addition to Paulo and Lila, the EYR occasionally employs Juan, who lives on the *Guyami* Indigenous Reserve a few hours horseback ride from the EYR. Juan works doing construction projects and other labour and offers to take EYR guests on horseback rides to his village where a local storyteller will entertain them for a few hours.

The Eco Yoga Retreat was originally built by Marcel, a yoga teacher from Eastern Canada who envisioned it as a sustainable living project that would be financially supported by tourists attracted to the eco-oriented principles of the location. He envisioned and built this eco yoga retreat with the help of several American and Canadian friends, under the building guidance of Paulo and a team of local Ticos. The primary building is a large guesthouse and yoga deck made out of local rainforest hardwoods, cement, rocks and other local material. A local artisan set the stone and tile work into the cement floors and walls and created several tile mosaics throughout the main house, including in the communal showers and a sink near the front entrance (see images 3.2 and 3.3).

The EYR property rests on about 5 acres of land. A mixture of rainforest and cultivated fruit trees surround the buildings on the property, including a main house, a separate kitchen, a chicken coop and two *cabinas*. A small patch of flat land has been cleared for an organic garden and leveled where the main house sits, but the majority of the land is steeply sloped. One advantage to the sloping is that it is easy to use gravity to encourage the flow of water from the low impact rainwater systems placed uphill from the main house, kitchen and gardens. In addition to collecting rainwater for washing and gardening, and fresh spring water for drinking, the EYR employs low-tech waste management in the form of composting toilets and constructed wetlands for grey water recycling. The current managers, Martie and Zeke, are very interested in applying permaculture principles to the EYR. The EYR vision of building sustainable living systems is highly influenced by the permaculture movement, which integrates organic farming, local ecology and principles of social justice.

The main house at the EYR is comprised of a communal sitting area at the front, guest accommodations, communal showers and toilets, and a small library at ground-level (Image 3.2), and

a sprawling yoga deck overlooking the jungle with a view to the ocean on the second floor (Image 3.3)



Image 3.2 Main floor of Guest House with detail of floor and lending library



Image 3.3 View from Eco Yoga Retreat Yoga Deck

When I visited the Eco Yoga Retreat in 2010, it had been running for about 4 years, but had been sold by the original owner, Marcel to a friend, Simon, the previous year. The couple managing the Eco Yoga Retreat, who I call Martie and Zeke, had met Marcel when they answered a call on the

Eco Yoga Retreat website to be wet-season caretakers on the property and do some managing should guests wish to stay there in the off-season.

Zeke told me that an important aspect of the relationship between locals and foreign landowners in Costa Rica is that it is necessary for foreign landowners to have a local act as caretaker for their property. This is because of a clause in land ownership laws wherein local peoples may claim squatters' rights on foreign-owned property if the owners are away, even for a short time. The relationship with Paulo and Lila thus serves both to provide employment for the local couple, as well as to protect the interests of the EYR owners.

From my observations and from what Zeke and Martie told me, the relationship that the EYR maintains with Lila and Paulo is a close one. I was unable to speak with Lila and Paulo directly, so I don't know what their perspectives are on this relationship, but I did learn through Fred, another tourist staying there who was fluent in Spanish and had been to the EYR twice before, that Lila was much happier at the EYR than she had been working for another ecotourism venue nearby. Lila told Fred that her last employer did not allow her or the other domestic workers to talk with the tourists, and that they did not treat her very well. The original owner of the EYR, Marcel, was fluent in Spanish and I learned from Zeke that Marcel considered Paulo a close friend. Zeke and Martie also felt that they were beginning to develop friendships with Lila and Paulo. Both Martie and Zeke were working on improving their Spanish so that they could better communicate with Lila and Paulo as well as other locals.

Most Ticos in the nearby village spoke little English, and while Lila and Paulo seemed to understand some, they did not speak any English themselves. The closest town to the EYR, which was a two-hour walk away, was a famous surf tourism location and had developed a busy tourist industry over the last ten years. In this town, many locals had become involved in the tourist industry, and knew enough English to conduct transactions with tourists. While the EYR liked to consider itself as different from the other players in the local tourism industry, and while in some ways it was, it was also reliant on this industry. Although the EYR managers tried to encourage a respectful attitude towards locals to the tourists who stayed there, and although they tried to maintain a sustainable flow of tourists, they were still responsible for the development of tourism in the tiny village, which had seen very little tourist activity prior to the construction of the EYR. The nearby surfing town had witnessed the arrival of serious social problems (such as increased drug and alcohol use amongst the youth and a rise in sex tourism) with the development of tourism, and Zeke told me that there were mixed feelings about the arrival of foreign tourists in the village. While the EYR provided employment for a few local people, the potential negative social impacts such as drug

and alcohol abuse, sex tourism, rising land costs, and changing economic and social relationships associated with tourism development, were of definite concern to local village residents. I discuss this problematic in greater detail in Chapter 5 when I talk about the ethics of ethical tourism<sup>41</sup>.

### **Who are the owners and operators of the EYR and why are they there?**

Martie and Zeke were in their mid-20s and originally from Florida, and although Martie had done a Yoga Teacher Training program, she only taught yoga at the EYR when there was no one else available to do so. They were originally attracted to the EYR because it was designed and built with sustainability principles in mind, but primarily they chose the site because they are avid surfers and the EYR is located within walking distance to a good surfing beach. The EYR is really an ideal living situation for Martie and Zeke. It allows them to spend months surfing and to live off the grid and learn about organic farming without having to own their own land or take the financial risks involved with owning a foreign business.

Martie and Zeke were in their third year at the Eco Yoga Retreat, but their first year managing it on their own when I stayed there. The phrase they used to describe their life was that they were “*living the dream*”. The couple would have liked to buy the Eco Yoga Retreat from Marcel when he decided to sell it, but did not have the money to do so. They were happy when their friend Simon, who had been a previous work exchange guest with them at the EYR, decided to buy it from Marcel and to maintain Marcel’s vision of it as a sustainable living project. Simon was not at the EYR when I visited in 2010 because his wife was having a baby and they felt it would be safer for her to have the baby in Switzerland than in Costa Rica. Simon arranged for Martie and Zeke to manage the EYR in his absence. This arrangement allows Martie and Zeke to live their dream lifestyle of surfing everyday and working towards building a sustainable part-time community in Costa Rica. The low pressure situation suits their laid-back approach to a life oriented primarily around surfing.

In previous years Marcel had been much more involved in managing the retreat and teaching yoga, although he also offered the EYR space to Yoga Teachers to organize their own retreats. According to Zeke, Marcel decided to sell the property after he and his wife split up because he could not manage it on his own. On my last day at the Eco Yoga Retreat Marcel arrived to stay there for a month as the yoga teacher. In this way he maintains a connection to the EYR, which was

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<sup>41</sup> I delivered a paper on this topic at the 2011 AAA Meetings in Montreal entitled: *Embodying Ethical Tourism through Yoga: a “Sustainable Living Project” in Costa Rica.*

largely built through his vision of place to practice yoga in paradise, although he no longer bears the financial responsibilities or workload of running it.

### **What is the EYR about?**

Although the website describes the EYR as a *sustainable living project*, I believe that this idealistic characterization obfuscates some of the complexities involved in this kind of tourism venture. The EYR is a kind of intentional community. They have a clear vision and goals for development, and seek to be inclusive of the different members that comprise their community. This community is made up of people who occupy vastly different positions in the global political, social and economic order. While I have critiques of this model from a political economic point of view concerned with how power operates in relationships, I was also able to see from the perspective of the EYR how this setup works for them based on principles of respect and intentions for alternative ecological and community models (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed analysis).

Some of the concerns I have with the EYR envisionment of a *sustainable living project* revolve around what we mean by “living” in terms of larger critiques of neoliberal visions of “lifestyle” (Hoey 2010) and the excluded larger structural dynamic of how power operates in this “community.” The basic arrangement at the EYR is that it functions as a yoga tourism location only during the Costa Rican dry season, roughly from January to June. During the wet season from July through December, tourists can stay at the EYR with meals (provided by Lila) and board included, but there is no yoga. Martie and Zeke told me that very few tourists come to the EYR during these months. While Martie and Zeke had spent one wet season at the EYR as caretakers, they now returned to the US after the main tourist season, as they found the wet season at the EYR to be “miserable and too wet to really be inhabitable”. For the past three years Paulo and Lila have taken over all of the caretaking duties during the wet season, so that outside of the main tourist season the EYR reverts to being a place inhabited by local people. When the tourists go home and Martie and Zeke go back to Florida, Paulo and Lila and their two children live at the EYR, providing food and cleaning for the few tourists who venture forth in the rains.

Who “lives” at this “sustainable living project” is therefore shifting. During the dry season Martie and Zeke are the only ones who actually “live” there long term as the other community members, including yoga tourists and Yoga Teachers, are continuously rotating, with some returning but many coming only once for a short time. That said I did feel like I was “living” at the EYR when I was there, and it was the only yoga tourism location I visited where I felt that. This feeling of feeling “at home,” and part of the community, at the EYR was also communicated to me by

other work-stay participants. This largely had to do with the work duties that yoga volunteer tourists undertook together in the maintenance of life at the EYR (see Image 3.4). Because we all practiced yoga together, cooked, farmed, ate, socialized, built, planned projects, and slept in the same rooms (see Image 3.5), the EYR did feel like a community. Not only were we working together, we were also living together in the sense that each of us was involved to some degree or another in the shared enactment of the ideal envisioned by the EYR of an alternative *living project* – something we knew we were only temporarily a part of, but also something we might return to in the future or in some way take home with us.

What is this *living project* then? In many ways it is a lively, alternative intentional community model with a shifting widespread network of community members who are connected in local as well as global ways, and many of who will never have direct contact with each other (Strauss 2005). Members of the EYR community may never overlap with one another or have any knowledge of one another's existence, yet each person who stays, works and lives there for a time carries with them their experiences of the place and the people they come to know there. In this way the EYR really is an imagined community (Anderson 1991) connected through the vision of living and caring for the inhabited environment, modeling the potential for sustainable co-inhabitation of human and ecological communities. This model provides yoga volunteer tourists with an alternative modality of being for the one month to two month period they live there, and some of these volunteer tourists return year after year to experience this modality again. The EYR is a venue for Martie, Zeke, Simon and Marcel to co-construct a dynamic social space that allows them to live out their visions of being-in-the-world in an ethical and engaged physically, spiritually, and socially vibrant way. It also provides secure and relatively well-paid and respectful employment to Paulo and Lila compared to other nearby tourism employers and other local farm, construction or domestic work. In many ways, the EYR feels like paradise: a warm place near a warm ocean, nestled in a human-maintained part of the rainforest filled with fruit trees, fed by spring water and inhabited by what Ariel called "like-minded" people – most of them from urban locales abroad, all of them interested in preserving and caring for this place as a microcosm of the larger multiply-inhabited planet.

While in some ways the EYR fulfills the vision of a "living project," from a critical political and economic perspective that considers its place in the larger structure of the tourism industry and the phenomena of sustainable and ethical tourism, there are some larger anthropological concerns with this model. These will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 5.



Image 3.4 Photograph of Author in the EYR Kitchen doing dishes



Image 3.5 Smaller dorm room at EYR

While the social nature of the EYR was fluid and highly dependent on personalities and dynamics shared by the visitors staying and passing through, the landscape shaped much of the conversation and highly affected the embodied experience of place. The two main geographical features that define the landscape of the Eco Yoga Retreat are the slope of the land and the jungle.

The gradient of the slope is very steep, the various buildings are all at different altitudes, and the 100 steps from the main house to the chicken coop are a difficult climb for anyone who is not physically fit, likewise the climb to and from the kitchen. In the dark, flashlights are required and guests are warned to keep an eye out for snakes and scorpions hiding in the foliage. Staying at the Eco Yoga retreat requires a lot of up and downhill climbing. The beach is a 15-20 minute walk down a steep slope with uneven footing and deep ruts that can be slippery and difficult to walk when it is wet. This hill is barely ascendable by 4x4 vehicles and guests often arrive at the EYR looking harried and heavily loaded after making the trek up the hill to arrive at their destination. While complaints about the hill abound when guests first arrive, by the end of a stay it is considered a rite of passage to trek the hill with ease. Here is Ariel's description of arriving at the EYR for the first time:

*Ariel: It's totally exciting coming up the hill because every step you take you know you are getting closer to the place you've been dreaming about getting to and you get to the end of the road and you see that steep dirt hill, and you think "okay stairway to heaven, here I go" and up you go and then you start seeing the signs, and you know, I felt with every step I took I was getting closer to the thing I dreamed about, like a perfect match and when I came here I was very aware of trying to figure out how things are done here, so I felt at first, before I let myself feel totally at home here, I just made sure I understood what the boundaries are, "okay it's a very casual place, you can do what you want, it's that kind of place Ya hoo!" [laughs]. Meeting the managers and just how they run things is marvelous, and Michael [the yoga teacher], and other people started coming and going and I kind of got the rhythm of it, and after about a week my body relaxed into it. I let go of any need to understand the place, I just started to feel part of it. I got into a rhythm of doing my projects and doing the yoga and having talks with my partner and little by little I just started to feel a part of the place. It's only been two weeks, but it's been marvelous, it's like an archetype: this sustainable yoga community in nature, this environment surrounded by local people that care-take the place. There's a nice relationship going with the native people and the people coming and going and that's really important to me that that is a healthy flow. It feels good to have them coming and going in a symbiotic way, and on that level it's like that's a healthy foundation for the place. The land is healthy and the human relationships around the land are very healthy, nice awareness and any cravings that I have are gone because everything I want is here. So that's what it's like for me. It's like I arrived at this archetype that matches perfectly my idea of what it was going to be, like "oh yah, this is it."*

The second defining feature of the EYR is the jungle. The diagram below cannot do justice to the presence of the jungle, an all-pervasive scape of greenery and sound. Howler monkeys bellow in nearby trees and spider monkeys are seen daily twittering in the ylang-ylang trees whose scent washes over us in the afternoons as we practice yoga on the deck. Toucans, parrots, frogs and cicadas contribute their choruses of screeches, skrees, reverberating whistles, blips, zaps and rolling electrical drumbeats. Hummingbirds, butterflies and snakes are frequent visitors, as well as sloths and pizote (a raccoon-like mammal that travels in small family groups). The jungle is loud, so loud that I had to borrow earplugs from one of the other guests to be able to sleep there at night.

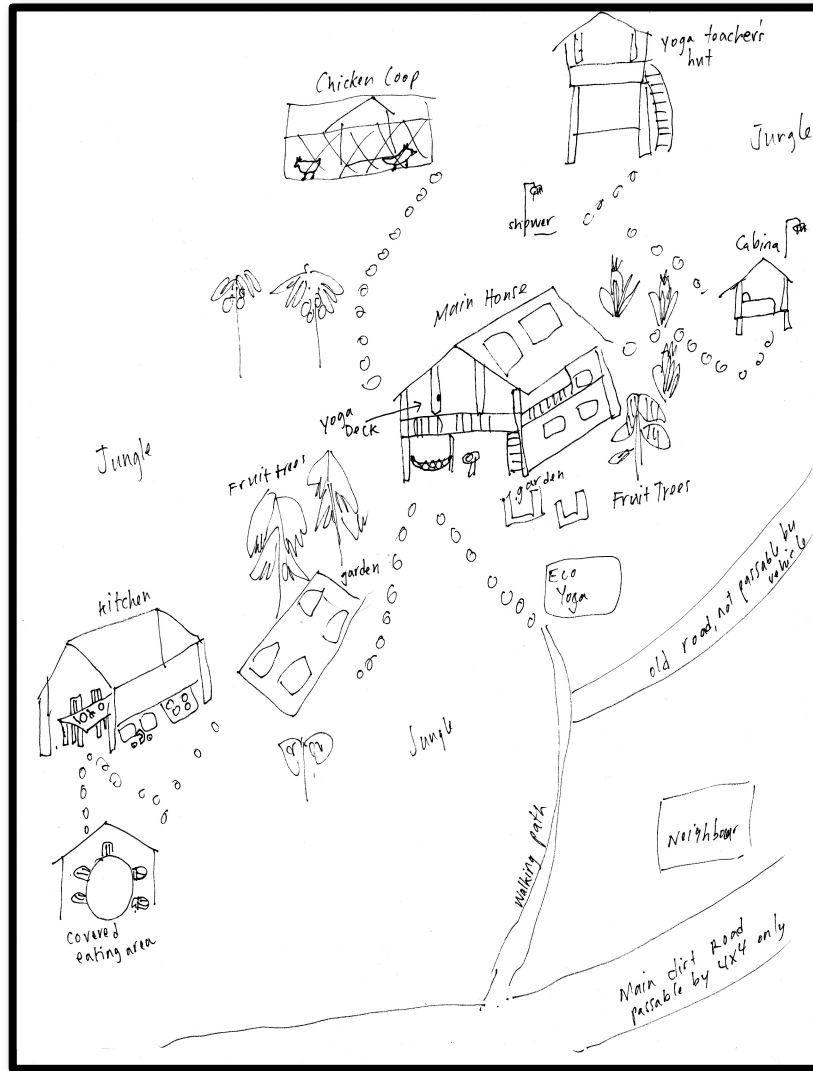


Image 3.6 Rough Sketch of Eco Yoga Retreat Layout

### **Different types of travelers that stay at the EYR:**

Travelers to the EYR fall into two categories: work exchange participants and shorter-term guests. Work exchange participants commit to a one month minimum stay and agree to contribute 10 hours a week of labour in exchange for \$500US for one month of room, board, and daily yoga classes. Of all the yoga holiday, vacation, and retreats I found, this was by far the least expensive, which speaks to the sustainability rather than profit-driven motive of the EYR in both an environmental and social sense (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4 for a comparison of costs with other retreats). While some of this no doubt has to do with the lower cost of operating the EYR than retreats in other countries, there are slews of other yoga retreats in Costa Rica that cost far more to stay at than the EYR, so the cost seems purposefully kept low in order to permit lower budget travelers to stay there, but also

to attract a particular demographic of guests. Of all the yoga tourism locations I visited, the EYR was the only one where the average age was 20-30, rather than the more common 30-45. Additionally, the EYR attracted more men than the other yoga holiday locations, speaking to the fact that the yoga was not the primary focus of the EYR, but only one of its main features, along with surfing and sustainability. In this way the EYR more aligned with sustainable work-oriented ethical travel projects such as organic farms and the WWOOFing<sup>42</sup> network, than with other yoga retreats. In fact most of the EYR guests were “backpackers.” That is, they were traveling away from their home countries for several months at a time with limited belongings stored in backpacks they could carry from place to place. The EYR was only one of many stops along their various journeys following their *Lonely Planet*<sup>43</sup> guides through Central America. Although the EYR is not unique in offering reduced rates for work exchange in yoga travel, as some ashrams and Yoga Centers offer reduced price fares for work exchange guests, the amount of work time expected of guests at the EYR is very minimal, only 10 hours a week compared to 20-40 hours a week at ashrams and yoga centers. What this means is that there is a lot of leisure time at the EYR, a fact that suits transient backpackers and surfers quite well. The only scheduled activities during the day are yoga, at either 6:30 am or 3:30 pm, six days a week, and breakfast, lunch and dinner. All activities are optional, and some guests opt not to participate sometimes, choosing to pursue other interests and activities.

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<sup>42</sup> According to the WWOOF website: WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is a world-wide network of organizations that links volunteers with organic farmers, and “helps people share more sustainable ways of living.” WWOOF is an exchange of volunteer time for food, accommodation, and education about organic farming (<http://www.wwoof.org/> accessed 04/07/2012).

<sup>43</sup> *Lonely Planet* guides are part of a suite of travel-related products for global backpacking and self-guided travel. As of 2010, *Lonely Planet* published “about 500 titles in 8 languages, as well as TV programmes, a magazine, mobile phone applications and websites” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonely\\_planet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonely_planet) 04/07/2012). *Lonely Planet* Guides give information about specific regions broken up by categories that are supposedly of interest to travelers. There are sections on food, accommodation, recreation, sightseeing, history, language, sexuality, entertainment, environment, etc. These travel guides serve to provide information to backpackers and other travelers so that they can travel in a way that they are discovering new places with the added safety of having the opinions and information provided by other members of their own culture who supposedly have the interests and desires of different types of travelers in mind. Information is usually provided about a range of travel options from budget to luxury so that travelers can choose based on their own travel budget. I found when traveling that the way people use these guides very much means that although each backpacker feels s/he is going on a unique adventure, that every other backpacker with the same book is essentially following the same trail. The books give the illusion that travelers are following new paths as they are going on tour individually or with a few other group members in self-guided tours. But in a sense these tours are not that different than guided tours, it is just that the guide is not immediately present with you while the tour is going on. This also gives the opportunity for going out of the tour and seeking other experiences in ways that may not be available in guided tours or more fully booked travel itineraries.

The general feeling of the EYR, as described to me by one guest, is “laid back.” The managers envision it in line with an intentional community vision rather than a health or wellness retreat. They subscribe to permaculture principles in the design and maintenance of the site, and encourage guests to learn as well as share skills they have in gardening, building, composting, waste management, cooking, and anything else guests might be willing to contribute. Work duties at the Eco Yoga Retreat were separated into two categories: 1) regular tasks and 2) projects. The regular tasks included: 1) compost duty, 2) chickens, 3) food run on the horses once a week, 4) watering the gardens, 5) rotating dinner duty. The various projects undertaken while I was there included: building walls for the Yoga Teacher’s hut, fencing the chicken coop, building a retaining wall on Martie and Zeke’s *cabina*, washing the yoga mats, building raised beds near the main house, hauling building supplies, collecting horse manure and leaves for sheet mulching, collecting worms, collecting and planting plants, digging and making concrete steps for pathways, cutting bamboo and maintaining the water lines.

I could say a good deal more about the EYR, including descriptions of the individuals I met there and exclamations about the beauty of the landscape and the general goodwill amongst most of the people I met sharing yoga, work and food. What I will focus on is the camaraderie that developed amongst the work-stay participants as we learned to inhabit the space over our month-long stay. The camaraderie at the EYR was in many ways unique amongst the yoga tourism locations I visited, a result of the way work stay guests were incorporated into the structure of the community as participants and decision makers. This experience may have had something to do with the amount of time I stayed there, one month as opposed to 1 and 2 weeks at the other locales, but I also think it had much to do with the “casual” structuring of the community that allowed guests more room for personal initiative, expression, and sharing on their own terms. Unlike at the Yasodhara ashram, which I describe momentarily, sociality at the EYR was not highly scripted, and unlike the other yoga retreat/vacations I attended, guests were not pampered to with a strict separation between “work,” carried out by staff, and “relaxation, vacation, leisure,” the luxury provenance of tourists. Sharing food, yoga and work created bonds of intimacy between us wherein we shared aspects of our lives at home, things we were struggling with or aiming towards, reasons we came to the EYR and what we hoped to get out of our stay. Ariel, who I introduced previously, described her decision to come to the EYR this way when I asked her how it came to be that she was here:

*Ariel: You know, I got hit by a car three years ago and the rehabilitation process involved a lot of physiotherapy and swimming pool time and getting to know what it feels like to have a new knee and I noticed that last winter was, two years after the*

*accident, and the cold damp weather of Victoria made it really sore, but it was around the same time I was thinking I should be doing yoga, so I started doing yoga and I thought “next year I should go somewhere warm to do yoga” because everyone says if you have arthritis-like pain, warm weather dissolves them. And yoga was a priority, like if I go away to somewhere warm, there has to be yoga. So it’s not like a holiday I’m looking for, it’s a continuation of healing and growing. And then my partner started getting interested in surfing, so then surfing came in. Okay, so we want to go away for the winter and there are surfing interests and yoga priorities, so it was going to be India until the surfing came in, and then it switched to Costa Rica, because there is such a yoga surfing scene here. So as a couple it was nice, and Costa Rica worked, so then we started searching for what would fill those things. And there are all sorts of surfing yoga camps that cost like \$1000/week, and we just didn’t have that kind of money and my gut told me, there’s got to be something down-to-earth going on with yoga in Costa Rica with a beach nearby, laughs. So the words “sustainable yoga” just popped into my head, because I was thinking down to earth, and then we typed in “sustainable yoga” in google and up came the [Eco Retreat Costa Rica]<sup>44</sup>, and it was just like an omen, wow! So intuition has spoken, and it’s not to be ignored, so we were on it.*

Ariel’s comments about the surfing, the cost, and the “rustic” or down to earth quality of the EYR, were also descriptors that attracted the other guests and work-stay participants that I met in Costa Rica, some with whom I spent a good deal of time with over the course of my month-long stay.

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<sup>44</sup> As stated previously, this is not the actual name of the location, I have altered Ariel’s (also a pseudonym) words to preserve anonymity of persons.

## Case Study 2 Yasodhara Ashram<sup>45</sup>, Kootenay Lake, Canada



Image 3.7 View of Yasodhara Ashram gardens in early October, Temple of Divine Light, and Kootenay Lake in the Background

### **Snapshot provided by website:**

- 1. Key words:** *vibrant spiritual community, expand awareness, bring teachings of yoga to life, in-depth self-inquiry, harmonious living*
- 2. Images:** automatic slideshow showcasing students sitting in meditation, views of lake and gardens at ashram, temple, karma yogis working, snow-capped mountains

The Yasodhara Ashram (YA) is located in a fairly remote location in Canada, about a two-hour drive from the nearest regional airport and seven hour drive from the nearest international airport. It is one of very few yoga ashrams in Canada with a residential community of initiates<sup>46</sup>. The YA was

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<sup>45</sup> While other yoga field sites names have been altered for the sake of protecting the identity of the participants, the idea of trying to mask the identity of the Yasodhara Ashram is problematic, largely because it is the only ashram in BC. Part of the problem in attempting to mask the ashram is that it is highly identifiable and it seems odd to write about it without making specific reference to Swami Radha, a follower of Sivananda an important figure in the globalization of yoga (Strauss 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Although I do not know the exact number of ashrams in Canada, I estimate between 3 and 4 based on ashrams that advertise online to potential yoga travelers, 2 of which are affiliated with Sivananda. There are also a number of Yoga and Holistic Centers with residential communities but unlike ashrams these centers do not necessarily follow one lineage of yoga, and the residents are not necessarily swamis (initiated disciples).

founded by Swami Sivananda Radha, a disciple of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh<sup>47</sup>, and continues to exist in a direct yoga lineage where spiritual leadership is passed down by a guru to a disciple. While Swami Radha acknowledged the teachings of Swami Sivananda and paid homage to him as her guru, Yasodhara Ashram is based on her interpretation of the teachings and does not follow the Sivananda teaching directly as Sivananda Ashrams do.

Prior to delving into the particularities of the YA, I define what an ashram is and how it operates. Primarily an ashram is defined as being the primary dwelling of a guru and his or her spiritual disciples. On the YA website, it is defined as a “spiritual home,” that presents a “particular lineage of teachings” (<http://www.yasodhara.org/about/faq/>” 2011/09/02). Bruner describes an ashram as a “sanctuary, a hermitage, a place of religious retreat where those in search of peace might have an opportunity for quiet and meditation. It is also a place of learning where disciples go to study with a holy man [or woman], who might be called a guru, a swami, or a yogi” (1996: 301).

An ashram is a spiritual community wherein each of the residents and/or visitors is expected to follow the guru’s spiritual teachings and participate in a specific manner in community life. In this way, the YA, as a community of people in Canada organized around a transplanted Indian tradition, can be contextualized in relation to the Himalayan Institute Ashram in Pennsylvania where Bruner studied yoga and meditation:

The Himalayan Institute founded by Swami Rama [originally from India] is one of a number of similar ashrams, institutes, and societies transplanted to America. Although I am not competent to make generalizations about all transplanted Hindu traditions, some common characteristics may be discerned (Ellwood, 1987). They are led by a charismatic teacher (e.g. Swami Vivekenanda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Sivananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh, and Swami Bhaktivedanta). They offer the “spiritual wisdom” of India and establish communities of followers. Their teachings stress the universality of all spiritual traditions, and they cultivate the divine that is within each person. Although based on a complex philosophical system, the emphasis is less on abstract doctrine and more on the techniques needed to achieve spirituality and inner peace (Bruner 1996: 309).

### **A brief history of the Yasodhara Ashram**

Swami Radha was born in Germany in 1911. She founded the Yasodhara Ashram in 1963 after living through two wars, becoming widowed twice, emigrating to Canada in 1951, and undertaking a pilgrimage to India in 1955. Her life is a fascinating story unto itself, and would be worthwhile of

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<sup>47</sup> Swami Sivananda was the founder of the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh. Sivananda played a fundamental role in the global dissemination of yoga, as can be seen from the number of international Sivananda ashrams that continue to exist in Canada, the US, Austria, the Bahamas, and India among others. Strauss (2005) describes Sivananda’s work and life in her study of yoga’s globalization, paying particular attention to India and Germany.

further study in the globalization of yoga, particularly as she was one of the first white woman to be initiated into sanyas in a Hindu tradition<sup>48</sup>. In addition to founding an ashram and many spiritual centers throughout Canada, the US, France and the UK, with a wide array of disciples and students, Swami Radha also published extensively on yoga through the publishing house she started at the YA, *Timeless Books*.

A two-week stay at the YA barely touches on what this community is about and the work carried on there. As with the other places I visited as a yoga traveler, this is but a tourist snapshot of the YA. However, unlike the other yoga tourism venues I visited, the YA does not intend itself as primarily a tourist destination. It is first and foremost a spiritual community, although it does rely on funding from yoga travelers to support its activities. Another factor that sets the YA apart from other yoga tourism venues described in this dissertation is that there is an extensive amount of self-produced information available on the YA, both through its publishing house and a frequently updated website and blog. I draw on published material, the YA website, a blog written by a YA trained teacher (<http://www.itsallyogababy.com/>), a reading of some of Swami Radha's books and *Ascent Magazine* (a former YA publication) in framing my analysis of the YA. My intention here is not to provide a detailed ethnographic history of the YA, although this would be a worthwhile anthropological project for gaining more clarity about the transformation of yoga in Canada over the last sixty years. Rather my focus is on yoga travel. On what it means to stay short periods at different places orienting themselves around yoga. I cannot characterize the YA as only a yoga tourism location, although that is part of what goes on there, but also it seemed important to me to include an ashram in my study of yoga travel, as many people do travel to ashrams, both in and outside of India to learn and practice yoga. Later I will theorize about some of the differences that emerge when comparing yoga travel as recreational or devotional pursuit, for which a snapshot of an ashram provides contextualization.

There is a large body of literature on religious and spiritually motivated tourism, some of which is concerned with distinguishing between different types of travel such as pilgrimage and pleasure tourism (Morinis 1992, Graham and Murray 1997, Badone and Roseman 2004, Coleman and Eade 2004, Timothy and Olsen 2006). In my research I found that recreation and devotion were often intermixed, as were pleasure, excitement, the exotic and devotion. This is particularly so for travelers who conceptualize a spiritual connection with nature and tend to see sacredness in landscape (Timothy and Conover 2006). That said, there are some differences between how

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<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.yasodhara.org/about/spiritual-directors/swami-sivananda-radha/> (2012/01/21) for further biographical details, and *Radha Diary of a Woman's Search* (Radha 2011) for a memoir of her time in India with her guru.

pleasure is conceptualized through devotion to the Divine at the YA, and the satisfaction of desire framed through consumer modes at some of the yoga holidays I visited. I will describe this further when I write about ethical tourism and ethical consumption. For the current instant I focus primarily on description of the YA, to provide a picture of the community, its organization, a bit of its history, and its practices.

Swami Radha was initiated into sanyas<sup>49</sup> in Rishikesh in 1956 ([http://www.yasodhara.org/gallery/timeline/\\_2011/09/02](http://www.yasodhara.org/gallery/timeline/_2011/09/02)), returned to Canada later that year, and founded the YA in its current location in 1963, she was the spiritual leader of the YA until her death in 1995. The current spiritual leader of the YA, Swami Radhananda was chosen by Radha as her successor prior to her death. Although Swami Radha died in 1995 there were photographs of her placed on altars in every building on the ashram grounds, as well as images of her guru, Swami Sivananda in the Temple of Divine Light (primary worship space) and Mandala House (primary meetinghouse). There is a heavy emphasis at the YA on the spiritual practices of yoga as understood, written about and taught by Radha. There is an extensive library on the ashram grounds where copies of all of Radha's books as well as all other books published by the ashram publishing house, *Timeless Books* are available for browsing while staying at the ashram. There is also a bookstore where Radha's books and other yoga-related books can be purchased. The library also stocks back issues of *Ascent Magazine*, which Radha founded as a monthly journal and which was widely circulated nationally and internationally from 1979 to 2010.

Radha's books focus on different aspects of living a spiritual life through the path of yoga. All guests were encouraged to study these books, particularly her *Divine Light Invocation* (1966, 2006, 2010), which is a teaching unique to Swami Radha's lineage and one of the primary practices at the YA. Although the focus at the ashram is on the living of yoga practices in everyday life, many of Radha's books deal in greater depth with yoga philosophy, particularly her *Kundalini Yoga for the West* (1978, 2004), which offers "the tools by which those who wish to cooperate with the process of evolution [through the awakening of *Kundalini*] can do so" (Radha 2004: 23). Despite Radha's deep engagement with yoga philosophy and weekly classes in which her writings were discussed, the majority of daily life at the ashram was organized much more around techniques and practices such as karma yoga and *the Divine Light Invocation* (which I discuss momentarily) than around discussions of theory or philosophy. This coincides with what Bruner (1996) experienced at the Himalayan

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<sup>49</sup> To take sanyas is to become initiated into the direct lineage by a guru. In this initiation a disciple renounces material existence for a spiritual life, thereby giving up his or her former identifications. At this time the initiate becomes a sannyasin, is given a new name by a guru, takes vows of celibacy, and devotes his or her life to spiritual pursuits.

Institute, where techniques and practices, rather than philosophy and theory, form the core of community life.

### **What was daily life like at the ashram?**

Daily life at the Ashram was highly scripted, and schedules were followed with discipline (see Table 3.5). Disciples followed this schedule six out of seven days a week, with one day, usually Sundays reserved as a personal reflection day, or as some of the karma yogis understood it, a one-day weekend.

7-8am Hidden Language Hatha Yoga
8-8:45am Breakfast
8:45-9am Karma Yoga Meeting
9-12 Karma Yoga
12-1pm Lunch
1-3:30 pm Karma Yoga
3:30-4pm Reflection period
4-5pm Karma Yoga
6-7pm Dinner
8-9pm Satsang

Table 3.5 Daily Schedule at Ashram

### **Karma Yoga and the Young Adult Program**

Because one of the current aims of the YA is to become as self-sufficient as possible through organic farming and sustainable energy sources, and as the ashram functions as an educational yoga and life-skills community that provides food and accommodation, there is a good amount of work that needs to be done in order for the community to function. Karma Yoga, the work of selfless service, is the primary means through which this work is achieved. There are two Karma Yoga programs at the YA, one is called the Young Adult Program (YAP) for people between the ages of 18-30, and the other is the regular Karma Yoga program. Regular Karma Yogis pay between \$35 (for eight hours of work) to \$135 (for 2 hours of work) per day to stay at the ashram. Participants in the YAP work 8 hours a day and are not charged a fee. When I was staying at the YA as a participant in YAP in early October, there were between 6-12 YAP participants and 2-4 regular Karma Yogis. I learned that there are often up to 20 YAP participants during the busier summer months, and that the YAP participants make up the bulk of the Karma yogis at the ashram. Karma Yoga is one of the primary spiritual practices at the ashram, a practice in which aspirants contribute labour, without attachment to the outcome of that labour, as a service to others, the higher ideals of

the community, and ultimately to the Divine<sup>50</sup>. Much time is spent working in different areas of the ashram, including the farm, landscape and building maintenance, dishes and kitchen work, cleaning, office work, design and publishing and other odd jobs around the 150-acre property.



Image 3.8 View of YA Orchard

Another primary practice at the ashram, which is coupled with karma yoga practice, is speech mindfulness. Karma yogis are encouraged to practice silence or limited verbal dialogue as they carry out their work in order to increase awareness of the quality and energy of one's internal thoughts, which prioritizes the relationship of self to the Divine rather than the social. Out of respect for the fact that all people at the ashram are on some kind of personal internal journey, idle chitchat and other forms of daily talk are strongly discouraged. These forms of talk are seen to contribute to undisciplined thoughts that ultimately serve as barriers to work being done in the service of the

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<sup>50</sup> Karma yoga has a long history as a form of yoga. It is mentioned in the *Bhagavad-Gita* as the yoga of selfless service. At the YA, we were encouraged to read Sivananda's *Practice of Karma Yoga* (2004) as a guide to devoting all work done at the ashram as selfless service both to the community and the Divine. Sivananda describes the goal of Karma yoga as such:

What is the object of Seva or service? Why do you serve the poor and the needy and the suffering humanity at large? Why do you serve society and the country? Yes, by doing service you purify your heart. Egoism, hatred, jealousy, the idea of superiority and all the kindred negative qualities will vanish. Humility, pure love, sympathy, tolerance and mercy will be developed. The sense of separateness will be annihilated. Selfishness will be eradicated. You will get a broad and liberal outlook on life. You will begin to feel oneness and unity. Eventually you will obtain knowledge of the Self... The world is nothing but a manifestation of God. Service of humanity and the country is, in fact, nothing short of service of God (2004: 1-2).

Divine. Instead disciples are encouraged to chant *mantras*<sup>51</sup> or discuss only things relevant to the work they are doing so as not to unduly waste vital energy or intrude on the mind space of others.

There is a half hour period reserved each afternoon for reflection practice, wherein Karma yogis meet in the dining hall in small groups to reflect on the quality of their work and thoughts. The reflection period is opened with the chanting of a *mantra* or enactment of the *Divine Light Invocation*, and then individuals spend about fifteen minutes writing in their journals. Following personal written reflection, each person reads what he or she has written aloud to the group without comment from the listeners. The reflection period is closed by the chanting of a *mantra* and is often followed by a little snack or cup of tea before returning back to karma yoga work until dinner.

Initially the reflection period caused me a great deal of anxiety as I felt uncomfortable about sharing my internal thoughts and reflections with strangers, about the intimacy of sharing my process of living through these practices, many of which I had no previous experience of. I quickly realized however that these reflection periods served to develop a kind of non-judgmental intimacy between guests as each person was given a bit of time to voice his or her struggles, realizations, and reflections – speaking in emotionally intimate language became the norm rather than the exception. Because we were all working on some level with the same practices, though coming at them from different places, and because we were encouraged to share our thoughts but not comment or judge the thoughts of others, reflection periods allowed us moments of sharing intended to develop both our speaking and listening practices as well as compassion for our co-inhabitants of the ashram.

Karma yoga took up the bulk of the day, but there were also other practices in the ashram daily itinerary, including Hatha Yoga and an evening satsang gathering where we chanted *mantra* together as a community and received teachings from senior teachers and *swamis*. I will provide a more in-depth analysis of my experiences of *Hidden Language Hatha Yoga* (Radha 1987) in greater detail in Chapter 4.

### **How does the ashram fit into the larger yoga tourism landscape?**

Similar to how Bruner (1996) characterizes the Himalayan Institute, the Yasodhara Ashram is descended from a Hindu tradition transplanted to Canada by a charismatic leader who had studied yoga in India and translated these teachings into a non-denominational universal spirituality intended

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<sup>51</sup> Radha's *Mantras: Words of Power* (2005) describes various *mantras* and the way that they are used at the YA. She writes: A mantra is a combination of sacred syllables that forms a nucleus of spiritual energy. This serves as a magnet to attract, or a lens to focus spiritual vibrations...Mantra is not prayer. Prayer consists of words of supplication chosen by the spiritual aspirant, whereas mantra is a precise combination of words and sounds – the embodiment of a particular form of consciousness, or Sakti (Radha 2005: 23).

to make the wisdom of India accessible to a Western audience. Radha makes this motive clear in her *Kundalini Yoga for the West* (2004[1978]). It is not my intention here to attempt to analyze how ashrams in Canada are different from or similar to one another or to ashrams in India<sup>52</sup>. I felt it was important to include an ashram in a research project that looks at yoga travel and tourism because ashrams are places that people travel to practice yoga. Beyond that, many ashrams, including the one I visited, have been in operation for much longer than most other yoga tourism venues, which have become popularized only in the last decade or so. This project is concerned primarily with yoga-motivated travel, but it would be more apt to categorize the ashram as an intentional spiritual community for which yoga travel forms an integral component. Hosting yoga courses and maintaining the Karma Yoga program are important aspects of the YA's functioning, motivated by the community's primary goal of sharing, building on, living and educating people about the spiritual teachings of yoga as taught by their guru. There are also subsequent goals decided on and implemented by resident and non-resident swamis. Since Radha's death, the swamis who have been initiated into the lineage have collectively made decisions on the direction of the community. These goals have changed throughout time, and will continue to change in relationship to the larger society and the interests of community members. For instance, the last decade has seen the YA focus much more intently on environmental issues and sustainability, which has meant growth in the ashram's farm, orchards, and renewable energy systems. One long-time resident told me that during the 1980s the emphasis was more on creative arts and creative expression, but that now with all the farm work there was little time to focus on these pursuits.

Certainly the YA relies on the income from people who travel there to practice yoga to meet its financial requirements, and towards this end it has a well developed website and promotional material intended to draw people to the ashram to practice yoga. For this reason, it is difficult to draw a definitive separation between ashrams and other forms of yoga-motivated travel as they make use of similar marketing technologies and online interfaces to interact with dispersed networks of people. In this way, these networks are envisioned as both a community of people and potential future clientele who may choose to visit and therefore contribute tourist dollars to the financial upkeep of yoga-related businesses/communities/residences reliant yoga as both a source of income and form of lifestyle/spiritual pursuit.

<sup>52</sup> The goal of this project, as mentioned previously, is to look at yoga tourism outside of India. While I had planned to visit two ashrams in India that catered specifically to English-speaking yoga travelers, I was unable to do so for lack of funding. Strauss' (2005) ethnography of the Divine Light Society Ashram in Rishikesh and Froystad's (2009) account of the "return globalization" of Ananda Sangha's (Bliss Society) from India to America and back again, both serve as comparison points for Anglophone Yoga in India.

I made the distinction earlier that I characterize travel to the YA as yoga-motivated travel in contrast with holiday-motivated yoga travel. I would delineate the distinction simply as, on the one hand, yoga being the primary reason to travel, with teachers, practices, and programs being the primary factors determining the yoga travelers' choice of location, and on the other hand, holiday being the primary reason to travel, with a desire to incorporate yoga into the holiday, but not having the yoga supplant desired holiday aspects. In a holiday-motivated yoga travel location, climate, food, accommodation, and then yoga tend to be the primary indicators of choice. A minority of the women I met on yoga holidays had spent, or wished to spend, time at an ashram to "deepen" their yoga practice. Yoga travelers usually saw ashrams as more serious places of study rather than holidaying. In this sense, travelers to the ashram were seeking some sort of spiritual growth or transformation, while holiday-motivated yoga travelers most often just wanted a break from their daily lives. Most of the women I met on yoga holidays had no desire to spend their holiday time in serious yoga study, but preferred having a bit of yoga added on to their holidays abroad.

While ashrams certainly bear stronger ties to Indian yoga traditions than most yoga holidays, and although ashrams in Canada and the US usually emphasize their roots in Indian spirituality, one thing to keep in mind is Bruner's contention that

[i]t would be misleading... to overemphasize the historical continuity between the transplanted Indian traditions that have come to the United States over the past century, because Hinduism and yoga philosophy have been reinterpreted to fit each historical era. Although practitioners of any tradition may see a long unbroken history, there is actually a series of new constructions... Just as ashrams in India evolved over thousands of years, ashrams in America are also evolving as the times change, for all continuing traditions are always in the process of reinvention (Bruner 1996: 309).

The Yasodhara Ashram had changed considerably over the three decades since it was founded when I stayed there in 2010, and it will continue to evolve and reinvent itself in relationship to the local and global factors<sup>53</sup>. Therefore, any picture I paint of the ashram is only a partial one. I cannot claim, after spending 2 weeks there, to understand the complexity of life at the YA. The information I present consists of what I observed and experienced, and what I was able to glean from information provided about the ashram for public perusal, the limited amount of conversation I was able to have with longer time residents, and the comments on the YA posted on the blog *it's all yoga baby*. As part of the YA's work over the last three decades has been publication of a monthly magazine and books, there is a rich textual history to both the spiritual teachings of the ashram as

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<sup>53</sup> See the *it's all yoga baby* post on a interview with one of the community members of the YA dealing with the question of transitions in the community over time: <http://www.itsallyogababy.com/ashram-adventures-a-yoga-community-in-transition/> (2012/01/25)

well as the larger life of the community. In the same way that Strauss (2005) published an entire book about the Divine Life Society (DLS) Ashram that she studied in Rishikesh, India, an entire monograph focusing on this particular Canadian ashram and the changes it has gone through since its foundation would certainly help paint a clearer picture of the globalization of yoga and its changing role in Canadian society over the last several decades. This work is not about that, but rather about lining up a snapshot of this ashram with snapshots of other places people travel to practice yoga in an effort to use multi-sited ethnography to say something about the relationship between yoga and tourism in 2010.

### **How is a yoga community structured? Organization of the Yasodhara Ashram**

At the Yasodhara Ashram, hierarchies, relationships, and expectations of community members are quite strict and clearly laid out, at least from an outsider's perspective. Space is clearly demarcated for specific activities and community members are expected to adhere to proper utilization of space and rules of conduct. One karma yogi in the Young Adult Program (YAP) told me that she and a group of other YAP participants had once organized a dance class in one of the yoga rooms on their day off. They had been admonished for this by one of the swamis who told them that they were not allowed to organize group activities on the ashram grounds without approval of the ashram community. Because of that incident, there were now signs on the yoga room outside of the main building indicating that people had to gain permission before using it, and that practices other than yoga were not allowed there. The residents of the YA community seek to strictly control what activities go on there by monitoring and managing all aspects of social behaviour on the ashram grounds. As a YAP participant, I often felt watched by the swamis; a kind of watching that was similar to how teachers watched in elementary school, a look that said, "you better behave." The other YAP participants who I shared a dorm room with also talked about feeling this way. Several of them had been chastised at different times for stepping out of the tightly regulated system of rules that seemed to define yoga as discipline or lifeway at the ashram. These infractions were usually minor and often involved being too loud, but one woman had received a disciplinary word for having worn her swimsuit outside of the beach area, and another for keeping food in her room.

Guests staying at the ashram are expected to familiarize themselves with and adhere to community guidelines, which include following the daily schedule, attending morning Hatha Yoga practices and the evening devotional gathering, abstaining from drug and alcohol use and observing celibacy. People are at the ashram under different programs or roles and their behaviour is also governed by the expectations laid out in those program roles. Aside from the explicit guidelines,

there are also many more subtle regulations that Karma Yogis learn about only if they overstep them. As stated previously, these are usually minor disturbances that are disapproved of but not strictly warned against when you first arrive. It seemed to the Young Adult Participants of the Karma Yoga program that our activities were more closely monitored than others, and that those who were there paying for courses were allowed greater flexibility and freedom to stray from the subtler rules than we were. Young Adult Participants were the only ones (aside from the swamis and permanent residents) who were not charged a fee for staying at the ashram. Although we worked eight hours a day like the other Karma Yogis, there was an expectation that we should be grateful for the benevolence we were receiving by being there. While the permanent residents seemed to feel the YAP program was important, they also seemed to sometimes be impatient with the YAP participants because they did not always know or follow the rules and because new participants were always arriving so repetition was required on an almost daily basis. This was partially due to the lack of mentorship for YAP participants when they first arrived, which meant that it often took several days for new participants to learn what was expected of them.

Daily life at the ashram is organized around the foundations of spiritual discipline as outlined in the teachings of Swami Radha and the Sivananda lineage to which Radha was initiated, as well as by the interpretations of these teachings by the current spiritual leader and by the resident swamis<sup>54</sup>. The hierarchy of the ashram, according to my observations, operated under a series of vertical and horizontal relationships that I choose to represent as a pyramid (see Figure 3.1).

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<sup>54</sup> Swamis are disciples who have been initiated into *sannyasin* vows. They have renounced material life in devotion to spiritual life. Swamis take on new names associated with the lineage into which they are initiated, make vows of celibacy, and form the core of the spiritual community at the ashram. My observations of the role and life of swamis is purely descriptive. In actuality I had little contact with the swamis while staying at the ashram. Although the Swamis assigned and oversaw work duties, primarily my time was spent with other karma yogis and long-term residents who had not taken vows. I am certain that if I spent more time at the ashram I would have had time to develop more personal relationships with some of the swamis. Out of the seven swamis residing at the ashram during my stay, there was one swami who I did spend time with, and she talked to me somewhat about her life prior to renunciation and some of her ideas and conflicts about the way decisions were made at the ashram. However, there was certainly a sense that it was inappropriate to be personal with swamis, out of respect for their position as spiritual guides. Indeed it was somewhat conflicting to be interested in social relationships at the ashram, since the primary goal was developing one's own spirituality. Because of this social relationships were both vague and highly defined by hierarchy. The swamis undertook roles of teaching, guiding, and performing sacred rituals for the lay disciples, and many karma yogis talked to me about feeling intimidated by them as people, since they were unsure how to interact with them.

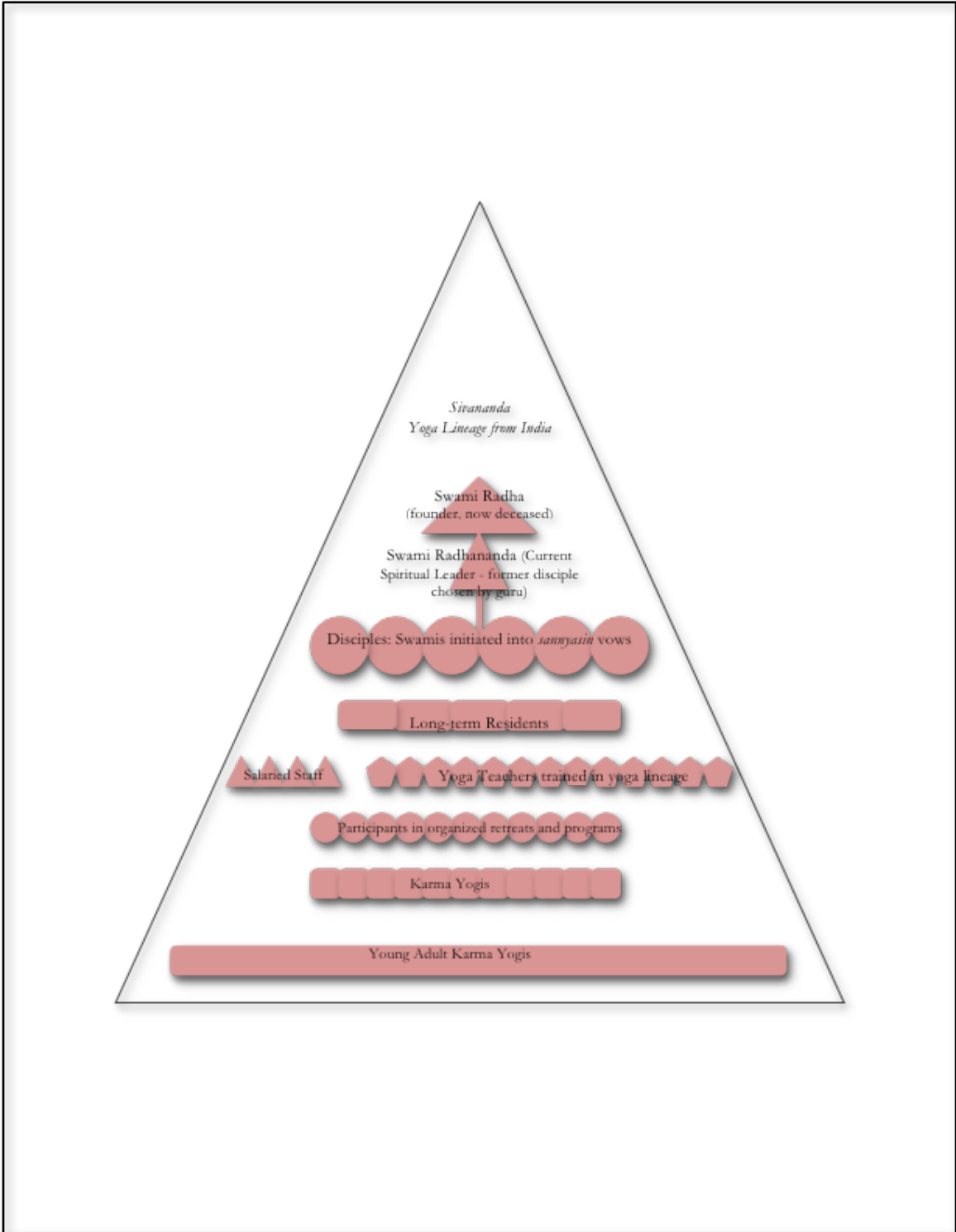


Figure 3.1 Hierarchical roles and relationships at Yasodhara Ashram

While there is no schema exactly representing this hierarchy at the ashram, there are titles, allocation of space, distribution of duties, decision-making and time that correspond to the various roles and the position an individual occupies in the community. From my observations, it seemed

that there are roughly three determiners of role: 1) spiritual commitment, 2) paid employment, and 3) program of participation. Employees differ in two ways from the other roles in that: 1) they receive a wage for their services, and 2) they do not necessarily follow the spiritual practices. Some employees do have a spiritual connection to the YA and many attended the ashram for spiritual reasons prior to becoming employees, but other employees, particularly the kitchen staff (who I had the most contact with during my time there) are not expected to participate in the spiritual practices.

