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Tracing an American Yoga: Identity and Cross-Cultural Transaction

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology

Joint PhD Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Christa Schwind

June 2015

Advisor: Dr. Jacob Kinnard

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at the creative identity of an American yoga, both rooted in its Indic origins and radically transformed in its U.S. manifestations. It traces the broad historical transactions of yoga in terms of East and West, Secular and Religious, authenticity and idealized conception, as well as provides a critical historical genealogy of Anusara and Sridaiva yoga. Furthermore, the project relates yoga to the identity, power, and knowledge dynamics of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern histories and interpretations of yoga and Tantra, multiple theoretical discourses, and the embodied practices of individuals within Indian and American contexts.

I argue that there is a unique and polysemous yogic identity in America, and that this identity has developed from a messy process of transaction between Indian and Western modes of being and knowing. Furthermore, the current Americanized culture of yoga brings along with it narratives of specific value. American yoga displays a particularly consumptive quality of yogic lifestyle that reflects a cultural atmosphere of reinvention and a merging of profit and personal purpose. American yoga's identity today is entrepreneurial, branded, business oriented, and marketed for consumption.

This dissertation shows how the American yogic identity is in flux, continuously fracturing and multiplying into various and novel understandings that relate to yoga's past and to the market value for today's American consumer. It examines the moving nature of yoga in the American landscape as what Jared Farmer calls a "center of

creativity” and as a display of excess and choice. The discussion of yoga is further located in John Friend’s styles of yoga and/or lifestyle practices, Anusara and Sridaiva, as they both redefine and further remove yoga from established Indian markers of identity. My locations as American yogi, as comparativist, as ethnographer, and as a Bachelor of Science in Advertising and Marketing also situate this analysis.

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Chapter One: Tracing American Yoga: What Is Going On?



Figure 1. Image of ‘Shiva’ and ‘Shakti’ from an Anusara Newsletter

Introduction

On an official Anusara yoga newsletter,¹ a white Western Shakti dances with a dark-skinned Shiva who bears a striking resemblance to the Na’vi from the movie *Avatar*: What exactly is going on here? This dissertation addresses the characteristics of American yoga and investigates the ways in which complex machinations have worked to form an innately American yogic identity. I argue that yoga as practiced today in America is not representative of one modality of thought—Indian/American or

¹ Benjamin Lorr, *Hell-Bent: Obsession, Pain, and the Search for Something Like Transcendence in Competitive Yoga* (St. Martin’s Press, 2012), 245.

religious/secular—but rather is a dynamic and relational practice tied to shifting global and local religious and cultural worldviews.² Yoga is deterritorialized from India, in terms of both religion and culture, and reterritorialized in the United States as its own construct of imbricated transnational interaction.³ Furthermore, this reterritorialization involves the complex and discontinuous adoption of specific and historicized understandings of yoga that have resulted in distinctly American imaginings. I argue that the historical transactions and understandings of the moving concept of yoga have led to a recognizable yet fragmented American yoga, which is at once rooted in its Indic origins and radically transformed in its U.S. manifestations.⁴

Yoga as practiced popularly today in the United States is a distinctly American phenomenon, and yet this distinctiveness cannot be viewed outside of transnational historical and cultural exchanges of identity, power, and knowledge. My thesis is that there is a unique and polysemous yogic identity in America, and that this identity has developed from a messy process of transaction between Indian and Western modes of being and knowing. Furthermore, I show how this American yoga has come to be and how it functions as a particular form of lifestyle branding and consumption. Part of my project is the construction of a critical genealogy of Anusara yoga, one that will help to

² In this dissertation I capitalize specific forms and styles of yoga; however, I do not capitalize its broader notions, as yoga refers to multiple modes of belief and practice.

³ *Deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization* are terms coined by Deleuze and Guattari and are discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

⁴ My interpretation of “transaction” will be understood as the overlap of consumer capitalism, historical and present day transnational interaction, and as the practice of yoga being intimately linked to bodies in action across space and place.

illustrate the complex, hybrid, and unique nature of American yoga.⁵ This work will be ultimately concerned with present history; however, it will remain critically aware of historical contexts and genealogies from the earliest writings on yoga to the current state of the Anusara community. It is important for this project that the historical context and the present lived reality of yoga in America are held in constant tension with one another, since the past is crucial for understanding the present, and the present is responsible for influencing how that past is remembered. Not only that, but yoga's past and present are in tension on the ground in academic, popular, and political discourses.

This dissertation examines the identity of yoga in America at the level of macro historical and cultural transactions between East and West and at the micro level of a specifically American yoga (Anusara and later Sridaiva). This project is comparative in nature and aims to create a multidimensional approach that collapses a center/periphery dichotomy and forms a more nuanced understanding of yoga's identity construction in America. It is important that I understand yoga from a variety of overlapping and contentious perspectives so that I may fashion a more accurate interpretation of the creation of an American yoga. Rather than focusing my energies toward a singularly modern, teleological, or Western-minded historical process of investigation, I will intentionally construct a fragmented, moving, and rhizomatic account of Anusara and Sridaiva as illustrative of American yoga today.

The current American yogic landscape is a diverse and hybrid amalgamation of imaginations of yoga's relationship or lack thereof to Indian religion, culture, and

⁵ My understanding is that this project is genealogical in the sense that it begins with the present and traces a lineage and history using multiple sources and a nonlinear trajectory.

worldview. The term *yoga* is etymologically linked to “yoking” or “binding together” and has also been used to describe war, astrology, fraud, diligence, alchemy, and a myriad of other endeavors.⁶ The origins and proper understandings of yoga are still being debated within both academia and popular culture, and yoga is often touted (in yoga classes and beyond) as eternal and found in the earliest imagining of Hinduism. This understanding reflects, at least in contemporary America, notions of an unbroken and unified transmission of yoga, a phenomenon characterized by ideas regarding the transcendental aspects of classical yoga rather than a shifting and historically contextual descriptor entailing innumerable forms of Indian and American religious and secular expressions. Yoga in America is a phenomenon in flux, continuously fracturing and multiplying into various and novel understandings that relate to yoga’s past and to the market value for today’s American consumer.

⁶ David Gordon White, *Yoga in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.



Figure 2. Find Your Yoga Style Image

Figure 2 above illustrates the multifaceted spectrum of yogic understanding and wide range of supposed yogic practice in America, from nude yoga or acro yoga to an amorphous and undefined *hatha* yoga.⁷ Yoga in America is both simplified and

⁷ Alex K., "Find Your Yoga Style," *YogaTrail*, October 30, 2012, <http://www.yogatrail.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Find-Your-Yoga-Style-Infographic.jpg>. Used with permission from Alex K. at *YogaTrail*.

categorized by its multiplicity. Anusara yoga is identified in the figure above by a desire to open the heart and a lack of desire to chan—is it really that simple? While I find the chart interesting in terms of social discourse, American yogic delineations are not that easily explained or categorized. Because my goal is to both complicate and define yoga in America, I provide the styles of John Friend (Anusara and Sridaiva) as an avenue by which to examine an American yoga as it has come to be and to explore what makes its identity uniquely American. Furthermore, examining the rise and fall and rise of John Friend shows the rhizomatic nature of yoga as it creates and breaks down boundaries of understanding. Individuals are defining themselves as yogis in America amongst a plethora of religious and secular yogic options to consume. Furthermore, consumption is how Americans display and define lifestyle. Brands create narratives to make consumers feel as though the brand shares in their values (both individually and socially), cares about their needs, and fits their personalities. David Gordon White notes that,

[t]hroughout Yoga's history, proponents have established and acknowledged authority primarily through lineages based on transmission from guru to disciple, however, beginning in the late-twentieth century, proponents also established and acknowledged authority by branding and marketing Yoga in urban areas across the world.⁸

American yogic consumers are constructed by, and in the process of constructing, the market of American yoga through multilayered transactions of history, geography, individual behavior, and social forces of interpretation.

⁸ A. R. Jain, "Branding Yoga: The Cases of Iyengar Yoga, Siddha Yoga, and Anusara Yoga," *Approaching Religion* 2, no. 2 (2012): 4.

Anusara yoga was started in The Woodlands, Texas, in 1997 by an American, former financial analyst and longtime yoga practitioner, John Friend. Over the next two decades, Anusara quickly became one of the most consumed and widespread Tantric yoga systems in the world. Anusara gained a reputation within the yoga community for its rigor in teacher training as well as its physical alignment and spiritual message. John Friend associated Anusara's yogic philosophy with Tantra, his bodily alignment principles with anatomical science, and his business practices with consumer capitalism. Furthermore, his teaching style has been described in terms of an evangelical pastor: "Consider those religions that focus on sin and damnation, on discipline instead of Yoga. Fundamentally they say no . . . we are the Yoga of Yes."⁹ This statement alone exhibits the layers of confusion inherent in identifying an American yoga: is it a religious or secular practice, and what purpose does it serve? According to a study released by *Yoga Journal*, the top five reasons listed for beginning a yoga practice include flexibility (78.3 percent), general conditioning (62.2 percent), stress relief (59.6 percent), improvement of overall health (58.5 percent), and physical fitness (55.1 percent).¹⁰ The spiritual aspect of yoga is not mentioned in this list, yet John Friend's incredibly successful yoga system is indisputably linked to both broader categories of spirituality and the practice of Tantra.

The creation of Anusara yoga by Friend must not be viewed as original, but rather as a creation based upon a layering of multiple transactions along a discontinuous line.

⁹ Mimi Swartz, "The Yoga Mogul," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/25/magazine/25Yoga-t.html>.

¹⁰ "Yoga Journal Releases 2012 Yoga in America Market Study," *PR Newswire*, accessed January 28, 2013, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/Yoga-journal-releases-2012-Yoga-in-america-market-study-182263901.html>.

Friend relies upon his charismatic authority and a mixture of American and Indian spiritual knowledge and symbology. He carries himself like the “Joel Olsteen” of the yoga community and often tells his students that he will “pray for them” when they attempt an advanced posture.¹¹ I am personally aware of his evangelical demeanor as he told me he would pray for me in one of his classes (while attempting to touch my toes to the back of my head in scorpion pose). I point to his evangelical attitude not to demean Friend’s teaching, but instead to show how yoga moves and adapts itself to the climate in which it finds itself. As Mimi Swartz argues,

Friend’s “dharma talks”—short sermons—are based largely on simplified tantric principles (not, he stresses, the ones relating to tantric sex): students learn that they are divine beings, that goodness always lies within, that by opening to God’s will—opening to grace, Friend calls it—“you actually become vastly more powerful than the limited person that you usually identify with.” Instead of joining a megachurch, you join the Anusara *kula*, Sanskrit for family.¹²

This exchange of American and Indian imaginings of spirituality are situated within particular philosophies of being and knowing as well as within larger de/reterritorializations of cultural and historical significance such as colonialism, postcolonialism, technological development, and consumptive practice. Anusara and Sridaiva yoga provide an especially captivating example of the fragmented processes of transaction and transformation in creating an American yogic identity. Furthermore, looking at the demise of Anusara and the creation of Sridaiva by John Friend allows us to continue the conversation about American yoga as it innovates and refracts in multiple directions.

¹¹ Swartz, “The Yoga Mogul.”

¹² Ibid.

Yoga in America is like bamboo: ubiquitous with imagery of Asia, it is a rhizome that develops in underground networks and springs up in unpredictable cycles of growth and flourishment, a symbol of transaction that contains both cultural and economic significance, and when planted changes and adapts to new and different locations. American yoga situates itself and operates within a present day framework of excess, choice, and competition. American yogis want their subjective yoga experience to connect with their values and their lifestyle preferences, as well as to be “authentic.” In this environment, consumer desire transacts directly with the production of an American yogic identity. In other words, yoga in America is a merging of profit and purpose.

Ethnography and Subjective Contextualization

“How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live.”

—Thoreau

This project is a postmodern one that holds the notion of objectivity to be unfeasible; the production of knowledge is replete with issues of power, authority, and contextual social normativity. Furthermore, the researcher and the research are implicated in multiple locations and relationships of culture, ethnicity, gender, economics, and a variety of other independent and overlapping polyphonies. Because of this, and my view that to understand one’s scholarship one must also understand one’s context, I feel it necessary to place myself within this endeavor.

I locate myself within both the discourse and the practice of yoga in America. I am not only a consciously Western-minded practitioner of yoga, but also a yoga teacher and part of a network of yoga communities. My initial relationship to yoga began as what I would call typically American; I equated my personal end goal of the practice with

toned arms or the idea of a “yoga butt” more than with philosophical or spiritual training. My experience of “exercise yoga” was also coupled with an academic background that explained yoga as an Indian religious practice whereby the physical benefits were only a fragment of a greater spiritual and/or supernatural end. Yoga as a series of human transactions occurs as story, and “all good stories, while they are constantly renewed in the retelling, nonetheless draw on a common treasury of themes, structures, and tropes according to time, place, and the storytellers’ craft.”¹³ In broadening the conversation, even a brief glance at history tells us that the purpose of yoga has rhizomatically shifted between notions of truth and authenticity on a loose continuum ranging from immortality and super powers to “rational” enlightenment or the cultivation of calm.¹⁴ Yoga in America tells its story through multiple locations. Like all narratives, some storytellers’ voices are heard louder than others in the polyphony of truth and authenticity that is American yoga.

My early yoga experiences would prove many of the assumptions I had about the practice of yoga to be wrong, while at the same time providing a firsthand account of the paradoxical conundrum of yoga’s multiplicitious definitions and embodied forms. My personal yoga practice began over a decade ago with an accidental private yoga session from an eccentric and learned teacher (originally from Austin, Texas) in the jungle overlooking the ocean in Costa Rica. The class was totally cliché in terms of the beautiful surroundings and the body-of-a-goddess yoga teacher. At the same time, it was transformative. I could not believe that this woman could convey such strength, grace,

¹³ David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

¹⁴ Here I am thinking about Vivekananda and his spreading of yoga to the West.

flexibility, and knowledge about the connection between physical and mental states. Not only that, but I consider myself to be in good physical condition and was so sore the next morning that I could barely walk—the exercise freak in me loved this. This experience of yoga led me to begin a yoga practice, attending classes at the university and at local gyms or yoga studios in the Denver/Boulder area. I, like most Americans, experimented with multiple styles, ranging from Jivamukti to power yoga. While yoga began as a part of my exercise routine, it soon became more than strength training for my body; it also had the ability to calm and focus my mind. The more I practiced yoga, the more my body and my mind seemed to long for the hour or two of physical exertion culminating with moments of energized stillness.