The kitchen staff members were the only people I observed who were routinely on the ashram grounds not necessarily for spiritual reasons but for work. There were, however, in some ways the focal point of the community as food is highly important to daily life at the ashram. The growing of food, and its consumption (though not necessarily its preparation), are regulated by spiritual discipline. The growing of food is largely attended to by Karma Yogis and all meals are eaten in silence. A head chef and team of professional cooks prepare healthy vegetarian whole-foods in the ashram's commercial kitchen. The head chef is responsible for managing a number of cooking staff and Karma Yoga volunteers who do most of the cleaning. Food is one of the highlights of life at the YA. One Karma Yogi commented to me that it seemed the ashram was in reality focused more on food than on the more esoteric spiritual practices since much of our work was organized around food production in the gardens and orchard, food preservation at harvest time, food preparation for mealtimes, and clean-up afterwards. Indeed, it seemed like our days rotated around producing food to eat, eating, and cleaning up afterwards only to begin the cycle over again the next day.

Swami Radha placed great emphasis on sensual experience through the various sense organs as a path to deeper relationship with the phenomenal world, which is the reason that all meals at the ashram are eaten in silence. Eating in silence encourages eaters to engage with their food in a spiritual way, to give thanks and acknowledgement to its production and preparation by being fully present in its consumption. In this way, one is seen to enter into relationship with the food one consumes by concentrating embodied and mindful awareness on the sensual experiences taking place while eating, dwelling within feelings of gratitude for the work the community has done to produce it and the life force that goes into it.

Most of the seven to ten staff working at the ashram in the kitchen and in administrative positions lived outside the ashram. It was unclear to me whether salaried staff were required to live outside the ashram or whether they simply chose to do so. Certainly, the fact that the ashram is a celibate community that does not accommodate children, partnerships or pets, are deciding factors

in whether people reside at the ashram longer term or simply work there. Even though staff members were not expected to participate in spiritual life, it would be difficult to work at the ashram without reconciling oneself to the spiritual practices that guide the lifestyle there. One of the long-time resident swamis told me that the local communities had for a long time regarded them with some measure of interest and suspicion, wondering whether they were a dangerous spiritual cult. She also told me that the ashram had made a concerted effort to improve relationships with nearby locals by hosting inexpensive drop-in yoga classes as well as opening up the ashram grounds for community events such as weddings. Certainly the popularization of yoga over the last decades has contributed to people from the surrounding communities being more comfortable with the ashram in general, as has the ashram's practice of hiring locals to work in the kitchens when they need extra help. Unlike in India where the function of ashrams is well known, in rural Canada an intentional yoga community whose group members observe celibacy is regarded as somewhat peculiar.

### **My experience at the YA**

For my part, staying at the ashram was both difficult and transformational (although these transformations were difficult to bring home and apply to a daily life far removed from the ritualized discipline at the ashram). Though I stayed at YA for only two weeks, I thought to myself after about the third day that I would not make it through the entire two weeks, (which is an absurdly small amount of time considering the usual length of time anthropologists spend in the field). I questioned my research topic and only wanted to go home, which I could achieve by simply getting in my truck and driving back to my parent's house a 45-minute drive away. I felt completely alienated and had a good deal of difficulty adjusting to the social hierarchy at the ashram. Even though for all extensive purposes I was an anthropologist studying my own culture, I could not rely on my developed structures of talk or identity to relate to other people at the ashram. When I first arrived no one greeted me or talked to me about where I should be and what I should be doing. I was expected to figure things out on my own while at the same time observing and participating in highly scripted activities where everyone who had not just arrived understood the rules. The role and presence of the swamis contributed to this discomfort as several of the swamis were very unfriendly with the Karma yogis and became irritable with us when we did things incorrectly. Since it seemed no one who really knew how things were supposed to function explained things to us or showed us how to do them, we often did things incorrectly and many of us felt somewhat afraid of the swamis. This in and of itself very much made the ashram experience different from other yoga tourism experiences where accommodation and comfort are highly stressed and organizers go out of

their way to ensure smooth and satisfied experiences. At the ashram my position was not one of tourist consumer, but one of disciple/student. Since one is not supposed to have attachment to the outcome of one's actions, one of the practices, on a very fundamental level, is not taking things personally. I suspect that some of the swamis were hard on the new Karma yogis on purpose, so that we would spend time reflecting on our habitual patterns of relating to others and the expectations or desires we have of others and ourselves in these relationships, and ultimately so that we would be forced to take a hard look at our expectations and take responsibility for our emotional reactions. These kind of experiences are seen as part of the transformation from living purely in the material world to beginning to live a spiritual life. Difficulties with others and social discomfort are understood as lessons on the path, as ways of discovering the workings of our own minds. The goal is to go beyond the workings of the mind to dwell in the spiritual reality that lies beneath. Holding onto emotional reactions or analytical judgments are barriers that prevent a disciple from realizing that reality. For this reason I think part of the reason the ashram does not make arrival comfortable is to encourage people to begin to recognize the difference and the shift from routine life lived primarily in the social/material realm, and the kind of spiritual life encouraged at the ashram.

As this section focuses primarily on descriptive details about the field sites I visited, I will leave discussion about the various yoga practices I experienced at the ashram and at my other field sites for Chapter 4, where I consider embodiment as it relates to yoga, spirituality and yogic conventions of the body as a means of knowing the Divine.

### Case Study 3 Spiritual Retreat Centre, Italy: *Holistic Energy Spiral*



Image 3.9 Lounging in the hammocks at Holistic Energy Spiral

*The best holiday I have ever been on. I loved the fact that you can come alone and immediately feel at ease.*  
–Peter, Berlin

#### **Snapshot provided by website:**

**1. Key terms:** “delicious, Italian, healthy, vegetarian food,” “100 acre wooded hill in the heart of Italy,” “holistic holidays with a difference”

**2. Images:** young women with closed eyes and a glint of sun on her face with rolling Italian hills in the background, groups of students in various yoga *asanas* on the yoga deck overlooking vineyards, the geodesic dome poking out of the forest, groups of people sitting at the long tables sharing meals with their faces obscured.

Note 1: See Appendix A for a detailed cast of characters present at HES during my stay

Note 2: the telling of this Case Study differs somewhat from the others. It unfolds as a narrative around the traumatic event of Beatrice’s fall on the third night of the yoga holiday, which led to her being in a coma for several weeks following this event.

The field site I visited in Italy was the most expensive of all the yoga retreats I participated in. At \$1270 US for six nights and five days, plus extra for airport or train station transfer to the remote location in the hills near Urbino in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, *Holistic Energy Spiral* (HES) put a definite strain on my field budget. HES was situated on a privately owned, mostly wooded farmstead in a hilly, largely agricultural part of central Italy about an hour’s drive from the Adriatic coastal town of Pesaro and near the UNESCO World Heritage medieval city of Urbino. HES was owned and operated by a couple from the UK, James and Maya, who had bought the property in 2006. James and Maya left well-paying jobs in the London advertisement sector and hectic urban lives to raise their two young children in what they characterize as a healthy, holistic and spiritually vibrant context. Story has it they drove around Italy until they found the old abandoned farmhouse

overlooking the countryside, hearing the wind speak to them as though breathing. They decided to convert the old farmhouse to guest quarters and commercial kitchen and renovate one of the smaller outbuildings into a private dwelling for their family.



Image 3.10 HES Farmhouse

On the property James and Maya also had two separate guest cabins built in the style of the farmhouse, converted the stables into an office, constructed a yoga deck, installed a huge heated geodesic dome (Images 3.12 and 3.13) in the forest on a wooden platform for yoga classes, and had a pool dug out overlooking the valley (Image 3.11) for guests to relax and enjoy the view.



Image 3.11 HES pool overlooking the countryside



Image 3.12 HES Geodesic dome in forest: yoga practice space



Image 3.13 Inside Geodesic dome

Holistic Energy Spiral uses the motto, “yoga holidays with a difference,” to advertise to potential yoga travelers online. They cite the difference as being a combination of relaxation, luxury and a kind of *guiltless pleasure* through what they perceive yoga travelers really desire: indulgence in gourmet Italian food prepared by a chef, no housework or care work, plenty of free time for relaxation, and four hours of yoga a day to offset the guilt of indulgence. At HES, all the work you do is directed toward your own wellbeing and the guilt of over-consuming rich gourmet food is attenuated by the physical strain of four hours of daily yoga practice. Whereas at Yasodhara Ashram, spiritual growth comes from selfless service to the community, at HES self-improvement work is framed through a discourse of indulgence in the luxury of taking care of the self by *not*

*having to do any labour* for others. At HES, one is given the time one supposedly lacks in her day-to-day life to focus care on herself *rather than* others.

HES runs a full suite of 1-week spiritual holiday programs throughout their operating season from June to October. They offer courses in yoga, *Qi-gong*, and various other spiritual modalities that can loosely be described as *New Age*<sup>55</sup>. The program I attended in June 2010 was a one-week *Hatha* yoga holiday with a yoga teacher from New Zealand who was at the time of the retreat based in Malibu. For the sake of this story, I call her Dairen. HES prides itself on running programs with global spiritual leaders in various healing modalities. They focus a good deal on the personal qualities and experiences of the various teachers in order to give credential to the quality and authenticity of the teachings. The land itself is said to be sacred, the wind being a spiritual presence that encourages spiritual opening and wellbeing amongst the people who are lucky enough to stay there. I will focus somewhat on Dairen's personal story to highlight the type of work that she sees herself doing in the world, and which she shared with us through her yoga teachings. I will also tell another story about the HES, because a strange thing happened while I was there that altered one yoga tourist's life forever, and in so doing served to highlight some of the contradictions of accessing spiritual healing through the commodified channels of yoga tourism. Woven into the story I tell about what happened when I was at Healing Energy Spiral with Dairen and 17 other women<sup>56</sup> – 14 from Britain, one from Norway, one from Austria and one an Italian Canadian from Ottawa, are ethnographic descriptors that set the story in a particular time and a particular place – particular because of what we were all doing there when the story happened.

### **Dairen's Vibrant Health, and Beatrice's Fall**

If I were to describe Dairen, I would borrow her own words to describe her as an embodiment of “vibrant health.” When I met Dairen she was 32, writing her second book about a life transformation that led her from a place of chronic illness, anxiety and obesity to vibrant

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<sup>55</sup>As I described in Chapter 1, many scholars have studied the New Age (Hanegraaf 1996, Heelas 1993, Possamai 2003, Wood 2007) and its relationship to other modern spiritual practices such as Nature Religion (Albanese 1990) and magical consciousness (Greenwood 2005). Some scholars (Carrette and King 2005) have described modern forms of yoga and modern interpretations of Eastern and Indigenous religious practices as part of the wider field of New Age spiritualities. DeMichelis' (2004) history of modern yoga confirms its connections with British esotericism through figures such as Vivekenanda in the late 1800s. Greenwood (2005) suggests that many current nature religions, particularly in Britain also have common roots in earlier forms of esotericism, therefore it is not surprising that yoga holidays are often offered in conjunction with other types of spiritual and healing modalities that can roughly be characterized as New Age, which Wood (2007) characterizes as types of spirituality with a strong focus on self-authority.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix A for more information

spiritual, mental and physical health. Yoga formed one component of her transformation, but so did her discovery of other holistic forms of healing and what she described to me as a decision to turn away from biomedical authority and to find her own path and discover alternative health modalities in the wisdom of the natural world and of the body. Dairen embodies the qualities she seeks to put forth in the world through her yoga instruction. She is energetic, vibrant, compassionate and engaged. Dairen has an intense desire to share her story and her discoveries with others. Outside of teaching and practicing yoga, she also practices EFT (emotional freedom therapy<sup>57</sup>), which she uses in her private therapy practice and life coaching to counsel women seeking to regain their vital energy force by losing weight, or what Dairen sees as the blockages in energy that are preventing them from embodying their full potential. Dairen sees her life's work as a spiritual path to share her teachings in order for, as she puts it, "all women to achieve the vibrant health that is their birthright."

Although I spoke at length with Dairen during the one-week stay at Healing Energy Spiral, and was able to interview her several months later via Skype when she was back in Malibu and I was in Victoria, I never learned exactly how she gained training as a Yoga Teacher. When I met her she had already been teaching yoga internationally for three years, although the retreat I attended as HES was the first she had taught there. From my understanding, she began to teach after she had found the benefits of yoga for herself when she was 19 and bedridden due to a chronic illness that her doctors told her would only be treatable by lifelong reliance on intensive pharmaceuticals. Dairen met a naturopathic doctor who introduced her to yoga, and for the first time in her life, Dairen told me, she began to feel at home in her body, to discover its beauty rather than being overcome by its burdensomeness. Overall Dairen decreased her body weight by nearly 75 pounds in three years. Through this process of changing her body, Dairen completely altered her understanding of health, wellbeing, and the embodied nature of both the mind and the spirit.

Dairen teaches yoga as a practice of "reconnecting with the authentic self that already lives in the body, of surrendering to the innate wisdom that we only have to quiet our minds to hear." She seeks to teach others to "cultivate kindness towards themselves in their minds, in order to love the body and the self, and through this love to transform negative patterns of being in the world to

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<sup>57</sup> Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is a counseling technique combined with the action of tapping on particular acupuncture points in the body. It relies on energy meridians used in acupuncture and is based on the idea that directing kinetic energy to these points while thinking about specific problems can help release the energy blockages that are created by these problems. Positive affirmations are used to help reroute energy towards bioenergetic balance (<http://eft.mercola.com/> accessed: 2012/01/25).

positive ones.” At HES Dairen taught us ten 2-hour yoga sessions throughout our stay. Many of the yoga holiday guests talk about how inspiring her teachings and her life story were for them. Although her classes were challenging both physically and mentally, they were also as one woman put it, “gently spoken, encouraging, and powerful.” Dairen’s approach to teaching at retreats such as these was to create a strong sense of intimacy during the first class by encouraging students who came into the class as strangers to trust one another and develop compassion both towards our fellow classmates and towards our own selves. This later became an important aspect of how the story at the HES unfolded.

In 2011, according to the HES website, Dairen was back two separate times<sup>58</sup>, once in June and once in October, which speaks to the success she had as a teacher there. Dairen spends her summers in various locations primarily in Greece and Italy teaching at yoga holiday locations. While the retreats at HES are only one week long for both guests and teachers, at some of the other locations where Dairen teaches, she stays on for a month while the guests cycle through for one or two week stints. Dairen had a good deal of experience teaching at yoga holidays, work that she claimed to wholeheartedly love. She said that it allowed her to realize her role as a global citizen, to travel and share positive energy with people in sacred places. Dairen does not acknowledge international borders (other than feeling unjustly intimidated by the powers that be when she has to go through them, particularly in the US) and feels it is her right as a global citizen to be anywhere at anytime, to teach yoga wherever it takes her, and to make a good living and live a good life that way. I discuss this position in greater detail in Chapter 5 where I discuss the ethics of yoga tourism.

### **When a Yoga Holiday becomes a Tragedy...**

When we were staying at Holistic Energy Spiral something strange happened that had to do with architecture, an occurrence that caused the yoga tourists to have to try and reconcile some of the major contradictions that lie at the heart of yoga as a commodified path of healing. A good deal of attention has been paid to architecture in the refashioning of the old farmhouse from a place of familial dwelling to a locus of deluxe relaxation with a rustic sensibility. The upstairs of the farmhouse has been converted to shared guest quarters, and to maximize on number of guests that can be housed in the old farmhouse the six rooms have been set up for double or triple occupancy with one or two beds down on the polished concrete floors, and one bed up a steep wooden ladder

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<sup>58</sup> At the time of writing this dissertation, in early 2012, I have just learned that the owners of HES are no longer running holidays there. They will continue to live on the site and travel to teach their own spiritual workshops in other locations in Italy and the UK, but will no longer host spiritual retreats. They cite their desire to have more free time as the primary reason for their decision to shut down their centre.

in a loft built out of reclaimed timber. One night there was a storm and Beatrice fell. But what does Beatrice's fall have to do with yoga and tourism? Maybe nothing, but Beatrice fell while we were at a yoga holiday together, and she almost died, so that what started out as a yoga holiday became something else afterward, something which all the guests had to interpret within the context of the yoga holiday, and take home with them differently afterwards. Beatrice fell from her ladder in the dark of the night and split her head open on the concrete floor. *It was a dark and stormy night...* and because of storm the lights were not working, and because the owners of the retreat were away in England and the local staff had gone home for the evening, we were left alone in the Italian countryside: a bunch of women from England, a Yoga Teacher from New Zealand, a Norwegian, an Austrian who had driven her own car into Italy, and two Canadians. Luckily for Beatrice, Liza spoke some Italian and Elka's Austrian cell phone worked in the Italian countryside, because if Liza hadn't been able to talk to the Italian emergency teams on the phone, then Beatrice would have died there and our yoga holiday would have been something else altogether.

It took a long time for the emergency team to get to HES because it is in the countryside, and also because no one quite knew the exact address of our location. After a while we were able to get a hold of the HES secretary Marta and she came to the house to help us. Because of the storm the lights kept flickering on and off. For me Beatrice's fall was strange because I was the second person in the room after she fell. I heard the thump and Liza's scream. None of us really knew what to do with her, I remembered two things from my high school first aid, don't move her if something could be fractured in her neck, and don't let her choke on her own vomit. Aside from that all we could do was wait. Keep everything as calm as we could and wait.

Beatrice was in a coma for 6 weeks after her yoga holiday. She was flown back to England when stable enough and had a metal plate put into the place where her skull broke. For a little while we all followed Beatrice's progress on *facebook*. Elka created a group for us where we could all post pictures of our trip and keep each other informed about our lives and Beatrice's progress. Beatrice became part of the group about 6 months after the trip when she finally woke up and was back home with her family. She thanked us all for saving her. She called Liza her angel because Liza went with her to hospital in Elka's car, a virtual stranger to Beatrice as we all were, but at least a stranger who could speak Italian.

That night Dairen brought us all together in the dining room and held a spiritual ceremony to send light to Beatrice so that she would be guided in her journey. We all held one another's hands in a circle and Dairen spoke some words, although I don't remember them now and didn't write them down at the time. Because she was the Yoga Teacher she also became the group leader in the

emergency, and felt she should offer spiritual guidance as well, as much for us and for her as for what our energy work (as she referred to it) could do now for Beatrice. Offering spiritual healing to Beatrice seemed like a way to give the yoga holiday guests collective agency in what had happened, a forum for using our own energy to offer healing to Beatrice and to one another.

Beatrice fell on Monday night and we still had two more days left of our yoga holiday. After the fall it didn't feel like a holiday anymore, but because it was supposed to be, and many of us had spent a long time planning it out and a lot of money on being there, we didn't quite know what else to do so we continued to behave as though we were on holiday anyhow. The yoga became a much more intimate practice, and the talk shifted from discussions of the inadequacies of our bodies in the yoga postures to observing our emotions and paying attention to how we were feeling spiritually in the wake of what had happened. In yoga practice Dairen said, *"we can only support others by first supporting ourselves, by supporting ourselves through love and compassion practices, such as yoga, we become able to respond to situations rather than react to them. The first tool in doing this is to remain grounded in breath and the current instant."*

After being notified by Franco and Marta that Beatrice fell, the owner of HES, James, came back on the next plane to Italy from London where he was visiting family. He gathered us together to apologize for not being there. Several of the women expressed anger and disbelief that we were left to deal with this situation alone, wondering what would have happened if Liza hadn't been there, able to speak Italian. In this moment the women began to talk about how the rooms were set up to maximize profit and although up until that time the commercial nature of the exchange had not been mentioned, the women began to focus on it. They blamed James and Maya for what had happened as a way to try to make sense of things. One woman in particular, Clara, whose husband was a lawyer in England, and who happened to be a neighbour of Beatrice's, was talking about how Beatrice should sue HES for damages when she recovered<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> I have since learned from Dairen that Beatrice has brought a lawsuit against James and Maya, and that Dairen has been asked to testify on HES' behalf, suggesting that the fall was due to Beatrice's consumption of alcohol and not the design of the architecture. After this incident, James and Maya stopped running HES as a retreat centre. I don't know for certain that their decision had anything to do with this incident, but I suspect the lawsuit against them conflicted profoundly with their aims of HES being a sacred place of healing. Dairen told me that she believed they were not at fault and felt that Beatrice's lawsuit was unfair, guided by her own aims to address personal financial troubles. This highlights some of the issues around yoga as being a practice of goodness, one that should guide people to be ethical and compassionate towards one another. Dairen and many other yoga practitioners I know firmly believe that everything that happens in life is part of the spiritual journey and that in spiritual growth one must take responsibility for one's emotions and always act in ways that foster growth rather than perpetuate suffering. In Dairen's view Beatrice's choice to take Maya and James to court over her own losses was a perpetuation of her own suffering on others, and could not be reconciled with Dairen's belief that James and Maya's intentions with the HES were only good because they were good people and therefore not responsible for Beatrice's injury.

The shift in focus from James and Maya being “brilliant” for thinking up the concept of HES to being somehow corrupt in their real commitment to spiritual healing once the tragedy had happened highlighted one of the conflicts of yoga tourism. This conflict has to do with brushing yoga tourism’s commercial aspects under the rug when it delivers on its promises of health, wellbeing, pleasure and spiritual experience, and highlighting the inherent corruption of its commodification when the holiday does not deliver on its promises somehow. This conflict surfaced more than once during my field research. In the case of HES it occurred because we had paid a good deal of money to stay at a place where all of our needs were meant to be taken care of by someone else, but when Beatrice fell there was no one around so we were forced to be responsible for a stranger’s life-threatening injury in a foreign place we knew nothing about. It also occurred in Turkey (although with much less severe consequences) when the food and accommodations did not live up to the perceived value of the money spent on the retreat.

Monetary exchange at HES is set up in a way so as to minimize the appearance of economic exchange. Guests must pay for their holiday well in advance of ever arriving there, usually three weeks in advance. If you book and pay six weeks in advance of your travel dates you receive a 10% discount on your fare. Refund policies for most yoga holidays are stringent, and HES is no exception. The only way to acquire a refund is by providing medical proof of illness. When guests first arrive at HES they are gathered together in a group meeting where the amenities, routines and regulations are explained. Franco gives a tour of the grounds and shows the guests the self-serve wine cabinet and chocolate bar where guests can keep a running tab of bottles of wine and bars of chocolate they consume throughout the week. No payment is made during the stay, but a record of which kind of bottle one has had is written in a ledger, which Marta tabulates the morning guests are set to depart. I was not able to find out exactly how much of a mark-up there was on the wine at HES, but one of the guests familiar with Italian wines remarked that prices were more similar to those in England than those you would find in Italy, so that the wine acted as a source of profit-making for HES, although it was presented as a courtesy service.

Since the focus is on spiritual holiday, *with a difference*, the availability of the wine speaks to the laid back attitude of HES, where holiday goers can do yoga *and* enjoy themselves with good food and wine in the evenings. It could be said on some level that the availability or allowance of alcohol in some way marks the difference between a holiday-motivated yoga retreat and a yoga-oriented retreat. A yogic diet (based on ayurvedic medicine) in fact prohibits alcohol consumption as well as the consumption of meat, and in some cases foods such as onions and garlic, which are seen to increase aggression. Holiday-motivated yoga retreats however, tend to cater to providing

yoga *as well as* responding to the holiday wishes guests might have in their travels. These wishes are usually understood as some kind of indulgence in the consumption of foods and beverages guests should have moral restraints around, such as desserts and alcohol. Although some consumption of these foods is thought to be “good for the soul,” too much is “bad for the body,” as one of the HES guests put it.

In my field notes I wrote that many of the women at HES were there to deal with grief, that they went on retreat because they needed to get away from things in their daily lives that were difficult to deal with, and that they hoped in attending a yoga retreat they would find new ways of dealing with things, or at least space to attend to their own feelings in a more direct way, rather than always being attuned to the needs of their children, partners and their work and domestic duties. Most of the women felt in some way overwhelmed by their lives at home, and had either started practicing yoga or were interesting in practicing, because they felt it would make them feel better. Although I cannot draw distinct lines of difference between the guests at HES in comparison to the guests I met at other yoga tourism locations, for the most part it seemed to me that the guests at HES were primarily from wealthier portions of the British middle class. And it also seemed that this is who HES was appealing to: those with enough disposable income to even consider, and believe they deserved a *luxury* yoga holiday. All of the British women at HES were from southern England, primarily living in and around London, and although I am unfamiliar with the subtleties of class in England, they all seemed to accept one another, or at least assume, that they were equal in that regard. This subtlety became more apparent to me when I attended less expensive (i.e. what some travelers referred to as *budget*) yoga holidays in Bulgaria and Turkey, and a less expensive but still up-scale yoga holiday in France, also all owned by and primarily attended by Brits. In Bulgaria and Turkey, the British yoga travelers talked a good deal about being working class and would often make derogatory comments about wealthy people and not being able to afford certain things, such as holidays in southern France, as other people could. For the most part, the yoga travelers I met in Bulgaria and Turkey were from Northern England, as opposed to those I met in France and Italy who were primarily from the south. I don't have any analysis to provide on that exactly, other than to say that it seemed significant enough to mention, and that these travelers seemed to know ahead of time by the location where they were choosing to have their vacation, what kind of class experience would be had there (which I as a Canadian did not).

Here I would like to bring up the theme of the yoga holiday as the kind of traveling a woman can feel safe doing alone. Amanda, one of my bunkmates at HES told me that “*it's a big thing to come away on your own, and I worried about it quite a bit, but I also knew that if I had a friend here with*

*me that I wouldn't be as free to explore other parts of myself because of the roles I play at home.*" Patricia, the oldest woman at the retreat, who was 67 when I met her, told me that this was the first time in her life she had ever been away on her own, and that she found it amazing to be among a group of younger women and to just be accepted as part of the group. She had worried that she would just seem old here, and would not be accepted or that in the yoga she would be left behind somehow because of her age. Patricia marveled that *"Dairen is able to teach to everyone at the level they are at, so that I can find strength in my own body and in realizing that age doesn't matter as much here as it seems to at home on a day-to-day basis."* Dairen, and most Canadian, American, and British<sup>60</sup> yoga teachers I have encountered (particularly so the women), place a good deal of emphasis on yoga as self care, using language which encourages students to move into postures with safe alignment, and to do modified variations of postures that are out of their range of strength or flexibility. In this approach practicing yoga is about focusing the mind on kindness and compassion towards the self while moving the body in sometimes challenging or difficult ways. One is supposed to challenge one's physical boundaries gently, focusing on growth and change over time, listening to the wisdom of the body rather than the ego-oriented urges of the mind that desire achievement. If you follow the mind's idea about what a pose is supposed to look like (the image), rather than sensing your way through a pose with your body and non-attachment, then as one of my yoga teachers puts it, "you are not really doing yoga." This approach to yoga basically combines scientific conceptions of health and fitness (what is good for the body) with New Age spirituality language on mind-body connection derived from various sources, as I discussed in Chapter 1 and elaborate further in Chapter 4.

I now move on from describing Holistic Energy Spiral to providing a snapshot of the guesthouse in Bulgaria where I travelled to after my stay at HES. I call this yoga holiday Spirit Yoga Villa.

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<sup>60</sup> The exception to this point in my experience was the British yoga teacher of Sri Lankan descent who I studied with in Turkey. She placed a good deal of emphasis on strength and endurance and her class was often referred to by guests as "yoga boot camp." I will talk about her approach to teaching yoga somewhat in the Turkey Case Study.

#### Case Study 4: Guesthouse Yoga, Bulgaria: *Spirit Yoga Villa*



Image 3.14 Spirit Yoga Villa

*Thank you for providing a nourishing lighthearted hassle-free space to unwind get tanned and feel decadent. The yoga practice was dynamic and enjoyable. I really appreciate the relaxed atmosphere – Trish, England*

#### **Snapshot provided by website:**

**1. Key terms:** relaxing, stress-free, FUN, *yoga holiday with a difference*, good food, good conversation, horseback riding, mountain biking, *ideal location for a “get away from it all” holiday, Jewel in Bulgaria’s Crown*  
**2. Images:** Guests lounging by the pool, instructor Jessa sitting in easy posture against a backdrop of grass, tree and sky, photographs of nearby historic Sozopol, former guests on mountain bikes, on horseback, and a slideshow of guests in yoga postures by the pool.

In this case study I describe the yoga holiday that I spent two weeks at in Bulgaria. The analytical theme that emerges from this description is the play between authenticity and absurdity in yoga tourism. This theme emerged at two of the yoga holidays I attended, the one in Bulgaria and the one in Turkey, where in both cases the yoga practice and the holiday seemed to be in tension. I suggest that this occurred because of a tension in what Bruner (2005) calls “master narratives,” in which the yoga tourism master narrative of relaxation, self-discovery, a unique experience, and union with nature did not fit with the locale in which owners attempted to enliven it, which I discuss further in the Turkey case study.

In Bulgaria, I suggest this was largely due to the fact that the yoga holiday was set within a cultural context of “Bulgarian culture” that was not appealing to the British tourists that SYV attracted, and a “natural” landscape that was not remote and exotic enough to be of interest as undeveloped or “newly discovered” (and therefore perceived as authentic). The village in which the yoga holiday took place had few tourist amenities, it was pockmarked with deep puddles and rutted

dirt roads, and the surrounding forested areas were dotted with piles of garbage and travelled by groups of Bulgarian men in trucks. The women on holiday did not feel safe traveling in the “natural” landscape alone, and the excursions they did take to the nearby beaches and bigger towns were always in groups and seemed marked with a sense of uncertainty about what they might encounter rather than excitement about what they might find. It seemed to the yoga tourists that their presence was not really welcome in the local village restaurant and tavern. There are many factors at play in why the villagers may have felt suspicious of outsiders which I did not come to know because I was focusing on the lives of the tourists and retreat owners and not the village dwellers (and because I was only there for two weeks), but I did get the sense that it had something to do with wealthy foreigners coming in and drawing tourists into the village. Foreign tourism by English-speaking tourists to this area of Bulgaria is relatively new (Ghodsee 2005), and it seemed salient that British business owners were drawing in British tourists as a means to support their own lives abroad, rather than local people themselves being the developers of their own tourism industry. West and Carrier (2001) have written case studies of several different eco-tourism locales in the same light, in which those who profit from these ventures are usually not the people who already inhabit places of touristic interest, but rather the foreign tourism developers that “discover” these less visited locales.

The absurdity came from introducing a practice that is meant to increase connection into a locale in which disconnection between tourists and locals was forefront. This clearly marked a weeding out of desirable elements of connection, in which “real” fulfillment of the yoga tourism master narrative could occur only without the presence of the local people already dwelling in the area. Their presence and their lifeways seemed to disrupt the possibility of fulfillment of that narrative, rather than form a further possibility for cross-cultural connection. Here yoga was clearly an imported system of self-knowledge, and while generally practitioners see yoga as a means of increasing embodied sensual awareness, this yoga tourism locale made it clear that this awareness required certain blinders on for authenticity to be achieved, tuning into only desired elements of experience and purposefully excluding others.

At the time that I visited Spirit Yoga Villa in 2010, it was owned by a couple from Chesterfield England, Mike and Jessa; it was the only yoga holiday location I could find in Bulgaria. A search in November 2012 reveals that at least five holidays are being run at different locations in Bulgaria during for English-speaking tourists (which speaks to the ongoing proliferation of yoga holidays in new market locales). Mike primarily operated the business side of the SYV while Jessa taught yoga and gave massages to yoga guests. Jessa had been practicing yoga since she was 16, was

trained as a British Wheel of Yoga<sup>61</sup> Certified Yoga Instructor, and had taught yoga for many years in England. She also offered massage therapy services, which many guests at SYV booked as an added bonus for their holiday experience.

Mike and Jessa bought what became the *Spirit Yoga* Villa in 2004 with the intention of retiring there. They had originally intended it as a vacation home for themselves and friends from England, and not as a yoga business. In 2009 Mike decided to take early retirement and the couple moved to Bulgaria full time in 2010, using the yoga holiday business as their primary economic support, a situation which caused financial stress for the couple and created tension between their desire to live a lifestyle abroad and having to rely on income from attracting tourists from their home country to be able to live out that vision. It was evident that for this couple their vision of their desired lifestyle as relaxed, free from workaday time constraints, less controlled by the stresses of modern urban life, and in a location with more sunshine and lower costs than England, contrasted with the reality of what it meant to try to maintain that lifestyle economically and socially. The couple was constantly working to cook, clean, provide yoga, advertise the business, and manage bookings during the tourist season, which was the same time of year they would have liked to have been relaxing and enjoying the weather themselves.

The SY Villa is set in a small village about a half hour walk to the Black Sea coast, near the historic town of Sozopol and the Black Sea resort city of Burgas. This region of the Black Sea has long been popular among vacationers and the beaches are developed with tourism in mind. The face of this industry, however, has changed extensively over the last two decades, as up until the 1990s Bulgaria was difficult to access for travelers from outside the Soviet Bloc. This region of the Black Sea Coast was referred to as the “Red Riviera,” serving as one of the most popular holiday spots for vacationers from the Soviet Union and other nearby socialist countries (Ghodsee 2005) because of its warm summer and extensive beaches. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and with shifting economic interests in Bulgaria following economic collapse in the early 1990s, the region has made efforts to reinvent itself as a locale for international tourism, extending its tourism industry beyond Eastern Europe to the West. This has required a shift in focus responding to the perceived desires of travelers from Western Europe, and a focus for those working in the tourism industry to learn English (Ghodsee 2005). It has also opened up tourism for foreigners, such as Mike and Jessa, to operate their own tourism ventures catering primarily to British tourists in rural

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<sup>61</sup> The British Wheel of Yoga is a professional organization and the primary certifying body for yoga instructors in Britain. It is similar to Yoga Alliance, the primary certifying body for yoga instructors in the US and Canada. I describe the role of these types of organizations in disseminating yogic knowledge in more detail in Chapter 5.

Bulgaria. The SY Villa provided a good example of the relationship between the arrival of yoga tourism in new locales and the spread of neoliberalism to previously untapped market locations under post-socialism (Hann 2006).

One thing that distinguished the experience I had in Bulgaria from other yoga tourism locations I visited in Europe was that unlike yoga holidays in Italy, France and Turkey that highlight experiences of local culture and cuisine, there is little emphasis on travelers mingling with local Bulgarians and delighting in local Bulgarian cuisine, which speaks to the lack of an overarching specifically “Bulgarian” tourism narrative. The experience is promoted instead on the SYV website as a “harkening back” to an imagined pastoral European past. This is demonstrated on the website which states that rural Bulgaria is *still* a place where travelers can relax to the sounds of local peasants driving their cows to pasture and traveling the rutted dirt roads by horse drawn buggies, while remaining comfortably relaxed by the private pool. The food prepared at the SY Villa was definitely British-influenced, with the ubiquitous *shopska salad*, a fresh mix of cucumber, tomato and Bulgarian cheese the only local dish on the menu. Bulgarian food was of very little appeal to British travelers, and in fact, many of the guests who were from Chesterfield and knew Mike and Jessa from home brought British staples for Mike from England which could not be easily acquired in Bulgaria. Breakfasts were a self-serve buffet of muesli, white bread and imported British teas, and Mike cooked all of the dinners to cater to a British palate (many of them Indian influenced with the spice tempered to suit British tastes). When we did go to local restaurants to eat, the SY Villa guests mostly complained about the lack of English, undecipherable translations on the menus and the “poor” quality of the food when it did arrive. Although the Black Sea region boasts a healthy variety of marine inspired food preparations, the fact that most of the fish were served with heads and tails on led to more than one incident of utter revulsion and uneaten meals by yoga tourists at local restaurants.

Jessa and Mike were the first British expatriates to open a yoga tourism venue along the Black Sea Coast, but they were part of a larger community of British expatriates in Bulgaria. This community was networked through a *facebook* page as well as an online community forum, which Mike was highly involved in updating. Mike and Jessa often hosted parties for a larger network of British expatriates living in the local area, several of whom owned guesthouses that catered to British tourists. Mike and Jessa supported other British-owned businesses by encouraging their yoga guests to go on various excursions such as ATV “safaris” and canoe trips offered by other British expatriates attempting to make a living through tourism in Bulgaria.

The marked growth of British tourism to Bulgaria is indicated by three primary factors: 1) British buying land and starting tourism venues in Bulgaria, 2) the influx of British tourists to the Black Sea region, and 3) the recent arrival on the travel scene of budget airlines such as *Ryan Air*, *Wizz Air*, and *Air Bulgaria* with daily direct flights from many cities in England to Burgas and nearby Varnas, both of which serve as hubs for the innumerable resort-style hotels that line the beachfronts of the surrounding coast (see Image 3.15).



Image 3.15 Beach on Black Sea near SY, view of resorts near Sozopol; beach chairs and umbrellas belong to resorts and must be rented from lifeguards.

Although I have not done direct research on the impacts of low budget airlines such as the Irish *Ryan Air*, and its newer counterparts, such as the Polish *Wizz Air*, it was clear from my conversations with the British yoga tourists I met in various locations in Europe that these low-cost airlines have a huge impact on the holidaying activities of tourists in the region. Although *Ryan Air* does not fly to Burgas, most of the yoga holiday guests I met in Italy and France had flown with *Ryan Air*, whose tickets can cost as little as 1 British pound for a flight from London to Rome, depending on the seat sales. In this way, flying to countries popular with British vacationers, such as Italy, France or more recently Bulgaria, and Turkey, can cost less than taking the train within the UK. I often heard the British guests I met on yoga retreats in Italy, France, Bulgaria and Turkey talk about which airline they took, how little their tickets cost, and how diligent they had to be about packing their bags so as not to be charged “horrendous” hidden service fees. Most of them had some experience or another of being “screwed over” by these budget airlines, and although they lamented the loss of security and services offered by these airlines, they also continued to fly with them because of the low costs. Several of the tourists I met felt that much of their holidaying

would not be possible were it not for the existence of these airlines. Choosing which location they went to for holiday often depended on where the cheapest flight would take them.

The SY Villa in Bulgaria was by far the most affordable of the yoga holiday locations I visited in Europe<sup>62</sup>. Although the décor at SYV could not have been described as luxurious, it was clean, comfortable and welcoming. The food prepared for dinner was delicious, the yoga classes were taught by a knowledgeable yoga instructor, and Mike and Jessa went out of their way to accommodate guests and make them feel taken care of.

All of the other guests I met at during my two-week stay at SY Villa, aside from three young women from London, were from Chesterfield England. These guests came to Bulgaria because Jessa had been their yoga teacher in Chesterfield at the community center, *Oxford Manor* (OM), in this way creating a network of tourist mobilization from Chesterfield to Bulgaria based on the decision by one couple to open a yoga tourism location there. A few of the tourists mentioned that they would never have chosen to travel to Bulgaria were it not for Jessa and Mike's presence there, and while they felt it was not as desirable a place to live and travel as Southern France or Spain, the cost for the good weather was much more reasonable and they felt that it would become even more desirable over time with increased presence of British landowners, business ventures, and tourism companies catering specifically to British tastes.

Amongst the tourists from Chesterfield at SYV there was a good deal of talking and joking about not being *posh*, but they were also sure to maintain that neither were they poor. Most of them were employed in professional working class jobs. Based on conversations amongst the 50-80 year old Chesterfield residents, I understood posh to refer to someone who displayed pretensions of wealth, as used in comparison to their less refined but in some ways more authentic class values. At the HES, I never once heard the women talk about being posh or not posh, and never about not being poor, which may be an indication of class distinctions between the British tourists at a budget locale in Bulgaria and the wealthier tourists at a luxury yoga tourism venue in Italy. This speaks to yoga's wide appeal and the various conditions of its accessibility. Like other commodities in the marketplace, different brands and styles of yoga appeal to different "types" of consumers. Yoga can be accessed at community centers like *Oxford Manner* as part of a general impetus towards health and active living, or at higher end specialized yoga studios for those with more money to spend for a

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<sup>62</sup> Whereas a *two-week* stay at SY villa in Bulgaria in a private room cost me US\$850, including two meals and two yoga/pilates classes per day (which breaks down to US\$425/week), a *one week* stay at HES in Italy was US\$1270, for a room in a shared dorm with two women I didn't know, three meals, and two yoga practices per day, a difference of \$845. Comparatively, a *one week* stay at Garden Yoga in Turkey cost US\$650 per week including 3 meals, accommodation in a shared hotel room, and two yoga classes per day, while a *one week* stay at Maison Yoga in France cost US\$750 for accommodation (excluding food) and two yoga classes per day.

streamlined yoga experience. Yoga holidays, like holidays in general, correspond to what Bourdieu defines as distinctions of taste as demonstrative of class differentiations. This became clear on the yoga holiday I went to in Turkey which attempted to market itself as a higher-end experience, but which did not live up to the expectations of wealthier tourists who felt they had been “cheated” (which I discuss in greater detail in that case study). Yoga tourism consumers must therefore learn to be savvy in sorting through the surplus of possible yoga holiday experiences, identifying, usually through websites, but also with a previous knowledge of geographical location, what type of travel experience they are likely to have somewhere. Those yoga travelers who are yoga-motivated, rather than holiday-motivated, are more likely to make their choices based on a particular Yoga Teacher, and not as much on the location where the holiday takes place, while the reverse is true for holiday-motivated yoga travelers. Likewise yoga tourism locales are expected to represent themselves in identifiable ways so that they achieve satisfied customer reviews to then attract more tourists. This requires experience on the yoga tourism owners’ part to correctly identify to its yoga consumer base and be realistic about its place in the yoga tourism marketplace in order to achieve customer satisfaction and remain viable as a business. These rules are not implicitly understood as yoga tourism locations almost ubiquitously market themselves as *unique*, *transformative*, *relaxing*, and *life-changing* (see Table 3.1), thus building up yoga tourists’ desired expectations by selectively highlighting ideals (and by doing so creating and perpetuating ideal yoga tourism narratives) and excluding factors that may not fit these ideals.

The *Yoga Spirit Villa* (see Image 3.16) was a large 3-storey house with a flagstone courtyard in the front and back, and a private pool surrounded by a stone wall. The aesthetics of this foreigner-owned house contrasted a good deal with the surrounding houses in the village owned by locals, as most of them were structurally unfinished (see Image 3.17). Unlike the SYV grounds, which consisted of a courtyard and pool, the unfinished houses usually boasted extensive and prolific gardens full of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, and were inhabited by families who lived on the completed floors of the house, thus marking out very different forms of inhabitation in these dwellings from the leisure-based purposing of the SYV. From my wandering in the village it seemed that only a few of the local houses were actually finished, and Mike told me that the houses that were finished belonged to British owners. He also told me that the villagers left their houses unfinished on purpose, partly because the owners ran out of money for building, affected by a recent economic recession, but also because keeping them unfinished allowed the house owners to avoid paying taxes.

Field Journal Observation:

Afternoon yoga. It does seem absurd to me, doing yoga in Bulgaria, looking up from my sun salutations at a half finished brick house where the top floor is uninhabitable, shabby torn sheets in place of windows, and us near the poolside, tiled with small blue squares, cool and inviting while we try to place our yoga mats on even ground amongst the crude cut stone filled with cement. The builders here are not precise, much of the work is off or crooked, not the design but the inhabitable outcome that is important. Mike complains, calls it the Bulgarian workmanship (see photos 3.16 and 3.17).



Image 3.16 View of the pool and deck where we practiced yoga at SYV. For yoga we would move the deck chairs.



Image 3.17 One of the village houses where the top floors are unfinished and residents inhabit only the bottom floor, much like the neighbouring house to the SY Villa.

I have described the setting of the SYV in order to highlight what I saw as an interplay between absurdity and authenticity at the SY Villa in terms of the location, the imported spiritual logic of yoga and the commodified nature of yoga tourism that heightened certain forms of self-awareness while dulling or marking out as irrelevant other aspects of experience such as cultural difference and inequality. I now turn briefly to describing what some of the heightened experiences were about for yoga tourists, and why they sought these experiences out. These particular observations are not localized to place but seemed to generally apply to most yoga tourists at various locales.

Field Journal Observation:

Jessa tells me that it is interesting to watch people arrive here, how they seem so stressed at first, that you can see in their faces, and how they transform through the week or two weeks they are here, open up to be themselves when they begin to relax and lose their edges. Jessa says she enjoys watching this process as a teacher, enjoys spending more time with her students and the greater intimacy she has with them in a place like this where the yoga can relax them and all their needs are taken care of. This allows them to really just relax and not worry about little things, giving them more time to think about a deeper focus in their lives. She says it's a blessing to be able to share this process with people, to connect and share time this way, encouraging everyone to really live the life they want to live.

I ask Betty, a social worker in her 50s who works with the elderly in Chesterfield and is married with a grown daughter, "*Why did you come here?*"

Betty: *Because of stress.*

Angelique: *But why here? Why Bulgaria?*

B: *Oh, because I knew Jessa from Chesterfield, and I knew that she was out here. I knew I wanted to be in the sun, that I wanted to be in the sun for a week, with nothing too strenuous. I've done a lot of walking holidays and I knew I didn't want that this year. I know people who do strenuous holidays but I didn't want that. I thought with the yoga I would come home relaxed.*

Despite the differences I have identified between different yoga tourism locales, the theme of stress is a binding feature between the different yoga retreats; identified as a major factor for many of the women I met who travel to practice yoga. There seems to be a shared hope among yoga travelers of going away as a means of garnering strength for building relaxation that can be brought home as a means of coping with the everyday. Yoga as a means of managing stress then becomes tacked on to already existing ideas of what one is looking for on holiday. Betty expresses it well when she says that she is looking for sun and relaxation. She contrasts this with other holidays she has gone on where there was more of a strenuous element, by which she means both physically

strenuous and in other ways experientially stimulating: walking as a way to be a tourist, sightseeing at a pedestrian pace.

Yoga holidays in many ways remove the stress of being a tourist; at least during the time one is ensconced in the holiday locale, which is why they are often described as *retreats*. By focusing on a practice of stillness – of looking within and relaxing – yoga travelers are decompressing their bodies and focusing their minds on immediate surroundings designed to enhance calmness, stillness and peacefulness (see Persson 2007). To maximize this experience most yoga holidays offer a comprehensive package that includes yoga, wellness-focused meals and accommodation. Outside of getting to and from the yoga holiday (which often involve highly stressful activities of air travel and crossing international borders), there is little need to travel once one arrives at their yoga holiday location.

Even though local surroundings are emphasized as an attraction to yoga holiday goers in the online shopping portion of booking a holiday, I found that very few yoga holiday guests ventured out much. When they did it was usually in groups organized by the yoga holiday managers as shopping excursions in nearby towns and villages for gifts to bring back home. Being away from home removes the pressures of relating emotionally to family, work and social life, being not just away from home but in a foreign country in many ways removes pressure to relate personally with others. What I mean by this is that the identity of the tourist is in some ways highly scripted. Short-stay tourists are treated in a particular way by locals who rely on them economically, and for the most part the yoga tourists seemed satisfied to consider locals primarily as foreign sellers offering something they might not be able to get at home, something they could take home with them to symbolize the place they had been. I observed very few attempts by yoga tourists to relate to people outside the yoga retreat in any kind of personal way or with any real interest. I found that, for the most part, yoga holiday goers relate primarily to each other and somewhat to the Yoga Teacher and holiday owners while away. In terms of how yoga guests relate to each other, there is usually a shared respect for one another's privacy and well being, and the yoga creates a kind of supportive intimacy, a space controlled by the Yoga Teacher where, within the confines of our own private and safe space delineated by a rectangular mat, we are encouraged to trustfully let down our guard in the presence of otherwise strangers. The yoga then provides a focal point of conversation based on shared (individual) experience. In many cases it offered something to laugh about.

There was a good deal of laughter at the SY Villa, and indeed at almost all of the yoga tourism locations I visited (except perhaps for the one in Turkey in which the Yoga Teacher was very demanding of us and in which there was no aspect of gentleness brought to the practice). At

SYV in Bulgaria, HES in Italy, EYR in Costa Rica, and Maison Yoga in France, there was always a range of yoga experience amongst the yoga tourists, but many of the women I met on yoga holidays had not practiced yoga very much, if at all, and did not consider themselves highly comfortable in their bodies. This often resulted in the class breaking down into giggles as we tried to move our resistant bodies according to the Yoga Teacher's instructions into unflattering and seemingly impossible postures. Over the course of a week we were able to see one another achieve postures we had not been able to perform initially, and this offered opportunity for camaraderie and support of one another's excellent feats of physical prowess. At a yoga holiday, as Ariel suggested, one expects to find others of "like-mind." But what does "like-mind" mean? It seemed to mean in many ways that many women went on yoga holiday in a foreign country to spend time with other people like themselves. Is it because they found little space at home in which to feel at home? Many of the women I met on yoga holiday, like Betty, were involved in care professions and spent much of their time caring for children, parents or spouses in their day-to-day lives. Betty described to me how stressful her work as a social worker had become. She said it was very difficult not to take people's suffering home with you. Betty cared a great deal about the people she worked with and felt that her work made a difference in people's lives, but she described feeling completely overwhelmed prior to her holiday because her daughter had also become ill and she felt completely overstretched, unsure of how to maintain her work and also offer care in her personal life. The yoga holiday is a place for women like Betty to feel taken care of, a time outside of the daily routines and demands of life. With needs such as food and domestic maintenance being cared for by others, women then became able to care for their physical, mental and spiritual being through yoga in a neutral space designed to effect feelings of relaxation and possibility. The theme of rejuvenation was a prominent one. Many women like Betty and Ariel felt that in taking time out to care for themselves and regroup their energy, they would be better able to go back home and do the sometimes draining and difficult work that was required of them.

### **Organization of *Spirit Yoga Villa***

*Spirit Yoga Villa* in Bulgaria was similarly organized to *Maison Yoga* in France (which I describe momentarily); both were owned by married couples from Britain in a split domestic/ business model. In this arrangement, the wife taught yoga and the non-yoga-practicing husband managed the business side of things. This split domestic/business model of the yoga holiday was evident at the yoga holidays I attended in Bulgaria, France, and Italy. At these locations the married couples that owned and operated the yoga holidays also lived on the same property where the yoga holidays took

place. There were variations in how the domestic/business model was arranged in terms of work distribution, dwelling space, and sociality with guests. *Spirit Yoga Villa* was somewhat different than the other two yoga holiday locations because the married couple lived in the same house where the guests stayed during their holiday. Mike and Jessa had their own private sleeping quarters and bathroom, but had no other private living area and used the kitchen to cook for guests. Because the property was quite small, Mike and Jessa were not afforded a good deal of privacy. Unlike the yoga holidays I attended in Italy and France, at SYV the hosts spent a good deal of time socializing with holiday guests. This conviviality was heightened by the fact that when I was there, so many of the guests had known Jessa and Mike from Chesterfield.

This business/domestic model for yoga holidays was present at all yoga holidays I visited in Europe and was reflected in the organization of many other yoga holidays I identified through online research. The model was usually some variation of a domestic/business arrangement between heterosexual married British expatriates wherein yoga was primarily the focus of the wife and business organization primarily the focus of the husband. In some cases, such as the *Holistic Energy Spiral* in Italy, both the wife and husband were interested in the spiritual practices offered through their business, but for the most part, both in my experience and in online yoga holiday research, there was a gender differentiation in which the yoga aspects of the holiday were overseen by the wife for primarily female yoga holiday goers. The yoga holiday, or as Mike at *Spirit Yoga Villa* put it, “a holiday with yoga in it,” then provides, a business model for British expatriates owning property abroad, as a means (if not necessarily a profitable one) of supporting their lifestyle in a foreign country. These small business owners who use their home as a locale for yoga tourism then market and draw in tourists from Britain to support their desired lifestyle abroad. They are able to achieve success with this model because they are familiar with the consumer habits of tourists from their home country.

As kind as Jessa and Mike were in Bulgaria, and as happy as I was to spend time with the generous and good-humoured holiday goers from Chesterfield, of all the places I went on yoga holiday, this place in Bulgaria somehow seemed the most absurd to me. This is perhaps because of all the places I travelled I was most familiar with the political economic and cultural history of Bulgaria written about by anthropologists such as Creed (1998), Ghodsee (2005), and Kaneff (2004). It seemed absurd to me to practice yoga in Bulgaria partly because of the lack of attention paid to both the locale we were in and the origin of the practices we were doing. Despite the wellbeing it afforded us, I could not help but be reminded of anthropological literature describing the expansion of neoliberal markets in postsocialist locales on one hand (Hann 2006, Mandel and Humphrey 2002)

and a postmodernist cultural appropriation of Eastern religious systems on the other (Possamai 2003). The yoga tourism narrative did not really seem to fit in the location and it was difficult for me to accept any authenticity around the practices in that location, which lent a level of absurdity to the situation. Perhaps because the owners of the retreat were drawing on tourist narratives for Bulgaria that did not really fit well-defined tourist desires. This says something about constructions of place preceding our entries into them (Harvey 2009), which I discuss in greater detail when I describe how the yoga tourism narrative contrasted with the Mediterranean resort narrative at the yoga holiday I traveled to in Turkey. HES in Italy successfully drew on the idea of slow food, local wine and the nearby cultural experience of UNESCO world heritage site, the EYR in Costa Rica aligned itself appropriately with eco tourism and the nature experience of the rainforest and Maison yoga in France with a timeless cultured European pastoral life and ancient pilgrimage routes across the welcoming countryside. The British tourists I met in Bulgaria had no desire to be in Bulgaria as a specific place. They were attracted to the generic idea of beaches, sunshine, and relaxation, and the actualities of Bulgarian village life, such as unpaved muddy roads and an unreadable alphabet became points of inconvenience rather than points of interest about the specificities of the place itself and the people who inhabited it.