In both my personal and academic life, I kept asking myself what is it that I and my fellow Americans are doing when we do yoga. Furthermore, my academic life and my personal life were becoming intertwined as I taught introductory courses on Asian and comparative religions (briefly covering yoga). In every class I taught, I had at least one student wanting to write a final paper on yoga. It was not uncommon for these same students to write about yoga from a very individualistic and Western perspective grounded in a yoga narrative of philosophical speculation and meditation à la Patanjali rather than that of *hatha* yoga and Gorakhnath. Why? Furthermore, most students unquestioningly traced yoga's beginnings to the second millennium BCE and the supposed proto-Shiva seal. Gavin Flood, in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, and Geoffrey Samuel, in *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, show how this seal conveys more ambiguity than clarity in its iconography and symbolism. The figure may be thought of as sitting in a yogic position (or not), the figure

may be thought of as a human representation (or not), and the figure's iconography may be representative of a proto-Shiva character (or not).

The confusion, and the often unilaterally-told narrative of yoga in America as the progression from proto-Shiva seal to Patanjali to Bhagavad Gita to Vivekananda to Bikram Choudhry, illustrates the need to delve in and muddy the waters of clarity as far as what yoga is and does in America today. Yoga must be understood as messy and layered, and thereby accessible only through scholarship that traces the altering perceptions and realities of yoga's histories, as well as moves to recognize and locate its current proliferations. The image of yoga in America brings to mind the image of the lotus flower that appears on the lower back of so many American yogis' pants, a symbol of purity and beauty that is grown out of muddy waters.

My relationship to yoga, as it is practiced physically and as I study it in the academic realm, requires that I vacillate between emic and etic perspectives. For instance, I was a receptionist at a popular gym/yoga studio from 2008 to 2012. This studio offers many styles of yoga that range from spiritual (bhakti yoga, dharma yoga) to purely physical (yoga sculpt, cycle yoga) in character. Most of the members and employees are young, urban, and incredibly fit beings clothed in high-end workout attire. The average yoga sculpt class includes a mixture of yoga postures and weight training done while listening to loud music. This class is illustrative of the type of workout yoga classes that can be found around Denver and throughout the country. While classes such as yoga sculpt provide a good workout, their constitution poses this question: is this what Krishna, Patanjali, Krishnamacharya, Gorakhnath, or Vivekenanada had in mind when they invoked the term *yoga*? Does it matter?

Yoga in America is often understood within a paradigm of exercise and fitness, intentionally or unintentionally oblivious to previous yogic associations with warriors, ascetics, mercenary soldiers, alchemists, or boogey men.¹⁵ The American yoga market brands its yoga lifestyle through modes of fashion and retreats in exotic locations rather than with ascetic practices of deprivation or solitude. The recent headline in the *Huffington Post*, entitled “E. W. Jackson, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Candidate, Says Yoga May Result in Satanic Possession,” illustrates the disparity in opinion about yoga in America as secular workout or menacing religious practice.¹⁶ Can it be both secular and religious? Does it always depend on who is doing the defining? I argue that yoga in America can be defined in many ways and that this constant redefinition or rebranding constitutes, in part, its American character.

I would like to qualify that in loosely defining an American yoga I do not aim to speak for all Americans or their perceptions of what yoga was, is, or will be in the future. I understand, and hope to keep in mind, the myriad viewpoints (not all of them even remotely concerned with the gym or fitness) that help to make American yoga both fragmented and unique. At the same time, I cannot ignore the pervasiveness of such yoga clothing lines as Lululemon or the multitude of classes being offered in settings that are far from spiritual in nature. I also believe that the eight million hashtags referencing the word “yoga” on Instagram alone says something about yoga’s placement within this

¹⁵ In his work *Sinister Yogis*, David Gordon White argues for the varying definitions of yoga throughout the history of India.

¹⁶ “E. W. Jackson, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Candidate, Says Yoga May Result in Satanic Possession,” *Huffington Post*, June 5, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/05/ew-jackson-Yoga-satanic-possession_n_3392386.html.

culture. Microbreweries offer yoga classes, professional football players are extolling the benefits of yoga, and “yoga selfie” imagery is everywhere. The particular blending and multiplicity of the dissemination and consumption of yoga in America make it a complicated and captivating notion to define in theory and practice.

I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in advertising and marketing and therefore am particularly attuned to consumerism and branding. This will come in handy in viewing the ways in which the larger yoga phenomenon in America is marketed as well as to understand how Friend has chosen to present and distribute his messages of Anusara and Sridaiva. Furthermore, I lived part of my childhood in The Woodlands, Texas, which provides insight into the particular cultural setting of Anusara yoga’s beginnings and its world headquarters. Knowledge about The Woodlands is useful as it provides a subjective look into the demographics of Friend’s community base as well as a cultural perspective on his evangelical style as a yoga teacher. My current context of Denver, Colorado, also happens to involve John Friend as he currently teaches Sridaiva at a local yoga studio, Vital Yoga. As Friend would say, I have opened to the grace of the universe and have found its willingness to help in writing this dissertation (kidding, kind of).

I am a participant in the culture of yoga in America, but I am also a scholar. As such, it is my responsibility to negotiate the boundaries of self and scholarship in an informed and pragmatic manner. My relationship with yoga is philistine and scholarly, experiential and at the same time heavily dependent upon precise and detailed research methodologies. I represent yoga culture in America as a spandex-wearing participant in what is often described as “workout yoga,” yet I also view yoga through a wider experiential and academic lens that demands a great deal of contextual and historical

awareness—all of this, coupled with rigorous research standards. It is because of this that I must continue to understand this work as, in part, located within the ethnographic discourse of a subjective present history. The long academic discussion of the complex position of participant observer, found predominantly in anthropological and sociological theory, helps to situate and guide my thinking about the various locations I must responsibly occupy.

Genealogically, I can point to such figures as Bronislaw Malinowski or Clifford Geertz to provide a backdrop or framework for understanding how to research and collect culture. These men have been influential and exceptional in the ways in which they have helped to complicate the dynamic, informal, and contingent aspects of scholarship. Ethnography is a method that allows for a situatedness of complexity and the provision of new ways of seeing categories and practices through a process of immersion. The combination of ethnography and interpretation

allows for the reconstruction of how culture (the meaning-creating machine) operates in practice, and how the actual production and interpretation of meaning are practical activities, often central to both power struggles and economic maneuvers, and shot through with emotions.¹⁷

Participant observation is both epistemological and situated in its contribution to knowledge as conditional and constituted (epistemological in a sense of the conditions of knowledge and situated in how knowledge comes to be).¹⁸ Because this project aims to include multiple spaces and places for understanding an American yoga, participant observation provides a crucial component to the knowledge collection process. However,

¹⁷ Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

like all methodologies, participant observation is burdened by the challenges of neat models of scholarship standing up against messy lived realities.

The major problem I face in utilizing a model of participant observation is its formative methodological notions of objective scholarship. This false pretense of objectivity is couched within modern assumptions of progress and scientific viability and exists in tension with the subjective actuality of scholarship. We are all participants in a world that is neither rational nor homogenized, and identity exists as a powerful and shifting politic of being that is always in relationship. As Jan Kubik writes,

The postmodern turn makes the task of studying such processes of invention and stabilization even more demanding: the formation of identity needs to be caught in *statu nascendi*, as various flows intersect in a single locale and/or are traced down through several locations/locales.¹⁹

This project traces both the local and the meta-historical transactions and/or locations of identity intersection. It does so by providing knowledge collected from involvement in the present yoga culture (especially Anusara yoga) in America, as well as a rich and academically informed perspective of the transactions of yoga's past.

Participant Observation

Edward Schatz explains that “[r]esearch conducted at close range invites the researcher to see differently heterogeneity, causal complexity, dynamism, contingency, and informality.”²⁰ I hold this as the original premise for the inclusion of participant observation in this project as it, at the very least, gives some perspective on how insiders understand and experience their yoga practice on and off their yoga mats. I enter this

¹⁹ Schatz, *Political Ethnography*, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

project fully aware that the transmission of yoga through time and space includes problematics that range from those of religio-cultural significance to everyday normative behavior and understandings of the world. The practices of yoga are directly informed by frameworks of socialized subjectivity, both operating within bounded notions of time and space and incorporating overlapping transactions. Because of this, research must reflect the proclivity for individual and social identities to create boundaries while at the same time account for the inevitability of boundary crossings (especially in a globalized world). The introduction to *Knowledge and Power in Collaborative Research* argues that “researchers can best deal with such tensions through reflexive, complexity- and context-sensitive analyses.”²¹ In order to do this type of critically sensitive work, the researcher must be directly involved in the world being researched.

In participant observation the object being studied is not static, nor singular, but rather includes multiple shifting realities. An ethnographic assessment of yoga provides a glimpse into this moment of the identity construction of a uniquely American yoga, while the incorporation of a variety of other methods and fields of study aims to responsibly engage with the historical complexities of yoga’s move from India to America. Joseph Alter claims that

[e]ssentially the present’s just past is a time frame of rapid remembering and forgetting, compounded by the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. In other words, the just past of the present . . . is when facticity matters a great deal, but when individual memories produce competing and contradictory

²¹ Louise Phillips et al., eds., *Knowledge and Power in Collaborative Research: A Reflexive Approach*, Routledge Advances in Research Methods 6 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3, 4.

realities . . . Interpretation must show that in any scenario constructed as a clear dichotomy, both perspectives are wrong.²²

In essence, for yoga it does not matter that it can be described as both ancient and new, American and Indian, spiritual and exercise practice; what matters is who is spinning the message and how much power is behind that marketing. By carefully shifting the location of my discussion between time periods and geographic spaces, I illustrate the complexity of definition and interpretation when unpacking an American yogic identity, while at the same time in some respects defining yoga once again.

I stand within the discourses of anthropology and sociology in terms of participant observation, as a postmodern thinker with an interpretive sensibility. Schatz notes that immersion both generates information and puts the researcher in touch with the power relations that occur in a complex social world.²³ It is up to the interpretive ethnographer to both acknowledge peoples' competing orientations in the world as valid and also to deal with this complexity by holding rival categories and notions of legitimacy, power, authority, and truth in tension.

DeWalt and DeWalt argue that,

for anthropologists and social scientists, participant observation is a method in which the researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and cultures.²⁴

²² Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3, 4.

²³ Schatz, *Political Ethnography*.

²⁴ Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 1.

My location here is also complicated, as these daily activities, rituals, and interactions are a part of my explicit and tacit life routine. This kind of involvement makes it essential that I am aware (to whatever degree that is possible) of my preconceived notions about yoga. I maintain an ethnographic viewpoint that blurs the lines of emic and etic observer as well as complicates the layers of identity found within and amongst the self and the social as entangled actualities. My acknowledging and accounting for this complexity adds to the richness of discourse by providing a personal and experiential angle to the study of an American yogic identity. As someone who frequents yoga studios, attends yoga festivals, and teaches yoga weekly, I empathize with this world, and at the same time I consider myself a critical scholar who is beholden to thoroughness in research. It is because of this that I approach a range of differing transactions of yoga to proffer any sort of meaningful analysis.

Pierre Bourdieu addresses the participant/observer and objective/subjective tensions in a way that assists and adds depth to this study. He aims to break down the false dichotomy of objective and/or subjective scholarship through “the objectification of the generic relationship of the observer to the observed.”²⁵ Bourdieu points out that practical logic is almost never communicated in a way that is wholly coherent or incoherent: “[T]o demonstrate this one would have to recite all of the facts collected, without imposing on them even the basic level of construction represented by

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 15.

chronological order.”²⁶ It is because of this that we necessarily taxonomize our worlds, for the purposes of coherency.

For Bourdieu, both belief and symbolism are found in the collective; however, this collective is always caught in a means of struggle between the logical logic of economic conditions and symbolic practices and the pre-logical logic of practice:

[G]enealogies and other models are to the social orientation which makes possible the relation of immediate immanence to the familiar world, as a map, an abstract model of all possible routes, is to the practical sense of space, a system of axes linked unalterably to our bodies which we carry about with us wherever we go.²⁷

I aim to create the genealogical mapping as a palimpsestic history of yoga. This project continually acknowledges and holds in tension my social location and subjective experiences and understandings of yoga with the myriad experiences of history, culture, and geography of those whom I am studying.

Yoga in America lends itself to a critically historical project of comparison as it originated in India, has been defined and categorized in the West through the projects of modernity and colonialism, and has itself colonized the United States through various understandings of both its practices and its outcomes. The continual and often hegemonic transactions of yoga across time and space have, at various moments, both reproduced structures of social normativity and acted as transgressive subcultural practices in direct defiance of authority. A comparative project will allow for viewing these dynamics as relative and adaptable rather than as static iterations of pure culture or authentic tradition.

²⁶ Bourdieu and Nice, *The Logic of Practice*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

Within the current American landscape, yoga has once again been modified to reflect specific cultural ideas and ideals of right and wrong practice. For instance, American yoga today is posture-based and societally sanctioned rather than antinomian or radical in nature. As Krishnamacharya is famous for stating, “Yoga is 99% practice and 1% theory.” While this might be true in America today, this equation has not always remained so unbalanced. A new way of doing comparative religion should be aware of the voices constructing the discourse being studied, as well as how cultural specificity functions alongside ideologies and assumptions of shared ontology. Discourses, just like religious communities, are not static entities. They shift and adapt over time to appropriately make sense of the world in its varying social, political, theological, and economic contexts. As the study of comparison is itself an examination, rearticulation, or eradication of the boundary work of difference, it is important to understand how borders have historically (and through a variety of mediums) been conceived. It is for this reason that this comparative project must look at various histories and geographies of yoga to provide a viewpoint not based on rigidly constructed boundaries, but instead on the traces that have yet to be fully erased and the moments of in-between that blur the margins of designation.

Tracing a Layered Account of India and America

Modern Yoga Research

This project sees itself as a kind of Venn diagram of multiple academic discourses; however, it is most directly situated within the field of modern yoga research. Religions and their traditions do not live within constricted arenas of practice but rather cross over and blur these lines. It is because of this that scholarship must do the same

thing. Furthermore, this specified and overlapping plurality of locations provides a point of departure to investigate yoga's contentious past and to explain yoga's present manifestations in America. Modern yoga provides an example of how to do this as its research relies upon this overlap of multiple fields of knowledge such as anthropology, sociology, cultural theory, postcolonialism, and religious studies.