Singleton (2008) has written about the creation of authenticity within contemporary Anglophone yoga circles based on a re-invigorated engagement with the *Yoga-Sutras*, and scholars describing New Age religions have written about issues of the postmodern cultural appropriation and commodification of Eastern and Indigenous spiritual practices<sup>63</sup> (Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1993, Possamai 2003). They argue that in these appropriations authenticity is created by relationship with what is understood as ancient premodern wisdom envisioned as some true strain of human being that existed prior to the Cartesian corruption of the body and mind into separate spheres of study, morality and experience (Lock and Farquhar 2010). And I would agree that in many ways people undertake or at least maintain a connection to yoga in a search for some kind of authentic meaning, a meaning that might ultimately be found in our own embodied experience of greater connection with the world. What this authenticity is becomes complicated by the ways it is mobilized as ancient wisdom to support particular contemporary worldviews. It became clear to me

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<sup>63</sup> There are differing views in New Age Studies about the relationship between cultural appropriation, postmodernism, commodification, authenticity and pastiche in New Age practices that draw inspiration from Eastern and Indigenous spiritual systems. Some scholars such as Wood (2007) and Greenwood (2005) study New Age or Nature Religions in their own right, drawing attention to ambiguities of power and magic in these practices. Possamai (2003) argues that the type of market-driven engagement with spirituality as a sort of free-for-all pastiche from history and all cultures is an extension of the cultural logic of late capitalism.

in Bulgaria that yoga's authenticity is certainly not tied to its political economic history, or to interrogating the forces that frame our tourist engagements with "sacred" places. Very few yoga practitioners and yoga tourists ask about where yoga comes from or question the means by which it has become a globalized health practice available to health-minded tourists in remote locations in places like Bulgaria, Italy and Turkey. The idea that yoga is a practice that was modernized in India primarily by English-educated Indian intellectuals (Alter 2004, DeMichelis 2004, Strauss 2005, Singleton 2010) and thus made amenable to already existing esoteric strains in British and American secular societies and that now it is spreading to remote areas of Eastern Europe with their own complex histories of dominance by imperialist forces from Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Turkey, never came up once during our poolside conversations. The clanking bells of the cows being driven out to pasture every morning at 5 am was talked about as a charming annoyance, and the "gypsy camp" at the end of the street with a sort of suspicion. Both of these things delimited the total relaxation yoga tourists were seeking to fulfill on their holiday, became factors as to whether or not they would return here next year, or if they might just seek out somewhere more totally converted to a tourist-scape, where they did not have to confront the wafting smell of cow dung over the fence during breathing exercises or the dark-eyed unemployed Bulgarian village men who seemed always to be hanging about the local tavern and did not offer up welcoming smiles when we arrived.

Although I have a profound and sometimes confusing engagement with yoga, in Bulgaria, as in Costa Rica, when observed by the local people, I more often felt absurd than anything else. We were a spectacle to the local herders who would ride the horse by the fence and peer over at us as we lifted our hearts to the sky, aligning our chakras so as to draw energy up from the Bulgarian earth through *muladhara* and down through the Bulgarian sky, which is envisioned as every sky over the whole earth through *sahasrara* to express the inner wisdom of the heart through *anahata cakra* with the pure knowledge of the warrior *Arjun* in *virbhadasana I*. As the herders passed by the villa on their way to pasture, they would stop and laugh at what I imagined they saw as the white ladies doing funny exercises by the pool. This is the memory I have of doing yoga in Bulgaria: a bunch of pasty or sunburnt ladies in loose comfortable clothes, set out each in her own rectangular space, struggling to embody the suppleness and strength demonstrated by Jessa's smooth flowing *asana* sequences, her body shaped by years of yogic alignment, atoning for the stresses and overconsumption of everyday urban life in Britain, curiously regarded by local townspeople whose realities and histories mark a boundary at the edge of the wall that contains us underneath a sun relied on by the peasants to grow their crops and the tourists to darken their white skin before they go home.

## Case Study 5 Hotel “Garden Yoga”, Turkey and the Yoga Tourism Master Narrative



Image 3.18 Photo of author at yoga photo shoot at Apollo Temple, Side Turkey

**Snapshot provided by website:** " The holiday was a perfect blend of yoga, fun in the sun, sight seeing, gorgeous beaches and making new friends. It is an experience I will never forget (especially yoga at the Apollo Temple) and one I certainly wish to repeat!" **Martha, London.**

**1. Key terms:** life-enhancing “Holiday of Yoga, relaxation, delicious food, fun in the sun, our beautiful Oasis in the Historic town Side, golden beaches, experience a truly colorful and exciting Turkish Culture... Guided, qualified Yoga teachers, giving YOU the confidence to grow, be yourself and fully enjoy your holiday.” Asana (yoga postures), Pranayama (breath work), meditation (deep concentration), flexibility, strength, body, mind & spirit.

**2. Images:** snapshots of *asana* classes at the Apollo Temple and at the hotel yoga deck, photographs of yoga tourist seated at a café table eating, a photograph of a sunset over the ocean behind the ruins of the Apollo Temple.



Image 3.19 Yoga Deck, Side Turkey

In this case study I explore in greater detail the yoga tourism master narrative that came into focus through this research, highlighted in Turkey by a series of failures in the fulfillment of that narrative in a tourist landscape defined by a much stronger narrative of resort tourism and mass beachside leisure. I describe how this misfit between the enlivened desires for a “yoga holiday” painted through Garden Yoga’s website made it clear that one of the things yoga tourists are looking for in their yoga tourism experience is to be marked off from other tourists through their choice of a *yoga* holiday as an elite form of recreation indicating a moral orientation towards self-development in leisure against the perceived hedonism of wider tourism practices. In this way the yoga holiday, like eco-holidays, are enlivened through consumer frameworks of desire based on distinctions between different types of consumers (Lewis and Potter 2011) “at home,” and not really by concerns for the localities and peoples tourists encounter in their travels. Yoga tourists desire to be different from other tourists. They choose a yoga holiday because they want something “different,” something they will come home transformed from, not something they will have to recover from afterward. I saw this difference in terms of depictions of “mainstream” tourism by yoga tourists, as rampant over-indulgence in commodities, food and alcohol, over-exposure to sunshine, and a general orientation to social behaviour defined by narratives of tourists as deserving recipients of complete want-fulfillment because they have worked so hard at home.

At Garden Yoga in Side, Turkey, this narrative of difference from “other” tourists was unable to be fulfilled, which at first caused the yoga tourists discomfort, but which they came to accept by transforming their initial desires to fit the situation they encountered. Although we had chosen *not* to be *those* tourists, we knew how to be them, we could either choose to resist a situation over which we had little control or go along with it, incorporating this adaptability into our travel stories as part of our yoga, “going with the flow,” and becoming better adept at sifting through the global field of yoga tourism consumption for future experiences. This process demonstrated how tourists make tourist spaces their own through the experiences that actually happen there. We negotiate the master narratives created for us (in this case both yoga and seaside resort narratives) through our own belief in ourselves as individuated subjects with unique perspectives, thus creating tourist stories and memoranda that go alongside or challenge the master narratives already in place (Bruner 2005) before ever going on a yoga holiday in Turkey.

The Turkish town of Side is a popular holiday resort destination for Europeans seeking Mediterranean beaches and sunshine. It is located on the Mediterranean coast about a 45-minute

drive from the city of Antalya. Side boasts extensive Roman ruins, including the Temple of Apollo (see Image 3.8), as well as several other Roman archaeological sites including an amphitheater where, according to the Garden Yoga website, “performances” sometimes take place. Surrounding the historic part of town are what seem like hundreds of massive all-inclusive hotel structures, ranging from 5-star luxury resorts on the extensive beaches to 3-star hotels further inland (see Image 3.20)



Image 3.20 View of surrounding 3-star hotel complexes in Side Turkey

Garden Yoga draws on the history and geography of Side to attract yoga tourists. The website draws attention to Side’s archaeological and historic import, it’s natural beauty, and it’s “authentic Turkish Culture”. Although the website for Garden Yoga (as for most yoga holidays) boasts that a yoga holiday experienced with them will be relaxing and serene, in a natural setting with ample opportunity for de-stressing through yoga and good healthy food, the reality was a far cry from that experience. In July, Side is ablaze with tourists from all over Europe, with the most sizable populations from England, Germany and Russia. It is anything but serene and relaxing, and although our yoga deck overlooked a small avocado grove, there was little sign of “nature,” and aside from a few unhealthy looking potted plants, very little garden to be found anywhere within walking vicinity of our hotel. Once we arrived at our hotel, we were firmly ensconced within the confines of the resort town with access to what the website describes as “unspoilt forest” nearby only available at costly extra sums paid to local tour guides. From what we were able to see, Side is a slew of hotel developments surrounding the historic old town, flanked on the outskirts by agricultural land. In July when we were there, the temperature was between 35 and 37 degrees Celsius, which also limited the amount of daytime activity we were able to undertake in the hot sun.

On the developed beachfront and boardwalk in Side, signage abounds in Turkish, Russian, German and English, and the local hospitality workers are encouraged to learn passable service language in all these languages. Although the majority of the service workers we met did not speak

English extensively, they knew enough to respond to requests of a service-oriented nature, and what words to use to try to sell more services to holiday-goers. Resort employees were always around offering alcohol, massage, Turkish baths, boat trips, and various other amenities. Because I traveled to this retreat with my friend Jaeda, who spoke some Turkish, we were able to talk a bit with the service staff at our hotel beyond the usual service-oriented exchanges. Four of the waiters who worked at our hotel were seasonal migrant workers from other parts of Turkey who spent summers in Side living in small barracks behind the hotel. During the tourist season they worked 12-hour days seven days a week in order to save money for school.

When Jaeda and I booked our Turkish yoga holiday we had no idea that we would be staying in an all-inclusive hotel with other guests who were there on regular (i.e. non-yoga) holidays. The Garden Yoga website advertised peaceful accommodations, not the all-night poolside partying to techno music at the hotel bar that we were surrounded with every night as we attempted to get enough sleep to wake up for our 6:30 am yoga classes the next day.

Sam and Mehmet were the operators of this yoga holiday. Sam was British and Mehmet was Turkish, they had been married and living in Britain with their two young children but had recently moved back to Mehmet's home town of Side. Sam told me that she was tired of running a hair salon in Britain and that running her own yoga holiday had been her dream since she started practicing yoga. The couple organized their yoga holiday through Mehmet's contacts in the hospitality industry at a hotel from which they contracted rooms to host their yoga "retreat," and we were there for their first season of operation. Although Sam arranged all the bookings through her website, in effect she was booking her guests in blocks of rooms in a 72 room hotel complex. Mehmet had built a yoga deck that could hold a maximum of about 6 people off to the side of the hotel near the staff bunks overlooking an avocado grove (see Image 3.19). When we arrived our rooms were not available as the hotel had been overbooked, and rather than tell us this ahead of time, Sam and Mehmet arranged to have us stay in another nearby hotel for the first few nights of our one-week holiday.

The hotel room they wanted us to move into after our first two nights elsewhere had moldy mattresses and barely enough room between the two single beds Jaeda and I were meant to sleep in to consider them separate beds. Normally as a traveler who has done a fair share of backpacking and tends to be on the more budget than comfort side of travel, these kinds of things would not bother me. Had I been traveling alone, as an anthropologist studying yoga tourism, I would have just taken notes, gone along with it and not complained, it would have simply become part of the experience of studying tourism. Jaeda, however was not an anthropologist, she was a paying

customer who had been looking forward to a yoga holiday that she had been planning with a friend for several months in her new home country. She had expectations both for herself and for me, as she felt in some ways it was her responsibility to take care of me while I was visiting her in Turkey where she had been living for the last three years. Jaeda and her husband had taken every care to make me feel welcome and to experience the wonders of Istanbul, and she wanted to extend that experience to our yoga holiday in Side. Jaeda also knew I had been to several other yoga tourism locations and was curious to find out how this one compared. As it turned out, it compared very poorly on a consumer basis, and because we were also friends and I wanted her to be happy on her vacation, I could not disagree with her that we were not receiving what we were promised when we booked our yoga holiday. Not only was Jaeda a paying customer, who expected consumer integrity in the tourist industry, but she was also used to 5-star international travel experiences. Because this holiday was the first time since her three-year-old daughter was born that she was going to be away from her, she wanted her time away to be worthwhile. This experience served to highlight conflicts in the commodified nature of a yoga holiday that promised well-being and delivered additional stress when Jaeda and I had to confront Sam and Mehmet about what we felt were unacceptable standards and undelivered promises. It also put me in a strange place as an anthropologist/yoga tourist/friend. In the end, I chose to add my voice to Jaeda's confirming that we felt dissatisfied with our accommodations. We struggled a good deal with this because on the one hand we felt that as yoga practitioners we should have compassion and "go with the flow," so to speak, not focusing on the negative but instead allowing ourselves to learn about our desires and expectations and grow from what we experienced as dissatisfaction (a point I will take up later on when I discuss yoga and ethics).

After a series of disappointments and confusion about accommodations, Jaeda was ready to leave the yoga holiday and asked her husband to find us new accommodations. She wanted to ask for our money back as she felt we had been cheated. As it turned out Jaeda's husband was unable to find vacancies anywhere in Side. Because we were already there and since Mehmet negotiated that we stay in the nicer hotel, we decided to remain for the final four nights of our yoga holiday with Garden Yoga. The food continued to disappoint us, but we felt challenged and compelled by the yoga instructor, Tam, who was the most challenging Yoga Teacher either of us had ever practiced with. Although we struggled physically with her classes, because they pushed us to our physical and mental limits, we also felt intrigued by this, since it was a style of yoga and yoga teaching that neither of us had encountered before.

As a person who had never been to a resort before, I found the coloured plastic armbands tourists wore one of the most curious features of being on holiday in Side. These armbands served the purpose of classifying tourists by hotel, so that hotel staff could quickly identify guests as they accessed the all-inclusive meals and discounted drinks at hotel restaurants and bars. It was apparent in watching tourists and service personnel along the beach front that hotel staff and shop owners recognized who was staying at the higher-class hotels and who the less classy venues by the armbands they were wearing, and it seemed courtesy and selling techniques were altered accordingly. The tourist-scape of the entire town was colour-coded, and tourists embodied these distinctions somewhat unawares, giving off clues as to their stature in the consumer landscape with waterproof plastic accoutrements.

In addition to the mix-up with hotel booking at Garden Yoga, the food on offer at the hotel, which was included in the fare we paid for our yoga holiday, did not live up to the “delicious” meals described on the website. In private the yoga guests complained about the quality and selection in food and the unseemliness of the accommodations and other hotel guests. The yoga guests described the food as not “Turkish” enough and not healthy. Those who were vegetarian basically had a choice between soggy pizza, French fries, and salads whose vegetables tasted of chemical washes, a far cry from the “delicious Turkish food” described on the website (and which seemed to be available pretty much everywhere else in Turkey). Interestingly although all of the guests complained to one another about the food and some about the accommodations, none of them, aside from Jaeda and I, complained directly to Sam and Mehmet. Another behaviour I witnessed that fell into this pattern was that even though Brenda complained to Jaeda and I about both the accommodations and food, she later wrote a positive review for Sam to put on her website in the guest testimonials section.

Once I arrived at GY and saw the discrepancy between what was described and what was experienced I found it difficult to understand how guests could be writing glowing reviews such as the one by Martha, from London that I included in the opening to this section. Yet Sam had several such reviews, a few of which came from guests I met while staying there, who openly discussed their displeasure with me during the holiday. I understood this in two different ways. In the first instance I think the guests were unwilling to voice their displeasure openly because they liked Sam. Not only did she organize the retreat, but she also practiced yoga with us, and because we shared our yoga practice with her in a way this built up a certain level of intimacy. Although Sam’s business was first encountered as a business through a website that promised experiences and raised expectations about a yoga holiday, once people arrived and met Sam, they saw that she was much like themselves

and related to her personally rather than just as a business owner. Sam was a young mother who loved yoga and was trying to start a new business in a foreign country. Although she was making mistakes, she still seemed very sincere in her desire to give people a good holiday. She voiced her own frustrations with the guests about the arrangements with the hotel and tried to satisfy her guests' requests. It was clear that she lacked power to affect certain aspects of the tourist experience, particularly the accommodations and food, which were based on arrangements she had made with Mehmet's family friends. The yoga guests liked Sam and Mehmet, and were fond of their children, who were very precocious and often came around to chat with guests and display their own yoga moves after yoga practice. I think that although the yoga tourists were disappointed and openly shared that disappointment with each other, they still wanted Sam to succeed in her business, and did not want her to feel more badly than she already felt. This relates to the second reason I think that yoga tourists displayed a discrepancy between the displeasure they felt and the picture they painted of their yoga holiday in testimonials and to people who were not mutual guests, which is that, particularly as the yoga tourists were going home, they *wanted to believe that they'd had the experience they were expecting*. Yoga tourists wanted to feel as though it had been worth it. The money, the time, the hassles of foreign travel and the anticipation of planning a yoga holiday needed to be framed appropriately as worthwhile experiences to bring home.

There seemed to be a comparable shift as the week went on at the three one-week yoga holidays I visited. As the guests prepared to return home the way they spoke of their holiday began to shift to a more nostalgic light, one hued over with reminiscences of the things that *weren't that bad after all*. At the beginning of the week, after first arrival, yoga tourists noted that which differed from what they had been expecting based on the website and email exchanges with holiday organizers, around about day three and four, guests occupied the space of the holiday as though they were part of it, and on day five as they began to prepare to go home, they started to remember what surprised their expectations in a good way, what they would miss, or what they had learned. Shifting back towards home, yoga tourists would go out and take the photographs they'd been meaning to take, beginning to frame their yoga holiday in terms they could share with people back home, so that they could say it had been worth it. This was particularly so for women who had families and partners, for whom getting away alone had perhaps been a struggle, and who hoped that they would be able to get away again in the future. For these women it was important that their partners and children believed that the yoga holiday had renewed and refreshed them so that they could be better wives and mothers when they got home, and so that they might have the opportunity to go on yoga holiday again.

### **Being a Yoga Tourist in Side:**

Image 3.21 shows a view of the hotel pool and one wing of the hotel we stayed at during our time in Side. This hotel is the one we stayed in, not the one we were originally supposed to stay in. The original hotel resembled this one externally, although the rooms were much less clean and smaller. Like this hotel, the hotel we had originally been booked into overlooked a pool and courtyard with a restaurant where guests ate all-inclusive meals. The hotel pictured in Image 3.21 was nestled amongst a robust gathering of other 3-star accommodations, including the hotel where the yoga took place, which we could see from our hotel room window. These hotels were a good 20-minute walk from the beach and connected to the rest of the city by dirt roads covered in tar to keep the dust down. Image 3.21 was taken at 6am, just before the start of our morning yoga class. Although it shows the pool empty, during the day and up until midnight the pool, lounge chairs and bar were usually crowded with hotel guests and drowned out with pumping electronic music from the poolside bar.



Image 3.21 View of pool and hotel from hotel room window, Side Turkey

It was *hot* in Side in July, which was why we practiced yoga at 6:30am and 7pm. Although the beach was only a 20-minute walk away, in the sweltering 37-Celsius heat, it was a *long* 20 minutes across busy dusty roadways coated with tar, past tourist shops redolent with sellers hassling tourists to come in and buy. Because the entire beachfront was developed into mega hotels, with sitting areas corresponding to the large hotels, our strolls to the beach had us walking along the tourist-infested boardwalk until we arrived at a private sitting beach where we paid a small fee to rent a shade-covered chair. The beach, like the hotels, was crowded, loud, and overrun with tourist entertainment activities, including volleyball nets, paragliding and water motorsport ventures that

announced their services in Russian, English and German over megaphones (see Images 3.22 and 3.23).



Image 3.22 Beach in Side



Image 3.23 Paragliders, beachgoers and motorboats at the Side beaches

The old town of Side sits on a peninsula, and while the beach to the east of the old town has been developed into tourist hovels selling brand name sportswear, sunglasses and purses, bars, restaurants and mega hotels, the beach on the west side is much less developed. The type of development along the west beach takes the form of little restaurant shacks, each accompanied by beach chairs and umbrellas served by waiters in crisp white shirts.

Jaeda's husband had been coming to Side on holiday from Istanbul since he was a child and his father owned a home there. He told us that whereas the beaches used to be frequented by Turkish vacationers and serviced by *simit* and fruit sellers with carts, that new strict development laws have pushed these "illegal" businesses out, leaving only the beach bars to sell "international food" for tourists. Although the Garden Yoga website boasts of encountering "rich Turkish

Culture,” in Side, it is difficult to decipher what exactly this means. The website describes beaches, archaeological sites, mountains and forests, but little else about what constitutes this “exciting Turkish Culture.” Supposedly then, just by going to Side, tourists can expect to experience Turkish Culture. The “strict regulations placed on development” to protect the historic importance of Side for touristic consumption has resulted in particular developments in the tourist industry in recent years. Preserving this “rich history” means that tourists are now more apt to encounter discount versions of brand name goods such as *Prada*, *Nike*, and *Dolce and Gabbana*, in their proper places in beachfront stores than a wandering *simit* seller on the beach.

I am not trying to draw a distinction between *simit* sellers and sellers of discount brand name goods to argue that one or the other is not authentic, although from Jaeda’s husband’s perspective, who had long been vacationing in Side, this was how he perceived it. For him this shift represented a larger shift in the tourist industry in Side wherein rather than Side being a place for Turkish vacationers, it was attempting to become an International Tourist Resort catering to tourists from Europe and abroad. What I wish to point out here, following Bruner (2005) is how “rich Turkish Culture” has become mobilized as a tourist metanarrative that is drawn on by the tourist industry in constructing particular narratives for International (rather than Turkish) tourists that shape both the tourist experience and the landscape of tourism destinations:

Metanarratives are the largest conceptual frame within which tourism operates. They are not attached to any locality or to any particular tour, and they are usually taken for granted, not brought to consciousness. For example, Lisa’s story, which sees tourist performances as representations of an authentic culture, and my view of tourist performances as constructed and historically situated, are what I call metanarrative. Lisa was probably not aware of her metanarrative, and I am aware of mine only because my story arose in opposition to hers, as there was at the time a lively debate on the subject within anthropology (Bruner 2005: 21).

Bruner goes on to write, “narratives are not only structures of meaning but structures of power” (2005: 21). He suggests that the development of tourist metanarratives, such as that of authenticity, or in this case “rich Turkish Culture,” which supposes a kind of authenticity, relates to the work done by local government and tourism consultants who “strive to devise an appropriate story line” for the development of new tourist sites as a way to commodify them (2005: 22). This seems to relate to Harvey’s (2009) discussion of urbanization processes in global cities such as Paris, Hong Kong and New York under neoliberalism, which differ from one another in the means through which they are integrated into the global economy through a variety of factors, including history, politics and cultural influences. According to Harvey, under neoliberalism development takes place with the economic factors heightened, thus framing appropriate story lines in the

“flavoring” of identity along lines of perceived desirability that will contribute to increased capital, with other elements left out.

Thus the tourist begins to encounter “rich Turkish Culture” in the appropriate places in Side. These appropriate places are no longer the beachfront where *simit* sellers may sell their wares undisturbed, but rather they have become the properly contained stores, and demarcated historic sites, the places the tourists go into because they want to buy things or experience history. The beachfront and hotels have been “developed” into another kind of tourist scape; a place for suntanning, sipping cold beverages sold by legitimate establishments, and different forms of entertainment such as beach and water sports. In Side, as in other tourist destinations, these places are marked out beforehand in tourism brochures and tourism consultant websites, of which Garden Yoga is one, albeit as I will describe momentarily, one that got the narratives a bit mixed in its telling:

Tour brochures, government tourism bureaus, travel agents, travel writers, media, airlines, and hotels work within the frame of the pretour master narrative in their writing, advertising, photography, décor and depiction of the destination. It is marketing, branding, presenting a product, selling an experience... Tourism is not that innovative in inventing new narratives but rather seeks new locations in which to tell old stories, possibly because these stories are the ones that the tourist consumer is willing to buy. The disadvantage of such scripted stories, of course, is that so much cultural content is left out or masked; it is what I call the “touristic untold,” and is part of the politics of selection (Trouillot 1995)” (Bruner 2005: 22).

The problem with the Garden Yoga narrative is that it draws off the pretour metanarrative of tourism developed for Side, but also the pretour metanarrative developed specifically for yoga tourism, without being aware that these two narratives conflict in important ways. Although Sam was unaware of this conflict when she decided to situate her yoga holiday in Side, it became quite apparent through the dissatisfactions voiced by yoga tourists who were clearly unaware of the Side narrative when they booked their yoga holiday at GY, thus the Side as Resort narrative was part of the “touristic untold” (Bruner 2005) of the Garden Yoga Holiday. Sam altered the Side metanarrative to fit the yoga metanarrative in her marketing of GY. Thus the yoga tourists did not fit in with the other tourists in Side because they believed they were going to a different Side than the other Side tourists were going to.

In a sense I was grateful for this experience because it helped to highlight the yoga tourism metanarrative, which was one of the things I was interested in exploring in my research. GY made it clear that one of the things yoga tourists are looking for in their yoga tourism experience is to somehow be marked off from other tourists through their choice of a *yoga* holiday. One important aspect of this is that they should not be housed and fed with the other tourists, because then there is nothing about the experience that is setting them apart. Food is of particular importance because

part of the yoga tourism experience is a focus on health, and to a certain degree a rejection of the over-consumption usually typical of other holiday narratives. Yoga tourists at GY could not pretend that they were being healthy because they could clearly see that the other tourists around them, who were eating the same food as them, sleeping in the same hotel, going to the same beaches, and doing all of the same activities as them, aside from doing yoga, were clearly not in Side for the purposes of health. It became very difficult to reconcile the yoga narrative and the resort narrative, and because the resort narrative was the more prominent one, it tended to take over. Yoga rather than being the focus of the holiday, became peripheral to it, a sort of inhibitor to the indulgence we could see the other tourists participating in. The other tourists thus became both a source of disdain and envy. The yoga tourists had disdain for the other tourists because they were clearly engaged in over-indulgent tourism activities, which we as yoga tourists were specifically choosing not to participate in<sup>64</sup>, and by doing so were disrupting our previously ordained narratives of peace, relaxation and self-discovery on our yoga holiday. The other tourists were constantly reminding us of what we were trying to get away from, and yet here we were doing the exact same things as they were doing, and being perceived as *like them* by everyone in Side. Yet in a certain vein we also envied them too because they were fulfilling their tourist narratives (or seemed to) while our own yoga tourism narratives were being disrupted.

We could not ensconce ourselves in the *Yoga Holiday Narrative* because of the overarching reality that had been put into place by the *Side as Historic Mediterranean Seaside Resort Narrative*, but nor could we ensconce ourselves in the Resort Narrative, as it was not the narrative that we had been wishing to buy into. Since the first season of running this retreat, Sam has changed her website and although the Resort aspects of Side are still downplayed, at least now they are mentioned. She also provides links to other Side vacation websites so that potential yoga tourists to Garden Yoga can learn more about Side before vacationing there. This also served to highlight another important aspect of the Yoga Holiday metanarrative, which is that for the most part specific location is secondary to the desire for a particular type of experience. Most people I met chose their yoga holidays based on general desires to practice yoga in a warm place, somewhere relaxing, near a beach or pool, with dates that fit their holiday schedule, and sometimes as an opportunity to visit a country they'd never been to before. They usually also had a budget that defined how much they were able to spend, which in some cases helped define yoga holiday locations that were available to them.

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<sup>64</sup> In Chapter 5 I discuss how ethical forms of consumption do not exist without their non-ethical counterparts. In this case although we were trying to engage in a kind of bodily ethical tourism, we were unable to fulfill this goal because there was no clear demarcation between the non-ethical tourism all around us and our own tourism activities.

Bruner poses a few important questions that might help consider how each of the yoga tourists at GY reacted to the experience in mixed metanarratives that occurred there. He writes,

Given the authority of pretour narratives as constructed by the tourism industry and embedded in Western discourse, what can tourists learn on a tour that is new, and what are their responses to the master narratives?... How does one go beyond the closed circle of simply replicating an a priori narrative? Are tourists just revising their own former stories (Bruner 2005: 23)?

Bruner suggests that the tourist experience in a sense is about hunting for the unexpected, in some way searching for a disruption to the master narratives that are created for them. Although they may buy into the master narratives (and he emphasizes that there are individual differences between different tourists for how much they may or may not buy into them), tourists in some senses are also hoping to have stories happen that “dramatize and personalize the tour [so as to] claim the journey as their own” (2005: 23).

As the course of the week at Garden Yoga developed, yoga tourists there did begin to make their own stories out of the unexpected reality we found ourselves in. Much of it took the form of humour, of describing to each other the interactions with other tourists and sellers that we had not expected to find on a yoga holiday. As Bruner suggests for tourists in general, the yoga tourists I met at Garden Yoga made the experience of being a tourist in Side their own by engaging with the materiality of Side, by walking the streets, going to the beach, taking photographs and buying souvenirs, thus discovering the “touristic untold” in idiosyncratic ways. Although it may not have been the relaxing, secluded and reflective yoga holiday some of the yoga tourists were imagining, most of us knew how to participate in the beach tourist narrative enough so as to make the experience our own. Despite the fact that our ways of making the experiences our own involved visiting the same places and in many cases snapping the same tourist snapshots, by bodily engaging with these practices, we rendered them to our own stories both about ourselves and about the place we were visiting. It was our own belief in ourselves as individuated subjects with unique perspectives that served to create the tourist stories that went alongside or challenged the master narratives already in place before we ever thought of the idea of taking a yoga holiday in Turkey.

Although most days Jaeda and I chose to spend at the beach with our books, we also took time to stroll the boardwalk, stopping in for a refreshing drink at a bar as we made our way for an afternoon in the old town, taking each other’s photograph and asking people we met to take our photograph together so we would have a souvenir to remember afterward. In the mornings we woke to practice yoga and in the evenings returned to the hotel for the evening yoga class, talking over dinner with the other yoga tourists about what they had spent their days doing.

Unlike the other yoga holidays I visited, which were primarily in secluded areas, thus fulfilling the idea of a yoga retreat away from overwhelming social and material pressures of modern urban life, Garden Yoga took place amidst the spectacle of resort tourism. Brilliantly though, Sam did find a way to reconcile the yoga narrative with the Side narrative in a way that satisfied the yoga tourist's search for personal revelation amidst the exotic: a yoga photo shoot at the Apollo Temple in the early pre-tourist hours of the morning (see Images 3.18 and 3.24)

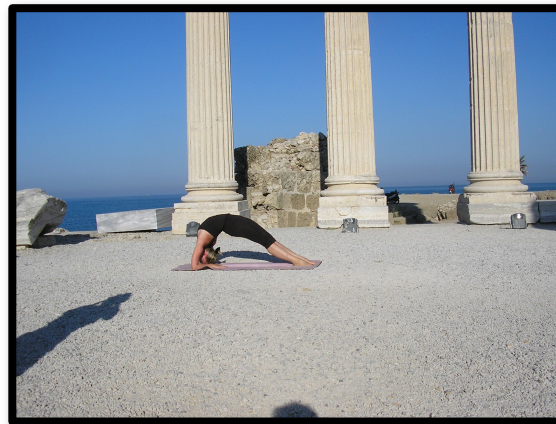


Image 3.24 Jaeda in a modified wheel posture at the Apollo Temple in Side (notice the author's photographic shadow).

Unlike at most historic and cultural heritage sites in Canada and the US, the Roman era historic features around Side are not cordoned off from public usage. Sam therefore arranges to have at least one early morning yoga class at the Apollo Temple so that yoga tourists have the opportunity to have photographs taken of them in yoga postures they have performed over the course of their yoga holiday. This was definitely one of the highlights of the week in Side. A strict schedule had to be kept the morning we went to the Temple to make sure that there were no other tourists there that would ruin our photos (although inevitably they began to arrive and then also began snapping photos of us to incorporate into their tourist stories). We each staged our yoga mats in various locations making it seem like we were alone in front of the Temple overlooking the Mediterranean Sea practicing yoga postures.

As demonstrated in Images 3.18 and 3.24, setting up our shots exactly as we wanted still proved difficult. In Image 3.18 you can see another person standing off to the side with her camera in the frame, and in Image 3.24 I captured my own shadow and the shadow of someone else's head in the photograph I was taking of Jaeda. As an anthropologist I was pleased that my shadow intruded on the picture to show my position as observer, to call attention to my gaze and the onlooking gaze of the other yoga tourists. However Jaeda had me retake this photograph on her camera to make sure that I got a better angle with no shadows and a better view of the sea beyond.

These kinds of posed yoga shots are becoming increasingly common in yoga holiday tourism. Yoga practitioners revel in taking photographs of themselves, usually in either difficult asana postures in beautiful locales, or meditative looking poised shots in serene settings, to take home as the ultimate yoga tourism souvenir. A search for yoga tourism online reveals thousands of these kinds of photographs, and social networking sites such as facebook are replete with albums upon albums of yoga tourist shots featuring *asana* abroad. Everyone I meet who has gone on a yoga holiday wants to show me pictures like the ones shown here.

It seems anthropologists are also fond of such photo ops, as when I travelled to the AAAs in New Orleans in 2010, I met visual anthropologist Peter Biela who when I told about my research was surprised to find out that his habit of having his photograph taken in *vrikasana* (tree pose) at his field site locations, was not an idiosyncratic practice! He even sent me some of these photos and agreed to have me use them in my work (see Image 3.25)



Image 3.25 Peter Biela demonstrating Tree Pose at Mt. Deborah, Mbezi Beach, and Moscow (photos courtesy of Peter Biela).

While each of us was eager to have our photograph taken at the Apollo Temple, we were also frustrated by the fact that the majority of the time was taken up by Sam and Tam taking photographs of each other. Tam later used the photographs taken of her for promotional material for her yoga teaching, and Sam for her business, to advertise Garden Yoga to future yoga tourists. The other yoga tourists felt that Sam and Tam as the owner and Yoga Teacher should have focused

on having the yoga tourists get good photos, fulfilling first the yoga tourist's expectations, and only thereafter their own.

Through the Garden Yoga in Turkey Case Study I explored the construction of pretourism metanarratives and particularly the elite aspects of the yoga tourism master narrative when it came into contrast with forms of tourism yoga tourists were trying to set themselves apart from by virtue of better (i.e. more healthful, not hedonistic) tastes. In the next section I develop the theme of ethical consumption further by exploring the lifestyle opportunities yoga tourism affords for the owners of yoga tourism businesses. I outline why I think it is more appropriate to consider yoga tourism outside of India more through a lens of ethical consumption than spiritual tourism by making reference to the pilgrimage metanarrative in Southern France.

### **Case Study 6 Maison dans la Campagne, France (Pastoral Yoga)**



Image 3.27 Maison Yoga Holiday in Southeast France

*I have been on 5 different yoga holidays around the world, and this is the very best! [Edla's] yoga classes are inspirational, and the accommodation and the grounds are simply beautiful.*  
-Penny, Edinburgh.

- 1. Key terms:** “Green and tranquil valley”, “beautiful foothills of the snow-capped mountains of the South of France”, “17th century rural chateau set in 18 acres of wooded hills and wild-flower meadows around a small lake,” relax, explore, adventure, food.
- 2. Images:** portrait photograph of Edla's smiling face, Edla in meditation posture on a bench with the Pyrenees behind, a group of guests around the brick barbeque, a shot of a yoga class in the refurbished barn, a picturesque shot of the property, including the pond, rolling field, farmhouse and forest beyond, images of the nearby medieval city of Foix.

In this section I use the Case Study of *Maison dans la Campagne* yoga holiday (Maison) to ask questions about what kinds of tourists yoga tourists are and how they fit into an already defined tourism field in the places yoga holidays are popping up. I argue that that the majority of yoga tourists I met on holiday, particularly at the yoga holiday locations I traveled to in France, Italy, Bulgaria and Turkey, were not traveling to yoga holiday locations for primarily spiritual aims. Instead, many of them saw yoga as beneficial to health and wellbeing in some way. I suggest that it is thus more fruitful to analyze these types of yoga holidays through a lens of ethical consumption rather than spiritual tourism. I also suggest, however; that in many cases ethical consumption can become a sort of spiritual quest, particularly since the kind of ethical consumption enlivened through yoga tourism and yoga more broadly is primarily an ethics of self-care related to pursuits of self-transformation. In Chapters 4 and 5 I will explore this second theme in greater detail.

The *Maison dans la Campagne* yoga holiday was a one-week yoga holiday in the French Pyrenees that I attended in August of 2010 with my partner at the time, Rafael<sup>65</sup>. There were four main buildings on the Maison property, the main house where Scott and Edla lived in which the top floor had been converted to a yoga studio, one guesthouse, one guest cottage, and the yoga barn (see Image 3.27). Both the guesthouse and the guest cottage had multiple private rooms with self-contained bathrooms and were equipped with communal kitchens for guests to prepare their own meals. The Maison yoga holiday was somewhat different than the other yoga holidays I visited as yoga guests were responsible for their own grocery shopping and food preparation while on their yoga holiday. Because of this there was much less leisure time and because guests were responsible for procuring and preparing their own food, they tended to eat alone more and not have the same sense of communal involvement in meal eating that was so characteristic of other yoga holidays. Having to obtain groceries also meant that yoga guests were required to go out and interact with local people, being forced to speak French or to rely on other yoga guests who did speak French to help them understand when interacting with locals.

The Maison was in a rural area along a small winding road. The lawns were expansive and dotted with lawn chairs surrounding a lake. There was a small village with a basic shop a ten-minute walk away and a larger village with a weekly farmer's market that could be reached by bicycle. Yoga guests walked daily to the nearby village, and Rafael and I often borrowed bikes to ride along the

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<sup>65</sup> See Appendix A for Cast of Characters. Rafael is the only yoga tourist for whom I did not use a pseudonym since he was my partner at the time and agreed to be identified directly in my dissertation.

expansive trail networks and to other nearby villages. The Maison is near several well-developed walking routes, including the *Chemain de Saint-Jacques*, an ancient pilgrimage route that connects through the Pyrenees to the *Camino de Compostela* in Spain. Most of the guests spent time walking parts of these routes through the countryside between *domaines*, villages, and bigger towns.

More than other places I visited on yoga holiday, there was a sense of being welcome in the French countryside as tourists. What I mean to say is that here I felt like less of an interloper and more of a temporary resident than I did at the other places I visited. This probably has a great deal to do with the fact that I speak French, although markedly with a French-Canadian accent, but also it seemed to relate to the fact that the Maison was along a well-established pilgrimage route, which meant that pilgrims were common in the part of the French countryside where the Maison was located. Did this effect how all types of tourists were received in this area of France? While I did not collect data to be able to back up claims about local perceptions of tourists, from my comparative experiences in other countries as an anthropologist/yoga tourist, I felt there were important distinctions in how the primarily English speaking yoga tourists at the Maison in the Midi-Pyrenees area of France were integrated into local life than they were in the other countries I visited. This was partially due to the fact that they had to interact more with locals in acquiring food, but I also think it had something to do with a popular distinction between tourists and pilgrims, one that has been argued and challenged in research on pilgrimage, namely that pilgrims are on a sacred journey and tourists merely traveling for fulfillment of pleasure. Graham and Murray, in their discussion of historical and contemporary perceptions of the *Camino* put it as such:

[T]here is the pressing need to distinguish pilgrims from tourists. In one effort to resolve this central tension, Smith has suggested a typology of the pilgrim-tourist in which a continuum, defined by the opposite poles of sacred and secular, encompasses a range of motivation from 'pious pilgrim' to 'secular tourist'... While a useful device in classifying the various sub-markets of those undertaking contemporary pilgrimages, the difficulty with this scheme lies in the nature of piety and the multilayered meanings of pilgrimage in a secular age in which 'holy' and 'pious' no longer define the 'spiritual'. Thus the search for personal consciousness and meaning far transcends the realm of the religious, and pilgrimage becomes the product of a multiplicity of motivations, attitudes and behavioural mindsets (Graham and Murray 1997: 401).

Graham and Murray discuss how the perception of tourists, pilgrims, and the *Camino de Compostela* in Spain and the *Chemin de St. Jacques* in France are part of larger forces of European regionalization:

From the Pyrenees to the holy city of Santiago de Compostela itself, the contemporary Camino is signposted by a motif depicting the cockleshell symbol of St. James turned on its side and streamlined into a fan of lines meeting to the left. This represents the roads of Europe, symbolically joined and leading to Santiago, no longer a ceremonial centre of Spanish nationalism, but declared a European

Capital of Culture... (Graham and Murray 1997: 398).

Graham and Murray (1997) suggest that the support of the *Camino* by government, locals and pilgrims alike, as a celebration of shared European Cultural Heritage, points to one possible reason why pilgrim tourists in the region of the Midi-Pyrenees may be more welcome than tourists in other areas. Namely, the relationship is not envisioned in merely commodified terms, but also enacted through historical interpretations of past pilgrims through the region, many of whom were strangers or foreigners undertaking sacred journeys and sharing in faith and cultural heritage with the people whose locales they were passing through.

Graham and Murray suggest that in this space of a celebration of European Culture and Heritage, the *Camino* is reinterpreted by the multiple actors who have a stake in its history and contemporary articulation, namely official government forces, international bodies such as UNESCO, local inhabitants, the Catholic Church, and pilgrims who seek out the Way of St. James for a multitude of reasons:

In vying for supremacy in the definition of 'pilgrim', alternative contemporary discourses have erected and reinforced complex social boundaries and distinctions that reflect wider constructions of society. Official and non-official discourses - and their consumers - seek to delineate their exclusive claim to the Way of St James. In the end, however, there are many parallel Ways, a pluralist pilgrimage for a postmodernist epoch, marrying renditions of the past, physical exertion and the search for meaning and inner peace in a secular world increasingly bereft of guiding principles (Graham and Murray 1997: 406).

The fact that many of the local villages in the Midi-Pyrenees region are organized around ancient pilgrimage routes that continue to be maintained as walking, cycling, and in some cases horseback riding paths, suggests that activity in the region has long been defined by the passing through of pilgrims. Perhaps the fact that modern pilgrims are perceived as traveling for spiritual purposes – in line to some degree with their historical predecessors through the region – means that rather than being interpreted through tourism metanarratives which necessarily place local and tourist in contrast to each other, usually in a commodified relationship, the relationship between pilgrim-tourist and locals in the region is more heterogeneous. In this metanarrative, both parties have an interest in preserving the local landscape as it has been historically experienced rather than developing it for new touristic purposes. Graham and Murray suggest that despite the heterogeneity in pilgrim motivations, definitions and experiences, that there remains an underlying assumption of sacred journeying in pilgrimage through the mode of travel pilgrims take:

[M]odern pilgrimage also appears to be a diverse and heterogeneous phenomenon [with] an insistence on the sanctity of the spiritual... [A]ll these readings are linked by the assumption that true pilgrimage is defined by a search for spiritual or internal enlightenment which derives, not necessarily

from the shrine itself, but from the hardships, joys and self-discovery of the nature of the journey to that place. There is an explicit assumption here that the realization of such values does not occur to travellers by car or coach. Thus motive meshes with mode, and the physical hardship of walking - or cycling - the Camino de Santiago - becomes a (if not the) primary distinction of the pious or true pilgrim (Graham and Murray 1997: 402).

In striking contrast to the yoga holiday at a resort town in Turkey, the tourism infrastructure in the area surrounding the Maison was much more subtle, oriented not towards mass tourism, but to local agriculture and the passing through of pilgrims. Basically, life did not seem to be organized entirely around tourism, but rather the types of tourism activities that went on there seemed to be largely integrated into local life. The visible infrastructure was mostly directed at pilgrims, including information in all the little villages about local routes, *gites* and guesthouses where pilgrims (and tourists) could stay, and multiple roadside markers indicating pilgrimage routes. The markets we visited for food and a parade celebrating agricultural traditions that we attended in a nearby town, were places where tourists intermingled with locals and pilgrims, but they did not seem to exist exclusively for the tourist (see Image 3.28). The one visible indicator that there was tourist activity in the region were the roadside signs pointing out the locations of local artisans and craft shops where tourists could stop to buy locally made products. Tourist activity was also evident at a cultural heritage parade that we visited, but this evidence again seemed to be integrated into the a local celebration of culture and not staged primarily for touristic consumption (see Image 3.28).



Image 3.28 Agricultural parade in Midi-Pyrenees region of France

Although tourists were present at the markets and at the parade, they were mingled with local people. It was not easy to separate out pilgrims from other tourists, as many pilgrims now elect

to have their larger bags carried by organized pilgrimage tours so they can walk unencumbered. Unlike the locations I visited in Turkey, Costa Rica, and Bulgaria where the divide between “us” as tourists, and “other” as local was racially, ethnically and linguistically marked (because most of us were white and spoke exclusively English) and enforced by political economic distance between tourists and locals, in France and Italy, the divide was less visible, marked primarily by linguistic distance (though there were undoubtedly other markers that I may not have been aware of as a tourist myself). Although “we” as tourists were still consumer-visitors marked as outsiders and as an economic resource, power differentials in social, economic and political positions were not at the forefront of the tourist-local exchange in this setting. When I asked observers and parade participants about the parade, they told me that the parade was organized by and for local people, a celebration of local cultural heritage that had been ongoing for many years. It was not the kind of organization of social space witnessed in Side where everything seemed organized around perceived tourist desires. Nor did it seem to be the kind of cultural event anthropologists have written about wherein events witnessed by tourists consist of a staged authenticity (MacCanell 1999, Bruner 2005).

MacLeod (2010) writes about the kind of social space I describe at the markets and parade in Southeast France as “grass-roots cultural heritage”. He differentiates this from official state representations of culture that may conflict with how locals understand the places they inhabit. MacLeod brings up an example of the state branding of Bayahibe, a ‘fishing village’ in the Dominican Republic to differentiate between “official state representation of the national cultural heritage...[and] unofficial local ‘grass-roots’ understandings, interpretations and cultural representations of community and family heritage” (2010:77). MacLeod describes the efforts of local people to create unofficial special places and events as manifestations of cultural heritage within and beyond the state’s representations, “a sense of space created by local inhabitants through their daily lives and experience: as opposed to one created by government planners” (2010: 77-78). While the parade in rural France may have been supported by government planners, with the dates published in local tourism brochures to attract tourists, it originated from the efforts and involvement of local people based on their own representations *of themselves for themselves* as a celebration of local traditions. The space was not organized around tourist activities and the perceived wants of tourists by official planners and developers, but rather both locals and tourists alike were observing and interacting with the social space in similar ways. More than likely these kinds of unofficial special places existed in Side as well, but as an ethnically marked foreign tourist who was unable to speak the local language spending only one week in the town, I was not able to

discover local relationships to Side. Instead, the experience I felt and shared with other English-speaking yoga tourists was of Side as a hyper-developed tourist space.

In contrast, being a “white-ish” French-speaking tourist in France, I was able to seek out (albeit over a very short time frame) at least some information from local people about how they shared social space with tourists. These differences, while valid ethnographic descriptions of the tourist locales I visited, may reveal less about the locales themselves than the perceptions of the yoga tourist/anthropologist onlooker. Part of my intent in designing a short-stay multi-sited ethnographic project about tourism was to pay attention to the kinds of comparative analyses that came up in my own autoethnographic tourist process. The kinds of things I describe are therefore dabblings in the application of anthropological theory to the embodied experiences of being a yoga tourist. The anthropology I have read and my fluency in the type of cultural consumerism yoga tourism entails highly shaped the shallow tourist-framed ethnographic data I gleaned from the touristic experience.

Yet the different interactions with place between yoga holidays located in different locales with different histories of tourism also highlights discussions raised in anthropology about different types of tourists. It brings up the question of what kinds of tourists yoga tourists are and how they fit into an already defined tourism field in the places yoga holidays are popping up. For the most part, as we have seen, yoga tourism locales outside of India are small businesses started up by Western foreigners interested in yoga, individuals with the freedom to set up where they choose to, as opposed to people from India who might find it much more difficult to make such “choices”. They come into being in places where local infrastructure for tourists from Europe, the USA and Canada<sup>66</sup> already exist.

Are yoga tourists spiritual tourists and is it helpful to analyze them through a lens of spiritual tourism (Badone and Roseman 2006, Timothy and Olsen 2006)? Although the ashram in the Kootenays was the only location I visited with explicitly spiritual purposes, it is difficult to completely separate out spirituality from yoga, as commentators on contemporary yoga suggest (De Michelis 2004, Alter 2005, Singleton 2010). Regardless of whether or not spiritual aims are the prime motivator for yoga tourists, there remains some connection with spirituality in yoga, and in some cases, such as ashrams, spirituality is forefront in yoga as a practice. That said, I would argue that the majority of yoga tourists I met on holiday, particularly at the yoga holiday locations I

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<sup>66</sup> Although I did not travel to Thailand or Bali to study yoga holidays, both of these places are highly popular yoga tourism locales. I suspect that at yoga tourism locations in Southeast Asia and Oceania one would witness a large presence of yoga businesses started up by yoga instructors from Australia and New Zealand, in addition to folks from Britain and North America.

traveled to in France, Italy, Bulgaria and Turkey, were not traveling to yoga holiday locations for primarily spiritual aims. Instead, many of them saw yoga as beneficial to health and wellbeing in some way, and in this sense I think it is more fruitful to analyze these types of yoga holidays through a lens of ethical consumption rather than spiritual tourism. As I will argue further on, I think that in many cases ethical consumption can become a sort of spiritual quest, particularly since the kind of ethical consumption enlivened through yoga tourism and yoga more broadly is primarily an ethics of self-care related to pursuits of self-transformation (rather than world transformation, although this may be talked about as being the prime motivator, as I discuss in Chapter 5). This self-transformation may in some cases be understood and envisioned as related to God or Divinity, but for many women I talked to who practice yoga and travel to practice yoga, it also has a good deal to do with achieving betterness envisioned in outwardly defined ideal terms (i.e. becoming a better version of oneself according to circulating discourses of femininity, which I elaborate on in Chapter 4).

I will return to a discussion of ethical consumption in another section of this dissertation. For the instance I want to highlight some of the possible categories in the anthropology of tourism that yoga tourists can identify with and be thought about in relation to, particularly the categories of pilgrim, spiritual/religious tourist, and adventure tourist. Anthropologists have written a good deal about the differences between pilgrims, tourists and other types of travelers including adventurers and anthropologists (Turner 1969, Morinis 1992, Badone and Roseman 2004, Gordon 2006, Turnbull 1992). While some anthropologists consider the divisions between different types of travelers arbitrary, particularly in contemporary settings where most international travelers originate from consumer societies with enough capital to make international travel possible (Badone and Roseman 2004, Timothy and Olsen 2006), other scholars interested in tourism such as Graham and Murray (1997), believe that the differentiations are important. Gordon (2006), who focuses on adventurers as a particular category of tourists, also points out what he suggests are important differentiations:

It is also necessary to distinguish adventure from other types of related experience, namely tourism and pilgrimages (although Houston's essay in this volume suggest that in mountaineering they can merge). Central to the marketing of the travel and leisure industry is the notion of an escape from the everyday. Most religions encourage travel in the belief that it is good for the soul. Pilgrimages focus on self-transformation. They are experienced and interpreted as rebirth, atonement, or liberation from materialism, jealousy, and hatred (and also of course status enhancement)... But what organized mass tourism does is minimize these risks by taking "the trouble out of traveling." The power and economic differential is such that tourists can typically withdraw if they feel threatened. And then there is that hybrid, adventure tourism. It entails a contradiction since adventure is about dealing with uncertainty, yet planned tours minimize this. Adventure tourism is marketed for those who have neither the time nor the desire to take the risk fully upon themselves (Gordon 2006: 7).

Reading definitions of adventurers and pilgrims that differentiate between tourists as travelers seeking escape from the everyday, pilgrims as travelers seeking self-transformation and adventures as travelers seeking submersion in uncertainty (Gordon 2006), I find I am drawn more towards Graham's (1997) contention that yoga tourists, like pilgrims, are characterized primarily by their heterogeneity. Some were in search of adventure and uncertainty, others in search of self-transformation, some sought out escape from the everyday, and others, primarily women traveling alone, sought out a safe place to travel alone, usually with aims of self-discovery if not transformation.

### **Being at the Maison dans la Campagne**

I have described a tourist experience of being in the surrounding region of the Maison, and now turn briefly to describing the Maison itself, including some information about the organizers, how it was organized and a bit about how it was experienced by the yoga tourists I met there.

I call the Maison dans la Campagne yoga holiday "Pastoral Yoga," to emphasize the nostalgic sense of the idyllic countryside embedded in what I came to understand as a desire among some British retirees to fulfill a lifestyle dream in the French hinterlands. I met two couples in Bulgaria who had wanted to purchase property and run tourism businesses in France but had chosen Bulgaria because they were unable to afford property in France. In France I met Scott and Edla and one other British expatriate couple living out this same dream. While this is in no way representative of the larger British population, when I probed Jessa and Mike in Bulgaria and Scott and Edla in France about this, both couples told me that there was a large British expatriate community in France, and that many of them were retirees. Scott and Edla were successfully living out their retirement dream through a yoga tourism business that had been running for seven years when I traveled there in 2010. Scott was fond of talking about how he had succeeded where many other British expatriates had failed. Like Mike in Bulgaria, Scott was part of the British expatriate community spread across the countryside of Southern France. He routinely kept tabs on who was buying and selling property and what they were spending time doing. He told me about how expensive it was to buy old farmhouses and convert them to livable properties, and that many Brits bought them only to be forced to sell them a few years down the road after renovation costs accrued. Scott also told me that this trend had caused prices to go up significantly in recent years, as there was a new demand for derelict farm properties among previously urban-based British.