While globalized structures of power and economy are not the most often discussed topic in relationship to modern yogic practice, there are a few scholars who have helped to make sense of yoga in terms of its enmeshment in national and transnational projects of influence and control. Joseph Alter utilizes historical anthropology to unearth an intellectual history of modern yoga characterized by its relationship to colonial and postcolonial transnationalism. His scholarship addresses the ways in which yoga has been transformed to reflect modern notions of nature and the body. Alter locates yoga within the everyday life of the colonial and national projects at the beginning of the twentieth century and in relationship to the discourses of science, health, and fitness. Science is understood as a kind of religion of modernity in which yoga becomes part of its project of furtive classification. Alter illustrates the continuities and discontinuities of a scientific understanding of yoga: “[T]he ultimate goal of yoga is to transcend knowledge and realize absolute truth through direct experience . . . the goal of science is to produce knowledge in order to understand and explain reality, rather than to experience truth as truth.”²⁸ His theoretical model is influenced by the postmodern existentialism of historical and scientific truth, and he begins to unpack some of the

²⁸ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 32.

binaries that continue to shape the paradigms of modernity concerning East/West, power/knowledge, and innovation/tradition.

Mark Singleton continues this discussion of transaction as he looks at the origins and development of modern postural yoga in early-twentieth-century India and the West. He holds that the ways in which we understand yoga today have very little to do with medieval *hatha* yoga or classical interpretations of yoga and more to do with notions of modern physical culture, “a cluster of ideological items, including manliness, morality, patriotism, fair play, and faith, ‘healthism,’ and Western esotericism.”²⁹ Singleton provides an in-depth look at *asana* as yoga culture developed alongside the modern physical culture movement, rather than an explanation rooted in historical notions of yoga’s traditional and/or authentic past.

History is significant within the field of modern yoga research, as the meanings and practices of yoga have been transformed alongside changing worldviews. David Gordon White complicates the notion of a univocal yoga as he traces yoga, etymologically and in practice, from its Vedic to its modern day understandings. White supplies an erudite teleological description of yoga that highlights the main moments and players in yoga’s history within the Indian landscape and toward the West. His account provides a foundation for understanding how yoga has been a process of layering and synthesis that includes Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophies that have at times both belonged to and rebelled against predominant cultural paradigms. He is able to

²⁹ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83.

complicate the notion of yoga while at the same time giving it credibility and meaning within its varied contexts.

White also explores the links between *hatha* yoga's beginnings and its current preoccupations with physical practice. He makes clear that, in yoga's long history, there are no easy categorizations of orthodox behavior or practice. For instance, in the Vedas yoga is linked predominantly to warfare, in the Upanishads to asceticism, and in the medieval period yoga is most often associated with alchemy. White points out that Gorakhnath and the Nath Yogis were the first to utilize *hatha* yoga to tap into a pneumatic bodily system that could be controlled and enhanced.³⁰ Not only this, but the Nath Yogis are responsible for catalyzing an alleged link between making the body strong and resilient and immortality, a notion that can be viewed today as the ubiquitous American obsession with youth and aesthetic vigor. Links between yoga in America today and a yogic past are variable and discordant; however, by looking at this disharmony in a careful and strategic manner, White is able to capture a historical rendering of yoga in movement.

This project aims at utilizing White's rigor while continuously shifting between yoga's various pasts and its current practice in the United States, utilizing an intentional fragmented interconnectivity. Sarah Strauss provides an ethnographic history of modern yoga in her work on Swami Sivananda and the Divine Life Society. Strauss in part looks at "how the propagation of Yoga in India, Europe, and North America over the past century represents an example of a broader effort, primarily by educated, middle-class

³⁰ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 17.

people, to promote an alternative vision of modernity.”³¹ Elizabeth De Michelis can also be placed into the category of historical scholar of modern yoga as she provides a fourfold classification of yoga typology (modern psychosomatic yoga, modern denominational yoga, modern postural yoga, and modern meditational yoga). Both Strauss and De Michelis provide historical vantage points that give clarity to the confusing concept of modern yoga and show how personal experience and categorization offer the possibility for rich analysis and discourse.

I will incorporate and continuously build upon the thinkers within the field of modern yoga research as I move between both past and present and space and place in the search for an American yogic identity. Yoga as a phenomenon sits more comfortably between dichotomies rather than representatively through them. In its current American context, yoga resides uncomfortably between East and West, secular and religious practice, authenticity and innovation, mind and body, and a variety of other unstable dyadic paradigms. These partitions are imposed, rather than innate, and result from power differentials seeking to define belonging while attempting to deny hybridity. I do not deduce from this statement that categorizations and borders are themselves to be done away with, but rather that these borders need to be constantly evaluated and understood for what they are, “distinctions produced (and resisted) for particular purposes by particular people.”³²

³¹ Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2005), 115.

³² Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 18.

For instance, the famous and/or infamous Bikram Choudry has demonstrated the urge to force/reinforce boundaries that are attuned to how we view the world (thereby fuzzy and incomplete). His proclivity to insert his charismatic, narcissistic, and at times toxic authority over his students is made clear in Benjamin Lorr's study, *Hell-Bent: Obsession, Pain, and the Search for Something Like Transcendence in Competitive Yoga*. He chronicles Bikram's boundary construction in a story about the International Yoga Asana Championship. At one point during the competition, Bikram demanded that a skilled competitor receive a zero for demonstrating a very advanced lotus scorpion pose (see Figure 3),³³ as it is not part of the ninety-one postures proposed by his teacher Bishnu Ghosh. During a meeting of the judges the next day (held primarily to discuss the need to incorporate multiple lineages and styles of yoga), Bikram proclaimed, "No. No. No. We must have borderlines . . . We must have borderlines, and to compete you must accept them. This is the way we do. You like it, you welcome. You do not, good-bye."³⁴ When a teacher questioned the lack of participation of other yoga styles in the International Yoga Asana Championship if, in theory, the goal of the competition is to get yoga into the Olympics, Bikram responded with, "Who cares? I control ninety-eight-point-five percent of yoga in this world . . . Ninety-eight-point-five percent of yoga is Bikram Yoga."³⁵ This incredibly incorrect statement helps to demonstrate the ways in which boundaries are constructed and maintained often by fragile and illusory figures.

³³ Image in Figure 3 used with permission of Julieta Claire.

³⁴ Lorr, *Hell-Bent*, 245.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vi.

Lorr states, “No Boss, you don’t control 98.5 percent of Yoga. The real figure is just under 8 percent. And that, actually, Boss, that is a delusional and destructive statement that will guarantee your wife’s goal of the Olympics goes unanswered.”³⁶ Bikram yoga may only constitute 8 percent rather than 98.5 percent of worldwide yoga, but the name Bikram remains synonymous with modern yoga in America. At the 2012 American Academy of Religion conference in Chicago, Bikram was the name brought up again and again when discussing modern yoga. He was the topic of multiple paper discussions as well as the lead character in the movie that was shown for the Yoga Theory group. The unequal distribution between the power surrounding the discourse about Bikram at the AAR and the actuality of multiple different embodied yoga practices taking place in America is demonstrative of how the significance accorded to someone or something is not always reflective of actualities.

³⁶ Ibid., vi



Figure 3. Lotus Scorpion Pose

Yoga has been able to adapt and adjust to the cultural climate of North America in a number of ways, since “[y]oga is so massive and complicated, so contradictory and baroque, that American society has been able to assimilate any number of versions of it, more or less simultaneously.”³⁷ Because American yoga sits between a number of dichotomies and constructs of identity, the story of yoga cannot simply exist as an idea conversed about within academia, but must also be read in the everyday expressions of popular culture. Stephanie Syman, in her work *The Subtle Body*, provides an easily accessible version of modern yoga history, one that both personifies and de-complexifies

³⁷ Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 7.

the notion of yoga in America. She blends practicality and humor into a well-researched historical account, one that allows for the inclusion of continuity and discontinuity:

It's hard to reconcile the subtle body and the possibility of experiencing divinity for yourself by methodically following a program of exercise, breathing, and meditation with Judeo-Christian notions of God and the afterlife . . . Maybe it's a sign of maturity that we can tolerate the paradox: Yoga is both an indulgence and a penance. It will tone your thighs, and it might crack open your reality.³⁸

At the same time, she does not include many of the details in the surrounding culture that influence the narrative of an American yoga. Philip Goldberg provides a broad account that is both thorough and apologetic in its discussion of yoga in America. As Sally Kempton informed me after a lecture she gave at the Yoga Journal Conference, if I really wanted to know what went on with yoga in America I should read Goldberg.³⁹

The paradox and specific nature of American yoga is its undeniable link to notions of lifestyle consumerism and commodification. Within the field of modern yoga research, such scholars as Shreena Gandhi and Andrea Jain have examined yoga in relationship to market value and commodity. Gandhi incorporates the notion of yoga as rhizomatic through looking at material culture, primarily *Yoga Journal*. Gandhi shows how yoga has been communalized and marketed in America through specific translations and practices of economy and worldview. She argues in her dissertation, "Translating, Practicing and Commodifying Yoga in the U.S.," that "continuing to perpetuate yoga as 'eastern,' spiritual, multi-faith with a sacred quality is in the market's best interest for it is

³⁸ Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 291.

³⁹ Discussion at the 2013 Yoga Journal Conference in Estes Park.

easier to sell than ‘western,’ religious, Hindu and human.”⁴⁰ Andrea Jain helps to locate American yoga’s identity through the use of Anusara, as an example, as well as her emphasis on branding. Her work is relevant to this dissertation as she directly locates Anusara yoga within the arenas of postural yoga practice, Siddha yoga, Tantra, and contemporary consumer culture. She argues that “for Friend, yoga, like food, is a consumable product, and his brand, Anusara, signifies better product quality.”⁴¹ It is her contention that through understanding “brand image management” we can comprehend the growing global phenomena of yoga popularity.⁴² Jain holds that Anusara exemplifies a second-generation yoga brand, modeled on the idea that goodness is present in everyone and created through a process of selection, introduction, elaboration, and fortification of first-generation branding (Iyengar and Siddha yoga).⁴³ Her insights into the history of Anusara yoga and its relationship to consumption are both helpful and invaluable to discussing how an American yoga could be constructed. While Gandhi and Jain provide helpful scholarship concerning American yoga, they both lack a personal ethnographic and experiential dimension in their analyses about yoga as embodied practice in America. By employing a Venn diagram of locations in terms of theoretical scholarship, history, and lived realities, I hope to inhabit the contextual and shifting nature of the identity of a uniquely American yoga. I also propose that we move past notions of modern or transnational yoga in America to a postmodern American yoga, one

⁴⁰ Alexander Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga,” YouTube video, July 3, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISr9HPkVucI&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁴¹ Jain, “Branding Yoga,” 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

that is understood by its history and its current manifestations from a place of located and fragmented discontinuity.

Mapping the Beginnings of a Tantric Genealogy

Tantra informs the transactions of American yogic identity and also the spiritual side of Anusara yoga. Hugh Urban notes that Tantra was never imagined as coherent, but rather as, “according to one common definition, . . . simply ‘a scripture by which knowledge is spread’ (*tnayate vistaryate jnanam anena iti Tantram*).”⁴⁴ Tantra, like yoga, continues to be an umbrella term that exists and modifies itself to its current surroundings. For Urban, “[T]antra is the most relevant spiritual path for our own age of darkness—it enacts a radically desacralized world where the sacred is not simply camouflaged behind the profane, but is actually identified with it.”⁴⁵ The Tantric path has engaged with America in very specific ways as it encountered the countercultural movement of the 1960s and its various forays into Asian philosophy and practice, and as it encounters today’s globalized world of subjective authenticity.

The Tantric genealogy that will figure most importantly for this dissertation is the nondual tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. Abhinavagupta was born around 950 CE in the region of Kashmir. His ideas are collectively known as Kashmir Shaivism, and his largest works, the *Tantraloka* and the *Tantrasara*, loosely categorize the different notions of Shaivic thought into a tangle of multiple traditions, making up the “one revelation” or

⁴⁴ Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

ekagama that is Tantra.⁴⁶ Friend claims the lineage of Kashmir Shaivism and the freedom of Tantra to innovate the practice of yoga. Kashmir Shaivism is appealing to Friend, as it exemplifies the nonlinear and experiential dimensions of subjective transcendence, often referred to in contrast to the rational/scientific and linear concepts of transcendence hallowed by Western modernity. Gavin Flood notes in *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* that, “[w]hile clearly being well versed in the orthodox texts, Abhinavagupta and his followers saw these merely as ‘external’ scriptures and as inflows into a higher expansion of consciousness articulated through the Saiva revelation.”⁴⁷ It was through the scripture of the body that one was able to experience the truth that there is no difference between self and Shiva or self and the world, as the nature of the self and the world is all composed of a vibrating and dynamic consciousness (*spanda*). Friend takes the notion of self and divinity to his present day American telling of Tantra, as it “pulls from whatever seems to be life enhancing, takes the ideas of the past and weaves them into a new and present paradigm.”⁴⁸

The addition of the body into spiritual practices has also become crucial to the understanding of both yoga and Tantra in America today. As we will see, the language of coupling “material enjoyment with otherworldly bliss” is often heard in the Anusara community that focuses upon positivity and the enjoyment over and above asceticism or monastic practices. Furthermore, for Friend, Tantra provides answers to questions such

⁴⁶ Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁸ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy,” YouTube video, posted by “Wanderlust,” October 23, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udRKAS4KgPM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

as, “What is the enfoldment of the spirit into embodiment?”⁴⁹ He notes that Tantra tells us that “there is a deep order to it, an optimal blueprint for all of us. . . . We have to cooperate and serve it to have an ever expanding and beautiful life.”⁵⁰ Bounty and joy are found in the physical, the spiritual, and the material and are justified via American translations of Tantra and yoga. Friend, like many other Western teachers, translates Indian philosophical and metaphysical discourses into understandable and/or palatable language for the American practitioner. As Hugh Urban points out,

It is hardly surprising that many New Age practitioners have turned to Tantra—a form of spirituality that seemingly affirms the essential divinity of the human self and seeks the union of sensuality with spirituality, material enjoyment with otherworldly bliss. No longer imagined as the religion for the age of darkness, Tantra has reemerged as one of the most powerful “religions for the Age of Aquarius.”⁵¹

Tantra has also been appropriated by the modern American imagination to represent the erotic, the defiant, and the individual freedom of Asian religions.

Jeffrey Kripal, in his work *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion*, speaks about the changing historical contexts for understanding Tantra in America. Kripal points to the experiential practices of artists, intellectuals, and philosophers as they incorporated and shaped Asian thought into the Western landscape, and also blurred the lines between culture and counterculture. His is an enthusiastic biography of “countercultural actors, erotic mystics, psychedelic visionaries, ecstatic educators, esoteric athletes, psychic spies, gnostic diplomats and cultural visionaries” that illustrates

⁴⁹ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Urban, *Tantra*, 227.

the opening up of a space in America for the “spiritual but not religious” descriptors of yoga often heard today. Whereas the turn-of-the-century intellectuals typically explored Asian religions in terms of ascetic and world-denying practices that allowed one to be in touch with nature (Emerson, Thoreau), the adoption of Asian religions in the 1960s and 1970s took place alongside the sexual and psychedelic revolutions. Esalen represented an example of the development of an American acceptance of “all those aspects of the human being that have not been generally developed in western educational practices and culture but are nevertheless quite real.”⁵² These realities included the illusory character of the Cartesian split between mind and body and the notion that, by experiencing our bodies, we can grow as human/spiritual beings. Kripal contextualizes this within the Tantric state of “Kalifornia” when he adds,

And this is precisely what constitutes Esalen’s left-handed radicalism: it did. It acted. Esalen “did it.” It abandoned the sexual prudery Murphy had uncomfortably witnessed in the ashram of the 1950s and enthusiastically embraced the excess of the sexual revolution, the psychedelic revelation, and the American counterculture in the ‘60s. It moved from the Apollonian to the Dionysian, from the right hand to the left. It became an American heterosexual mystical tradition . . . Hence also Esalen’s central ritual space of mixed nude bathing and general rejection of celibacy as a positive sign of sanctity.⁵³

As we will further discuss in Chapter 3, the changing definitions of yoga and tantra have led to a contemporary American translation in which bounty and joy are found in the physical, and the intermingling of the spiritual and the material are justified.

⁵² Paul Comstock, “Jeffrey J. Kripal, Author of *Esalen*,” *California Literary Review*, August 1, 2007, <http://calitreview.com/245/jeffrey-j-kripal-author-of-esalen/>.

⁵³ *Kalifornia* as metaphor is a layered mashup of Tantric Eastern Kali and a Western California.

Branding and Consuming Spirituality

The consumption and branding of spirituality, and the crossing of boundaries between the sacred and the profane, must be considered as part of an American yogic identity. For instance, it is impossible to go to a yoga festival today without encountering someone selling T-shirts that read “Spiritual Gangster” or “Yoga Dealer,” or at least one booth that does not contain Ganesha or Shiva figurines for sale. What are these material symbols displaying, and how do they interact between dichotomies of spiritual and market?

Vincent Miller argues that “consumer ‘culture’ is not merely a particular set of ideologies . . . It is primarily a way of relating to beliefs—a set of habits of interpretation and use—that renders the ‘content’ of beliefs and values less important.”⁵⁴ This observation is clear in the vibrant present day American spiritual marketplace that represents an individualistic, Christian informed, innovative, and privatized experience furthered by any number of spiritual/capitalist enterprises. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King note as much in *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*:

In a context where brands and images are becoming more important than the products themselves, “spirituality” has become the new currency in the task of winning human minds and hearts. Corporate business interests are served by utilizing the “cultural capital” of religious traditions—building upon their authority base and, in the case of Asian religions, cashing in on their “exotic image” at the same time as distancing themselves from the traditions. Ancient cultural traditions and systems of thought become commodities like everything else in this brave new world. Our rich and disparate pasts are now up for sale.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 1.

⁵⁵ Jeremy R. Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 25.

The pervasive and conscious collaboration between spirituality and marketplace is crucial to identifying an American yoga and will be informed by the linking of ideas of such authors as Vincent Miller, Ian Reader, Richard King, Jane Naomi Iwamura, David Chidester, and the theoretical models and methodologies that will be discussed in Chapter 2.⁵⁶ Again, I am not writing this dissertation as a wholesale critique of yoga in America, but rather as a space to explore its bamboo-like nature within this landscape, a nature of interconnectivity and fragmentation embedded in religious, social, economic, political, and cultural transactions. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that “there has been a spiritualizing of the corporate system in which care of the self is a particular kind of freedom . . . buying good is being good.”⁵⁷ Yoga in America has become linked to positive forms of consumption and social status/capital. As one well-known yoga teacher told me of his once student John Friend, “His whole concept of Anusara comes from the famous self help book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.”

Vincent Miller illustrates how consumption and commodification have changed the relationships we form to religious beliefs/traditions. It appears that anything is up for grabs in the culture of late capitalism, a culture that fragments and abstracts broader cultural traditions to allow for individual agency in expressing culture. Furthermore, the individual is more able to express and share this discontinuous agency “through consumption and display of commodities . . . [as] consumer culture accompanies an

⁵⁶ The theoretical models and methodologies of Chapter 2 will include those of Gilles Deleuze, Homi Bhabha, Jean Baudrillard, and Pierre Bourdieu in relationship to postmodern, comparative, and genealogical methodologies.

⁵⁷ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic TM: Politics and Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, Critical Cultural Communication (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 176.

explosion in literacy and, more recently, in technologies that make it possible for the masses not only to consume culture but to produce and share it as well.”⁵⁸ Miller calls upon Marx’s observation that humans have changed from a culture of “being” to a culture of “having” and how this alters how we view religion and culture in terms of knowledge, power, and authenticity. He also models using a variety of thinkers to place religion within consumer culture.⁵⁹ Such thinkers as Bourdieu, Richard Hebdidge, Henri LeFebvre, Robert Orsi, and Jean Baudrillard help him to create a complex and nuanced view of what consuming religion in the American marketplace looks like and the tensions it creates between individual agency and socio-religio-cultural imbrication and fragmentation.⁶⁰ We can see this model being used by John Friend and the yoga company Manduka in their collaboration:

Available in the rich, purple hue Magic that is embraced by John Friend’s 600,000 students for its spiritual energy, the John Friend PROlite is a heartfelt expression of beauty and purpose. “For years I’ve been committed to the teaching that yoga comes from the heart—that it is a practice accessible to all and brings out your inner joy and divine energy,” said John Friend, founder of Anusara yoga. “Manduka is a company that embodies the same principles while providing high quality products to enhance your practice. I am honored to collaborate with such an authentic company to bring an amazing new line of gear to the yoga community, deepening the connection between heart and mat, and inspiring students of any level to enjoy more energetic freedom during their practice.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 29.

⁵⁹ Miller defines consumer culture as these cultural habits of use and interpretation that are derived from the consumption of commodified cultural objects (30).

⁶⁰ These authors’ most influential works include Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974), and Orsi’s *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (2006).

⁶¹ “John Friend Helps Manduka Create the Perfect Yoga Mat: Video Inside!”, *YOGANONYMOUS*, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://yoganonymous.com/john-friend-yoga-mat-manduka-collection/>.

The obvious linking of “authentic” consumer products, individual choice, and spiritual freedom will continue to inform the understanding of American yoga’s identity.

Importance of Research

Globalization has brought massive change in the interconnection and interaction of religious traditions, as well as the ability to dialogue amongst and between a variety of boundaries and borders. Researching the genealogy of a uniquely American yoga is paramount as yoga (both its discourse and practice) is pervasive in this American culture and has yet to be examined in terms of its distinctive and messy “unhomeliness.”⁶² The identity construction of Anusara and Sridaiva are illustrative of processes of historical, social, cultural, and geographical tracings. Employing an interdisciplinary and comparative lens can make sense of the formation of a uniquely and polysemic American yoga with a theory base “grounded in an awareness and integration of heterogeneities and cross cultural parallels, and the destabilization of fixed oppositional entities.”⁶³ I believe this research to be important both in furthering and fostering discourse in the new and continuously changing field of modern yoga, and also in the broader context of what is going on at the level of American cultural identity formation. I also believe that this research has implications outside of the academic realm in that many Americans are themselves curious about what it is that they are doing when they practice yoga.

This dissertation is also the first to introduce academic research on the contemporary American Tantric yogi/yogini. My research on Anusara yoga illuminates

⁶² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

⁶³ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East”* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 215.

the cognitive dissonance between what it means to both do Tantric yoga and be a Tantric yogi in the United States. As Urban points out,

Tantra is now celebrated as a “cult of ecstasy”: an ideal wedding of sexuality and spirituality that provides a much needed corrective to the prudish, repressive, modern West . . . an image of Tantra that is very different from that in most Indian traditions, where sex often plays a fairly minor, “unsexy” role and there is typically far more emphasis on guarded initiation, esoteric knowledge, and elaborate ritual detail.⁶⁴

While the sexual notions of Tantra have played a large role in its envisionings in the American landscape, its relationship to postural yoga, as we will see, complicates these matters. Yoga is being defined and redefined in various ways in the American sense and also transnationally. This dissertation is a bold move toward a new way of approaching theory, method, and historical scholarship.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation consists of six chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. This introductory chapter has introduced how exploring a critical genealogy of Anusara yoga (and later Sridaiva) in relationship to a more comprehensive history of power, knowledge, and economy allows for the viewing of a uniquely American yogic identity. The introduction provides contextualization of myself and my scholarship as subjective and comparative in nature. It also locates the message of American yoga as consumptive lifestyle brand within the spiritual and capital marketplace.

Chapter 2 is concerned with negotiating the theories and methodologies that will be used to develop a comparative and critical historical genealogy of the concept and identity of an American yoga. Complex issues of identity are involved in the movement

⁶⁴ Urban, *Tantra*, 204, 205.

of yoga. It is for this reason that my theory includes such thinkers as Gilles Deleuze, Homi Bhabha, Edward Soja, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu. I employ, in particular, Deleuze's articulation of de/reterritorialization, Baudrillard's simulacrum and hyperreality, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, and Bhabha's notion of hybridity (especially within interactions of coloniality). I provide a brief narrative that attempts to define Hinduism in order to show the need for multiple ways of thinking about yoga as Indian, as American, and as a continually constructed and moving transaction between the two. I situate my theory within a method that is perspective based, comparative, critically historical, genealogical, and ethnographic. This chapter also begins to look at the development of modern yoga as it interacts with J. Z. Smith's notion of difference and comparison as well as the power dynamics and influences of colonial and postcolonial worldviews.

Chapter 3 explores the definitional relationship of yoga and Tantra within the context of India and argues that the yoga tradition in the United States reflects the palimpsestic mashup of these terms at the local, the historical, and in transaction with the global. The categorical issues of mapping nation states and spiritual traditions are also examined in the context of an American *habitus* of hyperreality. Chapter 3 also looks at how Tantra has been defined and branded as well as the ways in which Anusara locates itself within this narrative. Furthermore, the chapter situates Tantra and yoga as moving and changing within various socio-historical locations of transnationalism. The chapter explores defining Tantra as theory, as practice, and as a hyperreal. It maps the layering and fracturing of boundaries of authenticity and innovation as it surveys the relationship of tantra to *hatha*, to Islam, to British colonialism, to Vivekenanda, to neo-Tantra, and to Anusara.

Chapter 4 explores how we got to this point, to this particular telling of yoga. I accomplish this by looking at rhizomatic pieces of a genealogical American yoga and locate this picture within Anusara. I discuss the American sphere in terms of scholarship, lineage and legitimation, and the market and its makers, as well as discussing the role of the guru, the relationship between Tantra and sexuality, and how Tantra plays a role in the scandals of Mutkananda and Friend. This chapter examines such figures as Krishnamacharya, Pierre Bernard, BKS Iyengar, Muktananda, and John Friend. These individuals and their roles in the making of an American yoga reflect the taking apart or fragmentation of multiple histories and traditions and displays the process of splicing them back together to appeal to a contemporary American audience.

Chapter 5 looks at the ways in which American yoga's unique identity is presented through constructed and located authenticities and agencies of lifestyle performance. I examine the production, dissemination, and consumption of yoga in America as it displays itself. I discuss how Friend's creation of a new style of yoga, Sridaiva, allows us to witness firsthand the continued fracturing and readjustment of authenticity in American yoga as it remembered as being in the past and embodied in the present. I look at how yogic identities are displayed through mediatized bodies, showcased and discussed in online spaces and advertised/promoted via a #hashtag culture. The production of yoga is discussed through examples such as the YAMA Talent Agency for yoga, the Take Back Yoga movement versus Deepak Chopra, CorePower, and YogaGlo. Chapter 5 speaks to a hyperreal yogic landscape of American media and branding that disseminates its messages through mediums such as clothing brands (Lululemon) and yoga selfies. The consumptive aspect of yoga is explored by looking at

the American *habitus* of self-development as necessary, as sacred, as status, and as mediated through the marketplace. I also explore the phenomenon of the yoga festival and the subjective layering of individual choice in a culture that unabashedly merges profit and purpose.

Chapter Two: Theories and Methodologies: Clarifying and Confusing the Concept of American Yoga

Om Namah Shivaya Gurave, Hail to Shiva, the Teacher
Sacchidananda-Murtaye, Whose Form is Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss
Nishprapanchaya Shantaya, The Singular One, the Peaceful One
Niralambaya Tejase, ' The Self-Supported One, the Lustrous One

—Anusara Invocation

Introduction

The Anusara invocation displays, in a concrete sense, the inherent theoretical and methodological muddling necessary for understanding a multilayered and transactional American yogic identity. The invocation above has been recited in Anusara Yoga classes throughout America, and yet is not often translated, explained, or culturally made sense of in terms of its obvious Hindu orientations. What does it mean for Americans to chant these words dedicated to Shiva in Yoga class? Does that mean that these same Americans “believe” in Shiva? Do they even know who He is? The displays of seemingly Hindu religious discourse are made comfortable and accessible to Americans through a variety of transactions that easily lend themselves to surface understanding, yet quickly demand in-depth knowledge for further comprehension. It is because of the transactions of yoga occurring as both collective and subjective remembering, forgetting, and combining that I rely on the scholarship of those whose goal it has been to examine and interpret their worlds within the scope of insular fields of scholarship, as well as those who have moved

toward more transdisciplinary understandings of knowledge formation. In doing this I am better able to chart a course of tracings and palimpsestic layerings rather than construct a rigid mapping of the identity of yoga in America. The transactions of consumer capitalism, historical and present day transnational interaction, and the practice of yoga (as being intimately linked to bodies in action across space and place) call for a widening of possibility between academic territories of scholarship and a combining of tools to most assiduously make sense of these crossings. A mapping of the in-between spaces of intensities or desires (rhizomes) of American yoga relies on the creation of meaning making through reflexivity, understanding that this discourse is inherently clothed by Western worldviews that tell only a part of the story.