Edla told me that she and Scott would not have been able to sustain their lives in France without the yoga business. And while it allowed her to keep teaching yoga, a profession she valued, it was clear by Scott's disdain for the yoga guests that he resented having to share his dream with us in order to live it out. Scott was often unwelcoming and unaccommodating and several of the women staying there expressed a strong dislike of him. In fact one guest, Gretchen, who was on her second trip to a yoga holiday at Maison, referred to Scott as *the sergeant*, to emphasize his hard-lined approach to setting out rules and regulations for the yoga tourists when they were staying on his property. While Gretchen thought this was funny and did not take his attempts to control the yoga tourists' activities very seriously, other guests found Scott to be quite a damper on being able to enjoy the idyllic landscape. In both Bulgaria and Italy, where yoga guests also shared holiday space with the owners of the yoga tourism businesses, there was a strong emphasis on accommodating the yoga tourists. At the Maison, there was an overriding sense of being at someone else's house, someone who didn't really feel like having visitors. Several women had altercations with Scott and refused to ride in a car with him, and many said they felt he was grouchy, unpleasant and disrespectful.

Edla and Scott's business setup was much like the Spirit Yoga Villa in Bulgaria and Holistic Energy Spiral in Italy. All three were yoga tourism businesses owned and operated by couples from England wherein the wife taught either yoga or in the case of Maya at HES, energy healing, and at all three locales the couples lived on the property with the revenue from yoga tourism in the summer months as the primary income that allowed the couples to maintain their desired lifestyles.

Having described the five yoga holiday/retreat/study programs I travelled to for this research, I now turn my attention to yet another type of yoga tourism, the professional yoga conference before attuning my theoretical focus on the embodiment of yoga and the ethics of consuming yoga as a spiritual practice in the remainder of this dissertation. The case studies highlight similarities and differences in the contemporary global yoga landscape and set the descriptive stage for more the more acute theorizations pursued in Chapters 4 and 5.

## Case Study 7 Professional Yoga: The Vancouver Yoga Conference and Show

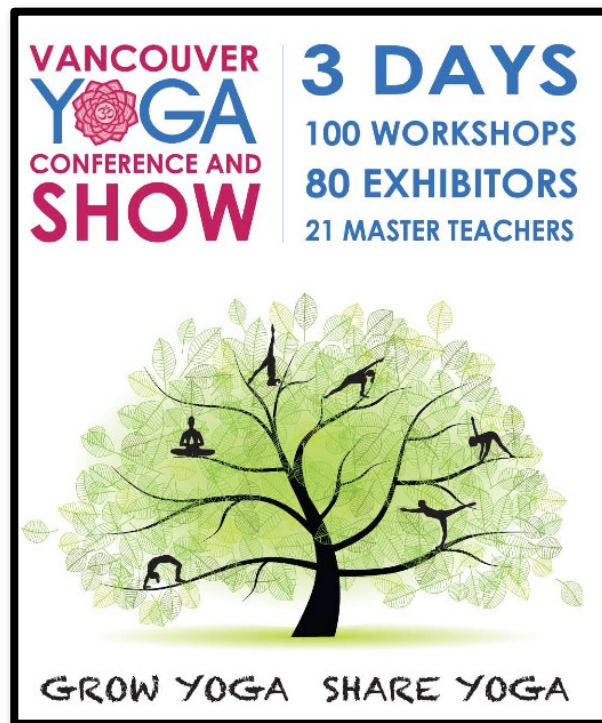


Image 3.29 Yoga Show Logo and Banner

- 1. Key terms:** intent, vision, unity, core values, entrepreneurship, mission, products, greatness, integrity, celebration
- 2. Images:** woman in white tank top and white pants preparing for a headstand on the beach with the sun behind her, product advertisement for the “Three Minute Egg,” a type of yoga prop, with a muscular blonde woman in a tight top and pants reclining over three blue egg-shaped bolsters, an image of Seane Corn, a famous American yoga teacher, the following image, which indicates the culmination of evolution is a professional woman transforming from walking with her briefcase into in *natarajasana* (dancer’s pose):

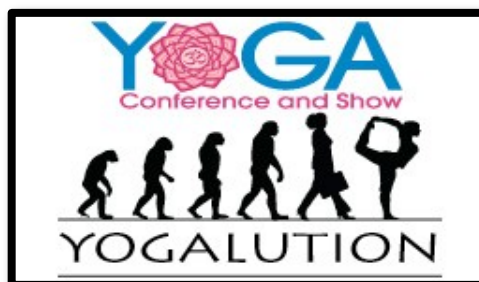


Image 3.30 “Yogalution” Banner

In this section I provide a snapshot of the Yoga Conference and Show that I attended in Vancouver. I discuss how the YCS epitomized some of the strangely conflicting messages coming out of yoga culture drawing on ethical consumer lifestyle discourses. The YCS thus sets the stage for Chapter 5 in which I explore how these types of discourses create the ethical tourist framework for those who

engage in yoga tourism as an extension of their at-home consumer ethicalities, which in many ways are just re-envisioned elite consumerist discourses grafted on new moral fields of eco-consciousness and imagined social responsibility (Lewis and Potter 2011). I also highlight how self-vigilance as social activism in yoga is problematic in terms of wider neoliberal discourses of flexible and adaptable personhood and how this logic enforces the idea that if consumers just stop consuming “bad” things, then they and the world will be better. I introduce the contradiction that this places at the heart of the entire yoga industry, which is built on the same logic it attempts to subvert and critique through practices of embodied self-awareness.

The Yoga Conference and Show (YCS) has been taking place twice a year in Canada for about three years. It is modeled on the *Yoga Journal Conferences*<sup>67</sup>, which I consider quite similar in format to other types of professional and industry conferences I have attended such as hair shows for the hairdressing industry and academic conferences such as the AAA Meetings. *Yoga Journal Conferences* take place four times a year in different locations in the USA. Both the *Yoga Journal Conferences* and the Yoga Conference and Show are venues where students interested in yoga can take classes from renowned yoga teachers and browse the yoga marketplace sections of the conferences, which are set up somewhat like trade shows. Many of the classes and workshops that yoga “aficionados” (as the YCS website refers to them) take at these professional conferences can be used as credits in Yoga Teacher Training programs (YTT) and towards continuing education credits for moving up the yoga certification ladder. Big name yoga teachers such as Shiva Rea, Cyndi Lee, Richard Yee, Seane Corn, and John Friend are almost always in attendance at the *Yoga Journal*

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<sup>67</sup> The *Yoga Journal Conferences* are organized and owned by *Yoga Journal*, the most widely distributed yoga magazine in the US. *Yoga Journal* has been in circulation since 1975. It began as a print magazine by a group of California yoga teachers to unite their community. *Yoga Journal's* history exemplifies the mass commercialization of yoga over the past 30 years. While it began as a small publication with a small circulation to a tiny subset of the population interested in yoga, it has now grown to a circulation of over one million subscribers. Since the 1990s it has been bought and sold a number of times. In 2006 it was bought again by its current owner Active Interest media and now has an extensive website as well as print magazine and DVDs. The website sends out daily emails to subscribers with insights and information about yoga. Prominent yoga teachers often publish articles in YJ and some of these teachers also write blogs hosted on the YJ website. The YJ website also maintains an active directory of yoga vacations and holidays. People researching yoga holidays online can click on a world map to find hundreds of yoga tourism locales in any particular geographical region. The *Yoga Journal Conferences* are a subsidiary of the larger YJ brand, which is also affiliated with several other health oriented lifestyle brands that publish magazines such as *Vegetarian Times*, *Backpacker*, and *Amazing Wellness*. Although YJ has a massive circulation of over 1 million subscribers, it also has drawn massive critique from yoga bloggers and those in the yoga community who oppose the commercialization of yoga. As one yoga blogger writes, “you know and accept that *Yoga Journal* is a money making magazine that answers to the call of the shallow market and the sexy body rather than the call of the cultural, the wholesome, the intellectual and the spiritual” (Bjonnes 2010: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2010/08/yoga-journal-controversy-why-judith-h-lasaters-plea-will-fall-on-deaf-ears/> accessed: 03/04/2012).

*Conferences*, and some of these teachers also attend other major yoga conferences, such as the one I attended in Vancouver, which are not affiliated with *Yoga Journal*. I had the opportunity to take workshops with Cyndi Lee and Seane Corn at the Yoga Conference and Show in Vancouver.

In addition to big names in yoga education, there were also big names in the yoga commercial world present at the YCS, such as lululemon®, prana®, and toesox®, which had representatives on hand to promote their products. The Yoga Conference and Show was organized by a group of yoga professionals in Canada who wanted to give Canadian yoga practitioners the chance to have access to famous, primarily US-based, Yoga Teachers. The YCS is held every fall in Vancouver at the downtown Convention Centre, and every spring in Toronto at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

The Yoga Conference and Show describes itself as:

Canada's Largest Yoga Conference & Consumer Show! "Uniting world leaders in Yoga to reveal, educate and achieve!" Combining the powerful intelligence of the body, mind and mysterious spirit is the healthy hype that captivated the yoga community and its followers, uniting them in YOGA, the Conference and Show held at the Vancouver Convention Centre (<http://www.theyogaconference.com/vancouver/media.php> accessed 11/03/2012).

According to the Yoga Conference and Show Vancouver Media Page, there were 21 "national and internationally renowned teachers and leaders" at the three-day event, as well as "98 vendors who did well in servicing the 8500 show floor attendees and 715 conference attendees" (<http://www.theyogaconference.com/vancouver/media.php> 11/03/2012). The renowned teachers offering classes and workshops included Seane Corn, a "spiritual activist" who founded the Off the Mat into the World® movement, Nischala Joy Devi, author of *The Healing Path of Yoga* among other titles, Maria Garre, a senior teacher trained by celebrity Prana Flow Yoga founder Shiva Rea, and Leslie Kaminoff, author of *Yoga Anatomy*. According to the media release for the Conference "The most amazing experience of the event was the cohesion and contentness [sic] of the attendees. Their smiles and gratitude for having such an event to participate in was enthusiastically conveyed to us over and over" (<http://www.theyogaconference.com/vancouver/media.php> 11/03/2012).

The functional layout of the YCS was set up with independent workshops in the smaller conference rooms at the Convention Centre and the Yoga Show in the larger exhibition area (where at academic meetings the book publishers would set up shop). Attendees to the Conference could either 1) pre-register in particular workshop/classes based on the schedule published online and distributed at local studios as a pamphlet brochure, 2) register for classes onsite, providing there was still room in the classes, or 3) buy passes to access the Yoga Show floor without signing up for any

classes. Yoga classes and workshops at Yoga Conferences are usually given by prominent Yoga Teachers and organized around particular themes. I will describe two of the workshops I attended to provide an idea of what type of yoga education is being offered in these contexts. Firstly I briefly describe the Yoga Show floor.

The Yoga Show floor at the 2010 Yoga Conference and Show (YCS) that I attended in Vancouver was set up basically along the same lines as the 2011 YCS represented here:

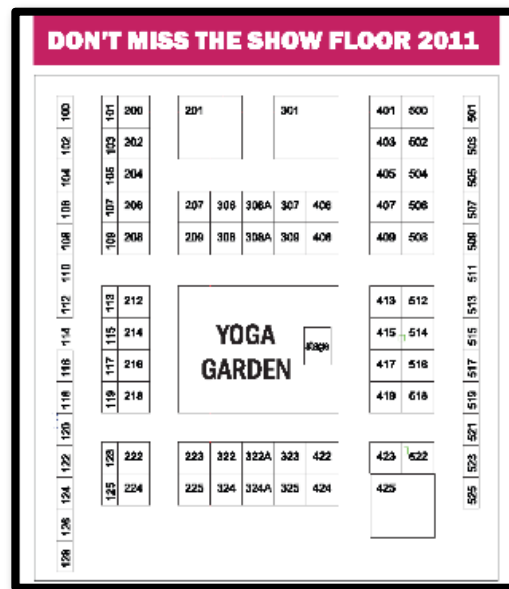


Image 3.31 Yoga Show Floor Plan

On the Yoga Show floor, there are a range of exhibitors organized around the central “Yoga Garden,” which consists of a raised stage and a large open area where teachers give yoga demonstrations and lead “free classes.” Anyone on the show floor can join in or leave these classes at anytime. Show attendees pay \$15 CAD for three days of access to the Show Floor, where they have access to 37 yoga classes and over 100 exhibitors. Exhibitors range from companies selling orthotics and health drinks to yoga studios, insurance agencies, massage therapists, fitness apparel companies, design companies, chiropractors, and other health and fitness oriented professionals. Many of the prominent Yoga Teachers who are giving workshops at the conference lead larger yoga classes at the Yoga Garden. Celebrity teachers such as Cyndi Lee and Seane Corn are advertised heavily in the YCS brochure, and show attendees are encouraged to arrive early for the demonstration classes these teachers lead in the Yoga Garden to ensure getting a spot.

The YCS Floor is a bustling place throughout the three days of the conference. Surrounding the classes being conducted over speaker and microphone in the centre of the room is an overwhelming space of yoga consumerism. The YCS seeks to attract exhibitors under the

auspices of profit making for yoga-oriented businesses. According to the YCS website, the “YOGA, Conference & Show brings together world renowned instructors and yoga aficionados,” it provides the “optimal opportunity to market your products and services to a powerful, trend setting, influential and well-targeted audience” (<http://theyogaconference.com/vancouver/exhibitors.php> accessed: 12/03/2012). The YCS website describes this “powerful, trend setting audience” as: healthy, engaged, environmentally aware, 73% female, college-educated 36-42 years old, primarily in the professional/managerial sectors of the workforce and with an average household income of \$75,000 (<http://theyogaconference.com/vancouver/exhibitors.php> accessed: 12/03/2012).

In my field notes from the conference I describe my feeling of confusion and disorientation when I entered the Yoga Show Floor space. I actually had to leave the Floor space the first time I went there because of the total sense of despair, confusion and inundation of all my bodily senses upon entering the room. I had just spent six hours in a yoga workshop intended to “open all the body’s energetic channels,” and although I was tired I thought I would observe the Show Floor before returning to my hotel to observe and take fieldnotes. Apparently my sensual channels had become too open because my body felt invaded by the overwhelming throng of yoga aficionados doing what they were supposed to be doing on the Yoga Show Floor: enacting commodified relationships with people, objects, and ultimately with yoga. In my journal I describe a panicked sense of despair. I was completely bewildered by having felt that I had done some psychological and emotional healing in the workshop, only to emerge into a carnival of conspicuous consumption that I probably build up habitual defenses to protect myself from under normal circumstances. I wondered at the absurdity of opening myself to emerge into a world of the frenzied shoppers (who are not other, but also potentially me) enacting market logic lives around spirituality.

The workshop I am referring to was a six-hour workshop with Cyndi Lee called “Opening the Gates.” This was a very intense workshop with three hours of lecture and discussion followed by three hours of physical asana practice. The intention of the workshop was:

[To] explore methods for unlocking the gates that prevent us from experiencing the confidence, balance and wakefulness that arise naturally when the body's channels are open. Our map is the Tibetan Buddhist 7 chakra system which strengthens our practice as we move up and purifies as we move down. Through an active, uplifting asana practice - deep twists leading to chest, throat openers and inversions - we will rouse our energy to create a sense of strength, joy and lightness. To balance our pranic flow, we will then work back down the spine with a purifying, earthy sequence. Along the way we will explore the enlightened and unenlightened aspects of each chakra (did you know the sole of the foot chakra relates to both love and anger?) as a path toward recognizing our own habitual patterns (YCS 2010 Vancouver Brochure).

In this workshop we focused on habitual patterns of holding, developed through daily moving through social worlds, embodiments of work, relationships and space. I moved parts of my body with awarenesses I had never had before, finding release in my tight hips by finding the strength of my pinkie toes in the floor. But what was all this for? So that I could move more fluidly through a commodified world? How could the language of yoga be applied here? If what we were doing in the workshop was seeking enlightenment, what did that have to do with packaged health snacks, new designs in yogawear and the repeated patterns of oppression placed on our bodies by idealizations of young fit beautiful women used to sell these products to us? It's not like this was the first time I had experienced the conflict between yoga as something that is "good for your body" and yoga as something that "gives you a hot body," but usually I approach this with a critiquing lens, robed in feminist academic discourse and analysis. This day I felt naked, and that nakedness made me feel so sad. Was this what I was shaping my body for through yoga?

I felt the same conflict the next day when I walked out of another 6-hour yoga workshop with Seane Corn. This workshop was called *Detox Flow: How Nutrition, the Environment & Emotions Determine Your Vitality*. In this workshop we had been challenged to detoxify our bodies and minds and to consider how our actions in the world create severe environmental impacts, and in turn serve to damage our vitality and health. Seane Corn talked fervently about the need to be healthy and aware and how environmental stressors negatively impact our health, offering physical sequences of asana postures to help move toxins from the body and encourage "optimal health." In her approach, she talked a great deal about "the environment" and vegetarianism, but had no clear social critique on consumption and capitalism as untenable modes of human and ecological wellbeing. There was a sense that if we became hyper-vigilant with what we put in our bodies that we would somehow be able to become stress-free, to evade the dangerous toxins out there in the world. Corn describes herself as a spiritual activist. Her yoga teaching is geared towards motivating people to engage in social causes, such as with her organization *Off the Mat, into the World*®, which "brings awareness to the HIV/AIDS crisis" (YCS Brochure). This discourse of self-vigilance as social activism in yoga is problematic. It is difficult to separate it out from wider neoliberal discourses of flexible and adaptable personhood. Somewhere in this logic there is the idea that if consumers just stop consuming "bad" things, then they and the world will be better. Yet the entire yoga industry is built on this same logic as the means through which to distribute and access yoga. One emerges from a detoxifying workshop into a hyper-consumerist space where yoga is branded, rebranded, marketed, designed, shaped and sold into different types of products to emerge as a lifestyle model or the "yoga, health and fitness aficionado" described above. Yoga is a moral tool for professional women

to achieve good health, good bodies, and a good sense of self. It helps women feel good about themselves and their place in the world. My critique of it is always conflicted because I feel good through yoga too, but sometimes what this good is worries me. Does it make us self-focused in a purely corrective way? Can it offer us freedom? Is freedom in this sense simply the freedom to feel good or is there more to freedom than that? These questions seem to be best contextualized through discussions around ethical consumption. They are discourses in the contemporary yoga world that I often feel myself resisting. Although I certainly do not begrudge people wellbeing, I feel a good deal of discomfort around what wellbeing often seems to mean.

Roseanne Harvey, a Yoga Blogger I follow on *It's All Yoga Baby* (and who I will discuss in Chapter 5), described her own reluctance to attend a Yoga Conference because of this aspect of Yoga culture (<http://www.itsallyogababy.com/tag/yoga-conferences/> 2012/03/16). She also described her choice to attend a smaller, rural-based Omega Yoga Conference rather than attend a larger *Yoga Journal* Conference because she is highly critical of the commercialized aspects of yoga culture. The YCS epitomized some of the strangely conflicting messages coming out of yoga culture drawing on ethical consumer lifestyle discourses that I draw out in Chapter 5 when I discuss ethical consumerism and how these types of discourses create the ethical tourist framework for those who engage in yoga tourism as an extension of their at-home consumer ethicalities, which in many ways are just re-envisioned elite consumerist discourses grafted on new moral fields of eco-consciousness and imagined social responsibility (Lewis and Potter 2011) .

## **Conclusion**

This concludes my snapshots of globalized yoga tourism landscapes in which I explored the themes of yoga as ethical tourism in Costa Rica and Turkey, the conflict between yoga tourism master narratives and resort tourism master narratives in Turkey, yoga as a lifeway for an environmentally-oriented intentional spiritual community in British Columbia, neoliberal discourses of flexible and adaptable personhood through yoga at a Yoga Conference in Vancouver, the relationship between pilgrimage, spiritual tourism, ethical consumption and yoga tourism as a lifestyle choice for (Western) foreigners in France, the absurdity of practicing yoga in a rural Bulgarian village, and the conflict between spirituality and consumption in the tragic story that unfolded at a yoga holiday in Italy. In the next chapter I will focus on anthropological approaches to embodiment and draw on my own autoethnographic experiences of yoga to discuss yoga as an embodied system of praxis. In Chapter 5, I further theorize ethical consumption and ethical tourism discourses in considering contemporary yoga worlds.

#### Chapter 4: Embodying Yoga as *Neoliberal Esprit*<sup>68</sup> or *Chance for life*<sup>69</sup>?

“We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway 1988: 580).

“[T]he body” has been a major focal point for scholars in contemporary humanities [anthropology] and cultural studies. Nonetheless, more often than not, the body, however privileged, has been regarded primarily as an object among other objects – most often like a text and sometimes like a machine. Indeed, even in overt criticism of the ways in which the body has been objectified and commodified in our contemporary image-conscious and consumer culture, many scholars tend to redeem the body, as Thomas Csordas writes, “without much sense of bodiliness in their analyses. Such a tendency... misses the opportunity to add sentience and **sensibility** to our notions of self and person, and to assert an added dimension of *materiality* to our notions of culture and history (Sobchak 2004: 3, italics Sobchak’s, bold emphasis mine).

In this Chapter I explore yoga as an embodied system of praxis through which practitioners develop corporeal knowledge and affective awareness of the self. I use the work of contemporary yoga scholar/practitioners Stone (2011) and Chapple (2008) to sketch out emergent interpretations of the *Yoga-sutras* (YS) through what I identify as an ethics of relationality. I suggest that this ethics of relationality can be understood through recent considerations of affect and embodiment in the social sciences and ideas of relationality emerging in feminist approaches to the life sciences (Haraway 1988, 1997 and Barad 2007). My intent in this chapter is to sketch out how the ethics of relationality developed in recent scholar/practitioner interpretations of the YS relate to anthropological theories of embodiment and affect. I elaborate my own sensate experiences autoethnographically by considering the relations between yoga and anthropology that emerge in my practice. I use two posture studies and a small selection of fieldnotes from my yoga practice journal as points from which to synthesize interpretations of experience. This often leads me to pose questions, some of which I leave open-ended as they remain unresolved in my embodiments of yoga. Throughout I consider the question of how some contemporary approaches to yoga might be understood as a *chance for life* (after Haraway 1988) and other contemporary approaches to the question of human life variously termed posthumanist (Wolfe 2010) and new vitalist (Olma and Koukouvelis 2007), which akin to yoga, posit emergent relationality as a processes of becoming together. This emergent relationality is grounded in the boundaries between discursive and material worlds, it becomes an exploration of the processes and practices of knowledge-making and world

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<sup>68</sup> After Freeman (2011)

<sup>69</sup> After Haraway (1988)

making. Physicist Karen Barad terms her feminist methodological approach to exploring this terrain a “diffractive methodology” (after Haraway) that places “the understandings that are generated from different (inter)disciplinary practices in conversation with one another” (2007: 93).

Barad’s method is to:

engage aspects of [knowledge produced through natural and social science] in *dynamic* relationality to the other, being attentive to the iterative production of boundaries, the material-discursive nature of boundary-drawing practices, the constitutive exclusions that are enacted, and questions of accountability and responsibility for the reconfigurings of which we are a part. That is, the diffractive methodology that I use in thinking insights from different disciplines (and interdisciplinary approaches) through one another is attentive to the relational ontology that is at the core of agential realism. It does not take the boundaries of any of the objects or subjects of these studies for granted but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce “objects” and “subjects” and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality (Barad 2007: 93).

Barad’s diffractive methodology eschews the focus on reflexivity and reflection in the social sciences, an analogy, she argues, was developed from the optics of reflection, in which ontological dualisms of subject and object are posited as atomic and separate entities. Instead she urges us to rethink ontology in terms of diffraction, in which differences are “marked from within and as part of an entangled state” (2007: 89). She argues that while reflection is about representations, mirrors and gazes from afar, that diffraction is about “making a difference in the world... taking responsibility for the fact that our practices matter; [and that] the world is materialized differently through different practices (contingent ontology)” (ibid).

By engaging yoga anthropologically and considering the irresolvable contradictions in my own practice, I explore connections between the proliferation of “practices of the self” and the spread of neoliberalism, considering the position that these practices of the self are indicative of what Freeman (2011) terms a *neoliberal esprit*. From a position in which my own body is inserted as a diffractive mechanism, I argue that it is not enough to reduce these practices to simple neoliberal processes. My aim in doing this is political, a feminist aim to imagine possibilities out of neoliberalism through the development of mindful embodiment as relational emergence.

In this chapter I interpose two posture studies, *kurmasana* (tortoise pose), and *bakasana* (crane pose) and yoga field journal snippets about my own yoga practice as points of diffraction into the scholarly text. The resulting pattern emerges as bodily thoughts, attempts at synthesizing anthropology and yoga; scholarly and personal worlds which are not separately embodied in my being, but which I often sense as strains and tensions. Strains and tensions which I seek to resolve through yoga, breath, meditation; methods of reconciling myself with the immediate sensate world,

a world from which I too often feel separate when caught up in the abstractions of mind that define my scholarly life, and yet which I also seek to understand through anthropological perspectives.

### **Posture Study 1: Tortoise posture/*Kurmasana*:**



Image 4.1 Author in Variation 1 of *Kurmasana*



Image 4.2 Author in Variation 2 of *Kurmasana*

#### **Field Journal Excerpt:**

Internal place of intuitive understanding – can only be heard when relaxed and silent. The mind must rest its efforts – on the breath, then the body is not struggling to hold but is comfortably exploring. The teacher asks can you find a place of inner wisdom in *kurmasana*? She suggests that this occurs from a softening. As my centre begins to soften, curled up beneath my spine, a casing meant to represent the tortoise’s hard outer shell, I hear as though a conch shell to my ear, my own heart in its liquid home. There everything is rhythm and water. I hear the silence of my heart beat that is not silence but such a loud tone that for a few moments it turns all else away (at Yasodhara Ashram, October 20, 2009).

These photos of me in *kurmasana* are taken quickly with my laptop camera, an impromptu insertion while sitting at my table writing this dissertation. I am in my living room in my one bedroom apartment (note lazy dog) quickly demonstrating this yoga pose for illustrative purposes. Technology heavily mediates my experience of this posture as I must set up my laptop in a place that will capture most of my body in the photo, quickly push the “take picture” button with my hand (I don’t have an external mouse so must use the touch pad on the computer), then get into the posture in less than 3 seconds before the camera snaps the photo. I have other options for staging these photos, drawing from a rich visual library of yoga posture imagery in which most yoga posture photos are highly stylized. The approach is usually to have the demonstrating body situated in a yoga studio, somewhere in nature or outside in a touristy locale, posed on interesting architecture, and usually in clothing that shows off rather than obscures the body. But this is immediate, interposed into the writing, I am wearing the clothes I am writing in, and don’t remove my dog from the photo, he’s here as I write. I write this as a way to say that potential experiences

of yogasanas are felt differently every time, depending on conditions, constraints, intentions. In the reflection from my field journal I am guided by a Hidden Language Hatha Yoga Teacher at the Yasodhara Ashram during an early morning yoga class early in the second week of the two weeks I spent there. In that space all of my attention is devoted to the sensory experience of the posture, I am encouraged to reflect, through writing, on the sensations and guided into reflection by the teacher's suggestions about the posture.

At my home my sense perceptions inform me that my carpet smells like dog and my socks are covered in dog hair, I think the carpet needs a good vacuum while I struggle with the technical reality that it's pretty darn tricky to wrap myself up in three seconds. In Images 4.1 and 4.2 the sense of smell was the surprising element. While I was operating under visual logic, trying to convey visual information to slot into the text to demonstrate what kurmasana looks like what I'm sensing is dog smell, which invokes a slight feeling of repulsion and desire to move my nose away from the carpet. Contrast this with the ashram, when I was dwelling in the liquid sound rhythms of my own beating heart, rising and fading on the waving crests of my breath. The practice space at the ashram is purposefully designed for sensual wellbeing, encouraging a move inwards, towards developing proprioceptive awareness and skill (sensing the position of parts of the body in space and intentionally moving them to achieve energetic, skeletal and muscular alignment). Looking at my body in the photos I see where my alignment is slack, where I'd straighten my legs more and elongate my torso if I were demonstrating the posture to students and instructing them to move their bodies into it. That is about translating the visual cues, mind to body sense information, it is also about how the outer forms of asanas are just visual suggestions, and are always in process as one moves towards more subtle levels of sensing. You cannot see what I sense in this posture and what you would sense would be different based on your body history. Yet there is some part of me that also wonders whether in fact it is also about self-corrective vigilance? If I base my yoga assessment on what the pose should look like, I am interpreting images and repeating what I think I see, what I sense then becomes involved in the question of whether or not I am performing the posture correctly. Sometimes I get caught up in this mimetic mode, where I am performing without developing inner sense. As I become more skilled the approach of sense development moves beyond the visual interpretive mode so that I develop the corporeal know-how of the asana, allowing for the body-mind to settle into the form and relax, here experience simply arises; the affective messages from the body come forward in experience. By focusing the mind on relaxing various bodily zones the mind also begins to relax, the organism begins to feel united as a sensing, breathing, thinking, feeling self. This self is not about identity but about processual unfolding in the sensate world. I experience self not as individualized identity but as relation to all the elements that make up sensation; those that arise from within, which literally are the same elements that interpenetrate all life. By being with self in this way I experience myself as an organism among organisms and move towards sensing that my being an organism is derived from the being and relational exchanges of the

energetic organisms of which “I” am composed. “I” am always moving, composed of the same stuff and always in relationship to the natural world.

## **Embodiment**

In this section I sketch out how embodiment has emerged as an “indeterminate methodological field” (Csordas 1994:12) for theorizing from ethnographic data about corporeal (human) beings interacting, thinking, feeling, and doing things in the world. By so doing I situate my yoga sense interpretations in the textual tapestry of anthropologies of the body. Csordas, who first proposed *Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology*, suggests that:

a paradigm of embodiment can be elaborated for the study of culture and the self. By paradigm I mean simply a consistent methodological perspective that encourages reanalyses of existing data and suggests new questions for empirical research... The approach I will develop from the perspective of psychological anthropology leans strongly in the direction of phenomenology. This approach to embodiment begins from the methodological postulate that the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words, as the existential ground of culture (1990: 5).

Csordas has spent the last few decades elaborating his approach to embodiment as an exploration of the existential ground of culture (see particularly Csordas 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2002, 2011). His call for a move from body as object to body as subject coincides with much feminist work on the body as contextualized by sexual difference (Moore 1994), as a site of gender performance (Butler 1990) and as a place from which to develop analyses about social inequality based on race (hooks 1989), sexuality (Lancaster 2003) and gender (Jaggar and Bordo 1989, Moss and Dyck 2002, Ortner 1996). Since the 1990s, embodiment has been taken up by anthropologists seeking to describe, categorize and summarize how “the body” is incorporated cross culturally (see VanWolputte 2004 for a good review of body and embodiment literature, Sharp 2000 for a review of the commodification of the body, and the edited volumes by Lock and Farquhar 2010, Mascia-Lees 2011a, and Weiss and Fern-Haber 1999 for broad topics addressed through embodiment paradigms, see also Orr 2006 for a review of feminist perspectives on embodiment).

The time period of focus corresponds to a marked transformation in the global popularity of yoga from the 1990s onward, what Singleton refers to as the “international *asana* revolution” (2010: 4). This shift has been marked by a rapid development and proliferation of styles of physical yoga. The increased focus on the development of the yoga body coincides historically with an increased scholarly focus on the body in anthropology and other disciplines, and with the global spread of neoliberalism. “Since the 1990s,” Mascia-Lees writes in the introduction to her edited volume on the body and embodiment, “the emphasis on embodiment [in anthropology] has

been accompanied by, and intersected with, another significant insight...that the senses, emotions, and affect are the essence of our embodied materialities and socialities” (2012: 2). Clearly scholars and yogis are cultural beings, and both it seems have become increasingly interested in understanding the body as locus of being-in-the-world at the same time as a capitalism has shifted focus towards flexible self-reflexive individuals as labourers and consumers, heralding in what Martin (1992) termed a new type of body.

Mascia-Lees’ edited *Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment* takes a topical approach to the body and embodiment, providing an alphabetized range of broad anthropological topics ranging from aesthetics, affect, autoethnography, bioethics, colonialism, dead bodies, (trans)gender, hybridity, mediated bodies, neoliberalism, personhood, racialization, the senses, transnationalism and virtuality (among others). In the essays in this volume, anthropologists explore how these topics have historically been treated in the discipline and how embodiment-oriented approaches define new terrain and future possibilities for inquiry.

By considering how we think, feel and sense things, embodiment approaches draw out the experiential realms of the social field. Anthropologists are able to explore how people sense (Howes 2003, 2005, 2006) and feel about the material, social and cultural realities and unrealities we encounter in often rapidly changing social and cultural contexts of globalization and neoliberalization. In these contexts we are reminded about how persons are transmuted to quotas, numbers, abstracted point qualities in surveillance audit systems assessed by managerial techniques of efficiency and profit maximization (Dunn 2004). On the news, in the field and in our neighbourhoods, we witness places reduced to development sites, resource extraction zones and potential sources of revenue in tough economic times; ideas about how things should be and the best way for them to be (discourses) are circulated through various communication technologies, manipulated and used towards desired ends enacted on the material realms of environment and body. These material realms are then manifested according to new configurations of value: culture and history become patrimony (Vaccaro and Beltran 2007) and everything from wildebeests (Butt 2012) and rivers (Mullins 2009) to terrorist targets and catastrophic detritus (Hartnell 2009) become attractions for tourists in diversifying income streams. Bodies are commodified into sellable parts (Sharp 2000), employed in the service of surrogate reproduction (Edwards 2000), used as sites for self-representation in circulating discourses of sexual, gender and racial identity (Lalonde 2007) and increasingly reaching into new realms of mindful embodiment in globalized marketplaces through practices such as yoga, life coaching (Freeman 2011), and Qi Gong (van der Veer 2009). Perhaps it is particularly important in these contexts for anthropologists and other social scientists to highlight

the agency, subjectivity and relationality of neoliberal consumer citizens' affective, emotive and experiential lives to interject points of pause in seemingly totalizing progress-oriented regimes?

Neoliberal forces are acting to shape our lives and bodies in unprecedented ways (Harvey 2001), but we are also enacting our own life forces in the particular ways we embody, carry out and respond to these changing flows and forces. As anthropologists we can examine how our subjects' and our own life practices in the domains of labour, intimate and kin relationships, spirituality and religion, political and community engagements, interaction with our environments, technologies and selves are expressed, understood, experienced and altered by shifting currents of power under these emergent (yet historically situated) political and economic systems.

In these ways we come to think about power not necessarily only in the mode Foucault has often been applied – as a diffuse force shaping all potentialities of being – but in a sense more akin to Bourdieu's habitus, in which, according to Csordas (2011), the forces between body and world act reciprocally. Ortner (2006) pushes Bourdieu's practice theory approach further, she rethinks habitus to emphasize resistance and agency in relationship to habitus, thus urging anthropologists to pay attention not only how we are shaped by the world, but also creatively act to shape it. Applying Deleuze and Guattari (1987) brings to our analyses of our subjects' lives the contention that within the operation of powerful discourses there always remains ambiguity, an otherwise. Drawing on Haraway (1988) reminds us to consider how these knowledges, whether powerful, ambiguous or marginal, are always partial and situated. By focusing on practice, ethnographic encounters are “fleshed out,” and we see that our subjects as well as ourselves are simultaneously shaped by the world *and* transforming it by being in relationship with it; power rests in bodies as well as being “inscribed” on them. By considering the multiple ways we are in relationship with the world and the layers of inequality, suffering, pleasure, hope, despair, elation, and complex webs of interconnection of people with all aspects of existence: material, spiritual, human, non-human, posthuman, political, economic, magical, natural, artificial, virtual, beautiful and inane, we produce perhaps a richer anthropology.

In this chapter I explore the experiential and relational aspects of embodiment enlivened through yoga practice. I draw on the concept of affect to explore different dimensions of yoga practice by primarily middle class white women in Canada, and the middle class white women (and a few men) I met during my yoga travels who were primarily from the UK, Canada, and the United States. I should address here that I am uncomfortable with defining my subjects under the rubric of

middle class because this term may flatten a good range of differences in life experiences and histories for the people I am talking about. When I describe the primary practitioners of yoga that I study as middle class, I am generally referring to a range of affective behaviours and tastes that have come to characterize certain expressions of femininity<sup>70</sup> under economic conditions of flexible capitalism in political and cultural spheres defined as neoliberal. Freeman uses the term middle class to describe a range of affective orientations in a neoliberal cultural economy in which women are responsible for cultivating “both their own independent modes of femininity as well as new forms of emotional, intimate masculinity in their partners” (2011: 359). She suggests that these modes of femininity are accompanied (in Barbados at least, but she also refers to neoliberal cultural contexts more broadly) by an entrepreneurial spirit towards the self, “in which the individual is defined as a self-propelled, economic actor ever-responsive to a dynamic marketplace,” who is seeking “introspection, self-mastery, and personal fulfillment in leisure and life as well as personal responsibility in the marketplace” (2011: 356). Freeman identifies self-care techniques such as life coaching and yoga as techniques for achieving self-mastery and personal fulfillment, presenting entrepreneurial opportunities for women to integrate their desires for holistic lives in which private and public life become increasingly indistinct, imbued with the same affective qualities of care, self-fulfillment, reciprocity and support. I discussed some elements of the political economy of yoga tourism in the previous Chapter and will focus more on the ethics of yoga “culture” in Chapter 5 where I discuss the yoga industry and technologies of dissemination under globalization. In Chapter 5 I will largely agree with the approach Freeman takes toward affective labour under neoliberalism, focusing on the structural components of power and influence that act to shape the way yoga “culture” has been constructed through neoliberally-embedded technologies and services through the trope of ethical consumption, focusing primarily on the Internet and the yoga marketplace as enliveners of consumptive desire for self-betterment. In this Chapter, however, I offer a tentative critique of the way Freeman glosses over how affective forces operate in relationship to the economic forces on which her analysis is primarily focused, thus attempting to apply embodied pressure on the totality ascribed to neoliberalism.

I take up this critique through my own embodiments of yoga, as an often-unwitting “insider” to this middle class affective cultural economy. While I am in agreement with much anthropological work on embodiment and neoliberalism such as Freeman’s (2011), I find myself dissatisfied with the conceptualization of force in some of this work. This dissatisfaction comes

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<sup>70</sup> Although I did meet some men in my travels, I focus primarily on femininity since the overwhelming majority of yoga practitioners in this study were women.

from the ways in which I have tried to use my own embodiments of yoga to inform my ethnographic analyses of contemporary yoga in cultural contexts heavily influenced by neoliberalism. I draw heavily on autoethnography of my own yoga practice, which has been influenced by the teachings I have received from my yoga teachers (for which I am grateful), insights gleaned from texts published by yoga teachers, and Yoga Teacher Training (YTT-250 hr) to inform my analysis of the various forces at play in the embodied practice of contemporary yoga.

On the one hand there are the bodily life forces that generate the physical potential for yoga. These are the forces one seeks to discover through yoga, and are on some level external to the operation of social forces. Even though interpretation of these forces is highly socially inscribed and mediated, I argue that these forces still have the potential to interject *a chance for life* in lives subject to neoliberal pressures. On the other hand there are the social, political, and economic forces that shape yoga's expression on a global scale. These are forces which I am heavily subjected to myself, and which I struggle to intellectually understand and politically respond to in ways that foster broad feminist goals of gender equity, queer subjectivity, environmentalism, and social justice. Under Freeman's analysis, which I explore in more detail below, these responses may simply themselves be emblematic expressions of middle class subjectivity suitable to the affective economic requirements of neoliberalism, but as I said, I am dissatisfied with this contention, perhaps simply because I need to feel there is room for radical change.

How do we situate feminism expressed by women such as myself who practice yoga as a means of exploring the body as a site for being in the world? If practices such as yoga are simply manifestations of the requirements of the neoliberal labour force for flexible, self-reflexive citizens who, as Strauss puts it, are embodying an ethos of *adapt, adjust, accommodate* (2002), what should we make of our desires to know ourselves better by practicing yoga as a means towards our bodies *and* to combat the oppressive and individualizing forces of neoliberalism? I want to address the contradictions inherent in how feminist goals mesh with the requirements of neoliberalism through the practice of yoga. I am interested in exploring the ways that women are willing to and, indeed, *want* to do unpaid work on the self as well as in society, much of which may be affective in nature, towards supporting political goals of social justice fostered through freedom envisioned through self-realization and desire to enliven areas of life not governed by market logics. Through yoga practice one begins to develop a means to consider the self differently in the world. As I see it, there are two broad strains of manifested outcomes currently at play in "yoga culture" for how these considerations play out in people's lives. One is an outcome directed towards freedom, and the other is an outcome directed toward self-betterment. The first delves deeply into forces that

generate the potential for yoga as a bodily practice, and the second is largely determined by the play of social forces expressed on the discursive plane. The distinction is important for how neoliberal logic is played out in the pursuit of self-cultivation through yoga. I do not mean to suggest either that these outcomes are mutually exclusive or that one necessarily leads to the other. More likely the impulse towards self-betterment, through neoliberal market logics that play out in authoritative discourses of self and manifest as desires for self-betterment in order to more perfectly enact visions of a successful entrepreneurial *esprit* described by Freeman (2011), is always in tension with ongoing considerations of bodily freedom that might be manifest through yoga. In this Chapter I explore the question of freedom through anthropological approaches to embodiment and affect, in the next Chapter I look more closely at self-betterment through anthropological approaches to consumption.

### **Point of Access into Questions of Force, Affect and Embodiment through Self-cultivating practices in Neoliberal Milieus**

In this section I sift through theory to develop my arguments for considering the two outcomes of yoga practice I outlined above, namely an outcome directed towards freedom, and an outcome directed toward self-betterment. Both outcomes operate at the level of affect, though I suggest that in the first case, the embodied agent begins to engage consciously with a transformation of affect experienced as emergent relationality, while in the second case, the affective pressures of neoliberalism (which I discuss in greater detail below), orient the body towards progress envisioned as acquisition of body-self ideals enlivened through consumerist discourses (i.e. the drive towards always increasing “happiness”). I begin with a detailed consideration of Freeman’s (2011) article in Mascia-Lees’ edited volume on embodiment.

Freeman’s article discusses the embodiment of neoliberalism in Barbados through the central figure of Colleen, who she describes as a young upwardly mobile middle class “Barbadian woman” (2011). Freeman considers how Colleen’s entrepreneurial ambitions are woven through with her desires for self-realization in all aspects of her life and relationships – professional, physical, spiritual, and intimate – through theories of affective labour under neoliberalism (after Ahmed 2004). Drawing on an anthropological analysis of the entrepreneurial ambitions of a middle class Barbadian woman may seem a strange place from which to expound theorizations about the popularity of yoga among middle class white professional women (and increasingly men), however Colleen’s preoccupation with *wellness*, in her business and in her life, is a characteristic that is broadly shared by middle class women in globalized milieus, and particularly so for the women I study who

are interested in yoga. Freeman describes this as a middle class affective domain in which divisions between public and private have become increasingly ambiguous, and in which neoliberal requirements for a flexible, self-reflexive labour force are giving rise to new expressions of affectivity that require closer anthropological analysis.

Freeman describes Colleen as such: “[p]etite, attractive, and with an open, confident smile, Colleen embodies many of the signature markers of a new, neoliberal cultural economy in her island home, Barbados” (2011: 353). Freeman describes Colleen’s upbringing by a single mom who worked as a domestic worker, makes note of Colleen’s success in high school and her transition from economically secure employment at a bank where she was personally dissatisfied to becoming a self-employed entrepreneur of a wellness retreat. Freeman describes Colleen’s decision to change her life following a trip to the US on an Outbound Adventure. Colleen’s story sounds very similar to many stories I heard from the yoga retreat entrepreneurs (owners and managers of yoga retreats and Yoga Teachers) and travelers I met in my fieldwork. Many of the yoga entrepreneurs I met left what they described as personally restrictive or dissatisfying lives to live out more idealized lifestyles focused on self-care and providing contexts for other people to come and cope with everyday life stresses in relaxing and beautiful environments. They were able to do this because of an emerging market defined by consumer demand for yoga retreats in exotic locales. Dairen, the yoga teacher from New Zealand, who I described in Chapter 3, told me a very similar story about her life and background as the one Freeman describes for Colleen, most importantly *the choice she made to live life differently*. While Colleen’s life growing up with a single mother in Barbados must have been quite different from Dairen’s life growing up in New Zealand, the element that unites them is that as young women, both *made a decision based on previously unavailable choices* to live life differently than what had been available to their mothers (i.e. women of previous generations). Both Colleen, as an owner of a wellness retreat, and Dairen, as a Yoga Teacher who teaches at wellness retreats globally, *decided to realize their own ambitions for wellness and share their experiences of personal transformation through embodiment-focused self-reflexive practices* (yoga in the case of Dairen, rock climbing and physical challenge wilderness pursuits in the case of Colleen) by *making a living teaching others or providing a context for others to achieve wellness by learning new life practices*. Through these choices both Dairen and, according to Freeman, Colleen are living happier, healthier, more fulfilled lives in which they can holistically flourish. Perhaps it is simply that Dairen, Colleen, Jessa who I met in Bulgaria, and other women like them are able to flourish under these circumstances because they have successfully embodied and translated neoliberal requirements of flexibility and self-reflexivity to the point of them seeming to be naturalized desires? It may be the case that this is so, but I still push the point

that it is worth considering how these circumstances are lived, understood, expressed and modified by these ambitious, intelligent and vital women.

Many of the yoga travelers I met were using time on a yoga retreat to reconsider the direction of their lives, hoping that time spent doing yoga and connecting mind and body would help bring insight into what they really wanted and what direction they might take in the future. There was definitely variation in this among the different yoga travel locations I visited with whether yoga travelers were looking for life transformation or simply relaxation, and I think this relates to the point I make about yoga being simultaneously a tool for self-betterment or potential for bodily-situated practices of freedom. In the case of yoga tourism, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, this relates to whether the yoga retreat is a spiritual pursuit for self-transformation, which I described as yoga-motivated travel, versus a holiday-motivated yoga vacation, in which yoga is seen as a desired element to tack onto an otherwise leisure-oriented vacation from which one returns home more relaxed, but not necessarily transformed.

As I have suggested in other parts of this dissertation, because all of my research subjects (entrepreneurs, teachers, travelers) came from milieus and geographical locations where neoliberalism has been over the course of the last few decades fairly subjectively entrenched, i.e. Britain, the US and Canada, to countries like Costa Rica, Bulgaria, and Turkey – which to them seemed like “new” and exciting markets for both entrepreneurship and safe places of self discovery for women traveling alone – they are both moving with the flows of the market, and through their choices and sensibilities of what a “good life” entails, spreading the market forces through which their desires are shaped, into new territories. The subjects of my research were extending these markets abroad based on new economic opportunities for yoga tourism businesses in Turkey, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, and rural Italy and France. These yoga businesses allowed them to fulfill their desires for travel, adventure, personal transformation, or in the case of the yoga retreat owners, living a “good life” in a more ideal location. While distinguishing between the two motivations behind yoga travel and the differing desires and potentials for yoga to enliven potential freedom or remain rooted in neoliberal logics of self-betterment, I still make the argument that yoga tourism in general is very much tied to the spread of neoliberalism to new locales (I discuss the logics of this more fully in Chapter 5). Whether it is their intention or not, my research subjects are participating in spreading neoliberal market logics to new locales when they choose to open yoga retreats or travel to locations that have no previous history of yoga tourism as yoga tourists because, as Bruner (2005) suggests, they cannot help but participate in tourism master narratives when they travel to new places. This is both because their affective sensibilities have been heavily influenced by

neoliberalism and because locals perceive them in certain ways, regardless of their own intentions when they are traveling abroad. Yoga tourism entrepreneurs usually capitalize on the “yoga tourism” master narrative of relaxation, nature, and a unique experience by combining this narrative with other local tourism master narratives such as “Mediterranean seaside resort tourism in Turkey,” “slow-food tourism in Italy,” “pastoral tourism in the French Pyrenees,” “sunshine on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast,” or “ecotourism in Costa Rica.”<sup>71</sup>

Colleen is from Barbados and, as such (according to Freeman), is emblematic of a new generation of “young Barbadians” who are seizing opportunities for opening up neoliberal markets in their own locales through newly developed sensibilities of a *better* life. Freeman analyses Colleen’s life choices as such:

Her business signals a new consciousness about the body reflected in a rapidly expanding array of services being imagined in a time of neoliberal development. Likewise, her own trajectory marks a new path of middle-class mobility that blends traditional values and practices with ones that are signaling an emerging *neoliberal esprit*... If Colleen’s own entrepreneurial trajectory departs from the conventions of her mother’s generation, so too do her expectations and enactment of relationships, especially marriage. Like many other entrepreneurial women I encountered... she expresses a new vision for marriage as an intimate “partnership” melding entrepreneurial and emotional desires, material and affective support and care... An array of vague illnesses, exhaustion, “stress” and “depression” led Colleen to rethink her business idea and her own path in life. Returning to school and combining courses in sports management and psychology, she began to reformulate her entrepreneurial trajectory toward a “wellness-based program and retreat” and at the same time, to develop a deeper self-understanding (Freeman 2011: 354, italics mine).

I quote Freeman’s descriptions and analysis of Colleen’s life at length because I want to delve into one of the primary problems I see with the way that *forces* are often conceptualized in anthropological analyses of neoliberalism that have to do with what Freeman refers to as practices of developing deeper self-understanding or reflexivity. By engaging this question I situate my argument about the potential for embodying freedom through yoga. In her question of whether Iyengar yoga offers the potential for liberation or a reinscription of self-limitation structured by discourses of power-knowledge, Lea (2009) surmises that:

the relationship between the practice and care of the self seems to be an ambiguous and fragile one. The constant threat of slipping back into a form of relation with the self that relies upon knowing is doubled by the idea of an essential human truth at the core of the individual practicing yoga, giving rise to the risk of us closing ourselves down within a set of practices that fix and determine the shape of our subjectivity. Constant struggle and work is needed to maintain the second ‘productive’ kind of self-mastery, and stop it slipping back to the forms of self-mastery that are restrictive and pin us back into repetitions of the same. Might this form of self-analysis and development become paralyzing: posing too much of a challenge to us? Do the dangers of these pitfalls outweigh the potentially therapeutic functions of yoga? (2009: 86).

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<sup>71</sup> Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Margo Matwychuk, for reminding me of this point.

Lea does not pose a clear answer to these questions, but suggests that further research be done, considering that “developing a contemporary care of the self (with the associated shift in the relation of subject to truth) is ‘an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task’ (Foucault, 2005: 252)” (Lea 2009: 88). She urges us to consider whether this task, when realized only through market opportunities for those who can “afford” to take the time to care for themselves and put out the costly sums that many yoga classes and certainly yoga retreat opportunities require, remains a luxury and privileged position. She asks whether under these conditions “developing a contemporary care of the self” becomes available only to elite consumers and unavailable to many segments of the population who remain dominated by “apparatuses of power-knowledge” (Gros quoted in Lea 2009: 88) and whose identities are imposed by these structures without opportunities for shifting their subjective relation to a “truth” they may feel they have little power over. Lea, after Foucault, suggests that we continue to question “the forms of self-mastery that are set in motion through the interpellating work of such ‘immaterial products’ as ‘ideas, information, images and also “affects”... that become engrained in our bodies, minds, and the interrelated spaces in between” (Hardt 2006 quoted in Lea 2009: 88). Essentially Lea is asking whether yoga has become an elite commodity, and how this elitism then gets wrapped up in an ethics of consumption that serves to reinforce class structures and offer freedom only for those who are privileged enough to “choose” a better life for themselves. In this way, an anthropological questioning of how the ethics of yoga are applied and interpreted by practitioners in a commodified cultural context moves beyond the problematic viewing of yoga ethics as neutral practices of ancient wisdom, as many yoga practitioners suggest (Singleton 2008), and repoliticizes ethics within the context of socially scripted dynamics of power.

In Chapter 5 I explore some of the issues at stake with yoga as a privileged practice of the self in the context of consumerism, in the remainder of this Chapter, I explore the question of how affect operates in yoga. I have struggled with the contradictions of yoga as privilege and as potential source for freedom throughout the course of my research on yoga, and continue to struggle with it when I engage with mainstream yoga culture and “develop” my own yoga practice. Many yoga practitioners/critics share these struggles and I believe that recent developments among yoga activist groups (which I don’t have space to go into here but which I intend to pursue in future research) are promising in addressing questions of inequality of access to the therapeutic possibilities of yoga. Another point I wish to raise, which I go into more detail later, concerns Lea’s question of whether the “[c]onstant struggle and work [that] is needed to maintain the... ‘productive’ kind of self-mastery” (2009: 86) is too much work. Living yoga *is* constant work. Unlike many approaches to

health through fitness or biomedical interventions that are meant to “fix” problems, yoga as a therapeutic system, is based on Ayurvedic principles of balance between various manifest states, or *doshas*. Sometimes the *doshas* are in balance and wellness is felt, but more often the work of yoga is to become aware of the imbalances and work towards restoring balance. In a world “*Out of Balance*” as Stone (2009) puts it, yoga practitioners will need to do constant work to find balance in themselves, and to pose questions about what balance is and how it could be enacted in the world. It is true that there is a lot of “slipping back” as Lea calls it, because discourses of knowledge and the conceptions/beliefs/experiences of self that are produced through these discourses are *powerful*, that is why yoga is a practice. The goal is not to create new discourses of power, but rather to continue to question those that exist, how they solidify in our bodies and minds. That is a lot of work. It is never-ending, although there are places of rest in it, also places of connection and relation. The ethical precepts of yoga set a path that is meant to provide guidance in a world that is ultimately understood as suffering. Yoga is the constant work of choosing not to become caught up in the suffering world but to dwell in and foster non-suffering in one’s engagement with self and other beings. I return to this in my discussion of affect and relationality.

Questions of force and power have been at the forefront of my struggles to contextualize contemporary yoga practices. I have already stated Lea’s use of Foucault and Deleuze as entry points into understanding yoga as a practice of the self; here I explore Freeman’s use of Bourdieu for thinking about affective domains under neoliberalism.

Freeman (2011) cites Bourdieu’s (1998) *The Essence of Neoliberalism* in support of her critique of the type of affective subjectivity embodied by Colleen in neoliberalizing Barbados, namely that of the *entrepreneur*:

The critical role of the affective in neoliberal subjectivity is illustrated boldly in a figure such as Colleen, an *entrepreneur*, that heroic agent who for many signifies the quintessential symbol of neoliberalism itself (Bourdieu 1998; Harvey 2005). Although the neoliberal esprit is most evocatively encapsulated in the creed that we *all* become “entrepreneurs of the self” (Giddens 1991), this imperative is especially pronounced among new entrepreneurs like Colleen, seeking middle-class status and lifestyles: they must simultaneously hustle to provide new services and goods for the rapidly changing global marketplace and to consume new goods and services in an effort to fashion *themselves* as flexible, self-aware, and innovative actors in a new era (Freeman 2011: 355).

I find problems in how Freeman (2011) moves from Bourdieu’s critique of neoliberalism to a simplification of Colleen’s affective life as an embodiment of neoliberalism. For one, Bourdieu (1998) does not really identify the entrepreneur as the symbol of neoliberalism in the text cited by

Freeman<sup>72</sup>, focusing more on managerial techniques of audit, measurement and reward that destroy collectivity and increase competition. Secondly I find difficulty with assigning Colleen only one subjective identity, that of *entrepreneur*. I understand what Freeman is doing in delineating the idealized heroic agent towards which Colleen may aspire in her desires for social, economic and cultural capital, but embodiment is a lot trickier than that, and though Bourdieu does emphasize that neoliberalism is a “strong discourse,” i.e. one that has more power to affect people’s lives than other forces, even a strong discourse is not a total one. Ortner’s (2006) discussion of Bourdieu reminds us that within practice, agents have power as well as being constrained by it. Haraway (1988) reminds us that it was feminists who pushed for and insisted on embodiment in the first place, and she also reminds us about the power of partial perspectives. Why not consider partial embodiments undertaken by women in response to neoliberal forces not as mere inscriptions, but as reroutings of power? Haraway writes, “Feminists have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything” (1988: 579). As feminists, she suggests that we “need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, *not in order to deny meanings and bodies*, but in order to *build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life*” (1988:580, italics mine). Why doesn’t Colleen’s embodied knowledge about herself count as knowledge in this story? Isn’t this what Haraway means by *situated knowledges*? Does it not count because it’s not as *forceful* as neoliberalism? It troubles me that a woman is denied subjectivity and that once she begins to discover embodied subjectivity by way of exploring the situated knowledges of her own body, getting to know herself better, sensing and embodying her own life force, that the story changes and her affective discoveries become just another expression, this time not of patriarchy (although that’s still part of it), but as expressions of a *neoliberal esprit*. I guess there’s no way out after all, what Colleen discovers about herself doesn’t count, in Freeman’s account we don’t get to hear about that part anyway.

What I am emphasizing and pushing for emerged for me as a powerful discovery when I first started reading feminist texts as an undergraduate student, and I wish to reemphasize it now in regards to theorizing neoliberalism, namely that knowledges are partial, situated, and contested even powerful ones, as Ortner (2006) argues in her critique of Bourdieu’s practice theory. Turning back to embodiment, the body (like the subject or even the object) is not a simple process affected primarily as a one-way force. Drawing on Csordas’ (2011) illustrative model of how agency is

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<sup>72</sup> It is not clear from reading Freeman’s (2011) text why she identifies the entrepreneur only with neoliberalism, considering that Bourdieu does not refer directly to the entrepreneur in the text she is using as a source and also that the entrepreneur has much older roots than neoliberalism, going back to early capitalism.

conceptualized in the relationship between body and world in the works of Foucault, Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, it does not seem, at least according to Csordas' (2011) reading of Bourdieu's range of works and responses to critiques of his practice theory, that Bourdieu held to that conceptualization of it either. I think Freeman is correct on one level that neoliberalism is embodied, but I am troubled by the way she describes it, in which Colleen appears as a sort of gendered victim or dupe. Freeman focuses heavily on ethnographic examples of how new labour arrangements under neoliberalism have created new modes of consumption and production, thus restructuring the very fabric of subjectivity (see for example Dunn 2004). She also suggests that

neoliberal reflexivity is not reducible to the restructuring of labor processes or the free-floating circulation of capital to rationalize and expand the parameters of the global assembly line, but has reached into the recesses of kinship (Stacey 1990), citizenship (Ong 1999), mind and body (Martin 1994; Walkerdine 2003) such that feeling and subjectivity itself is being constituted, managed and experienced in new ways (Freeman 2011: 356).

I do not disagree with what Freeman is suggesting about neoliberal labour arrangements altering embodied affectivities. I find particularly salient her contention that

the directive that one become an "entrepreneur of the self" – in which the individual is defined as a self-propelled, autonomous economic actor ever-responsive to a dynamic marketplace – has become central to the esprit of neoliberalism. The new entrepreneur of self is encouraged to seek introspection, self-mastery, and personal fulfillment in leisure and life as well as personal responsibility in the marketplace. The latter entails retraining and the procurement of new skills and networks as well as the imagination and courage to break outside of established channels of upward mobility. It also requires an interior dimension of selfhood and flexible self-making through enterprise in which capital accumulation is not an end in itself, but a means of reinvention. The reinvention takes hold of the person as producer, consumer, and citizen, as a social being as well as individual who cares for herself, her health, body, mind, and soul (Freeman 2011: 356).

In terms of Colleen and her entrepreneurial spirit, Freeman may well be correct that self-reinvention through capital accumulation takes hold of the person as an entire social and spiritual being (although I suspect there are still other forces going on), but in terms of many yoga practitioners, who have been (by Freeman as well as others) included under the rubric of neoliberal self-developers, I think this equation is too simple. Like the pure economic theory responsible for the neoliberal ethos that it seeks to critique, this argument seems to focus too narrowly on economics, pegging social, cultural, and spiritual factors as affected outcomes of economic and political restructurings alone. Agency is completely erased unless it is collective agency, but what are the means to enliven collective agency in affective milieus that foster individualization, as neoliberalism arguably does? This is a pressing question, one that I am concerned with in this dissertation, and which I intend to pursue further in post-doctoral research on intentional and activist yoga communities. I wish to consider whether yoga has the potential for enlivening collective agency

based on self-conscious embodiments of new types of affective relationality with the world. In this consideration, the impetus towards self-development in neoliberalism may have the potential for the harnessing of life forces towards collective goals of life building that incorporate new kinds of social, cultural, environmental, intimate, political, and potentially economic relationships among connected agents. The question turns back once again to Haraway's suggestion to explore "how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (1988:580).

### **Embodying Yoga as *Chance for life***

There are two points in Freeman's argument that I take issue with, the first is the manner in which the embodiment of neoliberalism through self-development is seen to occur, namely as though neoliberalism alone is causal to how feeling and subjectivity are managed and experienced, and the second is the assumption that economic and profit motives underlie the efforts of self-development involved in self-mastery and personal fulfillment for *all* those involved in self-reflexive practices. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1998) use of the term "strong discourse," and Haraway's (1988) situated knowledges, it becomes problematic to forget that there are other forces at play in embodiment, among them the physiological possibilities of the human organism to respond to stresses and tensions to which it is subjected as well as the rich cultural tapestries from which persons may draw in interpreting new situations they encounter.

What I mean is that on some level I interpret Colleen's story, as well as the stories of many of the women I met who embody neoliberal forces by virtue of living in relation to them, as demonstrating self-reflexive negotiation (if not sometimes outright resistance, or perhaps to use Barad's (2007) and Haraway's analogy, which seems to encapsulate both, a diffraction) of neoliberalism. Perhaps these self-body practices produce embodiments of affective relationality rather than ego-centric individualism, and in this way, perhaps self-fulfillment is not an expression of economic desire but of a desire to increase relationality with a world that the individualizing pressures of neoliberalism produce anxiety about and isolation from? I will explain this by first summarizing Bourdieu's article on neoliberalism from which Freeman draws support for her argument, then delving into recent literature on affect that highlights the relational *rather than* purely individual nature of affect. I think one of the problems with analyses that focus exclusively on neoliberalism as a subjectifying force is that they oversimplify the way affect operates in people's lives to produce particular embodiments of neoliberal forces that are not necessarily "inscribed on

bodies,” as Freeman (2011: 355) suggests, but may actively be rejected, reworked, or subverted through affective practices focused on self-understanding, such as Colleen’s “sports management and psychology” or in the case of my participants, yoga. These affective practices may have entrepreneurial outcomes, for some yoga practitioners they undoubtedly do, and Freeman’s (2011) analysis is important for considering how the neoliberal esprit is interwoven into these domains, but for many yoga practitioners they do not.

### **Neoliberalism à la Bourdieu**

Bourdieu describes neoliberalism as a “tutelary theory” that

has been founded on a formidable abstraction. For, in the name of a narrow and strict conception of rationality as individual rationality, it brackets the economic and social conditions of rational orientations and the economic and social structures that are the condition of their application (Bourdieu 1998: <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu> accessed 2012/06/04).

Bourdieu criticizes the rationality of neoliberalism as a dehistoricized and desocialized worldview. He suggests that its power lies in the fact that it has “the means of *making itself true* and empirically verifiable” (1998) through its appeals to a narrow and bracketed rationality conceptualized as a privileged mode of interrogation through which to access “truth”. Bourdieu emphasizes that even though neoliberalism seems to make itself true, particularly in manifestations offered by neoliberal regimes that strategically dehistoricize and desocialize by bracketing rationality out from social and economic structures, that we must analyze neoliberalism as a historically and socially embedded economic system. This seems to relate back to Polanyi’s substantivist critique of applying modern economic theory uncritically to different types of economic systems (Humphreys 1969) or to societies and cultures with vastly different histories, since no political or economic formulation is every purely political or economic. Neoliberalism, suggests Bourdieu, operates as a “strong discourse” in which rationality dominates, deemphasizing its historical and social embeddedness in economic rationality as a particular worldview held by the purveyors of power:

It is so strong and so hard to combat only because it has on its side all of the forces of a world of relations of forces, a world that it contributes to making what it is. It does this most notably by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relationships. It thus adds its own symbolic force to these relations of forces. In the name of this scientific programme, converted into a plan of political action, an immense *political project* is underway, although its status as such is denied because it appears to be purely negative. This project aims to create the conditions under which the “theory” can be realized and can function: *a programme of the methodical destruction of collectivities* (Bourdieu 1998: <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>).

The destruction of collectivities is thus understood as the danger of neoliberalism which Bourdieu describes as occurring by way of the politics of financial deregulation. Bourdieu argues that these

politics serve to dismantle collective structures such as the nation, work-based collectives such as unions, associations and cooperatives, and even the family. He suggests that this occurs through some of the features I described previously, namely “the individualization of salaries and of careers as a function of individual competences, with the consequent atomization of workers,” and “constitution of markets by age groups” (Bourdieu 1998). In this model both production and consumption are taken over by neoliberal agendas focused on individualized measurements (of skills and competencies at the level of production and of tastes, “likes” and desires at the level of consumption). Bourdieu locates power in neoliberalism in the hands of “stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, [and] conservative or social-democratic politicians” (ibid). He suggests that what it creates are economic agents regulated by sets of logical constraints set by pure economic theory completely severed from social realities and hence the triumph of the formalist economic man. The technologies of neoliberalism are expressed at the level of globalization through information technology and the mobility of capital. Through these processes a highly stressful world of self-focused development emerges amongst individual workers because of competition brought on

through the individualization of the wage relationship: establishment of individual performance objectives, individual performance evaluations, permanent evaluation, individual salary increases or granting of bonuses as a function of competence and of individual merit; individualised career paths; strategies of “delegating responsibility” tending to ensure the self-exploitation of staff who, simple wage labourers in relations of strong hierarchical dependence, are at the same time held responsible... This pressure toward “self-control” extends workers “involvement” according to the techniques of “participative management”... All of these techniques of rational domination that impose over-involvement in work...converge to weaken or abolish collective standards or solidarities (<http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>).

Bourdieu suggests that this order functions insofar as it maintains what he terms the “*structural violence of unemployment*” through a reserve army of the docile unemployed. I suggest that some people may be using yoga as resistance to the affective forces of neoliberalism because of the affective practices with which yoga is directly associated to produce a sense of embodied freedom that may combat this docility. Specifically I ask whether it is possible that new types of collectivities may emerge from the relationality invoked in yoga practitioners harnessing (“yoking to”) “life” forces to produce desired changes in the affective states of anxiety and stress that may block collectively motivated action through the individualizing pressures of neoliberalism.

Bourdieu terms the emergent system produced through globalized restructurings a neoliberal utopia that “evokes powerful belief – the *free trade faith*,” among those who derive profit from it as well as government officials whose existence is justified by its logic. One of the outcomes of this is the emergence of “the struggle of all against all and *cynicism* as the norm of all action and

behaviour” (1998). Bourdieu turns hopefully towards “conservation” of traditional collective modes as forces of *resistance* to new neoliberal orders. He suggests that traditional collective institutions such as the state and institutions of civil and public service

will be able to resist the challenge only by working to invent and construct a new social order. One that will not have as its only law the pursuit of egoistic interests and the individual passion for profit and that will make room for collectivities oriented toward the *rational pursuit of ends collectively arrived at and collectively ratified* (<http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu> accessed 2012/06/04).

One of the interesting things about yoga as a self-development practice that has proliferated under neoliberal conditions is that yoga is very much about identifying and dissolving egoic (in yogic terms)/egoistic interests at the individual level. However, that said, there has also been an outgrowth of types of yoga practice that seem to enliven and intensify power considerations that may amplify, rather than attenuate, egoic attachments, as Singleton (2005) suggests was the case for the type of power envisioned in early forms of yoga in the US and Britain influenced by New Thought (albeit at that time through different models of femininity than the hyper-fit, hyper-accomplished models propagated through today’s yoga). Current manifestations that may heighten egoic attachments – and perpetuate the self-developing isolated individual characteristic of neoliberalism in yoga – can be seen in prominent fitness-oriented yoga approaches that seem to promise fitness as the base point for a better, idealized, “blissful” life in which all desired elements of successful living become energetically attracted to you because of the care you show your body. There are many such examples from the yoga world<sup>73</sup> and I think the attraction to these approaches, the way that many people incorporate these types of yoga into their lives, and the way these types of yoga and their associated suite of products are marketed to yogi-consumers very much relate to the type ideal required of the neoliberal citizen.

Much of the yoga blogosphere is devoted to watching and commenting on developments in the yoga world and critiquing developments circulated around yoga as a means of acquiring social, economic and cultural capital. Most of these commentators emphasize the philosophical roots of yoga as a practice of self-inquiry and the pursuit of *freedom from* egoic attachments that enliven alternate possibilities of being. These yoga activists (as many have begun to call themselves) see

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<sup>73</sup> Some of the types of yoga more strongly associated with this orientation are Bikrams, Power Yoga, Power Flow, and see Smith’s (2006) article on power in Ashtanga yoga. While I name these forms of yoga as potentially encouraging, rather than attenuating egoic or self-interested development attachments, I do not mean to suggest that all people who practice these forms necessarily engage with them in this way, or that development of the body in yoga necessarily leads to achievement-oriented practice. What I am suggesting is that the potential to perpetuate this already learned subjective orientation under neoliberalism may be easier to perpetuate under these physical achievement yogas in commodified cultural contexts, as demonstrated by yoga advertisements using the bodies of sexualized, fit, young women in difficult *asanas* to sell yoga to people.

themselves as watchdogs for the yoga world, cued in on critiquing the *freedom to acquire* model promulgated by yoga as marketing medium and profit generator. Much of this critique occurs online, but increasingly community groups oriented around yoga are emerging in the public sphere and organizing direct action through grassroots initiatives that support social movements like Occupy<sup>74</sup>, democratic engagement through organizations like YogaVotes<sup>75</sup>, and community service through groups like the Yoga Service Council<sup>76</sup>.

I explore how mainstream yoga culture is largely marketed and promoted through the *freedom to acquire* self-betterness and the “good life” in Chapter 5, here my concern is with developing an argument for the embodied practice of yoga as *freedom from* the type of egoic attachments required of the neoliberal citizen. Yoga envisioned and communally practiced in this manner has the potential to enliven new types of collectivity that are not conservations of “traditional” modes *à la* Bourdieu (1998) (although they may draw inspiration from some of them), but instead take new forms based on the new modes of subjectivity developed through yoga in relationship to the neoliberal milieus in which practitioners negotiate the forces that interpenetrate their lives. When I say communally here I do not necessarily mean a group of people physically located in the same space, although sometimes that may be the case, but rather consider new forms of collectivity and communality that have emerged in new situations of global flows (Appadurai 1996, Strauss 2002) through sites such as blogs and some of the emergent yoga movements I just described. The Yasodhara Ashram, which I attended and described in Chapter 3, provides a good example of a more concrete form for a socially and environmentally active collectivity oriented around yoga, and it would be worthwhile to spend more time studying communities such as this as well as undertaking further research into emergent yoga movements. Work which I intend to take up in my postdoctoral research.

I used Freeman’s (2011) analysis of Colleen’s story as a starting point to develop my own position about the relationship between yoga and neoliberalism, and to consider whether contemporary globalized yoga is simply a cultural manifestation of a neoliberal *esprit*, as Freeman suggests is the case for the type of entrepreneurial self-development exhibited by Colleen in Barbados. There are points of Freeman’s analysis that I agree with, but there are points that also

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<sup>74</sup> See <http://www.itsallyogababy.com/michael-stone-on-the-occupy-movement-the-end-of-an-exhale-video/> (2012/06/22).

<sup>75</sup> See <http://yogavotes.org/> (2012/06/22).

<sup>76</sup> See <http://yogaservicecouncil.org/> (2012/06/22).

trouble me. I believe the primary issue at hand is, as I said previously, how Freeman understands the forces of neoliberalism through affect. I argue that her understanding of affect denies relationality by overemphasizing individuated aspects of self and thus acts to further sever individuals from one another and from the worlds they inhabit, thus theoretically producing the individuated neoliberal subjects the work intends to critique. In the previous section I summarized Freeman's key contentions about "the critical role of the affective in neoliberal subjectivity" (Freeman 2011: 355) as symptomatic of "*an entrepreneur*, that heroic agent who for many signifies the quintessential symbol of neoliberalism itself (Bourdieu 1998; Harvey 2005)" (ibid.). I questioned the way that she interpreted and applied Bourdieu's article on neoliberalism in her analysis. I now develop my critique further by drawing on anthropological work on embodiment and broader social science literature on affect, notably Wetherell's (2012) recent book. Wetherell's approach, rooted in psychology but drawing from interdisciplinary work on affect in the social sciences, emphasizes flows and enmeshments, mobility and dynamism, rather than direct force and as such corresponds to Haraway's (1988) exposé on situated knowledges and partial perspectives.

### **Embodying Yoga through the Senses: Developing affective clarity through self-body practices**

Embodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*. Thus we matter and we mean through processes and logics of **sense-making** that owe as much to our carnal existence as they do to our conscious thought. Furthermore... the irreducibility of embodied consciousness does not mean that body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, are always synchronously entailed or equally valued in our intent or intentionality or that our body and consciousness – even at their most synchronous – are every fully disclosed each to the other... Given that the irreducible ensemble that is the lived body is dialectical and, as Madison says, "never succeeds in coinciding with itself, and thus never achieves a fixed identity... our experience is not only always mediated by the lived bodies that we are, but our lived bodies (and our experience of them) is always also mediated and qualified by our engagements with other bodies and things (Sobchak 2004: 4)

In this section I am primarily concerned with embodiment approaches that foreground experientiality and interaction, what Sobchak above refers to as processes and logics of sense-making, as useful contexts from which to theorize yoga practices that heighten knowledge about and from the body. I explore how self-body practices such as yoga are involved in extending conscious mind-body communication and if these can be considered as methods for potentially enlivening freedom by working with intentionality, body and consciousness. This freedom is understood as

*freedom from* the egoic<sup>77</sup> constraints of the self produced through social and affective conditioning. Drawing from work such as Freeman's (2011), which suggests the need for better understandings of how neoliberalism is intimately involved in conditioning affective domains, I suggest that some yoga practices may pose a direct challenge to conceptions of self as atomized individual subject under neoliberalism. I am interested in how this type of embodied freedom acquired through yoga practice may have the possibility as a basis for forming new types of collectivities concerned with the question of how to live in the world through the emergent worldview I identified in Chapter 1, in which self and world are reciprocally realized.

In the view enlivened through the embodiment of mind-body communication through yoga, self is practiced as an aspect of being in the world that is conceived of as in process. Self and world are in process together, and thus are mutually emergent as an "*irreducible ensemble*" (Sobchack 2004: 4). In this worldview, identifications with the traditional collectivities identified by Bourdieu (1998), such as nation, family, gender, sex, worker's unions, etc. may fade in importance, not to be replaced by supreme individualism, but rather with a new type of bodily-grounded collective orientation towards the world as a whole, including other humans, animals, and "nature."

Chapple, (author of several published works on yoga (Chapple 1993, 2002, 2003, 2008) and Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at Loyola Marymount University) suggests that through yoga:

[i]ntimacy with the sensory process allows one to maintain focus on the operations of the mind. Thoughts (*cittavrtti*) generated in the mind lead one to question and investigate the source of one's identity and ego (*ahamkara*). Probing more deeply into the constituent parts of one's personality, one begins to uncover the maze and mire of karmic accretions housed in the deep memory structures (*buddhi*), lightened and released gently through reflective and meditative processes. However, in order for any of these purifications to arise, an intimate familiarity with the body and collection of habits must occur, an intimacy that takes place through an understanding of time and place. Yoga enables a person to embrace and understand the close connection between the body and the world. By understanding each, one attains a state of clarity (Chapple 2012: <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199754670.001.0001/acref-9780199754670-e-981> accessed 2012/05/04).

According to Chapple (2012), who draws on philosophical principles of yoga developed in the *Yoga-sutras*, this type of sensual development of intimacy with the body as microcosm of world in yoga

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<sup>77</sup> The Chapple (2012) quote below clarifies what I mean when I refer to egoic attachments in yoga. Basically, *ahamkara*, a Sanskrit term, translated as ego, is seen to be an aspect of mind, one which seeks to be seen as static, atomized and real, but which is ultimately an illusion, subject to fluctuations of desire and aversion which create suffering. Failing to recognize the nature of the ego to identify with its desires and reject that which it qualifies as undesirable, tricks the embodied being into thinking s/he is her identifications. Being attached to egoic identifications also fosters the false belief that we are separate isolated beings, and fails to recognize how heavily we are swayed by a world in which we are constantly in relation. In a sense, egoic attachment creates static representations for conditions which are constantly changing and fluid.

occurs by attuning the sensory process to the operations of the mind. In this approach, the body is a microcosm of world because body and mind are manifest phenomena, *prakriti* (material); the intellect (*buddhi*), although also a manifestation of *prakriti*, has the ability to inquire into its nature. By following the path of yoga, one begins to develop clarity when manifest nature is realized and one dwells in union with *purusa*, the witness consciousness that exists beyond dialectical processes of mind. In this interpretation, *purusa* is not a divine essence akin to God because it is built into the nature of human experience. From the point of view of affective states, basically what contemporary yoga writers such as Chapple and Stone seem suggest is that *purusa* could be understood as a state of experience beyond conditioned interpretations of mind, a place where emotional and mental processes are not in flux, where they are at rest and no new images, emotions, impressions, interpretations arise. Here one is not controlled by inwardly arising manifestations of outward forces and, therefore, might be suggested to be free.

According to this interpretation of yoga techniques described in the YS (and I fully acknowledge that I am making these interpretations based entirely on different cultural-historical contexts than those in which the YS were written<sup>78</sup>), this process unfolds through the bodily practices of *asana*, through breathwork *pranayama*, and meditative practices. It is based on the *yamas* and *niyamas* as ethical precepts for engaging with the world. By undertaking these practices the senses become attuned to different states of being, to how affect operates in relation to different sets of stimuli: thoughts, emotions, physical sensations. By attuning oneself to basic stillness, practitioners begin to see how habitual bodily and mental habits developed in life, usually through unconscious processes related to socially-mediated forces, create certain affective results. The process of “awakening” to these processes is the yoga practice of relating differently to the sensate world, and of acknowledging that this world is always in motion, that it is not fixed or static and that therefore self should better be understood as process of communication rather than solid entity. Previously held conceptions of self and other become increasingly experienced as manifestations of

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<sup>78</sup> Initially I thought to footnote this whole bracketed statement, but I want it to remain in the body of the text. I do however, also want to explain a little bit more about this acknowledgement, and as it is an aside to the current argument, I resort to a footnote for it. When I interpret the “teachings” from the YS this way I do not do so as a means to authenticate my connection with yoga as ancient wisdom passed down to combat modern ills, as Singleton suggests is often the case with how the YS is reinterpreted in contemporary yogas. As an anthropologist I am interested in interpretations, both in how they are made, and in making them myself. I am interpreting the YS based on my desired aims to make certain points about yoga, affect, embodiment, bodily techniques and politics. Perhaps ultimately I am trying to explain what I read, what I do, what I think and what I experience to myself to understand how it has come to pass that I do it as a particular kind of person in a particular kind of world. I draw on the various sources at hand, which in the case of this dissertation are: contemporary yogas as I’ve experienced them, translations and interpretations of the YS by Iyengar (1993), Satchidananda (1990) and Chapple (2008), and anthropology, that strange practice of getting to know others and selves.

relation and reaction conditioned through socially prescribed structures invested in shaping and producing various permutations of identity. As one realizes how *one's self* and one's understanding of reality is not an innate reality but a set of conditioned responses to interpreting the world, these structures of self-belief become thoroughly unsettled. Clarity, suggests Chapple, emerges from these unsettling, through intimacy between body and world. How do we make sense of this based on what Wetherell writes about how the patternings of affect emerge and interweave?

Affect is about sense as well as sensibility [the mundane as well as the spectacular]. It is practical, communicative and organized. In affective practice, bits of the body (e.g. facial muscles, thalamic-amygdala pathways in the brain, heart rate, regions of the prefrontal cortex, sweat glands, etc.) get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life. These components and modalities, each with their own logic and trajectories, are assembled together on pattern, forming and re-forming. Somatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns interrupt, cancel, contradict, modulate, build and interweave with each other (Wetherell 2012: 13-14).

From Field Journal:

In yoga you inevitably confront the personal history of your own body, which is different than everyone else's, but also culturally similar. The body experiences multiple sensations. The mind becomes attuned to certain types of sensations and habitually follows these types. These result in "states of mind." The body experiences multiple pains and pleasures; well-being is not the absence of pain or tension, but the cueing of the mind to pleasurable qualities, or neutral ones. There is also a danger of yoga becoming an attuning to the gaps in sensations, the failures, of labeling these absences as the centre of experience, so that what is missing or absent becomes observed more poignantly than the other presences. This is why in Buddhism there is a focus on loving-kindness. The mind has power. The mind knows how to sit in judgment and evaluate the self. This is the cultural history of the mind-body. The mind discerns, the body is meant to obey, to please, to follow. But the body builds up resistances that the mind cannot break through, and there are so many aspects of being bodied that the mind cannot know. Yoga teaches the mind to know the body differently, teaches the mind that it is not master and that meaning is not self. Through loving-kindness towards ourselves we create a new relationship between body-mind of reciprocal unfolding. Of being-together-in-the-world. The togetherness wed the body-mind organism to other such organisms creating a new cultural history of the body that does not exclude the material world through mind-based assessments of want/need/desire/revulsion. It ceases to be about the basic fulfillment of desires and aversion from undesirables developed in capitalistic modes of generating value unto self/other/object through consumptive modes of engagement. Objects/others/selves become enfolded into experience as what-they-are, not what-they-are-to-me. Qualities of what-they-are, are recognized as *shifting*, unholdable, and not perceived through grasping towards creating meaning as building up of qualities of self.

From Field Journal:

After a day spent working at the computer on candidacy exams: my face feels like a wall. I can barely breathe. I stretch trying to bring attention to my body but am distracted by others moving about the house. I can find no peace, feel furtive like the anxious dog stimulated to fear from pressures of the external world that seem beyond my ability to comprehend. Where does the wall come from? Jaw shifted to the right, compressing the eye. My mind is *out there* and cannot settle in.

Interweaving patterns often form affective ruts... Among all the very many things that bodies and brains can do, and among all the jostling possibilities for interpreting, representing and making sense, some [become] recruited, selected and articulated together... [to form] body story lines of personal history, some affective practices clearly stabilize, solidify and become habit... The interrelated patterning of affective practice can be held inter-subjectively across a few or many participants. It can thread across a scene, a site or an institution and is spatialised, too, in complex ways. Intriguingly, an affective practice can be 'held' in a particular place. Further solidification comes into view when we consider the affective practices of entire social categories and historical periods (Wetherell 2012: 14).

Here I am interested in two main things Wetherell says about affect: 1) that interweaving patterns of affect create ruts, and 2) that solidification of affective practices effect entire social categories and historical periods. At the level of the body-mind (let us call it the malleable substrate of the affective field), contemporary yoga is very much about addressing affective ruts. These ruts, Michael Stone (a psychologist, Buddhist and Yoga Teacher) suggests, are primarily created through a socio-cultural fixation on identity: that "*I am*" what "I" see, think, know and feel. In contemporary yoga approaches such as Stone's, which are roughly descended from modern forms of yoga in India (Alter 2004 and De Michelis 2004) and American and British esoteric milieus (Singleton 2005, 2007, 2010) philosophies of yoga drawn largely from the *Yoga -sutras* are about using the physical practices of *asana* and *pranayama* and the mental practices of meditation to re-route these affective pathways and interconnections. Disturbing these ruts is understood as expansion of self, understanding and unsettling of what we normally understand to be "other" and potentially, social possibility, envisioned as freedom from embodied constraint created by powerful social discourses and habitus:

The less we are preoccupied with propping up and maintaining the artifice of self, the closer we are to resting in and acting out of the deep bond between all sentient and insentient life. The path of Yoga helps free us from fixed self-images [the affective ruts]. Through ongoing opening to the larger world beyond I, me, and mine, we see that I, me, and mine are less solid than we ever thought, and this insight, in turn loops us back into participation with and feeling for the world, giving us a broader sense of how we are inseparable from the world... We always want to know what is behind the personality, within the body, underneath my life (Stone 2011: 21).

I want to interrogate what Stone writes about what is behind the personality, within the body, and the idea of *purusa* more closely because I feel it is very informative for understanding the primacy of affect in contemporary yoga and how the concept of suffering (which Singleton claims is absent from contemporary yogas that are primarily about achieving harmonious being envisioned through

middle class values of health, wellness and economic prosperity) is engaged with through yoga through self-enlivened affective re-conditioning. How does this play out through what Wetherell describes as affective ruts of entire social categories and historical periods in relation to neoliberal requirements for docility brought up by Bourdieu? Stone goes on to think about the relationship of suffering (affective ruts) and freedom in terms of the form of the body:

Perhaps, Patañjali suggests, pure awareness (*purusa*) is not within or behind this form. Perhaps the masks we wear are all we are and the key is noticing where they stick to us (suffering) and where we can let them transform (freedom). Underneath it all, there is just more and more “underneath” – it never ends. When we read about “the Self” in Indian philosophy, it may seem that there is some internal soul lurking inside the core of my personality. This may be a Judeo-Christian interpretation of the way *self* is used in Indian philosophy, because the self is not at all something that exists in the core of “me” – that would be a dualistic assumption requiring a “me” in relation to “a soul” (Stone 2011: 22).

The unsettling of self that Stone suggests here from Indian philosophy sounds a lot like posthumanist approaches such as Butler’s and Haraway’s that posit performance as the wearing and deconstruction as the unraveling of, as Stone terms them, masks. We might identify these masks, after Bourdieu (1998), as the “strong discourses” that lead us to believe in ourselves and our (mis)interpretations of “others” as concrete identifications of truth created by our habits of enacting our identities in the world. Stone’s interpretation of Patañjali and *purusa* uses different terms to echo what Wolfe writes about posthumanist approaches to the question of open and closed systems through autopoiesis, “that systems, including bodies, are both open *and* closed as the very condition of possibility for their existence” (2010: xxiv). Through what Wolfe terms “openness from closure” (2010: xxi): “the very thing that separates us from the world *connects* us to the world, and self-referential, autopoietic closure...actually is generative of openness to the environment” (ibid.). Wolfe cites Luhman, writing that in this self-referential mode

closure “does not contradict the system’s *openness to the environment*. Instead...closure is a form of broadening possible environmental contacts; closure increases, by constituting elements more able of being determined, the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system” (Luhman cited in Wolfe 2010: xxi).

Through my interpretations of Stone’s mask metaphor and Wolfe’s posthumanism articulated as a freedom from the restraints of a humanism that denies/disembodies/seeks to master many aspects of humanities’ interrelation with and therefore political commitment to the world, *freedom* is explicitly referring to *freedom from* affective ruts created by what Wetherell describes as “[s]omatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns [that] interrupt, cancel, contradict, modulate, build and interweave with each other” (Wetherell 2012: 14). Freedom then becomes a kind of (as Derrida puts it) intimacy of

“relation of the living present to its outside” (Derrida quoted in Wolfe 2010: xxi), a recognition of ruts and a potential for their unsettling through attuning to the living present. Meditation and yoga are practices of tuning in to the living present. Stone suggests that:

Yoga offers us the technology – through ethical action and meditative practices – not only to settle the mind and work with habitual energies but also to gain insight into the infinite number of components that make up who we are and what we are... *Intimacy, freedom* or even the term *enlightenment* refers to the ability to take care of oneself so that the contracted habits [affective ruts] we think of as “me” and “mine” are seen through, and in so doing we open to a larger, more connected reality. It’s not that reality changes or that ego drops away forever. We need an ego. We need a self-image. We need to take care of ourselves and treat the self as sacred. **We must care for ourselves in order to truly care for others. What we mean by freedom is that the reactive storyteller inside the mind [identity-consumer-self as creator of value and meaning for commodities] and the contracted defenses in the vocabulary of the body [the affective ruts connected to the meaning-maker] are seen clearly and thoroughly so that they can be put aside and we can give creative attention to what is going on in and around us** (Stone 2011: 23-24 [italics Stone’s, bold emphasis mine]).

To rework Stone’s words through anthropological considerations of embodiment, sensation and affect, what he is suggesting is that the techniques of yoga address the affective ruts (Wetherell 2012) created by structures of meaning-making acting on the vocabulary of the body. And because I find this quote incredibly pertinent, again: what Wetherell describes as the “[s]omatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns [that] interrupt, cancel, contradict, modulate, build and interweave with each other” (Wetherell 2012: 14).

From Field Journal:

It depends on the nature of the watching. Is the gaze scrutinous and harsh? Curious? Is the looking observed without judgment and how is non---judgment developed? How do we work with non---judgment of the body as it moves through the postures? There are no easy answers. I notice that I am often hard on myself through yoga. The expectations it builds up, that others build up through it: that we can end suffering? Sometimes in deepest suffering (pain?), there is a desire for damage, destruction, to break it so it no longer feels as it does, to put the pain *elsewhere*, to pinpoint its origin as *other*. A deep resistance to belief and hatred of the idealized.

I do not know what this means. I have no larger metaphors for it. Sometimes my body feels wound to the point of snapping. Everything is wrong and I want only *otherwise*. Otherwise does not come through will or force, but through surrender to the things I cannot will to change in the body. I have political resistance to it because surrender seems to indicate passivity, giving up to injustice, retreat into unworldiness for the sake of my own pleasure? But perhaps logistically it can be understood as finding better ground when the position is lost, when it is no longer tenable: lifting a long---held siege experienced acutely as tension, pain and fear?

In the absence of felt love from the world we still have the ability to generate love. Love, as a visceral feeling, relaxes the body and allows space in the mind, it moves into

tension and soothes. Here love is consciousness unbound from vigilance, a path out of anxiety and tension in which the mind and body feel at home in the world rather than in doubtful or fearful vigilance towards the external, a lifting of siege on the self. Through meditation I can enact love and soothe pain, when pain is soothed even a little, I feel more able to move out of myself, to give and share with others in ways that are not purely defensive or reactionary. I am able to give loving attention without fear, because in giving this love I am not asking for something back. This is what is meant by detachment in yoga, of not being attached to the fruit of one's actions, one gives love freely, without a desire for capitalistic exchange and return. It is very difficult but there are moments when it makes sense to me, when in being this way I feel like I am honouring people where they are.

In encountering people thus, perhaps one accepts the full otherness of their subjectivity, their difference, through the experiential metaphor of suffering. By referencing one's own felt suffering, and the need for love in that suffering – love as the means out of suffering – one relates to others as self, not as same, but as self, knowing that self is always shifting. The outward manifestation of suffering may appear different, but it is felt as potently as one's own suffering.

I have delved into this rumination from my field journal because I think it is important for bringing up the question of ethics in studying affect and embodiment, to consider, returning to Freeman (2011) that affect is not neutral, but is also highly subject to manipulation, can be employed (unwittingly or not) in the manipulation of others, and is embedded in relations of power (Ahmed 2004, Mascia-Lees 2011) As I stated in the opening sentence of this dissertation, to float in the river is also to notice the ways in which the river's banks, dykes, bridges, gutters, channels, and run-off, shape the flow. For the instant I turn back to Wetherell's approach to affect in the social sciences, and particularly the modes of consideration in which affect bears the most import. Studying embodiment necessitates an exploration of what Wetherell terms *affective practice*, which seriously considers the role of emotions in social and personal life. Wetherell draws on Burkitt, whose work has been influenced by Spinoza, Bateson, Vygotsky, Barthes, Williams and Foucault to describe a fruitful interdisciplinary social science approach to emotions:

Burkitt argues for an analysis of emotions as 'complexes.' He suggests that an *emotion complex is relational*, both discursive and pre-discursive. His emphasis on relationality is vital. Following Gregory Bateson, Burkitt emphasises that an emotion, like anger or fear, is *not an object inside the self*, as basic emotions research assumes, but is a *relation to others*, a response to a situation and to the world. An emotion is above all a relational pattern and as such, I would say, is *automatically distributed across a psycho-social field*. Affect is never wholly owned, always intersecting and interacting. Giving that is so, it seems to me that affective practice is the 'smallest' or most coherent unit of analysis for the social science of affect (Wetherell 2012: 24).

Studies of affect such as this seem to belong to an emergent trend that Fraser et al. (2005) have termed "New Vitalism;" approaches characterized by alternative considerations of the question of life. These approaches are descended from the breakdown in dualistic approaches to nature and

culture in the social sciences more broadly and particularly influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (Olma and Koukouzelis 2007):

The main proposition of such a new vitalism is the development of a notion of *process*, which we would like to understand here as a radicalization of the notion of continuum. Process... is what connects contemporary attempts to 'bring alive' cultural and natural entities (for instance, by understanding them in terms of information, cybernetics or complexity) with a certain dimension of the philosophical current of vitalism... a philosophical tradition that explicitly poses the question of life (Olma and Koukouzelis 2007: 3)

According to Olma and Koukouzelis (after Rousseau 1992), new vitalism differs from vitalism in the way *vital force* (Heraclitus's *logos*, Aristotles' *entelechy*, Paracalsus's *archeus*, William Blakes' *energy*) is conceptualized. Rather than seeing it as a basic/primal/original "static essence" of being, conceptualized as mythic (i.e. beyond science), new vitalism

rejects such an essentialist or mythical vitalism by thinking process in terms of a molecular relationality that is prior to the molar objects and entities that might emerge from it... 'objects, subjects, concepts are composed of nothing more or less than relations, reciprocal enfoldings gathered together in temporary and contingent unities. Furthermore, since a relation cannot exist in isolation, all entities can be understood in relation to one another' (Fraser et al., 2005: 3). Here, the continuum becomes a radically monistic concept of relational process. Life is understood in the context of an *ontology of morphogenesis*, i.e. a purely relational ontology of moving forces that throws up ephemeral forms soon to be drowned out again in the process (Olma and Koukouzelis 2007: 3).

What kind of awarenesses do practitioners of contemporary yoga have of the origins of their practices and do they even care where they come from? What kind of cultural logic are they following in perpetuating and adapting these practices to their own ends? What are these ends and how do then envision them? What kinds of bodies are formed in the process on a social scale? Singleton partially addresses this question by arguing that New Thought techniques of mind body cultivation act on the embodied individual to produce optimum health of the organism. Here the body is understood as

a malleable and perfectible instrument in the hands of the spirit. The organism is made tractable to the will through a combination of physical discipline and suggestion, such that the corporeal, cellular structure tessellates with the cosmic matrix in a relationship of perfect harmony. When this chord is struck, the anomaly of disease is eradicated and a natural state of health ensues (Singleton 2007: 81).

Returning to the concept of life in the context of an *ontology of morphogenesis* might be a better way to understand some of the features of contemporary yoga and magical consciousness approaches to re-envisioning the relationship of the embodied person to the world. It may be difficult for those of us who have spent time breaking down essentialisms and dualisms (it often is for me) to conceptualize or *believe* in the mystical explanations of *original source*, *Divine nature*, *essence of*

*being, primal wisdom, pure energy*, etc. as acceptable or meaningful ways to understand what is going on when we feel *connected* or experience *union* through yoga and other intimate experiences of union. To return to yoga's root word, *yuj*, often translated as *to yolk*, or more simply as *union*, is also to pose the question, union with what? Swami Radha has no qualms in identifying the source as Divine Light, which is why at the Yasodhara Ashram we consistently practiced the *Divine Light Invocation*. Through this *affective practice*, we were enlivening an embodied relation with all life, in a non-temporally bound manner, understood to be an emanation of vital force experientially understood by Radha and disseminated through her teachings as Divine Light. Let me return for an instant to Olma and Koukouzelis' (2007) introduction to the *Theory, Culture and Society* edition on *New Vitalism*. They write:

Manuel DeLanda (2002), who has recently introduced the notion of morphogenesis in relation to Deleuze's ontology, understands relationality in terms of multiplicity. Both relationality and multiplicity are notions that articulate an attempt to find a dimension that allows a potential new vitalism to think ontology, without falling back onto an essentialism that proposes a self-identical substance as the 'motor' of being. Approaching process via multiplicity or relationality means to conceptualize morphogenesis not on the basis of the *one of being* but rather on the basis of the *many of becoming* (2007: 3)

This relates broadly, but with important differences, to processual anthropology, which Halstrup defines as such:

In anthropology, 'processual analysis' was first established in terms of the 'extended case method' which showed how a number of factors combined to produce particular effects. While thus soundly questioning the prescriptive nature of 'culture,' processual analysis quickly became just another description of social life, in what remained distinctly empirical terms, often at a very detailed level of everyday minutiae that were then generalized into models (e.e.g Barth, 1966). The actors were allowed their own acts on the cultural scene, but the 'social dramas' brought into focus by Victor Turner in particular were still largely thought of as windows to some kind of systematic order... It is as if processes were just seen as a kind of temporary activity on the surface of an orderly calm, but as Rosaldo has pointed out, there is still a space between order and chaos to be studied... I would suggest that there is nothing much else to study than this space... In Ortner's words, history not only happens, it is made, and the whole point of the practice approach is to get at this making (Hastrup 1997: 353-354).

Hastrup (1997) proposes anthropological theorization occur in the space between order and chaos, what she refers to as the contact zone, "the zone where cultures meet, and horizons fuze... [in which] "[t]here is no vantage point outside the actuality of relationships between cultures" (Said, 1989: 216)" (Hastrup 1997: 352). Thus unlike early processual approaches which Hastrup suggests looked at activity and process as windows into structure, the type of process envisioned in new vitalist approaches aligns more cogently with Ortner's attention to making, drawing in theory, information and understandings about life from the natural and social sciences. Where new vitalists

might differ in their thinking of this relationality is that they tend to move beyond the boundaries of contact zones between cultures to consider contact zones between culturally shaped human bodies and non-human bodies alike:

One aim is thus to think about process, that is, what is distinctive about process as a mode of being. A second aim is to address some of the ways in which attempts are currently being made to introduce information, knowledge or 'mind' into social and natural entities, making them less inert, more process-like: bringing them alive. The two aims are held in tension. Thus while we consider the specific, contemporary set of circumstances in which the vitality of (social and natural) processes is currently being proposed – namely, the introduction of understandings of information, complexity, and cybernetics in the economy, science, and art – this is set alongside historical and philosophical understandings of process (Fraser et al 2005: 1).

Temporality is important in this ontology of relationality through the concept of *immanence*, which Olma and Koukouzelis suggest is the second defining characteristic of new vitalism: “there is no outside to the process, no supplementary dimension that could transcendentally determine the multiplicity of relations. Even time and space must not be understood as external to the relations that make up the process” (2007: 3). This also relates to Wolfe’s posthumanist understanding of autopoiesis, “that systems, including bodies, are both open *and* closed as the very condition of possibility for their existence” (2010: xxiv). In this view also there is no externality to the process.

I have already drawn a distinction between contemporary yogas in terms of *freedom from* egoic attachments and *freedom to acquire* self-betterness and a “good life” through yoga. Here I wish to articulate a further distinction in the *freedom from* orientation in terms of the point brought up by Olma and Koukouzelis about process in terms of “multiplicity or relationality [as a] means to conceptualize morphogenesis not on the basis of the *one of being* but rather on the basis of the *many of becoming* (2007: 3). It seems that freedom from egoic attachments in yoga is envisioned differently by those who see it as a movement towards the Divine through self-transcendence (corresponding more to traditional vitalism), and those who see yoga as a process of engagement with the immanent through the *many of becoming* (corresponding to posthumanism or new vitalism). In orienting yoga towards a process of engagement with the world, rather than a means of transcendence (i.e. means of progress out of the world), contemporary yogis are practicing a lived approach to embodied relationality posited in recent elaborations of affect (Wetherell 2012), neurobiology (Tattersall and DeSalle 2012), posthumanism (Wolfe 2010), ecological visions of dark green religion (Taylor 2010) and magical consciousness (Greenwood), and what Olma and Koukouzelis (2007) refer to as new vitalism.

I posit that Radha and many contemporary yoga teachers, thinkers and schools, who base their understandings of the experiences of flow, relationality, union, oneness, in yoga-enlivened

bodily experience on union with the Divine, or realization of *purusa* as immaterial essence, are working within frameworks of what Olma and Koukouzelis (2007) define as traditional vitalism. I think these frameworks relate to a humanistic worldview in which individuated body-mind-spirit persons are understood as the locus of subjectivity. In this mode *purusa* is posited as the essential source to be harnessed, the immaterial origin of manifest *prakriti*, and in which union, *samadhi*, is often explained as a transcendence of individuated self through mythical union with universal Self. In this approach a theory of life is posited which originates in *purusa* as an essential force.

This differs from the way Stone defines *purusa*. He suggests that *purusa* is “not within or behind this form [body-self],” that “[p]erhaps the masks we wear are all we are and the key is noticing where they stick to us (suffering) and where we can let them transform (freedom)” (2011: 22). In contrast to Stone’s approach, if *purusa* is understood as behind form – an essence – which we must transcend embodied existence in order to realize, then we are not in process with the world, but attempting to remove ourselves from it by reaching toward a disembodied idealization of essential nature (call it spirit, soul, *purusa*). This approach is demonstrated in Singleton’s (2005) contention that in New Thought approaches to yoga, which are derived from a Protestant worldview in which God as a Divine Creator exists, the locus of God’s place has shifted from an external to an internally manifest source of power within the self. In this contention, self as “cellular structure tessellates with the cosmic matrix [God, essential spirit, *purusa*] in a relationship of perfect harmony” (Singleton 2007: 81). The limitations of embodied selfhood are thus transcended to achieve union with essential being through *individually-embodied* realization.

I would like to contrast this view (which I think is by far the most popular in contemporary yoga circles, in which there is an assumption of nature as pre-cultural and concomitantly a supposition of a natural essential self that exists in a pure form beyond suffering) with Michael Stone’s emergent body of work, in which contemporary yoga is interpreted through psychological and Buddhist frameworks. Stone defines *samadhi* as intimacy (2011). It is my suggestion, following Wetherell, that contemporary yoga be understood as an affective practice. Particularly, as I suggested previously, contemporary yoga offers a set of techniques for transforming affective ruts easily identifiable in mobilities of the body experienced as tension, i.e. immobility. By learning to sense areas of immobility and practicing *asana*, meditation, relaxation, and various other forms of movement therapies integrated into secularized contemporary yoga, practitioners are not achieving transformation as salvation, as Singleton (2008) suggests was the case for practitioners of yoga associated with Protestant-derived New Thought, but rather transformation as *intimacy* of self as *coeval* with world, in which time and space are experienced not as rupture, resource, tension or strain,

but in which mind and body are affectively sensed as union in process: mutual enfolding. This mind and body union *in process* is not an end in itself, but a microcosm of the larger world, in which the stuff of self is understood as the stuff of everything else: energetic, chemical, molecular, cellular, social, cultural, political, economic forces and relations that are *always* in motion, which we as human organisms navigate through affective practice. It does not have an ultimate purpose, i.e. it is not Divine, it is simply and astoundingly *life*, which does not exist in isolation but through myriad intersecting relations.

### **Posture Study 2: Crane Posture/*Bakasana***

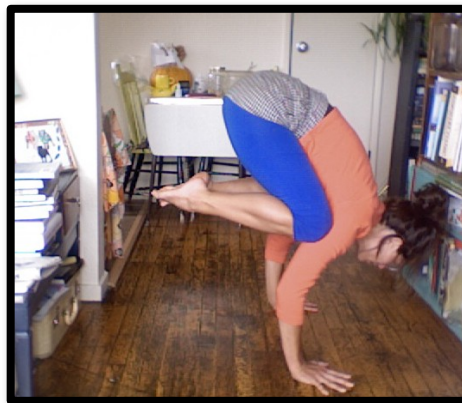


Image 4.3 Author in *Bakasana*

In bird poses (eagle, crow, rooster, peacock), common factors are flexion of the thoracic spine, abduction of the scapulae, and extension of the cervical spine. In other words, wings are spread and the beak is lifted. These actions require precision and strength in the muscles of the spine to achieve cervical extension without engaging the trapezius, which will interfere with the action of the scapulae and arms (Kaminoff 2007: 187)

Strength and balance are needed to do this asana because a fall on the face could be painful. Ask yourself: “Do I have enough strength to reach the point of balance and vigilance? Can I find that point in my life? The eyes of the crane are round and appear to be very concentrated, not easily distracted, a picture of watchful patience. What are my distractions? What am I afraid of?”... All the water birds seem to be an expression of the unconscious aspects of one’s self, the parts to which the conscious mind has little access. There is also the desire to take flight, and the difficulties of spreading one’s wings to come finally into full flight (Radha 2006: 190).

#### **Field Journal Excerpt:**

The pose today is Crane pose, *bakasana*. This is one of my favorite postures. I like the way it feels to balance on my hands, lifting my feet of the ground. I feel springy in this pose, contained and ready to pounce out. The teacher says, “Find the point of balance and keep focused on what is in front of you.” With balanced focus I find an inner lift, my body becomes lighter and there seems to be less weight on my hands, as though I am lifting up internally (at Yasodhara Ashram, October 22, 2009).

Contrast the focus on anatomy and musculature in Kaminoff's description of the posture with Radha's inquisitive approach that uses the body as symbol for self in world, as key to unlocking unconscious aspects of self. Both invoke the metaphor of spread wings. For Kaminoff, the purpose is bodily precision and strength to get physiological cervical extension. For Radha, the process is formed as a series of questions about the experience of embodying the symbolic essence of water birds, which she describes as expressing the unconscious because of their connection with water. As I write this and read from Hidden Language Hatha Yoga to get Radha's thoughts on bakasana, I move into her method where she asks us to: 1) Approach the pose patiently, 2) Observe the body by recording feelings that come up, 3) Reflect on key words and images associated with crane, 4) Record answers to a number of questions and reflections, and 5) to go further by doing this pose for a number of days and recording changes in emotional life. I'll address the body, key words, and answers to some questions here.

1) Observing the Body in bakasana: (I take a pause from writing at the computer where I feel constricted and in bad posture, back slumped, head reaching forward from neck, breath constricted to perform the asana). Feelings that come up my first time in the posture include: tense, purposeful, lifted, outwardly balanced but inwardly constricted. As I find the outer form in the posture I remind myself to relax, as I do my inner body softens and the breath begins to move more easily. Still I feel constricted by my body, not expansive as though about to take flight.

2) Key Words: reflecting on the word "crane" I think, paper cranes, colourful origami, awkward, gawky birds, tall, poised, slow, long-legged. It is hard to apply these images to my own body. I am reluctant and uncomfortable with the significance of this part of the reflection, invoking symbols drawn from various cultural realms (Chinese, Indian, Western) as Radha does, the anthropologist in me thinks these symbols are shallow and not really understood. I don't know what crane means or represents.