This chapter is concerned with negotiating the theories and methodologies that will be used to develop a comparative critical historical genealogy of the concept and identity of American yoga. I intentionally use select concepts of multiple scholars, as I believe they each add something particular to understanding a postmodern and globalized yoga operating within the geographical landscape of America. Through combining the theoretical and methodological opinions of multiple fields of thought, I encourage the type of interaction and overlap that occurs in the everyday practice of life.⁶⁵ In a world that is constantly interconnected, it is impossible to think that our scholarship must somehow contain disorderly worlds within neatly organized boundaries of thought.

I create my theory and method in a fragmented and imbricated way. I do this in part because of my understanding that it is impossible to use only one scholar's

⁶⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Kindle ed.

theoretical point of view on a topic when, as scholars, we are all affected greatly by the multitudes that we have read. Furthermore, I believe scholars incorporate our individual academic context at the levels of both conscious and unconscious scholarship, and it is because of this that I recognize directly many of the influences that have dictated my academic point of view. I also hold that each of us is merely a patchwork of a variety of influences, both within and outside of the academy, and the yearning for a modern laden holistic understanding of scholarly fields holds the academy back from creating scholarship that is more reflective of the inherent complexities of our pasts and presents.

Yoga, for some, fills the gaps and fissures of a postmodern world in its disjointed consummation of both secular and religious needs and/or wants. In such a disconnected world, people crave an often unaccounted-for connection, both to themselves and to one another. Yoga speaks to a reclamation of the modern disconnect between mind and body, and also between the postmodern angst of a conditioned binary between science and the human experience in accumulating and defining knowledge. Yoga is discussed as and defined by many in the West in ways that borrow and recreate notions of Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions. These unclear platitudes of yogic understanding point to an interesting connection between yoga as historically located, as in transaction, and as translatable to the popular culture of present day America. For instance, at the Wanderlust festival in Colorado, Shiva Rea (an incredibly popular yogalebrity) explained that, upon meeting Sivananda, she was struck by his ability to combine Eastern wisdom with Western metaphor: “Life is change, learn to surf.” This quote is much more palatable and understandable to the Western mind than if Sivananda were to directly quote a yogic text such as the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Hatha Yogapradipika*.

The commodification and specific consumption of yoga in America is a result of multiple notions and desires of what yoga is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do within our present day located cultural context. The creation of the Take Back Yoga movement by the Hindu American Foundation illustrates this point. This movement began initially because a popular yoga magazine failed to credit Hinduism for yoga's origins. Hindu American Foundation's senior director, Sheetal Shah, states,

We noticed that our sacred texts, philosophical ideas, and deities were consistently being referred to as "yogic," "tantric," "Indian," etc. We wondered, "How many different ways can a magazine avoid using the word Hindu?" and when the magazine was asked this question they responded by saying, "Hinduism carries too much baggage."⁶⁶

The statement by Sheetal Shah is helpful for us to see the problems of America's seemingly uncomplicated adoption of a non-religiously derived yoga, and is illustrative of the shifting and complicated nature of labeling. Furthermore, this statement begs larger questions such as, "What is Hinduism?" and "How would one begin to define Hinduism?"

The Paradox of Defining Hinduism

I could start by explaining that Hinduism has many points from which one could begin. While this is true, it is not helpful for seeing the ways in which Hinduism is both a loaded term and a categorical signifier of "something." Hinduism can be thought of as the world's oldest continuously documented religion, as its earliest texts were shaped by 1200 BCE, as well as the youngest since it was not named Hinduism until the nineteenth

⁶⁶ Alice G. Walton, "The Great Yoga Debate: Has Yoga Sold Its Soul?," *Forbes*, May 3, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2012/05/03/the-great-yoga-debate-is-western-practice-evolving-or-devolving/>.

century.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this naming was performed for the purposes of administration by British colonial authorities in order to categorize and classify multifarious and divergent religious practices, rather than by an indigenous collectivity practicing a monolithic religion. Hinduism is thus a constructed religious term that describes a variety of religious and cultural beliefs that span a long history of engagement and conflict without professing a uniform theology, text, founder, or organizational structure. Diane Mines argues, “Hinduism begins to appear as a worldview predicated on action, flux, flow, control, and the variable qualities of persons as they are made and remade through exchanges, transferals, and movements of substances.”⁶⁸ This definition of Hinduism argues for a kind of rhizomatic and moving identity based on contextual space rather than a holistic and stagnant determinism.

One could also argue that Hinduism has to do with place and is ultimately tied to geography. The term *Hindu* comes from the Persian (Hind) or Arabic (al-Hind) word (derived from the Indo-Aryan *sindhu*, “river”) for the area of the Indus valley. It became a designation by Persian authors, beginning in the eighth century, to designate Muslims from non-Muslim “hindus” within the same territory.⁶⁹ While originally the word Hindu was not used in any sort of an emic sense by non-Muslims, today Hindu nationalists place a heavy emphasis on Hindutva as necessarily in relationship to material bounded land.

⁶⁷ Arvind Sharma, *The Study of Hinduism* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 9.

⁶⁸ Diane P. Mines, *Caste in India* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2009), 33.

⁶⁹ Gavin Flood, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Blackwell Companions to Religion, vol. 5. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 3; Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Brian Smith, “Exorcising the Transcendent: Strategies for Defining Hinduism and Religion,” *History of Religions* 27, no. 1 (August 1987): 32–55.

Hinduism is also tied to socio-cultural understandings of ways of being within and knowing about the world; some examples of this would be conceptions pertaining to caste, the four aims of life, and the notions of *dharma* and *karma*. The concept of Hinduism as religion may be tied to conceptions of socio-cosmic order, accounts of gods and/or goddesses, and rituals and devotional practices such as *puja*, *darshan*, and *bhakti*. Hinduism has influenced and been influenced historically by the pre-textual Dravidian and non-Dravidian peoples, subsequent Sanskritized Aryan culture, and by Islamic and European conquest and colonization.⁷⁰ This brief and overtly broad defining of the term Hinduism proves that *yes*, the Take Back Hinduism movement is right in that Hinduism has some serious baggage, and so does yoga. However, this is what helps to make yoga relevant to today and so exciting to study in its polyvalent history. At the same time, this magazine reporting on the movement is irresponsible in not recognizing how important this baggage of Hinduism has been in shaping how yoga is understood and/or practiced in America today.

It is imperative that I recognize and situate my scholarship within the contextualities of multiple definitions of yoga. It is imperative that I am aware of whose definitions I use, when I use them, and why they are useful if I am to paint a representative picture of any identity, especially one as sticky and slippery as yoga in America. The identity of yoga in America has been and continues to be interconnected through transactions that do not allow themselves to remain restricted or bounded by the labels and histories that we have created for them. To examine yoga as beholden to a

⁷⁰ Sharma, *The Study of Hinduism*, 5.

specific and one-note understanding in its history and/or present day practice does not do justice to all that happens between binaries of classification, whether these be binaries pertaining to East/West or to religious/secular descriptors.

Yoga in America today initially appears as a kind of surface phenomenon in which each individual only has to think or adapt to that which makes him or her comfortable. If you want spiritual yoga, we have it. If you want fitness yoga, we have that, too. If you want to practice yoga naked on a slackline while hula-hooping, then sure, why not! I am being flippant; however, there is a serious conversation to be had about why this is and what this looks like in America.

Theory

It is my intention to use theory quite strategically in this project. In particular, I need ways to think about the complex issues of identity involved in the movement of yoga from India to America, the formation of Anusara yoga as a movement, and also how practitioners in America understand their own identities. The continual flattening and crossing of space and place that occurs within the American yogic landscape reflects that we live “in the epoch of simultaneity . . . in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.”⁷¹ Furthermore, this simultaneity requires careful scholarship, the acknowledgement of how classificatory practices take place, and a widening and opening up of space for multiple conversation partners.

Baudrillard proves helpful in understanding the postmodern phenomenon of yoga as he recognizes that “our entire linear and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22.

stockpile the past in plain view . . . we require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end,” and also recognizes that this visibility is no longer possible.⁷² We still map and categorize our world, yet these maps exist through the blurring of borders, as “everywhere there are three or four paths, and you are at the crossroads. Superficial saturation and fascination . . . [m]eaning, truth, the real cannot appear except locally, in a restricted horizon, they are partial objects, partial effects of the mirror and of equivalence.”⁷³ These partial truths become organized or mapped as “models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” that replace ambiguity with notions of truth and conceal the lack of truth through reinvention.⁷⁴ Dialectical polarity and linear continuity no longer exist as traditional forms of cataloging the world, but rather the trajectory becomes scattered and interpretation exists as multiple and indeterminate.⁷⁵

As our globalized world is occupied by continuous movement, we must realize that our processes of doing and being have changed in complex ways of connectivity, such as high-speed travel, the Internet, and the ubiquity of widespread advertising and marketing. The world is more connected and individuated than ever before; one can gain knowledge and posit identity from a variety of sources. Identity is no longer located unilaterally in the traditional yogic sense of lineage or even within modern classificatory binaries such as East/West, religious/secular, private/public, and national/transnational. I

⁷² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, The Body, In Theory (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 91, 108.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

hope to model a theory of the in-between that allows for the use of selective and myriad terms among multiple transactions of scholarship in order to engage in an intricate and imbricated world. This selectivity may appear at first glance, like American yoga, superficial in its makeup, but it actually requires both a depth in understanding to be productive and an acknowledgement of its limitations to be effective.

Deleuze and the Rhizomatic Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization of Yoga

The discussion of rhizomes and arborescent systems in *A Thousand Plateaus* provides a visual descriptor for understanding the various transactions that occur in a global and postmodern world and has consistently helped me in thinking and theorizing about the identity of an American yoga. Because rhizomes are connected to one another through intensity and desire, it makes sense that, in American culture, this would play out in terms of the many. I believe the metaphor of rhizome is indicative of the movement of yoga as in between India and America and the modern and postmodern—not as a complete binary between the two, but rather as a combining, an overlapping, and a muddying.⁷⁶ Furthermore, understanding yoga in America as rhizome allows for movement to occur not only as multiple but also in a variety of ways and through various forms.

For Deleuze, the West resembles an arborescent model in which the world corresponds to a tree in structure—the universal One that is stagnant and unchanging.

⁷⁶ Rhizome: system of lines or flights that connects nodes to one another through intensity and desire. Rhizomes are in constant movement with no central point within the rhizomatic structure. Instead, rhizomes contain various lines of intensity either rupturing in a positive light and connecting intensity or desire to another abstract line or negatively being ruptured and causing forced boundaries that cease to allow movement and fluidity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

The East resembles a rhizomatic model that occurs in a cyclical trend of multiplicity and lines of flight where there is no static monolithic unity except in fragmentation.⁷⁷ What is interesting is that Deleuze speaks of America as signifying the in-between. America represents an example of how the tree and rhizome model may not be opposed:

The first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an imminent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel.⁷⁸

In essence, each rhizome is a mini fracturing of a teleological genealogy of historical authenticity, while unity only occurs when there is a power takeover that suppresses this multiplicity: “Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc. . . . as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees.”⁷⁹ I only have to refer back to the “Find Your Yoga” diagram in chapter 1 (see Figure 2) to understand how this notion operates within an American landscape.

Deleuze’s notion of the rhizome is able to do work in explaining how and why we may now elucidate a uniquely American yogic identity that is still connected to its religious and cultural pasts. Deleuze concerns himself with the underlying abstract fluidity that occurs beneath power structures, while lending itself to fixed orders of connection as movements of de/reterritorialization. This theoretical model is one of movement and fracturing and thereby fits the study of yoga in America nicely. He

⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 20. Deleuze recognizes the difference between tracing and map by explaining the map as a construction of the unconscious, open and connectable. The tracing is produced by the structure, which is an overcoding of an artificial image. The rhizome is the map that tracings are placed upon.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

examines movements as they create boundaries, as they continually work away from or across boundaries, and as they fluctuate between multiple subjective perspectives interacting with perceived, yet unstable, narratives of stability, in this case often labeled as nation states. Deleuze argues that multiplicities inherent within our world are essentially rhizomes that do not contain subjects or objects but rather exist in movement. Characteristics of the rhizome include “principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure, and has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things.”⁸⁰ A rhizomatic account of yoga allows for this as it does not limit connections to arborific (and also inherently contextualized) power structures, but rather traces the map of yoga in America as palimpsestic rather than one-dimensional in its understanding of the layerings and interweavings of ideas and practices.

In combination with the notion of rhizome, the Deleuzian ideas of deterritorialization and reterritorialization provide key theoretical tools for understanding the transactions of American yoga. The movement between de/reterritorialization reflects the transactions that dictate that which is becoming, rather than that as being or fixed meaning.⁸¹ Deterritorialization, according to Deleuze, is the removal of a system of overcoding (ordering matter), and reterritorialization is the new set of structures that then emerge. The space that opens up in between the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is where this project is interested in digging. The theoretical tools of de/reterritorialization allow for the exploration of the ways in which yoga has been

⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6, 12, 25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

understood among concrete notions of geographical and embodied authenticity and tradition, and also broken down through interconnected fragmentations of ideology and practice (further situated within specific and multiple historical contexts). Moreover, deterritorialization does not exist on its own but is always accompanied by a reterritorialization in a process that, like our bamboo analogy of yoga, may “produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity or . . . acceleration and rupture.”⁸²



Figure 4. Bamboo as Rhizome Image

In the transnational perspective, yoga has been deterritorialized from India and reterritorialized within the United States as its own construct of imbricated transnational interaction. Furthermore, this reterritorialization has involved the complex and discontinuous adoption of specific and historicized understandings of yoga, resulting in distinctly American imaginings. The process of becoming an American yoga involves both an exchange and a fluidity of transaction, and thereby reflects the multiple spaces and places that yoga may occupy. Again, yoga in America may be likened to bamboo, ubiquitous with imagery of Asia, a rhizome that develops in underground networks and springs up in unpredictable cycles of growth and flourishing, a symbol of transaction

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

that contains both cultural and economic significance, and when planted changes and adapts to new and different locations (see Figure 4).⁸³ The reterritorialization of yoga in the American landscape as its own identity is the rhizomatic map that we are chasing and includes both moments of rootedness and developments of spontaneity. Applying the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization allows for pragmatic scholarship, an opening up of space to explain the fragmented and circumstantial nature of the in-between movement of yoga from India to America and back, just as “a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things.”⁸⁴

Homi Bhabha: Colonialism and Hybridity

If Deleuze explains how everything occurs in a sort of in-between space, Bhabha helps to understand how subjects are formed “‘in-between,’ or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference.”⁸⁵ The discourse surrounding yoga is beyond the control of any one community’s monolithic claims to authenticity and/or tradition, as yoga exists in process and thereby both outside of and inclusive of a binary. Furthermore, this binary is based upon difference, and this difference is a construct of becoming based upon both conscious and unconscious intensities or desires. As Bhabha states,

[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are lined through an “in-between” temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history.