3) Questions and Reflections: Radha suggests to move in and out of pose "letting thoughts, body awareness and insights arise" (2006: 193) and answering questions (questions direct quotes from Radha 2006: 193):

a) How much does the fear of falling on my face restrict me?

—literally in the pose and metaphorically in my life?

-I'm not afraid of falling on my face in the pose, I haven't in a long time, but I always take my time to set up, except for the photo in which I jump into the posture for a few seconds before I release so I can snap the photo. I try to remember to lift my abdomen up towards my spine so I'm not collapsing. In my life? I often try to save face. There are many realms of social existence that I feel require guardedness and containment. Writing this dissertation is one of them, I don't want to reflect too deeply on my emotions here, I am okay using my emotions and body illustratively but I don't think I'll go too deeply into fears here.

b) Do I have enough strength to reach the point of balance and vigilance? Can I find that point in my life?

-I have enough strength. Strength is not the question, it is finding softness to experience balance within that strength. I'm uncomfortable with the word vigilance. It reminds me of surveillance. It makes me think of self-disciplining in neoliberalism to be a more poised citizen. I am balancing pretending to be a water bird, equipped with qualities of vigilance. It seems absurd to me. What is the point of it in my life? To move gracefully through turbulent murky waters never considering the state of the waters but just watching my own feet? Does this make

me a more ideal woman? Do I want that? Am I embodying a crane or elements of an ideal feminine form? If I challenge the meanings does it change the impetus? I look up the word vigilance, the Oxford Online Dictionary suggests, “the action or state of keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties” (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vigilance?q=vigilance> 2012/05/31). I look up the word balance, there are several possibilities suggested in the online OED, I choose this one, “an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady,” (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/balance?q=balance> 2012/05/31). Radha is suggesting this pose is about being in a mental state of careful awareness of danger while poised in a physical state of uprightness and steadiness. Literally the danger of falling is present. If I am not careful I will fall, I have to embody a certain determination to hold steady but also desire to find steadiness and ease in the pose because to do so affects me in joyous, expansive and freeing ways when I feel rushes of intense feeling that heighten ecstatic-like experience of being. This time I feel able to find ease of breath but the pose begins to grow unsteady because my strength wanes. I can stay in the pose for about a minute. Life is like that too, I can remain balanced under certain conditions, but must still move through social spaces, relationships and undertake labours in which I become unbalanced, in which strength gives way under repeated pressure or exposure. Also Wetherell (2012) writes that intense experiences of affect are usually short-lived, that they pass through the body quickly. I feel that this posture is a way to potentially enliven intense feelings of well-being, the intention is to stay with them while they’re there, not anticipate their dispersal and return to duller states of being, which will inevitably come once the body stops “flying”. Is this about seeking peak experiences? About individual bodies pursuing heightened affective states (the heavily thrown around “yogic bliss”) as individualistic pursuits of self-betterment? I’m okay as long as I feel better and I can feel better through yoga. Or is it about being-in-the-world as a political project of affirming life? I get confused by these things sometimes. Maybe both are irresolvably present?

Usually I am not a lone body in a private room given space to be alone in the expressions and affective states of my body, there are always outer pressures and socially acceptable bodily postures in public spaces. If I were to perform bakasana in public without setting up the context first I would feel very awkward and uncomfortable.

c) The crane is a water bird. Water can symbolize the emotions, the unconscious, the imagination. Ask yourself: “How can I direct the emotions? What emotions do I want to feed?”

-I go into the pose again, this time the experiences of the other times going in fresh in my embodied memory. I focus on elongating my front body, heart reaching forward, and heads of femur bones reaching back. I begin to feel long, the breath is uplifting and I experience sensations of elation. I want to watch for emotions but I can’t quite tell, I allow the balance to stretch a little bit outward in front of me and a little behind finding an extended range of motion. I imagine my shoulder blades like lifting crane wings and my back body seems to feel alive. Afterwards I sit for a few minutes with my eyes closed and images of tall white cranes appear in my internal imaging systems. I feel my body has momentarily transformed my mental image of myself into a crane-like sense of being. Being a crane does not seem complicated. If I direct my emotions toward crane-likeness I enjoy a sense of uncomplicatedness. I prefer to feel that than words like balance and vigilance. In crane-likeness I don’t think of words. I don’t know how to differentiate out emotions either. In the pose I feel tense, light, long, tall, expanded, limited, silly, strong. After in reflection I feel crane-likeness: tall, white, surrounded by spaciousness. I don’t remember water, I don’t sense it either.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have drawn on various social science theories of affect, embodiment, and process to reflect on the embodiment of contemporary yoga practice. I outlined how scholars have analyzed contemporary body therapeutics such as yoga as demonstrative of a deep embodiment of neoliberalism through a focus on self-development and affective orientation towards self-betterness

towards becoming more ideal neoliberal subjects (Freeman 2011). I posed tentative differentiations in approaches to yoga in terms of the way freedom is envisioned, whether freedom is envisioned as the freedom to acquire, or as freedom from egoic constraints of individualism. I also suggested that there seem to me to be a further distinction in how freedom from egoic constraint is envisioned in contemporary approaches to yoga, namely: 1) as transcendence (documented by Singleton (2008) in his discussion of New Thought's influence on yoga), which I suggested corresponds to what Olma and Koukouzelis (2007) describe as vitalist, or 2) as immanence, akin to Stone's (2011) contention that there is nothing behind form, no static *one of being*, but that the changing "masks" of form are the process of *the many of becoming*, corresponding to new vitalism (Olma and Koukouzelis 2007) and posthumanism.

I raised two particular questions, the first of which I have provided a sketch of in this chapter, and which I elaborate on further in the next chapter, where I discuss the cultural logic of embodying yoga through consumer logics of subjectivity:

1) What kind of awarenesses do practitioners of contemporary yoga have of the origins of their practices and do they even care where they come from? What kind of cultural logic are they following in perpetuating and adapting these practices to their own ends? What are these ends and how do they envision them? What kinds of bodies are formed in the process on a social scale?

The second question posed in this chapter is one I leave open, as it is far from determined, raising a question of providing, as suggested by the title to this chapter, *a chance for life*, rather than a mere repetition of *neoliberal esprit*. I intend to pursue this question in greater detail in postdoctoral research that focuses more directly on yoga activist communities that incorporate yoga into their political engagements with the world.

2) Are there possibilities to move out of neoliberalism through the development of mindful embodiment as relational emergence? And does yoga have the potential for enlivening collective agency based on self-conscious embodiments of new types of affective relationality with the world? Or put differently, is it possible that new types of collectivities may emerge from the relationality invoked in yoga practitioners harnessing ("yoking to") "life" forces to produce desired changes in the affective states of anxiety and stress that may block collectively motivated action through the individualizing pressures of neoliberalism?

## **Chapter 5 Consuming Yogis: Better Bodies and Ethical Encounters**

Consumer-based lifestyles have proliferated on the back of the current wave of globalization since the 1980s. They can be related to the rise of neoliberalism and the view that the extension of the market is the sole guarantor of economic growth, wealth generation and political stability. They are linked to the assumption that only a life lived via the accumulation of consumer goods will allow greater personal fulfillment, human development and happiness (Featherstone 2011: xvii).

Your Practice, Your Results: Our classes fit your schedule. You can practice at home, at work, while traveling - or anywhere else you want. With one of the largest online library of yoga and wellness videos and articles in the world, you can choose the perfect class for you, exactly when you need it. We'll help you progress on your yoga journey and reach your fitness goals quickly and easily - whether you have tons of experience or none at all (<http://www.myyogaonline.com/about-us> 2012/08/25).

This chapter explores the relationship between ethical elaborations of consumption and yoga, interrogating how the visual culture of contemporary yoga shapes the embodiment of yoga in consumer-mediated marketplaces in which globalized yoga is accessed. I explore the various parts of mainstream yoga culture through current social theories about ethical consumption and contemporary interpretations of yoga philosophy, exploring the potentials contemporary yoga offers as a path toward creating “better” lives for its practitioners. Particularly I interrogate what kind of subjectivity is enlivened and encouraged through consumer lifestyle ethics of living a “good life” through yoga and what is meant by enlivening self-awareness in the yoga philosophy of the *Yoga-sutras*, which many contemporary yogas draw on as an authenticating text (Singleton 2008).

This chapter is divided into two main parts: *Better Bodies* and *Ethical Encounters*. In *Better Bodies* I elaborate how the version of betterness offered in mainstream yoga culture is concurrent with visions of ethical personhood promulgated through emergent ideas about ethical consumption. I sketch out the contemporary yoga body by providing examples of idealized image discourses in what has become, over the course of the last decade or so, mainstream yoga culture. I demonstrate that mainstream yoga culture follows the same assumption as consumer culture more broadly, that “only a life lived via the accumulation of consumer goods will allow greater personal fulfillment, human development and happiness” (Featherstone 2011: xvii). I discuss how over the course of the last two decades this assumption has been formulated in terms of the body, such that the “consumer goods” in Featherstone’s statement is replaced by a commodification of the body, whereby acquisition or “development” in yoga comes to be expressed in the proficiency of the body to perform *yogasanas*, thus accumulating a repertoire of identifiable postures recognized amongst a community of practitioners who also seek to develop themselves towards these ends. This “development” in yoga, expressed socially through the demonstrative body, also comes to mean a

more spiritually “developed” self, who lives better in the world based on her yogic achievements. This impetus towards “developing” the body and thereby the self in yoga, which began early in Yoga’s modernization (Singleton 2005) has resulted in the transformation of yoga into a globalized multi-billion dollar industry centered on health, fitness, and spirituality as consumable pursuits towards the achievement of a “better” life. I demonstrate that there are currently at least two prominent strains in contemporary yoga culture, a mainstreamed version which corresponds to and perpetuates neoliberal notions of self-development, betterness and acquisition, and an oppositional critique of this model, in which yoga is seen as offering an emancipatory politics based on the death of consumer subjectivity as a model for re-envisioning a new ontological politics of interconnectedness, (which I outlined in Chapter 4 as a distinction between a *freedom to acquire* model and a *freedom from egoic attachment* model).

In *Ethical Encounters* I use a case study of one of the yoga tourism locales I visited to consider the contradictions that exist for people who attempt to structure their being in the world according to ethical modes of consumption and travel: “the reverse side of a globalizing consumer culture,” in which there is “a growing concern to interrogate the ethical and planetary consequences of human action” (Featherstone xvii: 2011). I suggest that ethically oriented yoga tourism both plays alongside the neoliberal agendas it attempts to challenge and in some ways succeeds in offering alternatives. How encounters, such as the one described in this case study, play out are far from being determined. The contradictions are part of dynamic and ongoing processes of ethically-imagined consumer citizenship. I emphasize that these processes will continue to be redefined as global opportunities and closures shift the movement and therefore the possibilities for the improvisational scenes in which people play out their lives in response to larger global forces such as neoliberalism, environmental constraints, new social relations brought up by cross-cultural encounters, and citizen desires for imagined alternatives to exploitative and damaging modes of existence.

## **Better Bodies**

### **What is meant by ethical consumption?**

The notion of ethical consumption... addresses a cultural turn in advanced liberal societies around the world whereby political questions have become increasingly linked to people’s ordinary domestic lives, that is to an *ordinary ethics* (Barnett 2005b). The notion of ‘ethical’ here... is not necessarily tied to a stable external moral framework but rather speaks to what is at once a more pluralized and privatized moral universe. The ordinary and often individualized nature of the ethical – drawing from Foucauldian work on governmentality – indicates a changing relation between citizen and society in which the ‘government of conduct’ increasingly operates ‘on a territory marked out by the

vectors of identity, choice, consumption and lifestyle' (Rose 1996: 344 quoted in Lewis and Potter 2011: 10).

Tied into this ordinary ethics expressed at the level of lifestyle is a change in perceptions of community and indeed life in which the ethical includes a range of 'others' in its imagining, including producers of commodities in distant global locales and the non-human environment (Lewis and Potter 2011). Private consumer choice is then imagined and articulated not as rational economic logic but within a network of relations in which commodities symbolize and mediate social relationships (Appadurai 1986), including kin relations and the personal relationship with the self (Miller 2001). Lewis and Potter suggest that social scientific studies of what they term the 'ordinarily ethical' do not downplay the "structural constraints on consumers as social actors" (ibid), but rather aim "to speak to the routinized and habitual nature of consumption, and to the ways in which ethical conduct is increasingly becoming tied to every day practices, relations of being, and ontological production" (2011: 10). According to Lewis and Potter (2011) this turn towards ethical consumption has emerged in relation to the retreat of the state from social service provision.

Scholarly approaches to ethical consumption consider the limits and potentials of "new forms of political governance and agency" that emerge from new social modes of organization (Lewis and Potter 2011: 9). This emergent field contrasts with earlier critiques of consumer society that describe these processes in purely negative terms, focusing on effects such as the demise of traditional social collectivities such as unions (Bourdieu 1998) with the shift to "more pluralized and privatized moral universe[s]" under neoliberalism (Lewis and Potter: 10). My research on practices of self-reflexivity in contemporary yoga and on how yoga tourism is linked to broader practices of ethical tourism and consumption aligns with these approaches.

According to Lewis and Potter, the ethical consumer is a "savvy, reflexive consumer-citizen" who has become an important "demographic entity for marketers" (2011: 8). They suggest that this view reflects a "mainstreaming" of ethical consumption that is connected to a number of processes, including critiques of the negative impacts of consumer modernity such as 1) environmentalism, 2) anti-materialism, and 3) unsustainable lifestyles of over-consumption, in addition to 4) mobilizations of ethical consumers by Fair Trade organizations, and 5) the "biopoliticization of Western culture, which connects to a growing 'ethicalization of existence' under advanced liberalism" (Rose 1989 quoted in Lewis and Potter 2011: 9). Lewis and Potter draw on Hamilton's suggestion that primal issues of life and death are implicated in the position that sustainable lifestyles can only be achieved by seriously altering the consumption patterns of mainstream citizen-individuals. I find it salient

that yoga, a practice on some levels that is fundamentally concerned with the death of the subject, should become so wound up with ethical consumption in mainstream yoga culture:

Clive Hamilton describes the processes involved in altering current unsustainable consumption as ‘experiencing a sort of death’ for the subject: if ‘consumption activity is the primary means by which we create an identity and sustain a fragile sense of self’, he writes, then when ‘we are asked to change the way we consume... we are being asked to change who we are’ (2007:1). While consumption studies has long understood consumer practice as a mode of self-fashioning, the biopolitical tenor of contemporary existence means that human life itself, its constitution and its sustainment, is the underlying concern of the contemporary *polis*... [also] foregrounded [is] the role of non-human agents (such as animals and the environment) in posing ethical questions and constituting ethical subjects, a strategy which de-privileges the human in the constitution of life (Marres 2009) while challenging the shape of ontological politics (Lewis and Potter 2011: 9).

In this chapter I explore tensions in expressions of yoga through ethical consumer discourses. I suggest that in many ways ethical consumption in yoga hardens consumer subjectivities based on self-fashioning, and in other ways it offers a reactionary space in which a new kind of ontological politics arises. Here yoga offers an embodied psycho-philosophical technique for enlivening the type of ontological politics hoped for in posthuman discourses that de-privilege “the human in the constitution of life” (Lewis and Potter 2011: 9). The practice-based philosophy of the YS is interpreted by some contemporary practitioners as a method for recuperating life by “killing” the subject, creating meaning and experience *beyond* the death-of-self-as-consumer-subject through a recuperation of *body as life*, thus suggesting a very post-modern form of reincarnation. Life-of-body, as I sketched out in Chapters 1 and 4, is also life-of-world in modern interpretations of yoga that align with the ontological politics of nature spiritualities that (ideologically at least) do not privilege human subjects through socially defined identities such as gender, nationality, sexuality, race, religion or (supposedly) class. Here I explore how some manifestations of contemporary yoga and ethical consumption go hand in hand. I suggest that ethical consumption discourses promoted by the yoga industry shape the “taste” of yogic embodiment by “flavouring” the ethical precepts of yoga with the consumer fodder that contemporary yogis have been subjectified through in the first place, thus producing a new kind of ethicalized yoga body. I also demonstrate that while prolific, this yoga body is contested and that the ethical precepts of yoga are in turn used as a critical point from which to reflect on the highly commodified culture of contemporary yoga.

## Yoga and the Paradox of Ethical Consumption

The *Yoga-sutras* suggests that realization of the illusion of the subjective self results in a kind of death or annihilation of the identified self. How does this relate to the need to constantly produce oneself as the source of value of commodities in neoliberal conditions of flexible capitalism in which consumption is not defined by traditional or authoritative forms (Sassatelli 2007)? What kind of self exists beyond the illusion? Contemporary yoga, akin to the New Age discourses I discussed in Chapter 1, offers a lot of advice about how to live in consumer worlds more ethically, less stressfully, how to touch base with body and breath as life to draw oneself out of the karmic wheels of attraction and aversion (likes and dislikes, wants and rejections) that one must perfect as a consumer-self. Basically, like other forms of New Age spirituality, it offers “alternative approaches” to happiness, fulfillment and the good life, with narrative variations as to what this good life entails. Yet alongside pronouncements that yoga will produce bliss, happiness, and discovery of our “true selves,” exist contradictory advertisements, messages, product reviews, idealized bodies, ethical ways of being, that instead reinforce consumerist lifestyles reliant on global inequities of power between producers and consumers, necessitate a reliance on unsustainable food practices and resource extraction, and may merely serve to promote elite forms of consumption from which supposedly “non-ethical” consumers are omitted by virtue of limited social and economic capital with which to make “good” consumer choices (Soper 2008).

*Yoga Journal* and yogajournal.com, alongside other prominent for-profit yoga websites and magazines, post or print messages about ethical being and moving beyond the illusion of the consumer self while the margins are lined with advertisements for “ethical” i.e. “yoga-approved” commodities and services. Consumer subjectivity is at once contradictorily killed and reborn in supposedly life-enhancing rather than non-sustainable and harmful forms. Yet as Lewis and Potter suggest (after Arvidsson 2006):

Under this model, ethical consumers and their relation to ethical brands such as Fair Trade and Oxfam [lululemon, Gaiam, Toesox or Jade] can be seen in many ways as archetypal consumers within a branded environment which relies on the immaterial and emotional input and labour of consumers (2011: 12).

Ethical brands in the larger ethical consumer landscape of Fair Trade foods and sweatshop-free clothing tie into ideas about sustainability, human rights, environmental protection and “proper” ways to consume and live an ethical lifestyle. Yoga is seen by practitioners as ethical by its association with the soteriological philosophies of the *Yoga-sutras* that posit an ultimate unity of all beings. As such, anything having to do with yoga should by definition be “good.” Brands and

products associated with yoga are largely accepted as fitting in with yogic ideals of *ahimsa*, non-harming, and therefore ethical. Consumers look to yoga experts, such as Yoga Teachers, including what kinds of clothing they wear and products they consume, to help define yogically appropriate commodities. Prominent Yoga Teachers write articles about food, eco-friendly yoga mats and the environmental dangers of buying yoga mats with PVC in them. Other yoga teachers, such as J. Brown who blogs at [recoveringyogi.com](http://recoveringyogi.com), counter these environmental ethics with critiques of consumer elitism and suspicion about the actual intentions and practices of companies that claim to be producing products that are good for the environment when their motive is still to turn a profit. He writes:

Replacing the old tapas mat knock-off from the pharmacy with the rounded-edge nerf mat from Lululemon might be better on some level but, the fact remains, they are both useless when it comes to practicing yoga.

I feel bad for all the new years resolution newbies coming in with these symbolic mats tucked under their arms... I can remember a time when there was only one option: that light blue mat with the dirty feet stains on it. When I opened a yoga center and needed to equip the studio, I decided to go with this old standard, just in a darker color. Yes, I know. They have PVC in them. With that blasphemous admission, I'm betting some readers are already getting their backs up to make a comment on the horrors of vinyl but, before you get your Birkenstock's all in a bundle, hear me out. Fact is, I have the same twenty-five mats that I started with four years ago. If I had gone with the politically correct Jade Harmony mats then I would have needed to replace them three times over by now. Considering the high cost of those mats, for a small independent studio, it's just not financially viable. Not to mention, I find that rubber smell horribly off-putting...

Regardless of what raw materials they start with, the methods used for manufacturing yoga mats are trade secrets. Without knowing the process and what other mystery ingredients are added to the mat to keep it intact, we really don't know what the biodegradability and recyclability of the product is. I have had occasion to stand next to a rubber tree and it didn't smell anything like a yoga mat.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not trying to make a case for the glories of PVC. I do a lot around the center to be "green." I pay extra for the Seventh Generation toilet paper. I use a steam mop. I make due with the eco-friendly glass cleaner even though everyone knows it doesn't work half as good as Windex.

**I'm just not convinced that eco yoga mats represent an honest effort to help our environment. Call me cynical but it feels like another convenient marketing hoax that makes people feel good and is a boon for business** (<http://recoveringyogi.com/eco-yoga-mats-suck/> posted February 27, 2012, bold emphasis Brown's).

There are a few key points in this excerpt which are relevant to the contradictions in yoga culture and ethical consumption that I am bringing up here: 1) mistrust of business and profit-making from yoga, 2) elitism of eco products in yoga, 3) yoga newcomers as consumer brand name dupes, 4) Yoga Teachers/yoga studio owners as responsible for demonstrating "green" consciousness, 5) function of materials, in this case yoga mats, and 6) concerns/questions about lack of real knowledge about what is "better" for the environment: consuming "eco" products for greater cost or consuming "bad" products that last longer, are cheaper, but won't biodegrade. Brown is critiquing what he sees as trend following in yoga that is spurred on by yoga as a business model tied

into ethical ways of being in the world elaborated through consumer choice as the basis of self-identity and potential world-betterment. He suggests that new yogis are likely to be the trend followers because they don't know any better and arrive already following consumer logics of environmentally-friendly purchasing, or at least wanting socially to appear as though they are eco-purchasers when surrounded by the pressure of other "Birkenstock-wearing" yoga-consumers who may judge them as amoral for being out of the loop on yoga merch.

Brown's rant against eco yoga mats brings up an important point about how ethical consumption has to do with class, particularly through Bourdieu's ideas about distinction and cultural capital. Lewis and Potter draw on Bourdieu to suggest that:

claims made for the democratic nature of consumer-based politics (the notion that all consumers have free choice) continue to be undermined by the recognition of the class barriers to consuming the 'right goods' (such as access to organic produce) [or eco yoga mats], barriers are not just economic but related to the kind of class dispositions or cultural capital and forms of taste people bring to their consumption practices. Much of what gets defined as 'good' forms of consumption and lifestyle today, then, are not so coincidentally tied to middle-class virtues. Such debates about class and consumption point to some of the structural inequities and cultural values that frame the field of consumption (2011: 13).

In the next section I highlight how yoga has become a lifestyle choice exemplified in elite ethical consumption discourses, resulting in a new kind of ethicalized yoga body; a body always moving towards its own progressive development in the perpetual embodied pursuit of a "better" life.

### **Bodies: Yoga as Big Business and Lifestyle of Self-Betterment**

In Chapter 3 I discussed the Yoga Conference and Show highlighting how conference organizers used the terminology of "yoga aficionados" to refer to the attendees at the conference. The Yoga Conference and Show organizers were using the term yoga aficionados to refer to the demographic of practitioners/consumers of yoga-related products and services who would be on hand to attend yoga workshops and potentially consume products offered by yoga related businesses, they called them a "powerful, trend setting, influential and well-targeted audience" (<http://theyogaconference.com/vancouver/exhibitors.php> accessed: 12/03/2012).

The YCS website describes this "powerful, trend setting audience" as: healthy, engaged, environmentally aware, 73% female, college-educated 36-42 years old, primarily in the professional/managerial sectors of the workforce and with an average annual household income of \$75,000 (<http://theyogaconference.com/vancouver/exhibitors.php> accessed: 12/03/2012). A 2008 *Yoga Journal* survey reported that yoga had become a nearly six billion-dollar industry in the US, an 87%

increase over figures from 2004. The survey estimated that 6.9% of the US adult population actively practiced yoga. Most of these yoga practitioners were middle class (and I would suggest primarily white) women (72.2%). Of the yoga practitioners surveyed, both men and women, 80% of were between the ages of 18-54, 71% were college educated (27% with postgraduate degrees), 44% had household incomes of \$75,000 or more per year, and 24% had incomes of over \$100,000 per year. Findings from a 2006 survey in Australia broadly mirror these results (Penman et al 2012).

I draw on these statistics to emphasize that most practitioners of contemporary yoga – at least in the US, Canada, and Australia – are from a socio-economic demographic that is considered by the US Census Bureau (Bishaw and Semega 2008) and Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/120618/dq120618b-eng.htm>) as upper middle class, and in comparison to the majority of the population, affluent. There is also a definite gender bias in that the large majority of yoga “aficionados” are women, and therefore most definitely *identified as* consumers (Sassatelli 2007). Yoga aficionados have the income and time (or must find ways to make the time if they don’t have it) to engage in consumer acts of self-development; actually it’s a moral imperative (Sassatelli 2007, Miller 2001).

In North America over the course of the last few decades, yoga has become associated with the lifestyle practices of elites, popularized by celebrities and supermodels such as Madonna, Sting, Jennifer Aniston, and Christy Turlington, among others. This new yoga body has been shaped through celebrity endorsements in contradictory terms, both as a mode of self-development that corresponds to and fulfills narrowly defined bodily ideals of fitness, flexibility and health, and as a means to supposedly transcend the spiritual impoverishment of capitalist modernity. This transcendence is achieved through the natural wisdom of the body, thus lending an “ancient” (i.e. premodern) spiritualist credo to consumer subjectivities by “reconnecting” mind and body severed through “Western” philosophical and religious articulations of separation (Singleton 2008). The movements of the yoga body become the vehicle for transcendence of the mundane never-realized fields of self-identification in consumer modes of subjectivity (Soper 2008). The contradiction arises because the body is offered as the mode of salvation for a subjectified mind, a mind whose subjective pain and separation as isolated monad should once and for all be attenuated through total identification with a supposedly pre-cultural body, recuperating a primal oneness with a non-corrupted world. Whether posited as separate or not, however, the mind is always already embodied; the body is not only always also cultural, but as with all organic life is formed by its life interactions (Ingold 2011). Thus while in yoga, new experiences arise in the intimacy of mind and body, these experiences are interpreted through already-existing frameworks and pathways of

knowing, these pathways may be altered, but they always form the reference point. Contemporary yoga offers salvation through movement, movement of the body and movement of the mind through social fields of self-articulation in consumer societies where the basic modes of life are sustained through consumer acts.

### **Developing Yoga Online: yogajournal.com, Lifestyle Yoga and contestations in the Yoga blogosphere**

Yoga websites such as yogajournal.com and myyogaonline.com provide extensive lifestyle sections that cover everything from yoga practice and philosophy to diet and “green” shopping choices for the home, body and children. What does a yogic lifestyle consist of and what should a yoga body look like and feel like to properly achieve this desired life? Who is responsible for creating, maintaining and perpetuating these ideals? This section answers these questions by outlining the various “parts” of mainstream yoga culture and sketching a cursory map of online yoga terrains, within which meanings are constructed, disseminated, fashioned and contested by yoga promoters, profiteers, disseminators, crusaders, believers, “posers” and watchful bloggers.

According to yoga bloggers who task themselves with observing and critiquing developments in the yoga world, the primary perpetrators of the idealized yoga body are those who seek to make a profit from selling yoga to consumers. Consumers are encouraged to identify with images of yoga models performing their desirable yoga bodies in order to connect these ideals to imagined ways of fulfilling their own niche market identities through consumption (Dunn 2004). The idealized yoga body is almost exclusively a young, thin, radiant skinned, hyper flexible, strong and high-achievement white woman depicted looking fierce, sexy, content or blissful performing a difficult *asana* or postured to indicate meditative serenity. Although other yoga bodies circulate in the yoga media, the dominant imagery fits this model of femininity: athletic, young, flexible, reposed.

The woman who gracefully embodies the majority of yoga images by masterfully performing yoga *asanas* is the idealized yoga aficionado: fit, flexible, wealthy, beautiful, not only proprietor of a glowing outer beauty, but through yoga also possessed of a radiant inner happiness; she embodies the ideal characteristics of grace, blissfulness and “effortless effort,” living out her destiny of a good life. Her perfected being then shines into the world and makes the world a better place because her best self is also a compassionate, caring, generous self who wants to care for the world as she cares for herself through yoga. The idea is that every woman has this ideal woman somewhere inside her and that yoga is the means through which to find that woman. While in yoga discourse each and

every body is its own unique body with a different version of the ideal woman, the ideas about who this ideal woman is and what she looks like are in fact very “slim.” This is demonstrated in popular books such as Tara Stiles’ *Slim, Calm, Sexy Yoga: 210 Proven Yoga Moves for Mind/Body Bliss* (2010), which asserts that through Stiles’ “yoga superstar” guidance, that in 15-minutes a day “yoga can help you: sculpt a sexy silhouette, control diet-busting cravings, banish stress for good, amp up your sexual satisfaction, get smooth glowing skin, sleep better, stay healthy, and have through-the-roof energy” (quoted from Hall, Brooks 2010/09/06 post: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2010/09/slim-sexy-savvy-and-yoga-sex/>).

Stiles’ book is part of a larger trend of yoga as beautification regimen, also promoted by other “yoga superstars” such as Sadie Nardini. Weight, stress, and physical pain are the primary “problems” that yoga is promoted as overcoming. Yoga is about making life better by first making the body better. While not all women express this in terms of weight, without exception all of the women I talked to who include yoga as part of a life practice recount yoga narratives about how yoga has made life better. This better life is usually told of in terms of alleviating chronic pain, losing weight, feeling sexier, combating stress, finding a new career path through yoga, or finding confidence through yoga to move out of “unhealthy” relationships. On the first day of my Yoga Teacher Training, we were told that long-term relationships and friendships that “no longer served you,” often ended through deepened yoga practice. An exploration of one’s inner self through contemporary yoga is understood among practitioners as leading to confidence in one’s inner truth, a truth in which elements and people that cause suffering are eliminated from one’s perfected life.

Online forums, particularly blogs and social networking sites, have become one of the primary locales for Yoga Teachers and yoga practitioners to write about how their own lives have been transformed for the better through yoga practice. This message is often turned into a “success story” to share with other women who “converted” yogis want to help overcome life difficulties arising from unhealthy bodies and unhealthy lifestyles. One’s own yogic transformation and training is the position from which to launch a career as an “inspiration” for other women who are not living fulfilled lives. Yoga can overcome a range of issues in these narratives, but there always remains an overwhelming focus on the body as the means through which to improve life, and as the motivator for making more profound life changes. By improving the body, life will also improve. My Yoga Teachers have framed this idealized body in terms of “how your body feels on the inside, not how you think it should look on the outside,” “being free from pain and suffering,” “loving yourself as you are,” “loving the body that you have,” and “touching in with your own inner goddess.” Yet these messages of developing diverse bodily ideals of self-uniqueness conflict profoundly with the

promotion of yoga as weight-loss and the promotion of a young, slim, flexible and fit model of feminine beauty and sexual appeal.

Critiques and commentaries about the commodified sexualization of women's yogic bodies to sell narrowly defined ideals of feminine beauty are prevalent in the yoga blogosphere, an emergent online community that has grown dramatically over the course of the last decade<sup>79</sup>. Yoga bloggers are usually yoga practitioners and/or teachers who use online forums as a space for cultural criticism and discussion about the role of yoga in contemporary society. They often write about their own experiences, understandings and interpretations of yoga, and are largely critical of yoga's commercialization. Many yoga bloggers have a political orientation towards yoga, akin to the position taken by Stone (2011) in which yoga is seen as an ethical basis for life engagement in the postmodern context<sup>80</sup>, what I identify with other emergent social critiques that argue for a

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<sup>79</sup> Attention to the culture of yoga blogging would add much to the scholarship on modern yoga. The "yoga blogosphere" as it is referred to by yoga bloggers, is a lively arena of cultural debate, criticism and knowledge generation around yoga. Because yoga bloggers are not held to research ethics in the same way as academic researchers, and because the online forums are largely unregulated by copyright laws (or if they have copyright laws bloggers often ignore them) yoga bloggers are able to rapidly research, interview and publish online news pieces, critical essays, interviews, and share photographs (many of them subject to copyright). Indeed they *must* post often, comment on each other's posts and be involved in online conversations in order for their blogs to remain popular and therefore generate interest from advertisers. The speed at which information is generated, shared, commented on and then pushed out of focus by the next yoga news piece is one of the primary features of the yoga blogosphere. The yoga blogosphere in many ways provides the type of cultural critique on yoga that modern yoga scholars would seek to generate, albeit at a much faster pace and in a much more widely accessible format. The use of images and options for comments from readers generates discussion and debate in the public sphere. Yoga blogs are easy to locate online for anyone familiar with the most basic of search engines. In certain ways they provide an "alternative" online yoga community to those promulgated by for-profit yoga sites such as myyogaonline.com and yogajournal.com that are largely focused on promoting and selling yoga to fit in with a conscious consumer lifestyle. As yoga has grown in popularity and become mainstreamed the network of dispersed yoga bloggers has also grown. I have not carried out an in-depth study of the yoga blogosphere, as it was beyond the scope of this research project, but it would be a good direction for future research into emergent yoga communities. The yoga blogosphere is an emergent forum for debates, criticism and opposition to ideas of yoga as a mode of self-betterment towards acquisition. Many yoga bloggers see yoga as a potential base for an embodied and spiritually aware social justice movement, a means through which to embrace difference through an ethics of self-care akin to what I described in Chapter 4. For instance, during the Occupy movements yoga bloggers were active in organizing yoga practitioners to engage, participate and support various Occupy sites. Studying how yoga movements and potentially social actions emerge in relationship to the largely commercialized world of yoga that fits hand in hand with neoliberal logics of competitive individualize personhood and erosion of traditional social solidarities (see Chapter 4) seems a fruitful future direction for social science research on modern yoga. The forthcoming book by yoga bloggers Carol Horton ([www.thinkbodyelectric.com](http://www.thinkbodyelectric.com)) and Roseanne Harvey ([itsallyogababy.com](http://itsallyogababy.com)), *21st Century Yoga: Culture, Politics, and Practice*, surveys developments in yoga culture since the turn of the millennium. Their insights into and participation in the creation of a critically aware yoga blogging community will be an important contribution to critical studies of contemporary yoga culture. Horton, a political scientist, is also in the process of publishing a book called *Yoga PhD: Integrating the Life of the Mind & the Wisdom of the Body*, which falls closely in line with the autoethnographic component of this dissertation.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 4.

posthuman political ontology of animal-environment-human equivalence (Haraway 1991, Ingold 2011, Wolfe 2010).

An example of the kind of cultural critique of yoga that occurs through these forums occurred in July 2011 when Roseanne Harvey of [itsallyogababy.com](http://www.itsallyogababy.com) posted a letter by one of the *Yoga Journal* founders, Judith Hanson Lasater, critiquing *Yoga Journal's* (YJ) advertising policy. Lasater's letter expressed frustration about how YJ commodified the bodies of women to perpetuate unhealthy images of the feminine body in yoga-related marketing, and suggested that this was contrary to the "real" goals of yoga as a spiritual practice that should promote love and self-acceptance. Lasater wrote:

I feel sad because it seems that Yoga Journal has become just another voice for the status quo and not for elevating us to the higher values of yoga: spiritual integration, compassion and selfless service. My request is that Yoga Journal doesn't run ads with photos that exploit the sexuality of young women in order to sell products or more magazines (Lasater quoted by Harvey at <http://www.itsallyogababy.com/judith-hanson-lasater-to-yoga-journal-no-more-sexy-yoga-ads/> posted 04/08/2010).

Harvey accompanied this post with a Toesox® advertising image in which Yoga Teacher Kathryn Budig poses nude in a challenging arm balance, save for a pair of Toesox®. The post created a commentary controversy, resulting in 75 comments to Harvey's post in under 24 hours. Other bloggers quickly joined in the debate with links, commentaries and examples of how the sexualized female body is used to sell yoga. The Toesox® advertising campaign, a series of highly stylized black and white photographs, featured Budig performing a number of *asanas* wearing nothing but Toesox®. These images of Budig, young, blonde, beautiful, lithe and sexy, became highly controversial in relation to the type of "status quo" promoted by YJ, in which young women's sexuality is used to sell yoga-related products by drawing on the sexualized desirability of the yoga body.

Opinions on the highly stylized nude photographs of Budig, and the use of nude or almost nude female yoga models in yoga-targeted advertising more broadly basically fit into two camps: either commentators saw them as art, calling them beautiful images showcasing the female form and Budig's yoga prowess, or they saw them as objectifying and commodifying women's bodies and perpetuating unattainable ideals for most women; they were something either to admire or condone Budig for. Commentators in the second camp lambasted Budig for posing in the ads, suggesting that as a Yoga Teacher she bears an ethical responsibility to challenge objectified body ideals and that her choice to promote her own body in this way basically marks her as *un-yogic*.

Commentators seemed to echo attitudes in the yoga world more broadly, either they felt unaffected by the commodification of yoga, embracing the possibilities it offered for physical expertise such as

that displayed by Budig, or they were strictly opposed to it, seeing yoga as a spiritual practice meant to bring refuge from the stresses of modern life and therefore incompatible with mainstream idealizations of sexualized femininity that most women can never properly embody.

In yogic terms the conflict is between perpetuating suffering or choosing to act only in ways that foster ethical modes of being in the world, premised foremost on an ethics of *ahimsa*, non-harming. Critics of the yoga body as it is idealized in mainstream yoga media take the position that Budig and other yoga models are using their own idealized bodies to support an objectifying life model that causes suffering in the self and others through a constant compulsion to develop one's body as the source of value of the sexualized feminine self. In these ethical terms, guided by the precepts of the *Yoga-sutras*, actions (*karma*) that perpetuate suffering must be eliminated in order to break the perpetual arising of *samskâras* (subliminal activators).

Ultimately I believe the way that images operate in contemporary yoga is particularly problematic because of the mimetic mode of knowledge transmission in how *asana* is taught. Yoga Teachers promote the yoga body by virtue of their position as conveners of specialized yoga knowledge, knowledge which students desire as potentially life-transforming. Yoga Teachers acquire skills in using their bodies to demonstrate yoga *asanas*, it is part of their training, and in a sense, the larger the repertoire of *asanas* a Yoga Teacher can perform, the greater her yoga capital. "Good" Yoga Teachers should be able to translate their own bodies to function like an image, one that students look at and attempt to emulate in their own bodies. A good teacher must accompany her demonstrations with verbal (or in the case of print, textual) instructions to go along with the images. It is clear from observing any beginners' yoga class that students are mimicking the Yoga Teacher's body movements, more often visually following her and mirroring her movements in their own bodies than listening to what she is saying. How Yoga Teachers display their bodies therefore does have a significant effect in how students experience yoga in their own bodies, both through the movements of the *asanas* themselves and the interpretive frameworks offered by the Yoga Teacher and the yoga students' own cultural perspectives. As yoga expertise develops in one's own body, the mimicry that first takes place in yoga classes is replaced with a different kind of embodied awareness of breath and movement, but this process takes time, and in learning new sequences or *asanas*, students must draw on the mimetic faculty (Taussig 1993) to transform technical information into embodied skill. This does not necessarily mean that Yoga Teachers all display the kind of *asana* expertise displayed by Budig, and in the "real" world of yoga, i.e. in yoga classes at studios and community centers, one can find Yoga Teachers with a range of different body types and who are a range of different ages. However, these older and "differently" shaped Yoga Teachers rarely appear

on the cover of *Yoga Journal*, are not usually featured in online videos, or referred to as “yoga superstars,” and their bodies are not often used in yoga images to demonstrate the “perfected” forms of *asanas*. The reality is that there are many different types of yoga bodies in the world, and the idealized yoga body, like the idealized sexualized feminine body, is in fact a very uncommon body. That said, many advertisements for yoga use this uncommon “better” body to draw potential practitioners in, suggesting that yoga is a means through which to mold one’s own body more closely towards this ideal. The critiques of Budig’s choice to model yoga *asanas* in sexualized and commodified terms came largely from yoga practitioners who recognized the power Yoga Teachers have to shape their students perceptions of their own bodies and of yoga more broadly.

When I first taught an *asana* class, I felt like the leader of the child’s game *Simon Says*. It is a strange feeling to be granted the authority to suggest to a group of followers how to move their bodies through the movement of your own. They trusted that I had a body expertise that they did not, that through my self-embodied knowledge I would guide them to their own re-embodiment.

I talk here momentarily about the role of visual reproduction in what Singleton terms the “*asana* revival” (2010: 163), and then elaborate the contradiction at the heart of the Toesox® image controversy when the image functions as social imaginary and that social imaginary is experienced as further alienation from body rather than mindful embodiment. Singleton writes that the “phenomenon of international posture-based yoga would not have occurred without the rapid expansion of print technology and the cheap, ready availability of photography” (2010: 163). He also suggests that “yoga’s expression through such media fundamentally changed the perception of the *yoga body* and the perceived function of yoga practice” (ibid) because of the way that technology, and photography in particular, function to structure reality. Singleton’s focus is on the *yoga body* as the male Hindu body, which emerged through the interface of the “Hindu renaissance and world physical culturalism” (2010: 164). He describes how the advent and popularization of photography also coincided with colonial expansion and early anthropological cataloguing of colonized peoples:

Photography, in brief, was part of the apparatus of commercial and cultural domination that defined Empire. It could operate simultaneously as a mode of control and power over the colonial “other” and as an expression of personal and collective identity set in opposition to that other. As a vital locus of power, then, photography was to become a hotly contested medium for those colonial subjects who would assert their own identities and their own vision of their bodies against the demeaning visual narratives of foreign ethnography and casual voyeurism. As Narayan (1993) puts it, such photographs [of yogis and fakirs] remind us that what is supposedly objective “in fact derives from a positioned gaze that highlights, circumscribes, and is implicated in a system of power-laden social relations (485...)” (2010: 165).

In terms of yoga in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the circumscribed *yoga body* was a young, fit, male Hindu body. This image was produced and circulated by Hindu nationalists who sought to

recuperate the Indian spirit and re-masculinize the body in a particularly Indian way under the British colonial regime. Singleton suggests that this body had appeal within Indian society and that the photographic representations allowed for “objective scrutiny (and emulation) in unprecedented ways” (2010: 167). This marked a movement from more meditative forms of yoga popularized by Vivekenanda (De Michelis 2004) to physical styles such as those taught by Krishnamacharya that claimed continuation from earlier *batha* forms. Singleton describes early 20<sup>th</sup> Century pictorially rich *batha* yoga practice manuals and suggests that these were the precursors to the explosion of yoga books and online yoga media that we see today, in which once-secret knowledge has been re-imagined, moved out of the domain of the guru to a magazine shelf or clever *url* nearby:

The locus of yoga is no longer at the center of an invisible ground of being, hidden from the gaze of all but the elite initiate or the mystic; instead, the lucent skin of the yoga model becomes the ubiquitous signifier of *spiritual* possibility, the specular projection screen of characteristically modern and democratic religious aspirations. In the yoga body – sold back to a million consumer-practitioners as an irresistible commodity of the holistic, perfectible self – surface and anatomical structure promise ineffable depth and the dream of incarnate transcendence (2010: 174).

I draw on Singleton to emphasize two major points: 1) that photographs have historically been used to produce social realities about the “nature” of the yogic body, and 2) that in mainstream international yoga culture, the young Hindu male *yoga body* has either been transformed or acquired an updated sidekick in the form of a young white woman. So bodies perform yoga *asanas*, and bodies are used to demonstrate how yoga *asanas* are done. The issue at stake, as Singleton points out, is that photography is not a neutral representation of objective reality, but indeed structures reality through what it represents, and perhaps as importantly, what it leaves out. Ultimately perhaps the problem is that images of yoga *asanas* are a poor representation of what is embodied in yoga *asanas* (see Chapter 4), yet they continue to be produced, used in advertising, are an important part of a Yoga Teacher’s representation of herself, have become ubiquitous mementos from yoga holidays abroad, and are highly important self-representations for user profiles on online yoga singles dating sites (see <http://yogapassions.com/> and <http://www.yogaromance.com/>), not to mention that many of these photographs are highly photo-shopped or airbrushed, altered technologically to more accurately represent ones most “better” self. So what is the controversy about? Why are there so many opposing voices to this most recent figuration of the *yoga body* and what does this have to do with what Singleton refers to as “incarnate transcendence?” Does incarnate transcendence require a perfectible self? And what is the relationship between the idea of a perfectible self, the images that represent this, and the problem of the mimetic faculty in translating between self mind-body, other mind-body, and the incarnate transcendence on offer?

Basically from a point of view of yoga philosophy as elaborated in the Yoga-sutra, the beginning point of yoga is *karma*, action in the world *intended* towards embodying freedom from nescience (*avidya*, also translated as ignorance) and the causes of affliction (*kleśhas*) (Feuerstein 1979). The first step in beginning yoga is to consider that one's actions are interconnected, that they have social as well as psychological effects and may either 1) deepen habitual conditioned patterns that cause suffering (the affective ruts (Wetherell 2012) I discussed in Chapter 4) because they are grounded in the illusion that thoughts and emotions are solid, unchangeable and True, or 2) move towards freedom, in which actions become intentional rather than conditioned:

One of the first things to do in sadhana (spiritual practices) is to regulate actions and speech, promoting the positive and useful, while setting aside the negative and not useful. This is the first part of breaking the cycles of actions and reactions, or *Karma*. In Yoga, this includes practicing the *Yamas*, which are not harming, truthfulness, not stealing, remembering higher truth, and not being possessive (Yoga Sutras 2.30-2.34). Initially these practices might be done on the more surface level, like behavioral psychology, but later are done on a subtler level through meditation (Yoga Sutras 2.10-2.11). Then the *roots* of those negative or not useful actions and speech are dealt with through meditation at the level of Samskaras (Jnaneshvara accessed 2012/09/17:<http://swamij.com/karma.htm>).

To delve a little more deeply into what is meant by ignorance, nescience, Truth, and suffering, and why this is important for understanding the controversy around Yoga Teachers promoting yoga as a means to achieve a desired *yoga body* ideal, I draw on Feuerstein's translation and interpretation of Yoga-sutras 2.3-2-5. In Yoga Sutra 2.3, Feuerstein (quoting Taimni) suggests that the "theory of the causes-of-affliction is... "the foundation of the system of *Yoga* outlined by Patañjali"" (1979: 62). Feuerstein's translation of Yoga Sutra 2.4 is that "Nescience, I-am-ness, attachment, aversion, and the will-to-live are the five causes of affliction" (ibid). He asks, "What exactly are these factors which keep man [sic] ensconced in conditional or prakrtic existence" (1979:62)? Yoga-sutras 2.4 and 2.5, according to Feuerstein, outline that nescience is the primary cause of affliction:

This is not to be understood as a mere lack of knowledge; it is the absence of Self-awareness and thus, positively, false-knowledge, distorted cognition. *Avidya* is the cause of the fatal epistemic dichotomisation into object and subject which Yoga seeks to remove. *Avidya* conceals the root consciousness by establishing a false identity... Nescience is a cognitive error, a mistaken conviction about one's identity, which is congenital to man [sic]. Socialisation and education reinforce his innate belief in a false self, and it is only when he becomes aware of the pervasive social and cultural mechanisms which create and sustain his erroneous self image that he can begin to resist them and set out to discover his true identity, which is the Self (*purusa*) (1979: 62-63).

According to this reading, actions in the world that perpetuate "pervasive social and cultural mechanisms which create and sustain [an]... erroneous self image," can only lead to belief in a false self, an individualized ego caught in the suffering cycle of identifications, in which root

consciousness, the true Self, remains hidden. It is tapping into, or uniting with, this root consciousness that is the goal in incarnate transcendence, which is talked about in terms of an enstatic state of non-separation. Yoga is action directed towards correcting the false identity grounded in “distorted cognition” about the nature of the self as dichotomous, separate from the perceptual world. In posthumanist terms, it is about overcoming our own humanity in order to realize our interconnectedness. This is highly problematic in terms of mimesis because mimesis requires alterity in order to cognize a self (Taussig 1993). There must be an “other” and there must be an “I.” As long as one identifies with an image as external and seeks to incorporate that image, to interpret and emulate it, one supports a dichotomous identity, a split self/other. Daniel Miller’s (2001) anthropological approach to understanding the relationship of the identified self to a culturally imagined ideal self enlivened through consumer acts of realization (what he terms shopping for the self) is a useful analogy. Miller suggests that while sometimes the idealized self and the actual experienced self merge in shopping for the self, these realizations are short-lived because of the nature of capitalism to always perpetuate desire which can never be fulfilled: one creates an identity which one must always represent, essentially self-mimicking through consumption, identifying with other potential versions of self. But these consumer self-realizations can only be temporary, and the self must always return to a wanting or dissatisfied state in order to re-fulfill itself through the next desired commodity or newly revised image culturally enlivened by the never-ending proliferation of images in advertising, media, television, film, and online (Löfgren 2007). The *Yoga-sutras* suggest that unfulfilled desire is the natural psychological state of human psychology, and that it can be overcome through Yoga, when one realizes that the desiring sense of I-am-ness is false cognition, that there is something within human consciousness that exists beyond the dichotomous identification of subjective existence which always posits an objectified other (to be desired, avoided, rejected, mimicked, judged, etc.). I suggested in Chapter 4, that this is very much akin to what Haraway describes in her cyborg manifesto (see Alter 2006 for a good analysis), what psychologists refer to when they theorize affect (Wetherell 2012), what posthumanists (Wolfe 2010) describe when they suggest abandoning a humanism that denies/disembodies/ seeks to master humanities’ interrelation with and therefore political commitment to the world, and what Ingold is referring to when he talks about habitation, his drive to shift “anthropology in general, and the study of material culture in particular, away from the fixation with objects and images, and towards a better appreciation of the material flows and currents of sensory awareness within which both ideas and things *reciprocally* take shape” (2011: 10 italics mine).

The main issue here is the question of whether or not yoga should consist of a larger ethical agenda beyond self-realization as acquisition of a *yoga body*. Whether it is acceptable or not for yoga aficionados to circulate the idea that suffering will end once one acquires this perfectible self? Or whether yoga should be involved in an ethical imperative to end suffering caused by false belief in socially and culturally conditioned self-idealizations, of which being possessed of a sexy, slim female body is one? By perpetuating a belief that yoga is a means to acquire culturally conditioned bodily ideals, Yoga Teachers are fostering the cycle of *samskâras*, not taking action to reduce suffering and harm.

In response to the Kathryn Budig Toesox® controversy created by Harvey's original blog post, Carol Horton at thinkbodyelectric.com provided a critical perspective on how idealized images operate in culture more broadly:

For me, the problem with the Toesox ad and all that it represents is that it makes yoga part of the larger cultural movement to turn our bodies – and by extension, our selves – into commodities. That is, objects whose worth is determined by their market value, whether monetary (who gets paid the big bucks) or cultural (who's commonly perceived as sexy, admirable, desirable, and so on).

That's not to suggest that Ms. Budig or any other yogis consciously endorse such an agenda. But that's the thing about the dominant culture: If it's invisible to us – if we uncritically accept it as normal and natural without reflection – we get sucked into it and end up reinforcing its norms unintentionally.

Which is why Ms. Lasater's letter to *Yoga Journal* is important. She has the stature and reputation to take what's become normal (commodifying the bodies of prominent yoga teachers by using them as props for selling stuff) and change it into something to be questioned. (<http://www.thinkbodyelectric.com/2010/08/naked-yoga-beauties-selling-stuff-or.html> accessed 2012/07/05).

Online commentaries on personal blogs such as Horton's and Harvey's contrast with the primary messages that come through popular, highly commercialized yoga megasites such as yogajournal.com. Bloggers often combine personal yoga practice with larger political or social agendas about how they see yoga fitting in to contemporary society, creating a lively forum for debate about yoga in the public sphere. They offer an alternative voice to mainstream yoga forums that promote yoga as a path to self-betterness through a consumer lifestyle model solidified through the *yoga body* imaginary. This blissful imaginary relies on consumer-based models of the good life, albeit with a "yogic" twist, in which yoga offers a spiritual path through which to escape stressful competitive (neoliberal) lives while still attaining everything the good life entails: health, beauty, perpetual happiness, affluence, heterosexual marriage, parenthood, and guilt-free (over)consumption. While filled with articles about health, acceptance and the need to "love ourselves as we are," the sites also offer multitudes of information about losing weight, healthier diets, "green" shopping, and basically suggest that we are not okay as we are and that we could

always become better by practicing yoga more, eating healthier, being kinder and more loving, and making better “authentic” choices about everything from relationships, sex, money and career to which yoga pants to wear to avoid a camel toe<sup>81</sup>.

### **Yoga Teachers and the Transmission of Yogic Knowledge:**

Debates about the commodification of yoga extend beyond the yoga blogosphere, particularly in terms of Yoga Teacher Training programs, and how the structuring of these programs in a market-driven economy serve to shape the dissemination of yogic knowledge. Yoga Community Toronto (YOCOTO) has been at the forefront of this debate, beginning with a call for dialogue about Yoga Teacher Training standards at the 2010 Yoga Festival Toronto. YOCOTO has organized a series of Town Hall Meetings for yoga stakeholders to voice opinions about the YTT standardization. In an article posted on Toronto Mind Body’s website, Weger observed that:

It’s no wonder that the issue of YTT regulation has incited such controversy when it has raised so many questions without much consensus. It’s an issue perhaps most complicated by the practical considerations of regulation itself in which there arises a need to define and delineate industry criteria that will most effectively benefit all parties involved—students, teachers, and studios. Pragmatically, the systematization of yoga creates a number of complex problems—whether in the creation of pedagogical rubrics, the formulation of curriculum ratios of asana to philosophy to anatomy, or in coming to an agreement regarding the appropriate length of a foundational program. What is the baseline for what teachers need to know and how should they come to know it? (Weger 2011: <http://torontobodymind.ca/articles/debate-yoga-teacher-training-standardization> posted 2011/01/09, accessed 2012/08/21).

Weger raises a number of issues related to the transmission and mainstreaming of yogic knowledge, she defines the debate as having largely to do with the uneasy relationship between yoga as a “market-driven business,” which she suggests raises “fear that yoga’s spiritual traditions are fast being trampled by a culture of fitness, fashion, and celebrity endorsement” (ibid). Weger identifies the yoga stakeholders as students, teachers and yoga studios and highlights that the discussion about YTT regulation brings up a conflict among questions of spiritual integrity, revenue-generation for

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<sup>81</sup> This refers to a lululemon® (an internationally popular yoga apparel company) advertisement that appeared in *Yoga Journal* in which a young, thin, white yoga model performs *ustrasana* (camel pose), wearing a pair of new “anti cameltoe” lululemon pants with the headliner “Say No to Camel Toe.” Small-print then describes how the crotch of the pants is quadruple trussed to avoid the sliding of the seam fabric in between the labia, thus visibly outlining the shape of labia in the form-fitting spandex pants, which is what is referred to as the infamous “camel toe,” or CT on the lululemon website. Lululemon pants are made to cling to and highlight the shape of the buttocks because of the tight waste band accompanied by strong crotch seams, one unfortunate outcome of this clinging was the unintended accentuation of the labia alongside. This has since been remedied by technological restructuring of the crotch seam since seemingly it is important to accentuate the ass but mask the labia in optimal performance of yoga.

yoga studios, knowledge and pedagogical experience, and student-consumer satisfaction. She identifies pragmatic and doctrinal problems in the systematization of how yoga knowledge is transmitted in terms of: 1) spiritual transmission, and 2) externally enforced guidelines about pedagogy, curriculum design, and program length. Within this debate, questions arise about the “traditional” yogic knowledge situated within guru to student spiritual lineages and how externally imposed guidelines about anatomy to philosophy ratios might restrict yoga to its more practical aspects, thereby sidelining the question of spirituality altogether. Commentators in the debate suggest that also at stake is the “cheapening” of yogic knowledge when YTT programs are run online or in block weekend slots to generate revenue without taking into account the complexity of skills and experiential knowledge required of Yoga Teachers. Basically the debate seems to circulate around how to simultaneously allow for the creative expression of spiritual knowledge, which should not really be regulated by material concerns, and how to regulate practical instruction. One contradiction which cannot easily be overcome is that while spiritual knowledge is seen as something that should not be commodified, Yoga Teacher’s embodied skills are seen as a legitimately marketable source of capital.

This debate demonstrates that the figure of the Yoga Teacher is far from clearly defined within the yoga community. Methods of gaining credibility range from criteria such as: 1) years of study and practice, 2) a 200-hour or 500-hour certified Yoga Teacher Training program, and certification as a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) at the 200 or 500 hr level, 3) specialized anatomical knowledge and certification in a field such as kinesiology or medicine, 4) being able to successfully perform and demonstrate yoga *asanas* that are out of reach for most people, 5) crafting unique sequences that compel students to follow your lead, 6) writing a popular book about your own yoga experience, 7) producing a video that gets a lot of hits online, 8) opening your own yoga studio and successfully promoting yourself to your yoga market, and 9) personal charisma to your spiritual calling. While certification procedures have been defined by organizations such as the Yoga Alliance, there is a great deal of variation in how Yoga Teachers access and then pass on yogic knowledge. Some lineages and studios require one year and multi year certification processes (i.e. Yasodhara Ashram’s Hidden Language Hatha Yoga and Anusara® Yoga), others offer online YTTs such as Sadie Nardini’s 40-hr “Online Rockstar Teacher Training” (<http://www.sadienardini.com/teacher-training.html>). What yoga is and who teaches it continues to be up for grabs in the yoga marketplace. Students must sift through a range of styles and claims about personal transformation, grappling with questions about what it is that is on offer through yoga and who it is that they are modeling themselves after as they mold their *yoga bodies* in *Simon Says* fashion after the teacher at

center stage. Online yoga practice sites, yoga conferences, library check-out and at-home yoga DVDs, all offer potential points of access to media supported yoga instruction in the comfort of your own home. Gyms, community centers and church halls have been common places to register for in-person yoga classes since the 1970s when yoga began to be popularized as a mainstream wellness practice (DeMichelis 2004, Newcombe 2007). Since the 1990s the Yoga Studio has come to redefine urban landscapes, replacing storefronts once occupied by other long-forgotten businesses that did not make the transition to new neoliberal geographies. One street in downtown Victoria boasts almost as many yoga studios as it does Starbucks, with convenient early bird, post-work and at-lunch classes for workaday yogis to cultivate their innerness and bookend their busy schedules in “stress-free” 60-90 minute slots.

Yoga Teachers also teach on cruise ships, at yoga retreat centers, ashrams and holidays, at private and government offices, in hospitals, give private classes at home, in gyms, fitness studios, hospitals community centers and organize their own classes in churches and sometimes outside in public locations such as parks. Many Yoga Teachers also travel to give workshops at conferences and may also make money (or just promote their teaching) by making videos to post online. Writing books and making DVDs for yoga practitioners to practice with at home is one way for Yoga Teachers to increase their profiles and become more desirable faculty members at large yoga conferences.

The growth in yoga’s popularity and the expanding yoga market have served to increase costs of yoga dramatically over the last few decades through the creation of the Yoga Teacher as professional and Yoga Studio as business. At the same time that the health benefits of yoga are being promoted in mainstream media and prescribed by doctors, the increased costs of yoga and the imagined lifestyle that goes along with it as being for fit, flexible, wealthy, beautiful young people, who need specialized clothing and products to practice, have served to create perceptions of yoga as a celebrity fitness trend, yuppie pastime and self-indulgent New Age Therapy. What yoga is and who yoga is for is much debated in the yoga community, and while many value economic opportunities to live a fulfilling life by being involved with “spreading yoga’s message,” as one of my Yoga Teacher informants told me, and being able to make a good living doing it, others are highly critical of the commercialization of yoga and the fact that it has turned into an elite commodity.

In response to the rising costs of yoga, organizations such as *Yoga to the People* (YTTP), have formed to offer discounted classes (\$8-10 “suggested donation” as opposed to the more routine \$18-25 drop-in costs) at yoga studios in New York, Seattle, Berkeley and San Francisco (prices which are still out of reach for many people). Another community-focused yoga organization is the US-

based *Yoga Service Council*, which has a mandate to bring yoga to underserved populations, including veterans, trauma survivors, incarcerated adults and teens, cancer survivors, at-risk children, and domestic violence survivors ([http://yogaservicecouncil.org/?page\\_id=11](http://yogaservicecouncil.org/?page_id=11) accessed 2012/07/22).

While in my research I focused primarily on commodified aspects of yoga, particularly yoga tourism venues, yoga studios, and online yoga sites, it would be worthwhile to conduct further research on non-profit yoga organizations to gain a wider understanding of how yoga continues to transform as it becomes more culturally embedded in neoliberal societies, including the changing demographics of its practitioners through the efforts of yoga activists who respond to commodification by creating organizations such as YTTP, the Yoga Service Council, and many such others, research which I intend to undertake in the future.

In this section I sketched out the yoga body through the idealized image discourses that market yoga as a health, fitness and beauty mind-body lifestyle regime in what has become over the course of the last decade or so, mainstream yoga culture. I identified the various “parts” of this mainstream yoga culture by describing the technologies and modes of its dissemination online and through the figure of the Yoga Teacher. I mentioned that the Yoga Teacher is created by professional organizations such as the Yoga Alliance that are responsible for setting standards and creating boundaries around what qualifies as appropriate yogic knowledge. I introduced the primary locations of access for yoga in mainstream culture, namely: 1) the specialized spaces of yoga studios, yoga retreats and yoga conferences, 2) offices, hospitals, gyms, fitness centers, community centers and churches, and 3) various online yoga-related websites.

### **Conclusion 1:**

Consumer theorists have demonstrated that emergent ethical consumption movements and identities are also tied into elitism, defining moral fields of consumer existence from which non-elite consumers are excluded. These exclusions operate through “taste,” in which consumers must navigate consumer fields of meaning, generating “good” choices that will creatively generate the “good” life. These choices are seen as individual achievements or failures rather than socially defined class distinctions restricted by social, economic, and cultural barriers (Bourdieu 1984, Featherstone 2011). Consumer moral existence and the maintenance of lifestyle require constant work under conditions in which taste and choice are highly manipulated through marketing and continuously refashioned towards the generation of capital (Sassatelli 2007). One must always reinterpret and rearticulate oneself in relation to the always emergent commodities that may allow an

expression of the self never-before imagined, a fusion of self with other through a desire for fulfillment of consumer-generated dreams of the good life.

New forms, styles and expressions of yoga, alongside new yoga products, services, holidays, books, studios and festivals pervade the global cultural landscape. Yoga is concurrently manifested as an ideal mode of self-fashioning for fulfilling an elite life defined in terms of consumer ethics and acquisition *and* contested as a potential for an engaged world-inhabitation. The latter position is tied into what scholars have defined as a subjectivity based on an ontological politics in which human, animal and environment are equivalents, in which the body is inhabited not as pre-cultural, but as post-human, or as Alter suggests in his analysis of medieval hatha yoga, as a very ancient form of cyborg politics:

[Donna Haraway] argues that it is virtually impossible to define the uniqueness of humans on the basis of their difference from animals; impossible to distinguish between organism and machine; and impossible to know what counts as nature, or tell the difference between what is physical and what is not physical (1991: 151-3). The cyborg embodies the tension that these real impossibilities reflect, and Haraway's main point is that a new kind of politics can emerge out of the way in which we as cyborgs – human, animal, and machine hybrids – embody a sense of self that is not based on duality and opposition. In many respects Haraway's characterization of cyborg ambiguity relates to a theme that is perhaps more obviously South Asian: the transformation and transfiguration of animals, humans, plants, and gods in Hindu mythology... tremendous articulations of power abide in the symbolism of androgyny and other 'unnatural' reformations of nature. In this context, however, the cyborg provides a better point of reference simply because mythology is purely symbolic whereas yoga is real in practice and manifest as such in the natural world (Alter 2006: 766-767).

Haraway's cyborg politics, argues Alter, offers a way of understanding medieval yoga through social theory rather than what he terms the "prismatic of religion" (2006: 767). He suggests that cyborg politics are not so much post-modern as they are in contrast to the basic tenets of modern articulations of humanity. Alter suggests that

the structural similarity between a 'person' who has perfected the techniques of yoga and a 'person' who is a cyborg can be outlined schematically: the hybridity of personal, alchemical and transcendent selves in yoga compares directly with the cyborg hybridity of animal, human, and machine entities. Where the cyborg blurs natural boundaries and confuses categories, the yogi blurs the boundaries between biology, cosmology, and consciousness (2006: 767).

While Alter's concern is with using the cyborg to understand medieval hatha yoga, I also think the cyborg or posthuman is a useful way to interpret the type of politics offered in emergent political recuperations of yoga that are largely a reaction against the commercialization and mainstreaming of yoga as a defining component of an elite neoliberal lifestyle<sup>82</sup>. I end this chapter by considering how a practical application of yoga as basis for an ontological politics of human-animal-environment

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 4 for an expanded discussion of posthumanism as applied to yoga. This theme is one that emerged during the course of writing my dissertation, and one which I intend to research further in my postdoctoral research.

equivalence comes to life at one of my field sites. I outline how the contradiction between yoga as a lifestyle regime defined by ethical consumption plays out in relation to yoga as ontological politics of human-animal-environment equivalence at the Eco Yoga Retreat in Costa Rica, which I identify as a posthuman habitat because of its intentional framing as a “sustainable living project,” an environment in which human life and culture are designed in line with local ecology through yoga and permaculture.

### **Ethical Encounters**<sup>83</sup>

The questions raised by an ethics of consumption are not just about how to live a life of more regulated consumption, they ask us to think about the nature of the things we consume and their fate, their potential, or right to be something more than waste. Maybe it also asks us to consider more the balance between material and immaterial consumption, with a shift involving more contemplative knowledge: to connoisseurship, the play with classifications and the education of the senses, as opposed to ostentatious display, waste and excess (Featherstone 2011: xxv).

This section considers the lived and embodied ethics of an organic farm and yoga retreat in Costa Rica framed by the owners as a “sustainable living project<sup>84</sup>.” I consider how this project fits into the ethics of consumption identified by Featherstone, one in which yoga and permaculture<sup>85</sup> form the base for developing a sustainable lifeway according to new ethical modes that address the “balance between material and immaterial consumption” (ibid). I consider how permaculture principles for the design of relational and interactive systems re-envision waste to address material consumption and how the inclusion of yoga within this system enlivens contemplative knowledge forms and education of the senses towards developing a lived practice based on an ontological politics of human-animal-environment equivalence.

I also reflect on the uneasy contradictions that emerge from the Eco Yoga Retreat’s (EYR) envisioned goal: “To build community, to structure *our lives* around environmentally sustainable ethics, and to promote and provide a healthy yogic lifestyle” (italics mine). I compare the ethics envisioned by the community with the structural reality supporting their vision of environmental

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<sup>83</sup> This section is a revised version of a paper delivered in Montreal at the 2011 AAA Conference: *Traces, Tidemarks and Legacies*. The title of that paper was *Embodying Ethical Consumerism through Yoga: a “Sustainable Living Project” in Costa Rica*.

<sup>84</sup> I discuss the EYR in more detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Permaculture is an approach to landscape and community design based on observing and attempting to emulate the functioning of natural ecosystems to produce sustainable and productive landscapes conducive to the flourishing of biological life and human societies” (Hemenway 2009: 5).

sustainability: an international tourist industry reliant on tourist as ethical consumer. I focus on the place-making activities of foreign tourists and retreat organizers to whom the vision is directed as both marketing strategy and alternative/ethical lifestyle. Through the concept of irresolvable contradiction I explore how “*differences are made, marked, removed, maintained and altered within*” the “*multiply occupied place*”<sup>86</sup> of this yoga retreat.

Gender, race, mobility and nationality emerge as particularly salient in the sensual unfolding afforded the participant who falls into the structure of *our lives* potentially rendered healthier through yoga. Juxtaposing these ideal lives with the lives of locals who support the “community” through their labour raises important questions about new models of sociality that arise in alternative lifestyle movements based around environmental ethics in locations where community members may occupy vastly different positions in global structures of power. I question the play between ethical imaginaries and ethical actions in how this “sustainable living project” functions through part of the year as an intentional community reliant on global touristic flows, yet orients itself around ethics of permaculture and yoga as alternative possibilities to consumer-based lifestyles characteristic of globalizing neoliberalism. My intention is not to discredit the vibrancy and sincerity of the life-affirming model of community I witnessed and participated in at the EYR, but to consider the wider social contexts within which it operates and to raise questions about the types of relationships – economic, social, political and cultural – that accompany this emergent model of community. In addition to critiquing some of the implications of these emergent relations I think it is important to give voice to the vision itself, the possibilities it offers and to consider the ways in which its envisionment as a project and process leaves room for reflection, reconfiguring, and hope for more just ways of being in the world, even as these attempts remain entangled in the contradictory forces which they are a reaction against.

The EYR is an attempt to create a community based on the type of responsibility Featherstone draws from Bauman, to “build a counter-ethics to combat neoliberal market economics, overconsumption and planetary threat” (2011: xxv). The type of life community offered by the EYR in which the entire ecosystem is understood as a communicating component of a life community may be one example of the type of ethics described in Bauman’s work, in which “an appreciation of other life forms and our interconnectivity with them can lead to greater solidarity with things, a sense of the importance of the lives of other things” (ibid).

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<sup>86</sup> Exploring these differences was one of the aims laid out for the 2011 AAA Conference.

Firstly I discuss the internal dynamics of the ethics of yoga and sustainability, and how these dynamics draw on a particular concept of the self that I elaborated in Chapter 4. I suggest that in this model the self is an individual who enlivens a healthy relationship with the world through ethical action seen to increase personal freedom. Secondly I reflect on the structural components of a global world order that sets up the constraints of a tourism economy in countries like Costa Rica. Viewing the EYR in this wider context allows for a comparison of how the ethical imaginaries of this intentional community play themselves out against a strategic deployment of ethical consumption discourses. Of particular concern is how ethical tourisms invite foreign investors to realize their dreams of alternative lifestyles in locales not yet constrained by the tighter restrictions on personal freedom seen to exist “at home.”

I interrogate how in new yoga communities’ ethics there is a supposition that all persons are able to increase personal freedom through practices of self-care. In this imaginary, ancient Sanskrit texts (Singleton 2008) are interpreted through an ethos of universal oneness. Individuals are urged to transcend false identifications that create bounded notions of self so that markers of separate identity such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, nationality and even humanity fall away and all beings are ultimately understood as one. Freedom is then achieved by dropping societal constraints on the self that are seen to cause suffering.

I argue that at the EYR (and in yoga tourism more broadly), an ethics of personal freedom based on a supposition of basic sameness supposes a sociological equality of individual subjectivities that denies social difference, and implicitly, social inequality. It does not allow for diverse interpretations of reality that would enliven an ethics of difference rather than sameness, which I elaborate on momentarily.

This ethics of oneness means that on the one hand the EYR “project” is an attempt to transcend a social reality that causes suffering. On the other hand, however, the EYR relies on the problematic notion of ethical tourism *within* this same system to financially support its activities. I argue that this results in a contradiction that is implicit in how betterment practices such as yoga are embodied in consumer milieus more broadly. This contradiction has to do with the *embodied experience* of feeling better through yoga, and of seeking this state of personal *betterness* as an ethical drive through discourses of ethical consumption. This must be placed in the context of a world in which being a consumer is increasingly invoked as the prime marker of identity. Ethical consumption creates a moral discourse that highlights hierarchies of better choices amongst a field of potentially harmful ones without addressing structural inequities. This means that values of personal *betterness* are allotted to ethical forms of consumption alongside the reality that these forms

may not be available to liminal consumers with restricted choice due to poverty, class, ethnicity, nationality or gender. By consuming yoga (like other “good” consumer products such as Fair Trade Coffee (Lewis and Potter 2011)), embodied experiences of feeling better are incorporated amongst moral discourses of beauty, fitness and health such that feeling good becomes an ethical imperative towards an embodied expression of *betterness*.

I am not arguing that yoga does not produce benefits, but that accessing yoga through discourses defined in consumer terms results in particular embodiments of yoga that may not be apparent when focusing solely on health and without interrogating what we mean when we talk about well-being.

In this embodied ethnography attuned to lived experience, the EYR did offer transformational experience, both to me as an anthropologist studying yoga tourism and to the other tourists I met there. Through my yoga practice I experienced expanded awareness and felt the possibility for forming relationships with fellow inhabitants that were more equal and participatory, in which we shared day-to-day tasks and took care of one another and the land around us through an ethics of care that on a very fundamental level made me feel like a more connected person, a sort of better version of myself: comfortable in my body and supporting of others. This process however, was set against the irresolvable contradiction that as an anthropologist I could not help but be aware that our well-being was framed by the continual presence of the “other:” Juan, Rosa and Carlos. We watched Juan arrive and leave by horseback and Rosa by foot six days a week, to return to their own land a 40-minute walk away. Rosa cooked breakfast and lunch and cleaned the house while we did yoga, lounged in the hammocks and did our work tasks for one or two hours every day. Zeke (one of the EYR managers) told me that although Juan and Rosa had their own home in their village that they lived at the EYR full time during the rainy season when he and Martie (Zeke’s partner and EYR manager), returned to the US to escape the rains. Juan, Rosa and Carlos inhabited realities the majority of Anglophone tourists had no access to both because of language and social position in a global world order. They worked for the EYR but did not take part in the yoga or share meals with us. We were not invited to their homes and did not help them with their work. They did their paid work for the EYR and we did other tasks that were not theirs. They were always on the outskirts, supporting our work, but did not seem to be included in the community we were living out between us. The only people who had any relationship with them were Martie and Zeke. In this way there were two communities overlapping with the lives of the managers that never really met each other. The internal tourist community was enlivened primarily through yoga,

recreational time, shared food and work, and was facilitated by our American hosts in Costa Rica, Martie and Zeke.

The primary ethical intention at play at the Eco Yoga Retreat is defined in their goal of sustainability, in which a critical and rejecting approach is taken to consumer culture and capitalist exploitation of both people and the environment. This is why Costa Rica was chosen for the EYR project. Martie and Zeke told me that Costa Rica allows them (and the founder of the EYR, Marcel), greater personal freedom than the United States where laws are imposed to benefit corporations at the detriment of people and environment.

This vision of sustainability, however, contrasts with the discourse of ethical consumption drawn out by the EYR through marketing. In this model, moral comfort around unjust social arrangements between tourists and locals is created through encouraging modes of consumption that are interpreted as benefiting local economies as well as providing pleasure for consumers. What is absent from eco-tourism discourse is who really benefits from these arrangements.

Anthropologists have demonstrated (West and Carrier 2004, Stronza 2008) that it is rarely local people. Rather, it tends to be foreign investors and tourists, the latter of which are only there for a short time and rarely consider the impact their tourist activities have locally.

The Eco Yoga Retreat is able to exist as an enterprise and as a lifestyle option for the Austrian and Canadian owners and American managers of the retreat because foreign tourists from primarily the US, Canada, Europe and Australia are attracted to the way the Eco Yoga Retreat markets itself as a destination where travelers can go to reconnect and escape stressful lives at home. Their website suggests that tourists will benefit from renewed connection with nature and self through yoga, healthy food, organic farming, and the unspoilt beauty of the rainforest. Because the EYR offers work-stay holidays at a reduced price (US\$500/month)<sup>87</sup>, yoga tourists see themselves as offsetting some of the negative environmental and social impacts of tourism and being able to avoid the usual high costs of yoga retreats by contributing labour to the EYR, which depicts itself as fostering local community.

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<sup>87</sup> Although there is some variation based on the location, my wider research shows that generally speaking, all-inclusive yoga retreats and vacations run from US\$800-\$2300/week, although some ashrams do offer free or reduced cost retreats in the form of work-stay or *karma yoga* programs similar to the one offered at the Eco Yoga Retreat. Several tourists told me that they chose the EYR as their retreat destination because of the low cost of staying there. Importantly, this reduced cost is only offered to those who are able to commit to a minimum one-month stay. Shorter-term rates at the EYR are \$260-\$330/week, which is still much less expensive than most yoga retreats, but significantly higher cost than the work exchange guests.

## Conclusion 2

At the EYR both yogic conventions of holism and visions of sustainability emerged as an ethical responsibility to care for the self through a rubric of interconnection of all parts of the phenomenal world. This resulted in an ethical imagination of personal *betterness* put into place through ethical action geared towards enhanced mental, emotional and physical functioning. I contextualize this in terms of an articulation towards self-care as a reflexive orientation towards increased freedom, in which freedom is seen to be the basis of ethical action in the world (Faubion 2001). Thus the envisaged ethics is to move from a current state of limit, corruption, constraint and to *actively* transform the self and the environment in order to transform social relationships into more ethical forms.

The intentional ethics that manifest as a concern with freedom contrasts with the ethical discourse that frames the socio-economic system the EYR imports with it to Costa Rica. This is elaborated in how the EYR draws on consumer discourses of pleasure and ethics created by ecotourism and yoga industries to market itself to consumer-tourists, who envision their practices as both ethical and pleasurable through these discourses.

The EYR vision is to build community. But what is this community? Is it what one traveler termed, “like-minded souls,” who envision and invent themselves in relationship to 1) yoga, 2) the local landscape defined by rainforest and the Pacific Ocean, 3) and the drive towards ethical lives lived out through consumer choices at home? In this conceptualization there is a striking exclusion of the local Ticos (Costa Ricans of Spanish descent) and Indigenous Guyamí who have very limited access, if any access at all, to choice-based ethical consumer discourses of international travel vacations and self-betterment through yoga.

What is freedom then? Freedom for whom? And what if the freedom garnered through a practice of ethics results in the segregation of another? I suggest that the Eco Yoga Retreat in Costa Rica has as its other the local Ticos and indigenous Guyamí who do not have access to the ethos of *our lives* rendered more free through choice-based reflexivity of alternative lifestyle practice

offered at the EYR<sup>88</sup>. The Ticos and Guyamí inhabit the ecosystem the EYR dwellers seek to know and protect. They have at hand their own repositories of knowledge about the place and their own understandings of the patches of property now being opened up for foreign purchase and development.

The life envisioned in the EYR project is *different* from the lives of the Ticos and Guyamí, but *alternative* to the lives of other First World citizen-consumers at home. This is modeled to the tourists who learn how to live better as the EYR hosts live: eating healthy, practicing yoga, surfing every day, taking care of the environment, having the freedom to work only a few hours a day, and returning home during the rainy season when it's less desirable to be there.

Ethical tourism does not exist without its non-ethical counterpart. It is a discourse articulated by people who want to travel and see the world *and* who have the freedom and the resources to do so, not local peoples who are impacted in complex ways by tourist industries in which they contribute labour but rarely become tourists themselves. Ultimately for both tourists and the foreign owners of the EYR, the understanding of place and environment is envisaged through a lens of global tourism, and an ethics of care that is not locally derived but imported through first world ideas of self-betterment. Itself a complex ethic interpreted through a modern lens from the yoga traditions of India. In the EYR community, this all supplants a view of the specifics of Tico and Guyamí people and the places that they have made through long-term inhabitation of the area. This demonstrates that the ethics that play out in the EYR community are at tension with the visions of the community they seek to create and who is included in the vision-making. I do not know for certain how Juan, Rosa and Carlos felt to be part of the EYR “community,” but I do know that they were not participating in the reality shared by the tourists. In the vision of “To build community, to structure *our lives* around environmentally sustainable ethics, and to promote and provide a healthy yogic lifestyle,” the healthy yogic lifestyle was in fact perhaps the feature which excluded local people most prominently, perhaps because of the manner in which this lifestyle is

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<sup>88</sup> This is not to suggest that the Ticos and Guyami do not have choices while “we” do. Because I focused on the tourists and not the local people, I don't actually know what types of choices Juan, Rosa and Carlos had or felt they had to articulate freedom in their lives. But I do think there was a difference in terms of tourists being defined subjectively as consumers in global market places of choice, while it seemed to me that the local people had not yet been “developed” into articulating their subjectivities so completely through these modes (although the arrival of the tourist industry might have been changing that). There were very few options to act as consumers in the local EYR landscape. The nearby village had only one small store, and the town, a 2 hour walk away had a few more stores offering food, building materials and some household goods, but few local people had vehicles so traveling to shop was not something they engaged in often. While Juan, Rosa and Carlos were engaged in a cash economy in that they were paid wages for their work at the EYR, they also grew much of their own food rather than purchasing it and did not have a lot of opportunity to construct their identities by consuming goods that would demonstrate their subjectivity.

articulated as a consumer choice for self-betterment as I described in the beginning of this chapter, but also because yoga is not a neutral practice available for any one anywhere to simply take up and start performing, despite the fact that it may be promoted as such by its proponents. Promoting and providing a healthy yogic lifestyle is a value-laden and culturally-defined project that is defined by the desires of tourists who have been familiarized with definitions of health, yoga and lifestyle through mainstream cultural formats in their home countries: in popular media, through celebrity endorsement, and familiarity yoga studios as a feature of neoliberal urbanization. Yoga, as discussed throughout this dissertation is also a spiritual/religious practice with its roots in Hinduism, and as such is not religiously or spiritually neutral for those with other existing beliefs and practices. I can only speculate, but I suspect that it would seem not only culturally inappropriate, but spiritually inappropriate for Juan, Rosa and Carlos to all of a sudden start practicing yoga with the rest of the EYR community because of their already existing religious beliefs and practices. It would be worthwhile to interrogate this point more fully by spending time learning about Juan, Carlos, and Rosa's ideas about the yoga they are exposed to and how this relates to their larger spiritual worldviews, influenced heavily by the colonial pressures of Catholicism in the area, a question I did not take up in this project.

### **Conclusion 3: Tying things together**

In this chapter I explored the relationship between ethical elaborations of consumption and yoga, interrogating how the visual culture of contemporary yoga shapes the embodiment of yoga in consumer-mediated marketplaces and channels of yogic education in which globalized yoga is accessed. I described various parts of mainstream yoga culture through current social theories about ethical consumption and contemporary interpretations of yoga philosophy, exploring the potentials contemporary yoga offers as a path toward creating “better” lives for its practitioners, interrogating what kind of subjectivity is enlivened and encouraged through consumer lifestyle ethics of living a “good life” through yoga.

I suggested that in many ways ethical consumption in yoga hardens consumer subjectivities based on self-fashioning, and in other ways it offers a reactionary space in which a new kind of ontological politics arises, enlivening the type of ontological politics hoped for in posthuman discourses that de-privilege “the human in the constitution of life” (Lewis and Potter 2011: 9). I suggested that ethical consumption discourses promoted by the yoga industry shape the “taste” of yogic embodiment by “flavouring” the ethical precepts of yoga with the consumer fodder that contemporary yogis have been subjectified through in the first place, thus producing a new kind of

ethicalized yoga body; a body always moving towards its own progressive development in the perpetual embodied pursuit of a “better” life.

In *Ethical Encounters* I considered the potential for yoga to create a reactionary space by interrogating the lived and embodied ethics of an organic farm and yoga retreat in Costa Rica framed by the owners as a “sustainable living project,” in which the inclusion of yoga is used as a practical means through which to enliven contemplative knowledge forms and education of the senses towards developing a lived practice based on an ontological politics of human-animal-environment equivalence. I compared the ethics envisioned by the community with the structural reality supporting their vision of environmental sustainability: an international tourist industry reliant on tourist as ethical consumer. In addition to critiquing some of the implications of these emergent relations I also gave voice to the vision itself, the possibilities it offers as a process that leaves room for reflection, reconfiguring, and hope for more just ways of being in the world, even as these attempts remain entangled in the contradictory forces which they are a reaction against.

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation I summarize my findings and reflect further on the process of domesticating the body through yoga, posing questions for further research into some of the emergent political elaborations of yoga as a basis for posthuman collectivities.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion Leading to a Reflection on the Domestication of the Body in Yoga**

In this dissertation I applied anthropological and social science theories about religion, spirituality, embodiment, affect and consumption to the contemporary practices of yoga and yoga tourism. From these points of interrogation, I situated myself in certain positions from which to pose questions about these emergent globalized practices. Here I briefly restate the primary positions of encounter I proposed for elaborating an embodied analysis of yoga, and the questions developed from these standpoints. I then delve into a final consideration of the domestication of the body in yoga and what this might mean for considering the question I left open at the end of Chapter 4: Are there possibilities to move out of neoliberalism through the development of mindful embodiment as relational emergence? And does yoga have the potential for enlivening collective agency based on self-conscious embodiments of new types of affective relationality with the world? Or put differently, is it possible that new types of collectivities may emerge from the relationality invoked in yoga practitioners harnessing (“yoking to”) “life” forces to produce desired changes in the affective states of anxiety and stress that may block collectively motivated action through the individualizing pressures of neoliberalism?

The progression of the story I tell about yoga and yoga tourism roughly follows the narrative of: Chapter 1) the way yoga as a cultural practice emerged in India through processes of colonialism and modernity; Chapter 2) my position and methods in following yoga; Chapter 3) how yoga has continued its global expansion through more recent touristic practices; Chapter 4) the shifts in experience and perception that come about through embodying the teachings of commodified globalized yoga; and Chapter 5) the technologies of commodified globalized yoga.

### **Chapter 1**

In this chapter I outlined how the version of sacredness developed in contemporary yoga ties into ideas of universal spirituality, which were foundational in the development of modern yoga. In particular, I highlighted recent historical and anthropological scholarship on yoga that traces the modernization of yoga through central figures who synthesized and transformed Indian spiritual systems and practices in ways that were appealing to Western audiences. In this story certain figures played influential roles, particularly, Swami Vivekenanda and B.K.S. Iyengar (DeMichelis 2004), Swami Sivananada (Strauss 2005), Swami Kunalayananda (Alter 2004), Krishnamacharya and his disciples (among them Sri K. Patthabi Jois and Bikram Choudury) (Singleton 2010). Singleton

(2008, 2010) and DeMichelis (2004) also discuss how Esotericists and New Thought groups in Britain and the US supported and influenced these emergent modern syntheses of yoga, particularly among certain circles of the urban affluent middle class. In this chapter I also discussed how the spirituality we see in contemporary yoga relates to other contemporary spiritual orientations broadly described as New Age (Wood 2005); an ambivalent array of religio-spiritual orientations which draw inspiration from a wide variety of “Eastern” and Indigenous spiritualities that also have roots in Western Esotericism. I also described how nature spirituality (Taylor 2010) has come to define recent manifestations of universal spirituality, and as Albanese (1990) has documented, how this nature spirituality also identifies strongly (through cultural “borrowing” or appropriation) Indigenous religious practices and beliefs.

Position 1.1: Yoga is an ideal methodological tool for a sensually engaged anthropology, particularly because so many of its techniques involve reworkings and reengagements of the sensual body in cultural contexts in which yoga is relatively new so that the mind-embodied human organism experientially learns to know the world differently, and by so doing supposedly live differently in the world (or transcend the world as the case may be).

Questions: Does this enliven the type of magical consciousness imbued with aspects of dark green religion described by Greenwood (2005) and Taylor (2010) in relationship to other contemporary spiritual and religious social movements, and how does this relate to the cultural landscape of commodity capitalism and neoliberalism more broadly?

Proposition 1.1a: Considering yoga as a manifestation of magical consciousness and dark green religion sensibilities, the mind-body techniques of yoga may be a method through which to enliven a posthuman spiritual reformulation of society towards ecological harmony envisioned through a coevalness of humanity and the world oriented towards a new kind of nature, in which human subjectivity is unsettled to enliven a posthumanist ontological politics of human-animal-environment equivalence.

Proposition 1.1b: Simultaneously, aspects of contemporary yoga culture disseminated through mainstream channels of yogic education also demonstrate that yoga has become an aspect of green lifestyle movements that remain rooted in capitalistic logics of consumption. Contemporary yoga

can therefore be read as a range of contradictory methods for reclaiming the body for the self, with the *idea* of in so doing of reclaiming nature for the world.

## **Chapter 2**

In Chapter 2 I elaborated my methodological approach to gathering “data” for this research. I discussed: 1) autoethnography in considering how knowledge is produced in yoga through my own experiences, 2) multisited ethnography at various yoga tourism locales, including participant observation and interviews, and 3) the technologies of contemporary yoga culture, including yogaworlds online, yoga practitioners’ blogs, online commentaries, books, DVDs and other contemporary technological media. In this chapter I articulated the following positions, questions and propositions (some of the questions I leave open as they were explored in greater detail in following chapters of the dissertation):

Position 2.1: In both yoga and phenomenologically grounded autoethnography, experience produces knowledge, even though the nature of experience is understood to arise from different ontological planes. My embodied yogic transformations, minor liberations and conflicts, situated within the context of my own doubts and skepticism are thus reflexively lit to expose both the becoming of my yogic body and potentially other yogic bodies, and the embodied situatedness of myself as an “observing organism that has its history” (Roth 2005: 8). Autoethnography is thus employed as a feminist means of critiquing disembodied approaches to embodiment that leave veiled the role of subjective experience in ethnographic practice and the production of anthropological knowledge.

Questions 2.1: How does yoga play out in the highly gendered terrain of bodily experiences and how does this play into the shaping of subjectivity under neoliberalism? Does yoga, with its emphasis on connecting with your “true nature” and listening to the “wisdom of your body” reveal anything about gender? Does “knowing your body better” afford greater self-agency and health or do the mind and body resemble the neoliberal arrangement where the mind as expanding market moves into previously unconscious/uncommodified terrain in the body thus revealing evermore parts to watchful scrutiny? What kinds of meanings are shot through the bodies of practitioner/consumers of yogic knowledge in the social and material worlds of contemporary yoga in which the ontology of liberation in the *Yoga-sutras* intersects with a highly materialistic framework of consumption to produce embodied experiences that are meant to reveal to the practitioner the True

nature of being? How does the language of liberation outlined in *ancient* yogic texts help to support newly emergent visions of liberated selfhood? What do freedom, ethics and liberation come to mean in these contexts? What kind of persons do these contradictions produce? What does my body become as it moves, performs and embodies yoga practices and discourses? Does the nature of knowledge change as the connections between mind and body are refined through subtle physiological exercises? How much can my experiences stand in for those of others? What criteria do I then use to measure the closeness and distance between self and other?

Position 2.2: I chose to study yoga tourism outside of India to extend the question outward from the actions of yoga on the body to the actual opening of new yoga tourism markets in otherwise *unyogified* locales. In my consideration of yoga as a worldwide lifestyle movement, I follow Anderson's suggestion to distinguish (yoga) "communities" based on their "style of imagination" rather than their falsity or genuineness. This position aligns with Alter's (2004) assertion that "modernized" physical yoga is thought (and therefore imagined) to be a misunderstanding. Unlike many who dismiss contemporary yoga for its commodified aspects – and thereby make claims to an authenticity which exists prior to or somehow beyond (Alter 2004, Singleton 2008, 2010) – it is how this commodified imagining is produced and lived in relation to the knowledge produced by embodying yoga methods that I charted in my research. As yoga moves through technocratic visual fields of cultural imagining and takes on lives of its own, "local" yoga communities (as Alter suggests) are also reconfigured in relation. From my perspective the most interesting aspect of this reconfiguring is how "local" yoga communities take up and use the technologies of imagining yoga tourism and lifestyle yoga to concretize or elaborate their own, oftentimes-critical imaginings. In other words this research project provides an ethnographic account of the yoga tourism master narratives (Bruner 2005).

#### Questions 2.2:

What are the yoga tourism master narratives? How do they fit with other tourism master narratives? Did the enactors of globalized yoga tourism see the effects of participating in the spread of a foreign spiritual system to new cultural areas through their activities or did they understand their actions as benign through their own beliefs that yoga increases health and wellbeing and is therefore good for *every-body*?

Proposition 2.2: It seems, akin to colonialist practices of discovering uncharted territories, the more obscure the location the more interesting to draw tourists in: *to practice yoga where no (wo)man has practiced before!* For the most part I found that very few of the people even thought about these questions but when pressed mostly saw their activities as benign and thought that all people should practice yoga, which they saw as primarily a therapeutic practice, that (self)discovery, no matter the territory, was an embodied right. For many people, particularly women, yoga is a project of reclaiming the body and by so doing reclaiming the self, of realizing the gendered goals they have for themselves as moral and social beings.

Position 2.3: I approached the online yoga world as naive ethnographer, following threads and links and recording what I found, or perhaps more appropriately, what found me, taking an approach, as Reed does to blogs (following Gell) towards an “interpretation of text ‘as if’ it were an object with a practical mediatory role (and not just a form of symbolic communication” (2005: 224). Online elaboration of yoga tourism provides rich ethnographic detail for comparison across sites, allowing a much broader picture of yoga tourism than I could have hoped to gain from the financial and temporal limitations of visiting a limited number of sites in person.

Questions 2.3: What is the practical mediatory role of yoga blogs in the creation and elaboration of yogaworlds and lifestyle yoga? What styles of imaginings exist in the relationships, roles, and models elaborated in online yoga texts? Who makes use of these pages and who contributes to them?

Proposition 2.3: More than one participant told me that the primary reason she felt safe traveling abroad alone for a yoga vacation, was because she was able to do research and planning online at home. In this way, the idea of maintaining a sense of control while “traveling” the Internet at home can be extended to the physical reality of traveling, in which many unexpected elements of travel are tamed by the tying of disparate instances of movement away from home into a progressive string of anticipated arrival. Although not all yoga tourists planned their trips to yoga sites abroad in this way, most did, particularly those who both found excitement in and experienced anxiety about foreign travel. At all but one of the sites I visited, where the majority of guests personally knew the owners of the retreat, planning for and setting up a yoga tourism excursion was done by guests exclusively online. Yoga blogs also provide a forum for yogis to learn how to behave as yogis. Yoga bloggers become yoga cultural experts and critics who sift through the constantly emerging and sometimes overwhelming developments in online yoga worlds, yogic consumer products, yogic bodily

“technologies,” i.e. postures, practices and styles, detail the activities of yoga celebrities, and organize information about how yogis might want to identify with potential yoga experiences such as conferences, studios, retreats, teachers and festivals. Yogic knowledge is then extended to cover not only the performance of bodily techniques but also developments in the global yoga cultural sphere and “awareness” of where to situate oneself in that sphere in terms of identifications with a particular style or styles of yoga, brands of yoga products such as mats, blocks, clothing and magazines, yoga-related musical artists, and yogically appropriate food and health products that define an intentional and ethical (elite) yogic lifestyle.

### **Chapter 3**

In Chapter 3 I presented several “Case Studies” of yoga tourism/retreat/holiday locales. In this chapter I articulated the following positions, questions and propositions:

#### **Proposition 3.1**

The yoga retreat offers a place to regenerate, to build energy that becomes depleted when there is not enough time or space to care for the self continuously in the course of daily life. The theme of stress was a binding feature between different yoga retreats and was identified as a major factor for seeking retreat and regeneration by many of the women I met who travelled to practice yoga. There seems to be a shared hope among yoga travelers of going away as a means of garnering strength for building relaxation that can be brought home as a means of coping with the everyday. Yoga as a means of managing stress then becomes tacked on to already existing ideas of what one is looking for on holiday.

Even though local surroundings are emphasized as an attraction to yoga holiday goers in the online shopping portion of booking a holiday, I found that very few yoga holiday guests ventured out much. When they did it was usually in groups organized by the yoga holiday managers as shopping excursions in nearby towns and villages for gifts to bring back home. Being away from home removes the pressures of relating emotionally to family, work and social life, being not just away from home but in a foreign country in many ways removes pressure to relate personally with others. What I mean by this is that the identity of the tourist is in some ways highly scripted. Short-stay tourists are treated in a particular way by locals who rely on them economically, and for the most part the yoga tourists seemed satisfied to consider locals primarily as foreign sellers offering something they might not be able to get at home, something they could take home with them to

symbolize the place they had been. I observed very few attempts by yoga tourists to relate to people outside the yoga retreat in any kind of personal way or with any real interest. I found that, for the most part, yoga holiday goers relate primarily to each other, the Yoga Teacher(s), and somewhat to the retreat/holiday personnel while away.

The yoga holiday is a place for women to feel taken care of, a time outside of the daily routines and demands of life. With needs such as food and domestic maintenance being cared for by others, women then became able to care for their physical, mental and spiritual being through yoga in a neutral space designed to effect feelings of relaxation and possibility. The theme of rejuvenation was a prominent one. Many women felt that in taking time out to care for themselves and regroup their energy, they would be better able to go back home and do the sometimes draining and difficult work that was required of them in responding to their lives.

### Proposition 3.2

While I draw a distinction between retreat and holiday styles of yoga travel, both types rely on similar language and online technologies to talk about the experiences one can expect to have through traveling to participate in yoga-centered itineraries, and in this sense both types participate in the consumer frameworks of advertisement and marketing in a competitive yoga tourism market. There seem to be two emergent yet fundamentally different goals for different “types” of yoga tourists, the first being transformation and the second being escape. Roughly, the different yoga venues correspond to the desires of the aspirant (who wants to transform) or vacationer (who wants to escape). I also suggest that the lines are not as clear cut as that, and that certain people might both seek to transform through yoga or escape for a while with yoga at various points in their lives.

### Proposition 3.3

I suggest that through the use of online “shopping” for a yoga retreat, that in the planning of the vacation, “home” is also made *away* through imaginative acts of exploring the yoga tourism field. These imaginative acts include deciding where one may go and envisioning the types of experiences one hopes to have on vacation through yoga tourism discourses, particularly online, but also in print and by talking to other travelers. The “oscillation” that takes place between home and away occurs *throughout* the journey. Tourism producers capitalize on this process by producing master narratives that contradictorily promote tourists’ dual desires for safety and comfort with titillating experiences of the exotic. These titillating experiences are made safe through marketing practices that emphasize transformative experiences in idealized terms. Thus one will “progress” on her spiritual

journey, developing herself through her yoga practice, getting “better” at yoga by buying into a *unique experience*, a possibility for the self that exists nowhere else (and is available everywhere in limited supply!).

#### Proposition 3.4

In most cases, yoga tourism is about making a consumer choice for health, whether that is envisioned as physical or spiritual. Many times this consumer focus on health is also coupled with a focus on environment, such that moral discourses of self-care and environment-care are enlivened in the marketing of ethical tourism to potential travelers. Yoga vacations are vacations you can feel good about. They are a way to demonstrate your interest in taking care of yourself and the world.

#### Proposition 3.5

In my research I found that recreation and devotion were often intermixed, as were pleasure, excitement, the exotic and devotion. This is particularly so for travelers who conceptualize a spiritual connection with nature and tend to see sacredness in landscape (Timothy and Conover 2006).

#### Proposition 3.6

The experience with one yoga traveler’s life-threatening injury at Holistic Energy Spiral in Italy highlighted some of the major contradictions that lie at the heart of yoga as a commodified path of healing. After Beatrice injured herself, the other yoga tourists shifted their focus from seeing the HES as “brilliant” to seeing the owners of the retreat as corrupt in their real commitment to spiritual healing. This corruption was discussed in terms of a profit-driven motive, that the architecture of the farmhouse which had “caused” Beatrice to fall was dangerous rather than rustic, because it was designed to maximize occupancy and therefore profit, without regard for tourist safety. This conflict has to do with brushing yoga tourism’s commercial aspects under the rug when it delivers on its promises of health, wellbeing, pleasure and spiritual experience, and highlighting the inherent corruption of its commodification when the holiday does not deliver on its promises somehow. This conflict surfaced more than once during my field research.

#### Proposition 3.7

The yoga holiday I attended in Bulgaria, which I called *Spirit Yoga Villa*, highlighted the play between authenticity and absurdity in yoga tourism. This theme emerged at two of the yoga holidays I

attended, the one in Bulgaria and the one in Turkey, where in both cases the yoga practice and the holiday seemed to be in tension. I suggest that this occurred because of a tension in what Bruner (2005) calls “master narratives,” in which the yoga tourism master narrative of relaxation, self-discovery, a unique experience, and union with nature did not fit with the locale in which owners attempted to enliven it.

In both cases the absurdity came from introducing a practice that is meant to increase connection into a locale in which disconnection between tourists, “nature” and locals was forefront. This clearly marked a weeding out of desirable elements of connection, in which “real” fulfillment of the yoga tourism master narrative could occur only without the presence of both local people already dwelling in the area and other tourists participating in tourism in non-yogic ways. The presence of these “others” and their lifeways seemed to disrupt the possibility of fulfillment of the yoga tourism narrative. In Bulgaria and Turkey yoga was clearly an imported system of self-knowledge, and while generally practitioners see yoga as a means of increasing embodied sensual awareness, these yoga tourism locales made it clear that this awareness required certain blinders on for authenticity to be achieved, tuning into only desired elements of experience and purposefully excluding others. Yoga tourism in these locales became a way of creating enclaves for yogic unfolding rather than forming a possibility for cross-cultural connection.

### Proposition 3.8

Like other commodities in the marketplace, different brands and styles of yoga appeal to different “types” of consumers. Yoga holidays, like holidays in general, correspond to what Bourdieu defines as distinctions of taste that are demonstrative of class differentiations. This became clear on the yoga holiday I went to in Turkey which attempted to market itself as an elite experience, but which did not live up to the expectations of wealthier tourists who felt they had been “cheated.” Yoga tourism consumers must therefore learn to be savvy in sorting through the surplus of possible yoga holiday experiences, identifying, usually through websites, but also with a previous knowledge of geographical location, what type of travel experience they are likely to have somewhere. Yoga tourism locales are expected to represent themselves in identifiable ways so that they achieve satisfied customer reviews to then attract more tourists. This requires experience on the yoga tourism owners’ part to correctly identify to its yoga consumer base and be realistic about its place in the yoga tourism marketplace in order to achieve customer satisfaction and remain viable as a business. These rules are not implicitly understood as yoga tourism locations almost ubiquitously market themselves as *unique, transformative, relaxing, and life-changing*, thus building up yoga tourists’

desired expectations by selectively highlighting ideals (and by doing so creating and perpetuating ideal yoga tourism narratives) and excluding factors that may not fit these ideals.

### Proposition 3.9

There was a commonality in the way yoga tourism locales operated as a business/domestic model at all yoga holidays I visited in Europe and many holidays I identified through online research. The yoga holiday, or as Mike at *Spirit Yoga Villa* put it, “a holiday with yoga in it,” then provides, if not a business model for British expatriates owning property abroad, a means (if not necessarily a profitable one) of supporting their lifestyle in a foreign country. These small business owners who use their home as a locale for yoga tourism then market and draw in tourists from Britain to support their desired lifestyle abroad. For the most part, yoga tourism locales outside of India are small businesses started up by Western foreigners interested in yoga, individuals with the freedom to set up where they choose to, as opposed to people from India who might find it much more difficult to make such “choices”. They come into being in places where local infrastructure for tourists already exist.

### Proposition 3.10

The yoga tourism location I visited in the French Pyrenees highlighted how different tourism metanarratives that define who travelers are before they ever arrive in a locale, frame the relationship between tourists and locals, and shape the way that tourists then interact with localities. The different interactions with place between yoga holidays located in different locales with different histories of tourism also highlights discussions raised in anthropology about different types of tourists. It brings up the question of what kinds of tourists yoga tourists are and how they fit into an already defined tourism field in the places yoga holidays are popping up. I drew on categories in the anthropology of tourism to suggest that there are a number of traveler narratives that yoga tourists can identify with and be thought about in relation to, particularly the categories of pilgrim, spiritual/religious tourist, and adventure tourist.

### Proposition 3.11

The snapshot I provided of the Yoga Conference and Show that I attended in Vancouver epitomized some of the strangely conflicting messages coming out of a mainstream yoga culture that draws heavily on ethical consumer lifestyle discourses. In this Case Study, and in Chapter 5, I suggested that in many ways yoga narratives are just re-envisioned elite consumerist discourses

grafted on new moral fields of eco-consciousness and imagined social responsibility (Lewis and Potter 2011). I highlighted how self-vigilance as social activism in yoga is problematic in terms of wider neoliberal discourses of flexible and adaptable personhood and how this logic enforces the idea that if consumers just stop consuming “bad” things, then they and the world will be better. I suggested that this places a contradiction at the heart of the entire yoga industry, which is built on the same logic it attempts to subvert and critique through practices of embodied self-awareness. Embedded in consumerist logic as a form of elite consumption, yoga becomes a moral tool for professional women to achieve good health, good bodies, and a good sense of self. It helps women feel good about themselves and their place in the world. I asked whether yoga then makes us self-focused in a purely corrective way? And whether this can offer us freedom? Is freedom in this sense simply the freedom to feel good or is there more to freedom than that? I suggested that these questions seem to be best contextualized through discussions around ethical consumption and that although I certainly do not begrudge people wellbeing, I feel a good deal of discomfort around what this wellbeing often seems to mean in a larger social and political context.

#### **Chapter 4**

In this Chapter I explored yoga as an embodied system of praxis through which practitioners develop corporeal knowledge and affective awareness of the self. I used the work of contemporary yoga scholar/practitioners to sketch out emergent interpretations of the *Yoga Sutras* through an ethics of relationality. I suggested that this ethics of relationality can be understood through recent considerations of what physicist Karen Barad terms “agential realism,” and the way that affect and embodiment have recently been elaborated in the social sciences. I used the diffractive possibilities and disturbances offered by these theoretical frameworks to elaborate my own sensate experiences of yoga autoethnographically.

#### **Position 4.1**

I considered the question of how some contemporary approaches to yoga might be understood as a *chance for life* (after Haraway 1988) through contemporary approaches to the question of human life variously termed posthumanist and new vitalist. I suggested that viewing yoga in this way might be a way to explore the relationship of practices of the self to what Freeman (2011) terms a *neoliberal esprit* without reducing them to simple neoliberal processes. I articulated this as a political aim, a feminist attempt to imagine possibilities out of neoliberalism through the development of mindful embodiment as relational emergence, a *coevalness* of body, mind and world. From this position I set

out to address the contradictions inherent in how feminist goals mesh with the requirements of neoliberalism, exploring the ways that women are willing to and, indeed, *want* to do unpaid work on the self as well as in society, much of which may be affective in nature, towards supporting political goals of social justice fostered through freedom envisioned through self-realization and desire to enliven areas of life not governed by market logics.

#### Question 4.1

How do we situate feminism expressed by women such as myself who practice yoga as a means of exploring the body as a site for being in the world? If practices such as yoga are simply manifestations of the requirements of the neoliberal labour force for flexible, self-reflexive citizens, what should we make of our desires to know ourselves better by practicing yoga as a means towards our bodies *and* as a potential source from which to combat the oppressive and individualizing forces of neoliberalism?

#### Proposition 4.1a:

As I see it, there are two broad strains of manifested outcomes currently at play in “yoga culture.” One is an outcome directed towards freedom, and the other is an outcome directed toward self-betterment. The first delves deeply into forces that generate the potential for yoga as a bodily practice, and the second is largely determined by the play of social forces expressed on the discursive plane. The distinction is important for how neoliberal logic is played out in the pursuit of self-cultivation through yoga. I do not mean to suggest either that these outcomes are mutually exclusive or that one necessarily leads to the other. More likely the impulse towards self-betterment, through neoliberal market logics that play out in authoritative discourses of self and manifest as desires for self-betterment in order to more perfectly enact visions of a successful entrepreneurial *esprit* described by Freeman (2011), is always in tension with ongoing considerations of bodily freedom that might be manifest through yoga.