⁸³ Image in Figure 4 used with permission of Bamboo Botanicals owner Matt Lang, <http://www.bamboobotanicals.ca/html/about-bamboo/bamboo-growth-habits.html> .

⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

⁸⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

While contemporary American yoga can only “dwell at home,” it still creates an imaginary narrative of yoga’s historically authentic past. Bhabha provides a framework for understanding and complicating the transmission of information between people in a global/transnational world. His notion of hybridity is an especially important tool in tracing the transactions of people and perceptions of yoga across and between cultural and historical boundaries. Bhabha helps us to explain what is going on in the in-between as he posits, “it is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experience of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.”⁸⁶

The in-between or hybrid as theoretical strategy must recognize that various forms of identity are not chosen one at a time toward a perceived goal, but rather they develop through desires chosen by a cultural “tool kit” that incorporates moods, sensibilities, habits, and views of the world for constructing lines of action.⁸⁷ This necessitates “a radical revision in the concept of human community itself,” a recognition that community is always in transaction as well as in flux.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Bhabha holds that colonial and postcolonial encounters have led to both ambiguity and ambivalence as well as the desire for people to join. This desire to join is equally important because, as yoga has become more popular in America, it has paradoxically demanded both more

⁸⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

⁸⁷ Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 277.

⁸⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 8.

ambivalence and more authenticity as it contends with multiple “fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites.”⁸⁹

Overall, people come to understand their concepts of identity through the “cultural equipment” available to them and in opposition to what is not. Because of this, yoga in America reflects a specific and uniquely contextualized identity. The notion of cultural tool kit helps to make sense of this contextualized identity and illustrates how conversations of scholarship and culture themselves overlap. The notion of tool kit stems from a long conversation in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and religious studies and will mostly be applied to acknowledge and expand upon an earlier dialogue of cultural embeddedness. As Clifford Geertz told us, “[M]an without the assistance of cultural patterns would be functionally incomplete . . . a kind of formless monster with neither sense of direction nor power of self-control, a chaos of spasmodic impulses and vague emotions.”⁹⁰ While Geertz tells us that human beings need cultural tools to be able to interact with world, it is Deleuze, Bourdieu, and Baudrillard who allow for the theoretical openings to view present day American postmodern yoga as both structured and inherently unstructurable.

Because humans are constantly striving to understand their world, as well as make sense of their role within it (reterritorialize themselves), both culture and religion provide codes and answers to reality. Yoga in America lives in between both culture and religion and seems to evidence Bhabha’s point that

⁸⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 13.

⁹⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 99.

borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be as consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.⁹¹

Bhabha is especially interested in the ways in which stereotyping is used as an exercise of power that creates singularities of degenerate difference rather than varied multiplicities of interconnected beings. His is a lens colored by colonialism:

Edward Said describes this as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination—the demand for identity, stasis—and the counterpressure of the diachrony of history—change, difference—[where] mimicry represents an ironic compromise.⁹²

Because yoga in America is indisputably linked to colonialism, Bhabha provides theoretical context and tools for imagining how yoga has been implicated in and by Western projects of imperialism and neo-imperialism. For Bhabha, difference is equated within the colonial narrative in which “the ‘part’ (which must be the colonialist foreign body) must be a representation of the ‘whole’ (conquered country), but the right of representation is based on its radical difference.”⁹³ Recognition is then even more confusing, as the self does not only see the self but rather the self and the other in a sort of doubling or hybrid:

[T]he margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups . . . as homogenous polarized political consciousnesses.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 122. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, is a partial representation that rearticulates reality through repetition and, in doing so, always rearticulates its difference and its hybridity (125–31).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.

Soja and the Creation of Thirdspace

Bhabha's hybridity is a way of explaining this space of becoming,

that Thirdspace, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.⁹⁵

This hybrid Thirdspace is open and yet rests upon a rhizomatic map of cultural difference in which translation occurs in transaction and skews the recognition of both self and other. Edward Soja helps us to understand this Thirdspace of hybridity as a

term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings . . . in this critical thirding, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives.⁹⁶

Yoga exists in America both as the remainder of the constructed binary between East and West and as an open space for the creation of unique qualities among new landscapes. Yoga in America is also a wide-ranging phenomenon that embraces its contradictions and manifests itself in many ways.

In 2014, there were at minimum ten commercials on television in America advertising their products through the medium of yoga: diapers, laptops, home security systems, insurance, and Internet, to name a few. Yoga has definitely taken the mainstream American media by storm. At the same time, the media mogul of Def Jam Records, Russell Simmons, has found deeper meaning in his yoga practice surface "branding," or what one may glean from the average television commercial. For him, and

⁹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

⁹⁶ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 5.

many others, it is much more personal than its relegation to a buzzword for marketing campaigns; yoga functions as both a part of one's lifestyle and a reflection of it. Simmons praises the Jivamukti yoga book as the "bible of his spiritual practice" and is a very serious practitioner of not only physical *asana* but also other modes of yogic practice (meditation, *pranayama*, etc.).⁹⁷ The examples of visual branding and image of yoga for marketing purposes and the actual practice of serious yogis in America point to the nonlinear spectrum of yoga that ranges from secular marketing campaigns to spiritual practice. Yoga is used as a surface image that reflects health or flexibility, and at the same time speaks to something deeper, as yoga is used to "find union with the Divine Self," as Sharon Gannon and David Life (founders of Jivamukti yoga) phrase it.⁹⁸

I also realize that the perplexing nature of our postmodern world in conjunction with our uneschewable modern sensibilities requires a kind of disjointed linearity in order to make any sense of an American yogic identity. Whereas modernist dialectics view history in terms of teleological development, this project rather aims to put into conversation multiple different histories while recognizing that each involves specific transactions and conversations of authority or capital. I look at the formation of American yoga as a critical historical genealogy that touches upon definitional moments of yoga and Tantra in the premodern era, the modern era, and focuses on the postmodern present. I use multiple theorists, such as Deleuze, Bhabha, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Soja, and de Certeau to help to make sense of such issues as the colonial encounter, fragmentation, unhomeliness, cultural difference, and the opening up of new spaces. All

⁹⁷ Sharon Gannon, *Jivamukti Yoga* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), foreword.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

of these concepts occur in the narrative of yoga in America as representing the colonizer, the hybrid, and the colonized. The role of the colonial and postcolonial encounter cannot be underestimated in terms of the ways in which yoga has been planted in the American soil. As Bhabha argues, and I hope to offer in this analysis of yoga, what is needed is a “transnational ‘migrant’ knowledge of the world”⁹⁹ that constructs a rhizomatic map of yoga through the myriad process of transaction and always as a hybrid process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Bourdieu and Habitus

Because I must keep in mind that there are limits to my own theoretical understanding and to understanding the ways in which people act and perceive of their world, I find the theoretical tool of *habitus* to be paramount. We, according to Bourdieu, are all beholden to the structures of *habitus*. It is contextually dependent on both social history and human memory and can be understood as “embodied history . . . principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”¹⁰⁰ *Habitus* displays in everyday practice how we internalize external structures of the social or objective and externalize internal structures of the subjective or individual in order to perceive, understand, and evaluate the world. This relationship between cognitive and social worlds produces a socialized subjectivity that relies upon the practical skills and dispositions of past events

⁹⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 306.

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu and Nice, *The Logic of Practice*, 53.

and structures to provide shape to current events and structures, displayed in an unconscious manner by our everyday behavior.

Bourdieu holds that *habitus* both constrains and directs our actions but does not determine our behavior, a move away from or across the binary between subjectivism and objectivism (agency and structure). *Habitus* occurs as collective and individual, varying according to one's context in the world—class, age, gender, etc.—but also in terms of historical and geographical placement. *Habitus* demands a realistic conveyance about what is both possible and limited. In terms of yoga, this may be seen in how the Anusara invocation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter may only be understood in the context in which it is placed, as a moving translation held by a socialized subjectivity of interiority and exteriority. The yoga practitioners who chant the Anusara invocation may or may not understand what they are saying, but at the same time this does not necessarily make its message appear any less powerful or authentic in terms of individual experience. The *habitus* of the United States is a fragmented structure that lies between the individual and the social as well as being continually in motion between the historical possibilities it occupies and its everyday practices. Anusara and Sridaiva illustrate one fractured path among many on a larger transactional and located genealogical map. Socio-historical location is also important in the narrative of a shifting concept of yoga. The contemporary American yoga market in many ways dictates cultural behavior. This market also fails to devalue the complexity of yoga's message for all consumers. In other words, consumption does not unequivocally equal superficiality in terms of American yoga. The consumption of specific brands is rather a part of our American identity as we

both consciously and unconsciously display ourselves by what we buy and do. I will further discuss America's *habitus* of lifestyle consumption in Chapters 4 and 5.

Discourse of the Post

I locate my current comparative endeavor in what I have termed as the academic discourse of the “post.”¹⁰¹ The academic discourse of the post includes a variety of contentious and overlapping conversations that deal with the problematics of modern, Western, positivistic, objective, and teleological thinking and a turn toward something different or “post.” The ideas are involved with and stem from notions found in postmodernism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, the linguistic turn, and the subaltern studies group. While I realize that these conversations each hold their own distinct philosophies, they all speak to one another in that they are reacting to a new globalized world in terms of the historical, social, political, and economic, and are in conversation with hybridity, identity, authenticity, power, narrative, performance, and representation.

I am using the discourse of the post to explain the importance of Hindu/yogic transactions that occur within the colonial encounter and in conjunction with our postcolonial worlds of assumption, evaluation, and being. Spivak calls us to remember that India was under colonial rule of the Islamic Empire for 300 years and under the British for 200 years.¹⁰² The project of colonial map making provides a helpful example as the European powers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were obsessed with scientifically-based mapping, quantifying their domain as well as classifying, limiting,

¹⁰¹ This project is obviously a postmodern work; however, the academic discourse of the post is also inclusive of a variety of overlapping conversations such as poststructuralism, postcolonialism, the linguistic turn, the subaltern studies group, etc.

¹⁰² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* (London: Seagull Books, 2010).

standardizing, and surveying in acts of bordered world-making. Map making was a representational process inherently implicated in providing meaning and value in terms of conformity and consistency: “The scientific map form of the country is indispensable for after all it gives concrete shape to India . . . it provides the basis for rule and governance, and demarcates what belongs within its borders and what does not.”¹⁰³ This mapping is a demonstration of the ways the British government has been influential to the message of American yoga.¹⁰⁴

Richard King relocates the Orientalist conversation between the East and West. King examines the way in which a hyperreal (Christian/secular) Europe has been identified in opposition to a hyperreal (Hindu/religious) India and how these constructs are relational, interdependent, unstable, and unrepresentative in the heterogeneities they claim to represent, as well as mutually imbricated by the political, material, cultural, and religious particularities of their historical and social vantage points.¹⁰⁵ History is often the product of a winning power differential and is written in a way that attempts to ignore the multiplicities in favor of a unifying narrative of authenticity. Interpretation is a necessity within the postmodern world, as both authenticity and transparency no longer adhere to the borders that have been constructed around them through the coloniality of power, but rather have begun to exist in conversation.

¹⁰³ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 53.

¹⁰⁴ This mapping will be demonstrated in later chapters through such examples as the outlawing of yogic nudity by General Hastings in 1773, the role of nationalism and transnationalism in constructing yoga, the message of Vivekananda’s Raja Yoga, and the creation of BKS Iyengar’s curriculum and certification process.

¹⁰⁵ Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*, 53.

Amartya Sen points out that “culture is not homogenous, culture does not sit still, and culture interacts with other determinants of social perception and action.”¹⁰⁶ It is because of this that we must dictate a scholarship that is no longer bordered by the binaries that have constructed a modern notion of difference (dictated often by colonialist discourses and boundaries). Mignolo adds that the discourse of the post intentionally moves in between borders and calls them out on their originary myths because,

once authenticities are no longer an issue, what remains are the marks left behind by the colonial difference and the colonality of power articulating both the struggle for new forms of domination (e.g., Confucianism and capitalism) and struggles for new forms of liberation.¹⁰⁷

Yoga has negotiated both with colonialism and its current postcolonial and postmodern identity in America and beyond. The establishment of the Traditional Digital Knowledge Library in India and the election of the first Minister of Yoga by Prime Minister Narendra Modi illustrate how the narrative of yoga continues to shift as it supports both national and transnational projects of identity and ownership.

Overall, my theoretical methodology is one of in-between or a transaction between multiple tools found within specific locations of scholarship. This type of theory draws upon the cultural tool kit notion and applies this to my ability to draw conclusions about the complex phenomenon of yoga in America.¹⁰⁸ In order to achieve this, I must apply productive theoretical tools. Continuing with the tool analogy, I can also posit, as a scholar who is trying to construct a complex and multifaceted argument, that it does not

¹⁰⁶ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 112.

¹⁰⁷ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7.

¹⁰⁸ Swidler, “Culture in Action.”

make sense to use only one tool, but rather the best tools to create the best version that is in one's capability.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, I may only use the tools that are accessible to me because of my individual and collective contextual *habitus* as an academic, my embodied being practicing everyday activities in the world, and as a reflexively critical subjective participant of yoga in America.

Method

Just as postmodern thought represents reality as a non-fixed, unreifiable, and uncategorizable stream of events . . . [we as scholars must] consider the world's traditions not as fixed systems, boxes of texts and commentaries transmitted between generations, but rather as rivers, converging, recombining, perpetually in motion.¹¹⁰

I argue here, as I have already noted, that there is a unique and polysemous yoga in America, and that this yoga has developed from a messy process of transaction between Indian and American modes of being and knowing.¹¹¹ My method, like my theory, lives between the transactions of discourses and practices of being in the world. It is contextually based, comparative, critically historical, genealogical, and ethnographic. As this project is a genealogy, it highlights the intersections of multiplicity, discontinuity, and change rather than searching for some authentic origin or root in the singular. As Foucault tells us, “[G]enealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been

¹⁰⁹ Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, Columbia Classics in Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), Kindle ed.; Doniger, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹¹⁰ Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 8.

¹¹¹ Transaction will be understood in this dissertation in terms of consumer capitalism, historical and present day transnational interaction, and as the practice of yoga being intimately linked to bodies in action across space and place.

scratched over and recopied many times.”¹¹² My intent is to construct a comparative and critically historical genealogy of yoga in the United States. This method follows the Foucauldian idea that “[t]he purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity . . . [rather] it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.”¹¹³

Friend’s styles of yoga serve as a marker by which the complex changing religious and cultural dimensions of yoga may be examined and applied to particular moments and genealogies of geography and history. Anusara and Sridaiva exemplify the fusion and confusion inherent in the historical and cultural transactions of yoga, while at the same time provide key insights into the process of its innately American identity formation. My goal is not to be hypercritical or to disabuse the power of yoga within the American setting, but rather to show a layered mapping of who, what, where, when, why, and how in the identity formation of the dynamic and contested cultural phenomenon of American yoga. This project will construct a comparative and critically historical genealogy of the broader term of yoga as well as Anusara and Sridaiva yoga in the United States, paying particular attention to the role of identity within the Indian and American landscape. As I am dealing with multiple understandings of the concept of yoga that are neither singular nor simple, my project will also be interdisciplinary and comprehensive in scope. Anusara and Sridaiva yoga will serve as markers by which the complex

¹¹² Doniger, *The Implied Spider*.

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 162.

changing religious and cultural dimensions of yoga may be examined and applied to particular moments and genealogies of geography and history.

That which is of the “post” persuasion tends to denounce categorization and order; however, I would agree with J. Z. Smith that the relationship of difference, and thereby comparison, is crucial for how we think about the world and how we classify it.¹¹⁴ The post thinkers, even if they tend to criticize the comparative endeavor, have been helpful in constructing a self-reflexive comparative religious methodology. Yoga in America lends itself to a critically historical project of comparison as it originated in India, has been defined and categorized in the West through the projects of modernity and colonialism, and has itself colonized the United States through various understandings. A new way of doing comparative religion should be aware of the constructed boundaries surrounding the discourse being studied, as well as how cultural specificity functions alongside ideologies and assumptions of shared ontology. My comparative methodology employs the idea of Smith that it is the task of the historian to complicate rather than clarify, and that “we need to reflect on and play with the necessary incongruity of our maps before we set on a voyage of discovery to chart the worlds of other men.”¹¹⁵ This methodology sees the purview of yoga as located within human endeavors and thereby couched within specific historical conditions. David Chidester is helpful here: “If the history of comparative religion is truly to be a history, it must be a narrative of historically situated discourses and practices of comparison that is sensitive

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 253.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 309.

to their practical implications in the world—it must find itself once again on the frontier.”¹¹⁶ It is because of this that we must complicate rather than simplify the understanding of American yoga. The originality of yoga, and therefore its place within the American landscape, does not lie in one authentic root structure, but rather in the rhizomatic nature of its movements in-between.

J. Z. Smith: Comparison and Difference

My methodology as comparative owes a great deal to J. Z. Smith and his notion of difference:

Whether with respect to popular belief or professional procedure, that the issue of human differentiation will not be settled by more observation at the somatic level, but rather by theories of an intellectual sort. It will not be settled by taxonomies of differential exclusion but by comparative structures of reciprocal difference. It will be settled, at the level of culture, only by thoughtful projects of mediated discourse, by enterprises of translation, recalling that, whether intracultural or intercultural, translation is never fully adequate, there is always discrepancy.¹¹⁷

Smith models a comparative method that recognizes the importance of classification and follows Levi-Strauss’s notion that what is important is the in-between or relationship between differences, rather than the relationship between the objects themselves.¹¹⁸ A comparative method must be based on multiplicity and undertaken “in the service of disciplined inquiry” if it is to do work in recognizing and disassembling the false binaries of modern Western thought.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), xiv.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 316.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 85.

¹¹⁹ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 23.

The other is always the strange or unknown, the misunderstood, existing outside of the conventional boundaries of understanding of an individual, whether by religion, language, or other cultural distinction, yet difference is always relative and relational, “[f]or difference is an active term—ultimately a verbal form *differe*, ‘to carry apart’—suggesting the separating out of what, from another vantage point, might be seen as the ‘same’ . . . the making of difference allows for an understanding of the internal distinctions as well as external ones.¹²⁰ This comparative methodology therefore allows me to proffer a conclusion about what makes an American yoga unique from any other type of yoga. Smith also follows Durkheim’s notion that difference is not naturally derived, but rather depends upon a hierarchy of relationship situated within political and/or social transactions. It is because of this that my method is also genealogical and inclusive of the discourses of colonialism and postcolonialism as they relate to yoga in India and America.

Meaning is made possible by difference. Yet thought seeks to bring together what thought necessarily takes apart by means of a dynamic process of disassemblage [deterritorialization] and reassemblage [reterritorialization], which results in an object no longer natural but rather social, no longer factual but rather intellectual. Relations are discovered and reconstituted through projects of differentiation . . . It is thought about translation, an affair of the in between that is always relative and never fully adequate; it is thought about translation across languages, places, and times, between text and reader, speaker and hearer, that energizes the human sciences as disciplines and suggests the intellectual contributions they make. Vive la difference!¹²¹

¹²⁰ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 241–42.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

Baudrillard lends a good deal to this conversation with his notion of hyperreal, “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality.”¹²² In a sense, the map precedes the territory, as the map is created through selective and arbitrary organization and classification of the world: *habitus* meets hyperreality. Binaries of true and false, as well as what is authentic or fake, become a simulation created through the in-between transactions of narratives of a real that was never real. Take, for instance, the argument that “throughout their history India’s yogis have assumed alternate identities through a number of strategies . . . the identity of the yogi remains an enigma.”¹²³ Yoga in America engages directly with the simultaneity of narrative and lack of origin in its authentications of yoga and allows us to trace this opening through the example of Anusara.

Making Meaning

Chidester begins a conversation about the complex location of religion within popular culture in America. He argues that there are “three reasons for investigating religion in American popular culture: religious activity is at work in forming community, focusing desire, and facilitating exchange.”¹²⁴ Chidester goes on to assert:

Mediated through the senses, especially through the physical sense of touch, the embodied character of religion in American popular culture appears in the binding, burning, moving and handling of religious meaning and power, but it also registers as religion under pressure, as a pervasive sense of anxiety, distraction, and stress in a world that seems to be spinning out of control.¹²⁵

¹²² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

¹²³ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 253.

¹²⁴ David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

In *Authentic Fakes*, Chidester produces a study that is, in a sense, Baudrillardian in its makeup. He begins to complicate the boundaries of broad categories of religious and secular meanings. At the same time, he does not work entirely beyond the binary mindset of high culture and low culture.¹²⁶ I would like to take his analysis further in paying serious attention to the in-between spaces and places (neither high nor low) in which yoga has planted itself in the American soil. Chidester is astute in his observation that “paying attention to religion . . . helps in understanding the mixing and merging of political, economic, and cultural intersects in American popular culture.”¹²⁷ Religion does not exist in a state of isolation but is a layered event of presence and absence that deals with bodies, geographies, power, knowledge, and transaction. It is because of this that yoga provides such an interesting case of dwelling in between religious and secular as well as between high and low American culture.

Talal Asad asserts that, in order to understand the religious, we must recognize that both discourse and practice, as religious actors, are social beings tied to moral communities and governed by institutional structures. The practices, the discourse, the community, and its institutions are part of the boundary-making process and are integral to obtaining a more holistic picture of religious difference while at the same time helping to form conceptions of religious traditions that are both “polythetic and flexible.”¹²⁸ My

¹²⁶ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

intent here is to find what the meaning of yoga is and has been to the people creating it in relationship, rather than only what we want them to mean.

Wendy Doniger argues that myths from other cultures should be compared, since “we are always moving between worlds, trying to make sense of and orient our lives, and the trick of comparison is the trick of translating between these worlds.”¹²⁹ Comparison allows us to see both personal experience and the experience of being human. She follows Smith in her understanding that comparison is about making sense of difference. Doniger holds that cross-cultural comparison can be done when the questions that a scholar asks transcend particularities and the context is noted.¹³⁰ She posits that eclecticism is an essential part of comparison and “that any cross-cultural analysis will have to be sufficiently multivalent at least to acknowledge the validity of all these sets of variants, if not necessarily employ them all at once.”¹³¹ By looking comparatively at the major themes and motifs across yoga’s transactions of social and historical context, I am better able to see how particular peoples in the present historical context redefine the categories of religious and secular worlds. “Comparison defamiliarizes what we take for granted,” and allows us to see how each culture chooses to construct the retelling of their myths.¹³²

¹²⁹ Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42, 43.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 34.

The Development of Modern Yoga

A brief review of the historical movement of yoga provides examples of how messy and disputed the concept of an “original yoga” may be. During the early Vedic period, yoga was predominantly used in terms of agriculture and warfare; yoga referred to the literal yoking of animals to chariots as well as to the chariots themselves. When a warrior died in battle, he became yoked to yoga in the form of a divine chariot that would carry him along the path of the sun’s rays, through the sun (considered a gateway to the celestial realm), and to the heavens of the heroes and gods beyond.¹³³ Is this original yoga? Does this notion of originality lend any authority or credibility to American yoga? I would argue it does not.

The *Upanisads* provide multiple early yogic discussions that have to do with understanding higher or more ultimate truths through individual contemplation rather than Vedic ritual sacrifice: “Although ritual and cosmological speculations abound in the *Upanisads*, the focus of their enquiry is the human person—the construction of the body, its vital powers and faculties, the cognitive processes, and the essential core of a human being.”¹³⁴ There can be found a link, whether intentional or not, between the yoga of Vedic warfare and the concept of the self as charioteer: “The *Katha Upanisad* compares the body to a chariot, the senses to a horse, the mind to the reins that control the horses, the buddhi to the driver who controls the reins and charts the course, and purusa to the

¹³³ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 4.

¹³⁴ Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xlix.

inactive passenger.”¹³⁵ The *Mahabharata*, and especially the *Bhagavad Gita*, represent materials speaking to the continued re-envisioning of yoga as a theory and practice between the second century BCE and the second century CE. There are 884 references to yoga (120 references to *Sankhya*) in the 100,000-verse *Mahabharata* and only two mentions of *asana*.¹³⁶ Yoga is conveyed in the *Bhagavad Gita* in terms of action (*karma* yoga), meditation and study (*jnana* yoga), and devotion (*bhakti* yoga) to Krishna. Many of these teachings have to do with “taming and gaining control over oneself (atman), that is, over the ongoing mental, emotional, and physical activities that dominate much of one’s corporeal existence.”¹³⁷ The *Bhagavad Gita*, along with *The Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, is widely read in America for the purposes of comprehending traditional yoga. Does that mean that they constitute an origin for understanding American yoga?

In my yoga teacher training, instead of reading a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* itself, we were required to read *The Living Gita: The Complete Bhagavad Gita, A Commentary for Modern Readers* by Satchidananda because the original text was, as my teacher put it, “too hard to understand.” The fact that *The Living Gita* could so easily stand in for the *Bhagavad Gita* as authoritative shows that the distinction between authentic and inauthentic is no longer central, as “simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary.’”¹³⁸ American yoga teacher trainings also often employ Pixar animator Sanjay Patel’s *Little Book of Hindu*

¹³⁵ Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary with Insights from the Traditional Commentators* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), lii.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxviii.

¹³⁷ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 59.

¹³⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.

Deities to provide a cursory and simplistic introduction to Hindu mythology. The examples of *The Living Gita* and the *Little Book of Hindu Deities* show how American yoga simplifies and redefines complex ideas such as Hindu mythology and philosophy in terms of a simulated authenticity. Baudrillard notes that “the duplication suffices to render both artificial” and models a kind of hyperreal indifference that permeates American Yoga.”¹³⁹ The indifferent hyperreal can be seen everywhere in the yoga landscape. As Matthew Remski argues, “We have moved from an ‘exegetical’ mode, in which our goal is to render old ideas with faith and reverence, to a ‘hermeneutic’ mode, in which we are reflecting as much upon the old ideas as we are upon how we respond to them, and how we use them in the present tense.”¹⁴⁰ Take, for example, *The Yoga Sutras*: they are understood and applied in a very different manner in contemporary America than they were during the second century.

Patanjali became a pivotal figure in systematizing and defining the pre-existing understandings and traditions of yoga in his *Yoga Sutras*. The exact date of Patanjali’s treatise is unknown, but most scholars believe it was written in the first centuries CE. *The Yoga Sutras*, 195 of them, are composed in a succinct manner for the purposes of oral transmission and memorization. It must also be noted that Patanjali relied upon multiple traditions and philosophies to produce the *Sutras*. Like a majority of traditions at the time, it was necessary to have a teacher to explain the pithy and esoteric meanings of the sutras rather than individual elucidation. The guru/disciple relationship, so important

¹³⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew D. Remski, *Threads of Yoga: A Remix of Patañjalis Sūtras with Commentary and Reverie* ([s.l.]: Matthew Remski, 2012), 23.

within Hindu religious traditions, has in many instances been replaced in the American context by personal interpretation and/or various forms of media. For Patanjali, “yogic postures are useful only to the extent to which they facilitate fixing the mind completely . . . the body should be so relaxed that the yogi ceases to be conscious of it at all.”¹⁴¹ The number 84 has come to exemplify the undocumented traditional number of *asanas*, yet “the number 84 corresponds to no historical reality; it is a mythical number, attested in all Indian traditions . . . it probably expresses completeness, totality.”¹⁴²

Patanjali did not provide commentary on his text; it was Vyasa, in the fifth century, who deduced what the *Sutras* meant and became the primary resource for later commentaries.¹⁴³ Experience was and is prioritized within yoga, as “Patanjali, and after him countless yogic and Tantric masters, know that the *cittavrttis*, the ‘eddies of consciousness,’ cannot be controlled and, finally, done away with, unless they are first known experimentally.”¹⁴⁴ Matter (*prakṛti*) is manifested in both the physical body and the mind; however, neither the body nor the mind is representative of the inner consciousness of the soul. Matter within the world as well as the psychology of the mind can be found in the relative intermixing of the three *gunas*: qualities of *sattva* (tranquility, lucidity, detachment), *rajas* (energy, power, and restlessness), and *tamas* (ignorance, lethargy): “If we correlate *citta* with a garden, *sattva* with a beautiful bed of fragrant and

¹⁴¹ Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, 284, 287.