Both outcomes operate at the level of affect, though I suggest that in the first case, the embodied agent begins to engage consciously with a transformation of affect experienced as emergent relationality, while in the second case, the affective pressures of neoliberalism orient the body towards progress envisioned as acquisition of body-self ideals enlivened through consumerist discourses.

#### Proposition 4.1b

Whether it is their intention or not, my research subjects are participating in spreading neoliberal market logics to new locales when they choose to open yoga retreats or travel to locations that have no previous history of yoga tourism as yoga tourists because, as Bruner (2005) suggests, they cannot help but participate in tourism master narratives when they travel to new places. This is both because their affective sensibilities have been heavily influenced by neoliberalism and because locals perceive them in certain ways, regardless of their own intentions when they are traveling abroad. It is also because yoga tourism entrepreneurs usually capitalize on the “yoga tourism” master narrative of relaxation, nature, and a unique experience by combining this narrative with other local tourism master narratives such as “Mediterranean seaside resort tourism in Turkey,” “slow-food tourism in Italy,” “pastoral tourism in the French Pyrenees,” “sunshine on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast,” or “ecotourism in Costa Rica.”

#### Position 4.2

Yoga Teacher and psychotherapist Michael Stone (2009), suggests that yoga practitioners will need to do constant work to find balance in themselves, and to pose questions about what balance is and how it could be enacted to combat *powerful* social discourses that create experiences of separateness and isolation from one another, from our bodies and from the larger world. Yoga is a practice because it is ongoing. The goal is not to create new discourses of power, but rather to continue to question those that exist, how they solidify in our bodies and minds. That is a lot of work. It is never-ending, although there are places of rest in it, also places of connection and relation. The ethical precepts of yoga set a path that is meant to provide guidance in a world that is ultimately understood as suffering. Yoga is the constant work of choosing not to become caught up in the suffering world but to dwell in and foster non-suffering in one’s engagement with self and other beings. This is what is meant by an ethics of relationality.

In developing this position I drew on Ortner’s (2006) discussion of Bourdieu, in which she suggests that within practice, agents have power as well as being constrained by it. I harkened back to Haraway (1988), who reminds us that it was feminists who pushed for and insisted on embodiment in the first place, articulating the power of partial perspectives. I suggested that we consider partial embodiments undertaken by women in response to neoliberal forces not as mere inscriptions, but as reroutings of power, hoping to contribute to Haraway’s call that “[f]eminists have to insist on a better account of the world” that we “need the power of modern critical theories of

how meanings and bodies get made, *not in order to deny meanings and bodies*, but in order to *build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life*” (1988:579-580, italics mine).

#### Question 4.2

Does yoga have the potential for enlivening collective agency based on self-conscious embodiments of new types of affective relationality with the world?

#### Proposition 4.2a

In this consideration, the impetus towards self-development in neoliberalism may have the potential for the harnessing of life forces towards collective goals of life building that incorporate new kinds of social, cultural, environmental, intimate, political, and potentially economic relationships among connected agents. I suggest that in crucial ways, yoga offers us the possibility to “build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway 1988:580), although I remain skeptical of the way yoga tourism relies on consumer logic and contributes to the spread of elite ethical consumer moralities that may re-inscribe social inequalities.

I suggest that the possibility of a *chance for life* emerges because through the methods of yoga one comes to experientially learn that there are other forces at play in embodiment, among them the physiological possibilities of the human organism to respond to stresses and tensions to which it is subjected as well as the rich cultural tapestries from which persons may draw in interpreting new situations they encounter. What I mean is that I interpret the stories of many of the women I met who embody neoliberal forces by virtue of living in relation to them, as demonstrating diffractive negotiation (if not sometimes outright resistance) of neoliberalism through self-body practices that produce embodiments of affective relationality rather than ego-centric individualism, and in which self-fulfillment is not an expression of economic desire but of a desire to cultivate vital relationships with the world.

By posing the question of how yoga may offer bodies a *chance for life*, I suggested that one of the problems with analyses that focus exclusively on neoliberalism as a subjectifying force is that they oversimplify the way affect operates in people’s lives to produce particular embodiments of neoliberal forces that are not necessarily “inscribed on bodies,” as Freeman (2011: 355) suggests, but may actively be rejected, reworked, or subverted through affective practices focused on intimate self-understanding.

#### Proposition 4.2b

I suggest that some people may be using yoga as resistance to the affective forces of neoliberalism because of the affective practices with which yoga is directly associated to produce a sense of embodied freedom that may combat the docility Bourdieu (1998) suggests is produced by neoliberalism. I suggested that we consider the possibility that yoga generates *freedom from* egoic attachments as a means through which to enliven alternate ways of being-in-the-world through bodily-grounded collective practices directed towards the world as a whole, including other humans, animals, and “nature.” By undertaking certain mind body practices the senses become attuned to different states of being, to how affect operates in relation to different sets of stimuli: thoughts, emotions, physical sensations. By attuning oneself to basic stillness, yoga and meditation practitioners begin to see how habitual bodily and mental habits developed in life, usually through unconscious processes related to socially-mediated forces, create certain affective results. The process of “awakening” to these processes is the yoga practice of relating differently to the sensate world, and of acknowledging that this world is always in motion, that it is not fixed or static and that therefore self should better be understood as process of communication rather than solid entity. Previously held conceptions of self and other become increasingly experienced as manifestations of relation and reaction conditioned through socially prescribed structures invested in shaping and producing various permutations of identity. As one realizes how *one’s self* and one’s understanding of reality is not an innate reality but a set of conditioned responses to interpreting the world, these structures of self-belief become thoroughly unsettled.

I suggested that in orienting yoga towards a process of engagement with the world, rather than a means of transcendence (i.e. means of progress out of the world), contemporary yogis are practicing a lived approach to embodied relationality posited in recent elaborations of affect, neurobiology, posthumanism, ecological visions of Dark Green Religion, Magical Consciousness, “agential realism,” and new vitalism.

This proposition has led me to pose the question of whether it is possible that new types of collectivities may emerge from the relationality invoked in yoga practitioners harnessing (“yoking to”) “life” forces to produce desired changes in the affective states of anxiety and stress that may block collectively motivated action through the individualizing pressures of neoliberalism. While I offered some tentative examples about how these types of collectivities may be emerging around yoga in this dissertation, I also emphasized that I would like to conduct further research on this question in my postdoctoral research.

### Proposition 4.2c

I also suggested that as yoga has proliferated under neoliberal conditions it has undergone mainstreaming, and that many of the yoga “styles” that have manifested may amplify, rather than attenuate, egoic attachments, thus perpetuating the self-developing isolated individual characteristic of neoliberalism. I termed these manifestations of yoga the *freedom to acquire* model. I suggested that examples of the individualizing affects of yoga can be seen in prominent approaches that promise *betterness*, usually through fitness as the base point for an idealized, “blissful” life in which all desired elements of successful living become energetically attracted to you because of the care you show your body.

### **Chapter 5**

In Chapter 5 I explored the tensions between Proposition 4.2b and Proposition 4.2c. I suggested that in many ways ethical consumption in yoga hardens consumer subjectivities based on self-fashioning (what I referred to as the *freedom to acquire model*), and in other ways offers a reactionary space in which a new kind of ontological politics arises (which I termed the *freedom from egoic attachment* model). I suggested that in the second case yoga offers an embodied psycho-philosophical technique for enlivening the type of ontological politics hoped for in posthuman discourses that de-privilege “the human in the constitution of life” (Lewis and Potter 2011: 9). I suggested that the practice-based philosophy of the *Yoga-sutra* is interpreted by some contemporary practitioners as a method for recuperating life by “killing” the subject, creating meaning and experience *beyond* the death-of-self-as-consumer-subject through a recuperation of *body as life*, thus suggesting a very post-modern form of reincarnation. Life-of-body, I suggested, is also life-of-world in modern interpretations of yoga that align with the ontological politics of nature spiritualities that (ideologically at least) do not privilege human subjects through socially defined identities such as gender, nationality, sexuality, race, religion or (supposedly) class. I also suggest that ethical consumption discourses promoted by the yoga industry shape the “taste” of yogic embodiment by “flavouring” the ethical precepts of yoga with the consumer fodder that contemporary yogis have been subjectified through in the first place, thus producing a new kind of ethicalized yoga body. I also demonstrate that while prolific, this yoga body is contested and that the ethical precepts of yoga are in turn used as a critical point from which to reflect on the highly commodified culture of contemporary yoga.

Position 5.1: Contemporary yoga offers salvation through movement, movement of the body and movement of the mind through social fields of self-articulation in consumer societies where the basic modes of life are sustained through consumer acts.

Questions 5.1: What does a yogic lifestyle consist of and what should a yoga body look like and feel like to properly achieve this desired life? Who is responsible for creating, maintaining and perpetuating these ideals?

Proposition 5.1a: The woman who gracefully embodies the majority of yoga images by masterfully performing yoga *asanas* is the idealized yoga aficionado: fit, flexible, wealthy, beautiful, not only proprietor of a glowing outer beauty, but through yoga also possessed of a radiant inner happiness; she embodies the ideal characteristics of grace, blissfulness and “effortless effort,” living out her destiny of a good life. Her perfected being then shines into the world and makes the world a better place because her best self is also a compassionate, caring, generous self who wants to care for the world as she cares for herself through yoga. The idea is that every woman has this ideal woman somewhere inside her and that yoga is the means through which to find that woman. While in yoga discourse each and every body is its own unique body with a different version of the ideal woman, the ideas about who this ideal woman is and what she looks like are in fact very “slim.”

Proposition 5.1b:

In the second part of Chapter 5 I went back to my “Case Study” of the Eco Yoga Retreat in Costa Rica to consider the lived and embodied ethics of this “sustainable living project.” Through this consideration I demonstrated that yoga is not a neutral practice available for any one anywhere to simply take up and start performing, despite the fact that it may be promoted as such by its proponents. Promoting and providing a healthy yogic lifestyle is a value-laden and culturally-defined project that is defined by the desires of tourists who have been familiarized with definitions of health, yoga and lifestyle through mainstream cultural formats in their home countries: in popular media, through celebrity endorsement, and familiarity yoga studios as a feature of neoliberal urbanization. Yoga, as discussed throughout this dissertation is also a spiritual/religious practice with its roots in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism and as such is not religiously or spiritually neutral for those with other existing beliefs and practices.

## Reflecting on Relationality, and Becoming a Magical Yogic Cyborg through the Domestication of the Body

Alter uses Marx's theory of fetishism and Haraway's cyborg ontology (which has been highly influential to new vitalism and studies on affect) to understand premodern *batha* yoga and the *Yoga-sutra* anthropologically. He suggests "yoga fetishizes the body as a whole and parts of the body in relation to one another" (Alter 2006: 764), and looks to Haraway to deal with what he sees as the failing of both Marx and Durkheim's theorizations of religion to adequately address embodied consciousness:

[Marx] confused religion with the essence of human consciousness and human experience, just as Durkheim rhetorically blurred religion, collective consciousness, and the ability of the sociological imagination to comprehend 'all known reality'. For both, albeit in different ways, 'the social' – if not society in fact – came to define the clearest expression of human consciousness. What is not problematized in these socio-centric formulations is the nature of the self in relation to consciousness, even though, on some level, it is the self – as the consciousness of a material being squatting in the world, to adapt Marx's rhetoric – that seeks its true reality. The problem of consciousness is the problem of human identity, and the question of human self-consciousness relates to the **political problem of our relationship with the world at large**, including, but not extending well beyond, **the narrowly circumscribed conceit of our species-specific social relations** (2006: 766, bold emphasis mine).

Through techniques aimed at gaining greater control of the body and the body's functioning, the body and parts of the body in relation to one another become fetishized, they also, however, provide the conscious human organism with knowledge about the nature of its own experience.

Singleton (2005) takes issue with the fact that *batha* yoga was about control whereas Modern Yoga is about relaxation, but I suspect that Alter would apply the fetishization of the body and its parts to both of these techniques of bringing the various parts of the body into consciousness. What I suggest through a reading of Alter is that the different outcomes sought do not necessarily contradict, in that the goals of both 'relaxation towards life-affirmation' and 'control towards liberation from suffering' in contemporary and premodern yogas are to gain truth about experience through self-consciousness of the body, albeit towards different imaginings of social value. The drivers that frame the desired outcome of either control (medieval *batha* yoga) or relaxation ((post)modern yoga), and perhaps ultimately salvation through conscious knowledge of the embodied self, give insight into the socio-political framers that shape the seekers' transformative impulse. Alter suggests that the *batha* yogi sought an "embodied literalization of alternative reality" (2006: 764) envisioned in magical and mystical terms. I would argue that many practitioners of contemporary yoga seek much the same, although what that alternative reality is, and the embodied sentience they are working with, may bear little relation to those of the medieval *batha*

yogi (as Singleton (2010, 2005) argues). One of the questions that drove me to interrogate contemporary yoga anthropologically (as well as the embody it practically) was the question of what kind of alternative reality is being sought through yogic self-transformations. Alter offers an interesting approach to this question through his comparison of the *batha* yogi with the postmodern cyborg:

The structural similarity between a ‘person’ who has perfected the techniques of yoga and a ‘person’ who is a cyborg can be outlined schematically: the hybridity of personal, alchemical, and transcendent selves in yoga compares directly with the cyborg hybridity of animal, human, and machine entities. Where the cyborg blurs natural boundaries and confuses categories, the yogi blurs the boundaries between biology, cosmology, and consciousness (2006: 767).

Alter offers that yoga is non-religious because it: 1) conceives of spirituality as process rather than outcome, 2) considers humans and god to be of the same material nature, with god being (after Eliade) an archetype of enlightenment for the yogi/ni, and 3) is antithetical to ritual because it is “self-contained, internalized, and self-referential” (2006: 768):

What yoga seems to do is establish a transcendent union between the core of personal being and the absolute extent of existential being as such...For the practitioner of yoga, being alone is the structural equivalent of being part of a social community for which the meta-referent is religion. The yogi sits alone in the full and critically important axiomatic sense of that term as it stands in direct opposition to all other signifiers that are inherently social – this is the essence of *kainalya* (aloneness: Ultimate Reality). But – and it is a critical but – the all-alone adept is where he is only in relation to the world at large: that is, in relation to everything. Otherwise his being alone would have not point of reference; no real meaning (Alter 2006: 768)

Alter discusses the relationship between *maya* (illusion) – a metaphysical conceptualization of materiality as unreal – and *moksha* (liberation) – a state of enlightenment in which the unreality of the world is realized. He suggests that it is the materiality of the body which provides the means of achieving its own transcendence. A point Alter makes, which I wish to take up, is that the goal of medieval *batha* yoga - *moksha* as liberation - “leads not to the transformation of a person in space and time, but to the transformation of space and time” (2006: 769). In reading this I questioned whether it was perhaps most poignantly here in the realm of what-is-being-transformed, that medieval *batha* yoga and Modern Yoga differ theoretically. In most forms of modern practice, it is the body itself, and the self which is seen to dwell in that body, which are being transformed... and I would suggest, as Singleton (2005) does in regards to early forms of Modern Yoga developed in synthesis with the New Thought movement, that for the most part this transformation is not towards some enlightened form of liberation free from materiality (illusion which causes suffering), but rather towards a bettered materiality in the discourses of value defined by the society in question. I outlined in this dissertation that these discourses of value follow two particular paths in

contemporary yoga: 1) towards the cultivation of desired states of betterness envisioned through discourses of happiness, body cultivation and health, and 2) towards enlivening intimate immanence understood as a death of the subject in which the yogi, as an always processual being, lives as the *becoming of many* in a *coeval* relationality with the world. In this sense then, Alter's definition of the medieval yogi's purpose is turned on its head – it is the transformation of the person in otherwise unchangeable space and time (which are understood as quantifiable objective (albeit, agentic) realities), and not the transformation of space and time (as only magically transformable), which is being sought through Modern Yoga. This connects back to what Olma and Koukouzelis identify as immanence:

there is no outside to the process, no supplementary dimension that could transcendently determine the multiplicity of relations. Even time and space must not be understood as external to the relations that make up the process. Process is not movement *in* time and space. 'Instead', as the new vitalists put it, 'time and space change according to the specificity of an event. The event makes the difference: not in space and time, but to space and time'... in other words, time and space are intrinsic modalities of the process, determined by the changing constellations of the relational multiplicity. An event is thus constituted by the emergence of a constellation that in some sense introduces a difference into the process" (2007: 3-4).

Alter (2006) suggests that through attention to the body in *hatba* yoga techniques, many of which have not been transported through to Modern Yoga practice – such as the stopping of the flow of semen outward from the penis and a redirection of this vital fluid inward and upward through the body to the crown of the head – but many of which have, such as *asana* and *pranayama* – the body's sensual and experiential capacities are altered.

As Eliade points out, *asana* and *pranayama*, the primary techniques of hatha yoga, are designed to be contrary to the nature of normal human action and experience. *Asana* and *pranayama* purposefully abolish the 'modalities of human existence'... Significantly, this happens through the body, as the body becomes increasingly concentrated (Alter 2006: 778).

Part of the embodiment that occurs through these practices, and particularly *asana*, suggests Chapple (2011) is an embodiment of the more than human world, including both animal and plant forms, which are reflected in various poses that emulate animals, such as locust (*salabhasana*) and dog (*svanasana*) and plants such as lotus (*padmasana*). Although Singleton (2005, 2007, 2010) has made convincing arguments that suggest that many of the techniques of modern yoga have little to do with the concepts of liberation Alter (2006) describes in *hatba* yoga, I would suggest that the ongoing innovations in modern yoga may reflect creative re-engagement with some aspects of *hatba* yoga excluded in the early modern forms described by Singleton. I make this suggestion because the growth of interest in yoga has not just occurred amongst mainstream practitioners, but amongst practitioner scholars who have taken it upon themselves to describe and uncover the origins and

permutations that have occurred in the formulation of modern yoga. In creating a field of Modern Yoga Studies, authoritative knowledge about contemporary and premodern forms of yoga is produced and filters out into the domain of wider practice. A questioning of authenticity may then lead to renewed efforts at translating ancient texts, and a renewed effort by ‘serious’ yoga practitioners to educate themselves in theory, including translated *ancient* yogic texts as well as newly produced works like Singleton’s *Yoga Body* (2010). For this reason I believe that Alter’s considerations of fetishism in *hatha* yoga may also be useful in clarifying certain aspects of the transformations that take place in yoga, albeit through a lens that considers the reformulations it has undergone in different social contexts.

Alter suggests that the body is used in yoga postures to produce an illusion of an illusionary world (*maya*). Furthermore, Alter suggests that secrecy plays a key role in the power of *hatha* yoga as “the only mechanism for the representation of the inherently obscure and unignifiable truth about Ultimate Reality” (2006: 779). If one experiences the powerful release of *kundalini* energy in the body, then one is able to understand, but otherwise remains seated in ignorance. Alter suggests that it is *secrecy itself* and not the actual secret that gives yoga its power. Until one knows one must always strive towards that which is unknowable unless known. While I would suggest that the majority of practitioners of Modern Yoga are not after enlightenment (although some undoubtedly are), there remains a strong sense in the yoga world of progressing in yoga towards an ideal. What this ideal is undoubtedly varies from practitioner to practitioner (particularly in terms of gender and age), but as I suggested in Chapter 5, there are powerful discourses at play in determining what is possible through yoga, and these discourses do shape what people might imagine for themselves through yoga. Books, DVDs, websites, celebrity Yoga Teachers, and Yoga Teachers in general suggest that there is always somewhere beyond where you currently are, that you might get to through yoga. Often this is couched in terms of one’s “true nature” or “essential self,” a self hidden from everyday experience because of the vagaries of everyday social life and the dis-eases of the mind and body that accompany the stresses we must fend off to make our way in the modern urban worlds. These bear some similarity to the type of ideal self identified by Singleton (2007) in New Thought, but there are particular postmodern developments that have emerged as well, particularly in terms of the type of individualized personhood and reflexive self-development imagined under flexible capitalism.

While Singleton (2005, 2010) and Alter (2006) draw distinctions between medieval or traditional forms of yoga, and Singleton in particular shows how the yoga we see today is a modern invention not descended from older Indian forms such as the *hatha* yoga Alter (2006) describes,

these forms do play a large part in the inspiration for Modern Yoga. Indeed, in another article Singleton (2008) discusses how the *Yoga-sutra*<sup>89</sup> (YS) is used by modern yogis as an authenticating discourse. He suggests that, “the YS has come to symbolize, among other things, the ancient authenticity of modern aspirations and the fidelity of contemporary practices to the “yoga tradition,” in spite of the often-radical divergences between text and praxis” (Singleton 2008: 77). The interesting point about all of this for me is that texts, like the *Yoga-sutra* and the *Hathayogapradipika*, do have such spiritual currency among modern practitioners. Work like Singleton’s demonstrates the history of ideas shaped by social and economic forces such as colonialism in the spread of texts like the YS, which provides us with a valuable reflection point from which to observe how these texts are embraced and elaborated through modern yogis’ desires perhaps to connect with alternative authoritative discourses than the ones on offer in everyday social life.

Alter is interested in how consciousness is expressed through a yogic worldview from an anthropological vantage, and as such his approach aligns with Greenwood’s (2005) suggestion to examine how consciousness is altered and affected in what have been described as New Age reformulations of religious practices drawn from the cultural traditions of anthropology’s exotic others (which I discussed in Chapter 1). Alter suggests ultimately that we view yoga as “a product of human consciousness, [which] is linked to the truth of experience, rather than to Universal Truth” (2006: 764). In what ways then are modern forms of yoga linked to particular prevalent truths of experience? What types of Universal Truths are being drawn on and constructed through these practices? These are questions which I explored in this dissertation and articulated propositions to in the previous sections.

Singleton seems intent to discount claims made by proponents of Modern Yoga that it is 1) based on tradition, or that 2) it is a form of unadulterated wisdom, a pre-modern and therefore somehow innocent or ‘natural’ way of being that can offer universal and basic human truths that have been corrupted by modern capitalism. He wants to demonstrate that yoga is a cultural product, and that yoga in the West – in a consumer society – is a product of that society as much as it may have originally ‘belonged’ to another time or culture.

By tracing yoga’s history, Singleton demonstrates that much of the symbolism that yoga offers to modern practitioners is the consumption of an exotic otherness, something ‘natural’ that was lost or hidden, and that this lost or hidden knowledge lies innately within the embodied self. The message offered through Modern Yoga is that we have become separated from our bodies and

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89 Singleton uses the spelling *Yogasutra* (2008: 77).

our selves through the vagaries of modern capitalist society, but that it is possible to reclaim our innate goodness, wholeness, and natural state of being through yoga. This is the salvific function Singleton refers to, and this is where yoga ties in closely with the way that Greenwood describes magic and nature spirituality. Both contemporary yoga and nature spiritualities are concerned to find an embodied connection with 'nature.' The nature modern yogis seek to connect with through their bodies competes with authoritative definitions of nature as either 1) an objective set of principles to be known according to scientific investigation or 2) an economic resource to be privately owned, exploited and traded. Greenwood argues that an alternative approach prevalent among many practitioners of nature religion is that nature is "a source of emotional identification, relationship and tradition," or as "nature mysticism whereby nature has spirit and is worthy of reverence and awe" (Greenwood 2005: 3). The body in modern yoga is implicated in an analogous way to how nature is empowered in nature spiritualities. In the discourse of modern yoga, *the body is nature*, to be reconnected with, while the mind is the encultured sphere of false identifications which must be overcome in order to break the unhealthy disembodied habitual states of being developed in modern society's impoverished view of the body.

I began this research with the question or the inkling that yoga, as an embodied system of praxis, could inform an anthropology of the body; a means of knowledge acquisition *about and through* mindful embodiment. I was inspired by my mutual study of yoga and anthropologies of the body that have increasingly turned analysis towards the lived body as locus of interrelationality with world. At this phase of my project, however, I remain doubtful and have become more skeptical of yoga's ability to inform anthropology. While both are interested in self-study, through the premise of self-reflexivity in anthropology and *svadhyaya* as one of the five *niyamas* of yoga, the self that is studied in yoga and the one that is studied in anthropology remain fundamentally different kinds of selves. It is the confusion between them that leads the anthropologist to think that the yogic self can inform anthropological discourse. After much study, scrutinizing, transformation, opening, closing in, letting go and tuning in to the body in yoga I am left with the realization that while anthropology can provide insight into the social manifestations of yoga culture, it only serves to delimit the flourishing of yogic knowledge within the body because of its reliance on the intellect as primary source of knowing. Taking up this endeavour should clarify that the anthropological discipline remains an anthropological discipline, even when it encounters other forms of knowledge which may seem to destabilize it, such as the embodied discipline of yoga, which offers its own complex of mind, body, world-knowing through various techniques of self-study. If anything, the irresolvable contradictions I experienced between my yoga practice and my anthropological training

served to show me that both yoga and anthropology are different kinds of authoritative discourses and that anthropological tools remain grounded in the primacy of intellectual, mind-based knowledge, despite growing interest in skill, materiality, and embodied ways of knowing. Through my anthropological inquiry of yoga, there were difficult periods in which anthropological discourse dominated the yogic inquiry, its premises delimited yoga's flourishing within the body because the anthropological gaze occurs within the mind, and staying within the analytical mind is a barrier to yogic growth. Can one undertake a yogic inquiry of anthropology? The answer I believe is that yoga is not interested in anthropology, even though both are interested in self and other, and both take up the question of *what kind of world is this we are living in?* Alter (2004), discusses this when he describes his contention that anthropologists employ *mimetic skepticism* as a theoretical approach to yoga.

When I began this project I premised it as “an embodied anthropology attuned to lived experience.” I thought that by turning the anthropological gaze inward to the sensations enlivened by yoga, I could in some way help to explain what was going on in my body and in the bodies of other yoga practitioners, when they practiced the bodily techniques of yoga. I was interested in how changes in the body enlivened through yoga result in changes in the existential experience of self. Aligned with this I wanted to probe further into anthropological terrains such as space and place and political economy to consider the wider socio-cultural contexts within which these bodily and self-transformations are taking place. What I sought was a melding of yogic insights into the body and self with an anthropology interested in “embodiment and experience as the existential ground of culture and self” (Csordas 1994). One of the problematics to this study immediately arose in the question of how to deal with the manifold texts on yoga that exist, both ancient and contemporary. The issue was that I did not want to explain what yoga is, or what it had been, particularly since I do not read Sanskrit and am an anthropologist rather than philosopher, historian or scholar of religion. I then became interested more in how particular texts are used by contemporary Western yoga practitioners to create meaning and direction and in some cases lend authenticity to the yoga they are practicing and the language they use to describe their experiences (see Singleton 2008 and 2010).

Here is one discovery I made: an embodied anthropology attuned to lived experience could best be conceptualized as an intellectual project of self through mind-led embodiment. The tools of ethnography as participant-observation are more theoretically expounded on the observation side. How often do we really know about the participant experience of the ethnographer? The participant experience is meant to inform the observation, to render it more authentic particularly because of its embodiment, but these experiences are as personal as they are social, and the personal

aspects are rarely included in anthropological analysis. Therefore when I found myself trying to be a participant-observer through an autoethnographic lens on my own yoga practice, what I found was that I was primarily observing and recording, observing and remembering, observing and recording during the process that was meant to be experiential. What this became (in contrast to when I practiced yoga without it being an anthropological project) was a scientific self-exploration and self-making activity through the intellectualization of yoga discourse; the mind attempting to *apprivoiser* (domesticate, know by taming) the body. This produced disruptions in my sensate experiences of yoga because of a penchant towards thinking the mind can know the body objectively, that is, when I began to recruit anthropology to understand yoga, it began to feel as though domestication was a one-way deal in which one party emerged as sovereign. Anthropological thought is rooted in rational theories of mind and consumed primarily through textual consumption. Although much of this theorization critiques authoritative scientific objectivity, in a visceral sense, I ceased to feel open with yoga and started to feel my body primarily as suffering, as victim of institutional discipline, subject to neoliberalizing discourses that seemed to be inextricably connected to the global production of yoga. Was I actively participating in my own neoliberalization? Was I becoming a better (alienated/oppressive/oppresed/flexible) subject by embodying yoga?

At this moment in this ongoing process, let me say that my insight into domestication led me to ruminate further on what I felt about *apprivoiser*, which felt that it also had an intimate rather than purely uni-directive power-over and therefore somewhat sinister order when I thought about it as *apprivoiser* rather than “domesticate.” Thinking about the word in French led me back to the English. I did not like the word “tame,” although I think that the first time I wrote it, that was the sense I was feeling; that the mind as agent of surveillance unwittingly coerced into self-monitoring through techniques of governmentality (Linke 2006, Murray-Li 2007) was in fact trying to tame the body, to produce an ideal passive (although desiringly sexualized) female subject through the technologies of yoga: to turn something unruly and potentially dangerous into something civilized, workable, and hot-damn if it wasn't sexy too! My ruminations were inspiringly *affected* when I picked up the new volume on anthropologies of the body and embodiment edited by Mascia-Lees (2012). The concept I was looking for was affect. Delving into the anthropological and social scientific literature on affect led me to what I had originally been affected by as an anthropologist *practicing* yoga, and that is talked about in different language in contemporary yoga circles, namely that domestication is a two-way deal. Knowledge is transformed; the mind begins to sense the generation of intimate knowledge from the body.

A few days after writing that what the mind begins to do is to consciously (that is

intentionally) *apprivoiser* the body in yoga, i.e. to know it better by domesticating or taming, which I have just revised as a process of “generating intimate knowledge,” I read Despret’s (2004) account of how to interpret past psychological understandings of influence through theories of affect as rich fields of being and unfolding. She develops this position through a critique of Rosenthal’s famous experiment that deceived students into *producing* bright and dull rats. Despret suggests that although his intention was to *demonstrate researcher bias* (and not produce bright and dull rats – Despret’s interpretation) based on pre-existing belief in ‘real’ genetic differences between rats, what he actually demonstrated were his own biases about ‘reality’. She suggests that this experiment tells us about Rosenthal’s conceptions of a ‘reality’ which was not, “a world enriched and created by these differences,” but rather that his intent was to bring light to them in order “to mark them off as parasitic supplements that seriously contaminate the purity of the experiment” (Despret 2004: 118). Despret instead argues that the bright rats were produced by students’ belief that their rats were bright – a belief *authored* by Rosenthal’s *authority* – which led to the development of 1) bright rats and 2) students as competent experimenters. Through this process both the rats and the students became affectively transformed, that is *domesticated* to one another:

These emotional relations, made of expectations, faith, belief, trust, which link each rat to each student, disclose the very essence of the practice: this is a practice of domestication. As long as this practice proposes new ways to behave, new identities, *it transforms both the scientist and the rat*. Both the student and the rat transform the practice that articulates them into what we may call an ‘anthropo-zoo-genetic practice’, a practice that constructs animal and human. The rat proposes to the student, while the student proposes to the rat, a new manner of becoming together, which provides new identities: rats giving to students the chance of ‘being a good experimenter’, students giving to their rats a chance to add new meanings to ‘being-with-a-human’, a chance to disclose new forms of ‘being together’ (Despret 2004: 122, italics mine).

What I am interested here is the way Despret describes the process of domestication, a process of becoming together through affective engagement of the embodied interactions between students and rats that *transform both the student and the rat*. Embodied interactions are affective, that is, they are emotional relations. These relations, suggests Despret, can produce trust and contribute to a new conceptualization of belief:

This trust that links together students and rats, this trust that produces opportunities and domestication, may now allow us to redefine belief... *a belief is what makes entities ‘available’ to events*. It is because the students believed that their rats could be bright that both of them became available to the transformation of their identities: being good and bright rats on the one hand; being careful (in the most literal sense) and accomplished experimenters on the other (Despret 2004: 122, italics mine).

For the moment I am moving outside of critiques such as Singleton’s about where contemporary yoga actually comes from and what kind of logic it operates under (agreeing that the cultural

contexts are embedded in consumer logics) to unravel questions about how yoga produces belief in transformation through what I suggest can be understood as a process of domestication of the body by the mind which in turn affects a domestication of the mind in terms of the body which is experienced as an affective embeddedness of self in world through processes of mutual becoming. In this domestication, this *apprivoisement*, yoga practitioners experience themselves as ‘entities available to reality’ understood as unfolding events, *wanting* to be transformed by the intimacy of this relationship.

What yoga then offers is the potential for the transformation of a body shaped by a world one does not relate with, a world that very narrowly structures movement, sensuality, identity, becoming through powerful discourses such as neoliberalism that seem to offer a Reality and Truth with no way out, life-impoverishment in the pursuit of constant work geared to never-ending accumulation to feed a fear that can never be sated: that there is never enough, that we are not really getting anywhere, that we will die, that the world will go on without us, that we are nothing more than what we are, and that the only way to fill this void is to feed desires enlivened by the mechanisms that perpetuate the myth that somehow if we continue to accumulate, that things will progress, become better, that we will perfect ourselves through domination after domination of land, lack, and undesirables, turning everything to...?

Through this research on contemporary yoga and yoga tourism I have offered some positions, questions and propositions, which I outlined above. What I am interested in pursuing further, the question that I left open at the end of Chapter 4, is what kind of collective relationships are produced out of intimacies of coevalness, of *becoming together* enlivened through yoga? I have outlined the limits of certain developments of yoga as a technique for heightening the productivity of self-reflexive, savvy, flexible consumer citizens, elite “aficionados,” for whom yoga offers a path to betterness. I also suggested that I feel that yoga tourism in general contributes to the spread of this mode of consumer subjectivity to the locations where it is exported because of the ways in which yoga tourism and tourism master narratives are structured for yoga travelers before they ever leave home. However, I also suggested that some yoga retreats, such as the Eco Yoga Retreat in Costa Rica, and the Yasodhara Ashram in Canada, offer potential alternatives and opportunities for playing out new modes of social, ecological and spiritual *becoming together*. I also described that through yoga people are pursuing possibilities of being-in-the-world as a process *coevalness* through an ethics of relationality that sees all life as interconnected. In future research, and in continued yoga practice, I am interested in considering more fully questions of whether there are possibilities to decolonize and de-neoliberalize through the development of mindful embodiment as relational

emergence, of “yoking” to “life” forces to produce desired changes in the affective states of anxiety and stress produced through strong discourses that serve to sensually separate us from one another and the worlds we inhabit, creating energetic callouses through which we cease to feel our collective suffering.

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## **Glossary**

ahamkara (ego): a Sanskrit term, translated as ego, is seen to be an aspect of mind, one which seeks to be seen as static, atomized and real, but which is ultimately an illusion, subject to fluctuations of desire and aversion which create suffering. Failing to recognize the nature of the ego to identify with its desires and reject that which it qualifies as undesirable, tricks the embodied being into thinking s/he *is* her identifications. Being attached to egoic identifications also fosters the false belief that we are separate isolated beings, and fails to recognize how heavily we are swayed by a world in which we are constantly in relation. In a sense, egoic attachment creates static representations for conditions which are constantly changing and fluid.

apprivoiser/domesticate: a process of *becoming together*, a relational recognition of entanglements and emergences.

asana: physical posture; the third limb of Patanjali's eightfold path in the *Yoga-sutras*

bandhas: usually refers to what are called "energetic locks," "seals," or "bondages." Primarily talked about in terms of the root banda: *mula bandha*, the abdominal lock: *uddiyana bandha*, and the neck or throat lock: *jalandhara bandha*. These physical practices are usually used in physical yoga (*asana*) and breath practices (*pranayama*) to manipulate *prana* or affect the energetic state of the body.

bramacharya: in the YS, one of the *yamas* or ethical precepts, the discipline of chastity, although see Chapter 1 for a discussion of ambivalence around bramacharya in contemporary yoga

coevalness (of humanity and world): spiritual reformulations of society that emphasize ecological harmony, in which humans are embedded within nature and in which nature has agency. Coevalness emphasizes that as humans are in the ecological world and always in relationship, being shaped and shaping through life as practice of becoming. This also applies to Csordas (2009a) conceptualization of re-enchantment under globalization, in which current processes in global life be understood as "a multidimensional process, with religion, popular culture, politics, and economics as necessarily coeval and intimately intertwined" (2009a: 3). Thus coevalness emphasizes the *many of becoming* talked about by new vitalists, in terms of how socio-political processes are intertwined and emergent with ecological and spiritual worlds.

class: in this dissertation I am mostly interested in class as defined by consumption, this marks a shift in some anthropological analyses of economics from analytical questions of production, materialism, exploitation, class conflict and social relations to questions of consumption, culture, identity and social movements. My analysis of spirituality/religion, body/embodiment, consumer aspects and ethics of yoga culture and technologies of dissemination of knowledge about yoga is an attempt at an analysis of the social fields of force (after Roseberry) in yoga tourism and contemporary globalized yoga. I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of distinction in describing the cultural aspects of how yoga has been developed as a suite of products and services for middle class consumers.

enlivening: When I use the term enlivened or enlivening, I usually refer to imbuing knowledge with the reality of life, that is, that we are embodied living organisms and that our biology and sociality are intimately connected. Enlivening connects to process, inserting a reminder even in a static text, that processes are always ongoing and changing and that life processes are relational. Thus an enlivened way of seeing posits that we not view external "objects" as static entities which we observe, but also as in processes of change based on our interactions with them and their interactions with other forces (i.e. geologic, social, ecological, cultural).

ethics of relationality: Yoga is a practice because it is ongoing. The goal is not to create new discourses of power, but rather to continue to question those that exist, how they solidify in our bodies and minds. That is a lot of work. It is never-ending, although there are places of rest in it, also places of connection and relation. The ethical precepts of yoga set a path that is meant to provide guidance in a world that is ultimately understood as suffering. Yoga is the constant work of choosing not to become caught up in the suffering world but to dwell in and foster non-suffering in one's engagement with self and other beings. This is what is meant by an ethics of relationality.

Through this lens yoga can be viewed as generating *freedom from* egoic attachments as a means through which to enliven alternate ways of being-in-the-world through bodily-grounded collective practices directed towards the world as a whole, including other humans, animals, and “nature.”

*hatha yoga*: usually refers to the branch of yoga which emphasizes physical practices of *asana*, *pranayama*, and cleansing techniques *shodhana*

*Hatha Yoga Pradikīpa*: one of three classical manuals on *hatha yoga* (from the 14th Century)

*kundalini*\*: Feuerstein uses the combined term *kundalini-shakti*. He refers to it as “coiled power,” a concept drawn from *tantra* and *hatha yoga* in which spiritual energy, or serpent power is understood to exist “at the lowest psycho-energetic center of the body” (*muladhara chakra*), and which must be awakened and rise through the other energetic channels of the body (*chakras*) to achieve enlightenment.

*mantra*: the yoga of sound vibrations. Mantras are usually Sanskrit passages or invocations which are chanted in repetition

*nadis*: subtle channels along or through which the life force (*prana*) circulates

*niyamas*: the second limb of yoga defined in the YS, often translated as self-restraint or self-discipline.

*prakriti*: material essence or Nature, exists in opposition to *purusa*

*pranayama*: the fourth limb of yoga defined in the YS, refers to breathing techniques or practices

*purusa*: transcendental Self or spirit, exists in opposition to *prakriti*

*raja yoga*: from the *Yoga-sutras* also known as Classical Yoga”. Raja yoga is often seen to emphasize more the meditative aspects of yoga, or the upper limbs of yoga, while *hatha yoga* emphasizes the physical practices.

*Raja Yoga*: Vivekenanda's 1893 text (see DeMichelis 2004 for historical details).

re-enchantment of the world: a term proposed by anthropologist Thomas Csordas, elaborated upon in Csordas (2009a and b) in which he discusses re-enchantment as a renewed emergence of religion and spirituality under globalization. This re-enchantment, according to Csordas, contradicts predictions made in the early 20th century that modernism and scientific rationalism would lead to the abandonment of mysticism and religion.

*sakti/shakti*: the feminine aspect of the Divine energy.

*sanyas*: yogic vows of renunciation.

self: The self in this dissertation is taken into question by applying yogic psycho-philosophical notions of the self as an emergent aspect of a larger universal animating principle to question dualistic models of self in which self and other are opposed to one another, and from which conceptions of the rational individualized self as the locus of citizenship, labour and consumption has been theorized in much Western thought. From the point of view of the YS, the self is a unique manifestation, but is not ontologically separate from the whole of life, therefore the dualistic separation between self and other is an illusion based on false identification with the individualized aspects of the self (see *purusa*, *prakriti*, *ahamkara*).

*shatkarmas*: yogic techniques of purification (from Muktibodhananda 2009 [1985])

*moola shodhana*: rectal cleansing by inserting a turmeric root or middle finger into the anus)

*vastra dhauti*: abdominal cleansing by swallowing and then extracting through the mouth, a long thin length of cotton cloth (from Muktibodhananda 2009).

*tapas*: heat, also translated as austerity

*yamas*: the moral or ethical precepts of yoga, the first limb of yoga in the *Yoga-sutras*

*Yoga-sutras*: attributed to the sage Patanjali, the source of Classical or *Raja* yoga (thought to have originated somewhere between 100 and 500 BCE).

## Appendix A: Cast of Characters<sup>90</sup> at Each Yoga Location

### **1) Eco Yoga Retreat in Costa Rica:**

(Those I describe in greater detail are those I got to know a little better)

#### Managers:

*Martie:* 26, artist, surfer, and organic gardener from Florida, co-manager of the EYR with her partner Zeke.

*Zeke:* 26, surfer, permaculture enthusiast, and lover of D.I.Y. movements, also from Florida, co-manager of EYR with Martie.

#### Owners:

*Marcel:* 30-something, founder and previous owner of the EYR, yoga teacher from Quebec, Canada.

*Simon:* 30-something, Austrian, previous work-stay participant at EYR, now owner.

#### Staff:

*Paulo:* 30-something?, Tico, longtime local resident skilled in many aspects of local low-impact farming, building and horticulture. Caretaker of the EYR with wife Lila.

*Lila:* 30-something?, Tica, longtime local resident who cooks and cleans at the EYR, caretaker with Paulo.

*Juan:* early 20s, *Guyami*, works casually at EYR, usually construction or maintenance

#### Yoga Teacher:

*Michael:* 60-something, yoga teacher from Florida. Return teacher who teaches at EYR and holds private retreats there at least once a year. Life-devotee to yoga, while not an initiate at the time I met him, Michael was a follower a specific guru, sometimes touring with her across the US. Michael also practices Thai massage and has extensive yoga teaching experience, his yoga classes were taught primarily in *Sivananda* and *kundalini* styles.

#### Guests:

*Ariel:* late 30s, from Victoria, a free spirit who has travelled much and has many skills in different areas of work, was at the EYR with her partner, Drake. Primarily at the EYR to be somewhere warm to practice yoga, as a time of healing and preparation to go back home and take care of her ailing mother. More than ten years practicing yoga.

*Drake:* early 40s, from Victoria, traveling with Ariel for surfing and yoga, longtime meditator, new to yoga.

*Peter:* early 30s, from Brooklyn. Worked in investment in New York until the economic recession, had done some training in massage therapy and was planning to move to Arizona after several months backpacking alone through Mexico and Central America following the loss of his job. Peter was single and uncertain about the direction of his life when I met him. He felt dissatisfied with his previous work and was searching for a more meaningful profession. Peter had been practicing yoga for some time and preferred more athletic styles, such as Ashtanga and Power Yoga. Peter was at the EYR because he needed a break from continual traveling and was happy to have somewhere to rest for a month while he figured out his next move.

*James:* late 20s, my roommate while at the EYR, a geologist from New York. Like Peter, James lost permanent work with the recession and had since used the time he had on hand to develop his passion for photography. Also like Peter he was backpacking alone through Central America, uncertain of when he would go home and what he would do when he got there. James had some work in photography in Manhattan, particularly with weddings and commercial photography. James had little experience with yoga and was primarily at the EYR because of the surfing, cost and farming. Later I learned from him that his time at the EYR convinced him that he wanted to abandon a career in geology he was dissatisfied with to pursue his passion for photography.

*Fred:* late 30s, Anchorage Alaska, a return guest to the EYR, Fred was on the second half of a two month stay when I met him. Fred was a piano teacher and trained as a yoga teacher and the only person at the EYR who was fluent in Spanish. He was also fluent in French and a lover of games. Fred organized dice games, card games and various board games every evening at the EYR, recruiting guests into hilarious company. Fred was widely traveled and was in Costa Rica primarily for surfing and yoga.

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<sup>90</sup> All names are pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy. There is no cast of characters for the Ashram because I did not collect information about people there.

*Justine*: early 30s, New York, former model thinking of returning to modeling after being dissatisfied with administrative work in an NGO. Justine was at the EYR alone on a one-week holiday to try to gain clarity in making career-related life decisions.

*Emma*: early 30s, Montreal, photographer and digital media specialist. Emma had been practicing yoga for about 5 years and came to the EYR on a one-week holiday alone, primarily for the yoga.

*Gretchen and Phillipa*: early 20s, from Austria, in Costa Rica from Austria for two weeks, one week of which was spent at the EYR for yoga, both university students.

*Marta*: 60 something, Brooklyn, retired teacher, stayed in Costa Rica for a few months, one of which was spent at the EYR. Marta moved to a rented house down the hill near the beach a few days after I got there. She complained that she was not physically able to continue walking up and down the slopes for her chores at the EYR.

*Wendy*: early 30s, Boston, yoga teacher and social worker. On a month-long stay at the EYR with her partner Max. Wendy taught yoga at an inner-city community space in Boston for adolescent girls, many of whom she told me were overweight and had very little experience with making healthy choices for their bodies. Wendy firmly believed in the ability to change and better one's life through yoga, as she had been able to overcome substance abuse and chronic back pain through her yoga practice.

*Max*: early 30s, Boston, Wendy's partner.

*Carissa*: early 30s, Ottawa, yoga teacher and server. Carissa originally came to the EYR as a backpacker, traveling with a friend she had met in a nearby town. They came to the EYR on a whim because they found it in their *Lonely Planet* guide. Because the yoga teacher who was supposed to come was unable to make it, Carissa ended up staying on for almost 3 weeks teaching yoga. She had been teaching yoga for only about one or two years and taught primarily *Hatha* and *Yin* styles of yoga.

*Amanda*: 30, Michigan, ex-soldier in US Armed forces. Amanda had just finished her second tour in Iraq when she came to the EYR for a month long work-stay. She was leaving the army and returning to university to finish a psychology degree, and using her time at the EYR as a transitional period between these two phases of her life. Fairly new to yoga.

*Amber*: early 20s, San Jose, CA, university student. Amber was on two separate one-month work holidays at organic farming projects in Costa Rica. She had two courses left before finishing her undergraduate degree. She had secured a job with Google upon completion of her degree but was taking time off before she finished so that she did not have to enter the work force right away after graduating. New to yoga, very interested in organic farming.

## 2) Holistic Energy Spiral, Italy

### Cast of Characters:

#### Owners:

*Maya and James*: Founders, owners and residents of HES, mid 30s, with two young children:

#### Staff:

*Franco*: Manager, early 40s, Italian

*Marta*: Administrative Assistant, late 30s, Italian

*Jenna*: Chef, originally from Denmark, living in Italy for many years, early 50s

*Martina and Dominique*: Housekeepers, Italian and French

*Basilio*: Groundskeeper, early 20s, Italian

Bodyworkers (massage, bio-energetic massage, acupuncture):

*Arturo*, 40s, Italian

*Arianna*, 40s, Italian

#### Yoga Teacher:

*Dairen*: Yoga teacher/spiritual guide, early 30s, from New Zealand, global earth citizen

### Guests:

*Beatrice:* mid 30s, British: the one who fell, lives on a farm with husband and stepchildren  
*Elka:* television producer, mid 30s, Austrian, the one with the car  
*Liza:* early 30s, works administration for a company that develops and sells military equipment, primarily suits to wear while deactivating bombs, Italian Canadian, Beatrice's bunkmate and the only one of the guests who could speak Italian  
*Amanda:* early 30s, university student, British, one of my bunkmates  
*Andrea:* early 30s, managing consultant, British, my other bunkmate  
*Patricia:* 67, retired teacher and mother of two grown up sons, British  
*Wendy:* early 30s, mother of 3, married to film producer, British  
*Clara:* early 40s, mother of 2, married to lawyer, British  
*Luisa:* 50s, office administrator, British  
*Gwen:* late 20s, advertising design, British  
*Pia:* early 40s, British  
*Amy:* mid 20s, university student, British, had been to a retreat with Dairen before  
*Britt:* late 20s, worked for BBC doing research for a popular TV program, British  
*Krista:* late 20s, life coach, British  
*Tara:* late 20s, British, at HES with Kate  
*Kate:* late 20s, British, at HES with Tara  
*Anne:* late 20s, economist working for UN, Norwegian  
*Angelique:* me, early 30s, Canadian graduate student

### **3) Spirit Yoga Villa Bulgaria**

#### Owners:

*Mike:* 50s, retired civil servant, cook and business, including online advertising and bookings. *Jessa:* early 30s, Yoga Teacher and massage therapist

#### Yoga Teacher:

*Jessa*

#### Pilates Instructor:

*Pia:* early 50s, fitness instructor in various modalities for many years. Certified in pilates, Body Pump®, Body Balance®, Zumba®, and Chi Ball®, various styles of aerobics, and was thinking of also becoming certified as a Yoga Instructor. Pia also had her husband, *Frank*, along with her on the yoga holiday. He did not take part in the yoga but liked to chat with us around drinks and meals poolside.

#### Guests:

*Bea:* 60s: from Chesterfield, lecturer in psychology at the Open University, also trained as a Pilates Instructor  
*Emmy:* late 60s, from Chesterfield, postal worker  
*Pete:* 50s, from Chesterfield, car mechanic, lover of steam engines and model steam engine trains  
*Betty:* 50s, from Chesterfield, social worker  
*Hazel* and her elder sister *Tia:* 75 and 82, from Chesterfield area, both retired, having worked in hospitality and service industries  
*Clara:* early 20s, in the fashion industry, from London, on a girl's holiday with Mindy and Paula  
*Mindy:* early 20s, nurse, from London

*Paula*: early 20s, administrative assistant, from London

*Frank*: Pia's husband, 50s, British.

*Angelique*: anthropologist studying yoga tourism

#### **4) Hotel Yoga, Turkey**

##### Owners:

*Sam and Mehmet*, Wife and Husband: (late 30s with two children who were often around the yoga deck). Sam was a hairstylist from Britain and Mehmet originally from Side, Turkey, where the yoga holiday was located. The couple met in Side when Sam went there on holiday, and then moved to Britain for ten years. In 2009 the family moved back to Turkey so the children could attend better private schools than the couple could afford in Britain.

##### Yoga Teacher:

*Tam*: early 30s, British of Indian background, in Turkey for a month teaching a series of one week yoga holidays at Garden Yoga (GY). In Turkey with her one-year old daughter and father, who provided childcare while Tam taught yoga.

##### Guests:

yoga tourists from Canada, UK, US and one Canadian who lived in Turkey:

*Brenda*: early 50s, Yoga Teacher from Scotland

*Jackie*: early 60s, school teacher from England

Max and Jen: early 20s, from Michigan US, living in Georgia. Max was teaching at an International School and Jen worked for a non-profit organization doing development work.

*Jaeda*: early 30s, Yoga Teacher, model and actor, from Canada but living in Istanbul with her Turkish husband. Jaeda and I met in Victoria during a Yoga Teacher Training program and became friends. She wanted to accompany me on a yoga holiday in Turkey, which was one of the reasons I chose Turkey as one of my field site locations.

*Angelique*: anthropologist studying yoga tourism.

#### **5) Maison dans la Campagne, France**

##### Owners:

*Edla and Scott*: married couple from England, mid 60s, bought old farmhouse in Southern France as retirement property and converted the old outbuildings to guest cottages. Edla is certified with the British Wheel of Yoga and has been teaching yoga for 20 years. Scott is responsible for business and booking side of the yoga holiday. Scott designed and did most of the renovations on the property, and maintained the extensive property with the help of one employee.

##### Housekeeper/Groundskeeper:

*Magdalena*: Danish, early 30s. Magdalena was the only employee at Maison. She worked at Maison during the summer and returned to Denmark after the tourist season. Her work consisted mostly of housekeeping and some grounds keeping. She also spent time socializing with the yoga guests. Her room was in the guest quarters, not in the main house where Scott and Edla lived.

##### Yoga Holiday Guests:

*Marie*: 40s: British expatriate living in Paris

*Jenna:* 70s, American from New York, massage therapist and longtime yoga practitioner

*Betta:* early 30s, Irish, office administrator

*Gretchen:* 30s, German art teacher living in Spain with her Spanish husband, seven months pregnant during the yoga holiday, this was her second visit to Maison

*Sella:* 40s, British

*Petra:* 30s, British

*Rafael:* late 30s, Canadian, my partner at the time, accompanying me for the last portion of my fieldwork in Europe

*Angelique:* yoga tourist and anthropologist

## **6) Yoga Conference and Show**

### Organizers:

Yoga professionals

### Teachers:

High profile and celebrity yoga educators from across Canada and USA

### Participants:

Largely yoga professionals and dedicated yoga practitioners. Many of the participants were themselves yoga instructors, yoga studio owners, and other professional organizations or businesses in some way associated with yoga (such as clothing companies, companies who make and sell yoga props, consulting firms to help develop yoga businesses, and companies involved in the health sector).