¹⁴² Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Mythos: The Princeton/Bollingen Series in World Mythology 56 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 304.

¹⁴³ Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, xl.

¹⁴⁴ Eliade, *Yoga*, 40.

attractive flowers, and *rajas* and *tamas* with weeds and pests, then we have a useful metaphor for the practice of Yoga.”¹⁴⁵

In order for practitioners to be liberated from the cycle of death and rebirth (one goal of yoga), they must both realize and uncouple themselves from the layers of gross and subtle matter found in the body and mind that block the pure autonomous consciousness of the soul. For Patanjali, the body is not representative of this soul and thereby not an appropriate place to look for happiness. This idea is diametrically opposite from the popular usage and understanding of yoga in America today that is heavily dependent upon bodily image.

While it appears possible to trace yogic philosophy to a history of ideas, and even the development of *pranayama*, the tradition of *asana* practice is harder to deduce. *Asana* rarely occurs in the *Upanisads* and is developed by Patanjali in the sense that he provides three sutras on the topic. At the time of Vyasa’s commentaries on the *Yoga Sutra*, he was aware of at least twelve yogic postures. The physical postures that we think of in contemporary American yoga had very little to do with Patanjali’s yoga system of meditation and its goal of liberation. Furthermore, supernatural powers were a positive and powerful side effect to the yoga practice, rather than today’s goals of physical appearance and health. Siddhis, often understood as supernatural faculties or capabilities, constitute a large part of the Hindu yogic worldview, and Patanjali provides more information about mystic powers than he does about *asana*. In general, yoga’s historic associations with supernatural abilities find little engagement in the contemporary

¹⁴⁵ Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, 50.

American setting. David Gordon White holds that the definition of yoga should rest upon mysticism since it “respects both the spirit and the letter of Hindu sources on the uses of the term yoga, in ways that have remained remarkably unchanged from the time of the *Upanisads* down through the Tantras.”¹⁴⁶ From the fifth through the fifteenth or so centuries CE, the ideas of Tantra, Vajrayana Buddhism, *Hatha*, and Siddha yoga were formed and interpreted. A yogi in Tantric texts was often described in terms of supernatural and worldly satisfaction as well as soteriological aims. The characterization of yogis as correlative to the Western evil wizard or boogey man have come largely out of the mystical and Tantric elements of yoga found prevalently in the medieval era. While yogis were regarded with fear and suspicion, Tantra was at the same time experiencing its “golden age . . . a world outside of time, an Indian version of the Days of Camelot.”¹⁴⁷ It is obvious that the dangerous and powerful yogi found in many medieval narratives does not translate to contemporary American understandings of yoga. White echoes this sentiment when he asks, “[W]hy is it that not a single yogi in these narratives is ever seen assuming a yogic posture; controlling his breath, senses, mind; engaging in meditation; or realizing transcendent states of consciousness . . . ‘classical Yoga’? If these be yogis, then what is Yoga?”¹⁴⁸

While there are connections with the understanding of yoga and Tantra during the medieval period, the focus on the physical body was vastly distinct from Patanjali’s understanding, and just as widely disseminated. The historical period between the tenth

¹⁴⁶ Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, 333.

¹⁴⁷ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

and twelfth centuries may be characterized by the prosperity and overlap between Saivism, Tantrism, and the doctrines of the Siddhas (perfect yogis). Most of the early teachings pertaining to *hatha* yoga came out of Shaivic Tantras, where *hatha* was defined by its antinomian practices and its concept of “the union of the internal sun (*ha*) and moon (*tha*), which symbolically indicates the goal of the system.”¹⁴⁹

The most famous religious order associated with *hatha* yoga is the Nath Yogis, founded by Goraknath between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Magical stories about Goraknath are prevalent, and he was thought to be an expert of yogic super powers. *Nath* means “master,” and, within India, the Nath Yogis were often associated with such concepts as warfare, nudity, alchemy, siddhas, and the embodied *hatha* yoga tradition, as well as an impure *jati* (birth group) defined by its relationship to renouncer.¹⁵⁰ The *hatha* yoga practices of the Naths are indicative of a nebulous connection between the goals of bodily perfection and the goals of *asana* practice in America today. As James Mallinson argues, the *Goraksasataka*, composed around 1400 CE, posits some of the earliest notions of *hatha* yoga, such as breath control and breath retention (*pranayama*), bodily locks and seals (*bandhas* and *mudras*), and techniques for raising the energy (*Shakti*) found at the base of the spine through the body (*kundalini*).¹⁵¹ There are also vast differences as the *Goraksasataka* only mentions two physical postures, lotus (*padmasana*) and thunderbolt (*vajrasana*), in its telling of yoga practices.¹⁵² Donald Lopez argues that,

¹⁴⁹ Eliade, *Yoga*, 229.

¹⁵⁰ Donald S. Lopez, *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 401.

¹⁵¹ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 257.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 258.

[t]hrough the application of “violent force” (*hatha*) in his yogic practice, the yogi succeeds in reversing the natural trends of aging, disease, and death, and channels his energy, seed, and breath upward against the normal flow of bodily processes. In so doing, he rejuvenates himself—growing younger instead of older—and realizes all manner of other powers that flaunt the laws of nature, culminating in bodily immortality.¹⁵³

The Nath Yogis reached their height of power between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries and, at times, came to stand for the entirety of yoga in colonial travel and missionary writings.

The three main *hatha* yoga texts are the *Hatha Yogapradipika* (1350 CE), the *Gherandasamhita* (1650 CE), and the *Sivasamhita* (1750 CE). All of these texts deal with the physical practices of *asana* and *pranayama*, as well as abstract Tantric concepts. As Alter argues, “[E]ven though the three texts are intensely physical, in their focus on magical power and conquering death they are, in many ways, more abstract, mystical, and explicitly oriented toward the occult than *The Yoga Sutras*.”¹⁵⁴ These texts appear more in line with contemporary yoga in America in terms of their understanding of the relationship between yoga and postural practice, focus on bodily awareness and materiality, and the notion of the subtle body. At the same time, the more mystical and abstract concepts have not been easily reconciled within modern notions of science and rationality or American understandings of yoga.

The Shaivic *hatha* yoga of the fourteenth century was mystical and alchemical and therefore concerned with the premise that, “to manipulate the body is not to reflect

¹⁵³ Lopez, *Religions of India in Practice*, 400.

¹⁵⁴ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 22.

reality, but to transform it.”¹⁵⁵ From the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Nath Yogis, or “supernatural power brokers of medieval India,” became known as organized groups of militant ascetics who controlled trade routes within Northern India; even so powerful as to challenge the British East India Company.¹⁵⁶ White writes that “[d]escriptions of Naga warriors [naked] portray them as a terrifying force, with faces and bodies painted to give them an unearthly appearance and emitting blood-curdling yells and rushing at their enemies in a drug induced frenzy.”¹⁵⁷

The Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion in the late eighteenth century represented the beginning of the end of the public manifestation of the yogi warrior in India. The first governor general of India, Warren Hastings, outlawed the nudity of wandering ascetics as well as their ability to carry a weapon, both outward significations of the Nath Yogis in 1773.¹⁵⁸ The banning of ascetic mercenaries within India not only affected the livelihood of the Nath Yogis, but also their identity as public manifestations of religious practice. The colonial administration felt that these groups of wandering yogis were detrimental to the economic hegemony of imperialism as well as civilized (Victorian era) notions of modesty. Furthermore, the British were more apt to promote the devotional practices of Vaishnavas over Shaivas, as they more closely resembled Christian worship practices. The British interaction with *hatha* yoga was the first catalyst in the removal of the Shaivic renouncer traditions and Tantric physiology from the physical and psychological

¹⁵⁵ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 40.

¹⁵⁷ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 225.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

culture of what would become transnational yoga. Popular applications in contemporary American yoga of Shaivic Tantric concepts include *nadir*, the *chakras*, and the principles of awakening *kundalini*.¹⁵⁹

The British colonial period in India reshaped the understandings of yoga in its outward manifestations as well as its sectarian affiliations. During the British colonial period, the practice of *hatha* yoga was determined to be immoral, barbaric, and a source of entertainment rather than spirituality: “The performance of yogic postural austerities was the most visible and vaunted emblem of Indian religious folly, and as yogis increasingly took to exhibitionism as a means of livelihood, this association became consolidated in the popular imagination.”¹⁶⁰ In addition, colonial and orientalist scholarship played a role in determining and speaking for authentic versus inauthentic forms of yoga. For instance, while the renouncer tradition is still very much a part of Hinduism within India, it has not been a central feature of yogic understanding in America: “In India, the religious life is traditionally a hard life. Holy people of both genders eat little, sleep for only a few hours a night, have only one or two sets of clothes and few other possessions, and must spend their days in spiritual disciplines.”¹⁶¹ This is a far larger commitment than the average American makes when visiting the local CorePower. At the same time, the Hindu fashioning of yoga by such figures as Vivekananda and Krishnamacharya provides a direct and legitimate connection to how contemporary yoga is practiced in America today.

¹⁵⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 32.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶¹ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 419.

Figures of Modern Yoga

The widely understood definition of yoga in America today comes directly out of the pamphlets and lectures of Vivekananda. He was a nationalist, a reformer, a disciple of Ramakrishna (whose relationships to mysticism he would ignore), and an advocate of “masculinized-spiritualism.”¹⁶² Vivekananda presented the East and West in a dualist manner of Eastern spirituality and Western materialism. In order to overcome this duality, his solution was to trade material goods for spiritual well-being: “His categorization of Yoga into four divisions, Karma, Bhakti, Raja, and Jnana, presented a simplified classificatory scheme of Yoga and ideology as a practice geared toward consumption by middle-class English speaking audiences.”¹⁶³ He placed authentic yoga within the meditative philosophies of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* and its “Yoga theology” of worldly experience rather than in the realm of renunciators and ascetics.¹⁶⁴ European scholars of the period tended to agree on the value of the rational and contemplative aspects of yoga while condemning its material practices within India.¹⁶⁵ White remarks that

Vivekananda’s lectures and writings on the *Yoga Sutras* were highly congenial to the religious Zeitgeist of the Victorian period . . . in a word, yogi practice was made out to be the antitype of yoga, and the yogis of the twentieth century the degenerate heirs to the practitioners of the true yoga of yore.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 26.

¹⁶³ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 34.

¹⁶⁴ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 35.

¹⁶⁶ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 244.

While all of the concepts presented by Vivekananda were already in existence within Hinduism, his choice of emphasis on work, love, self-control, and knowledge were especially palatable by a Western audience: “His ability to frame Yoga and the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) in English, the language of his Indian middle class, was the prerequisite for generating worldwide interest in and recognition of these ideas and practices.”¹⁶⁷ Vivekananda is credited for defining and translating yoga into a globally applicable spirituality based “practical Vedanta.”

What is interesting in light of contemporary American yoga is his apparent dislike of postural yoga, as “the chief aim and result of *hatha* Yoga—‘to make men live long’ and endow them with perfect health—is an inferior goal to the seeker after spiritual attainment.”¹⁶⁸ Due to the negative opinion of *hatha* yoga by such figures as Vivekananda, Blavatsky, and Max Muller, the *hatha* yogi was either suspiciously construed or completely ignored in popular yoga literature for at least thirty years after the publication of *Raja Yoga*.¹⁶⁹ White (rather ironically) notes, “As for the raja yoga that the great Swami Vivekananda championed as the ‘royal’ yoga and ‘essence’ of the Yoga Sutra, commentaries from earlier centuries employed the same term to denote a yogi’s consumption of his female consort’s sexual emissions (rajas)!”¹⁷⁰ This example demonstrates that there are many definitions that tell the story of yogic theory and practice.

¹⁶⁷ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 35.

¹⁶⁸ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 71.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁷⁰ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 25.

The first modern Olympics correspond historically with Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* publication in 1896. This transaction illustrates the rise of importance of conflating nationalism and physical culture. The ideologies of modernity and the nation state place a great deal of emphasis on physical health and masculinity. Alter argues that nineteenth-century physical culture came to symbolize and stand for faith, morality, manliness, patriotism, and sportsmanship.¹⁷¹ These symbols also translated the *asana* culture of yoga in ways that reflected this definition of physical culture. Modern print technology, too, "fundamentally changed the perception of the Yoga body and the perceived function of Yoga practice."¹⁷²

Ideologies of nation state have also played a role in the way that freedom or liberation came to be defined within the Indian Hindu context of transnational yoga. Vivekananda recontextualized the notion of *moksha* (traditionally understood as liberation or release from the life and death cycle of *samsara*) in yoga when he translated it as freedom. This translation provided the necessary Western and modern understanding that one could be a free and liberated soul within the world (*jivanmukti*) rather than having to renounce the world. Nationalists in India at the time were also symbolically defining culture and freedom in terms of yoga. This was done through promoting *hatha* yoga as "exemplary Indian body-discipline-elect, the practice of *hatha* Yoga represented the most basic, elemental assertion of self-rule and, some years later, of emancipated and

¹⁷¹ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 83.

¹⁷² Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 163.

internationally recognized cultural identity.”¹⁷³ This telling of *hatha* yoga is part of the reason that it has become one synonym for contemporary posture-based yoga globally.

Sivananda Saraswati promoted the “practical Vedanta” of Vivekenanda and is known for his statement, “If you want to enjoy peace and happiness, practice this simple Sadhana, Adapt, Adjust, and Accommodate.”¹⁷⁴ He also established the notoriety of Rishikesh as a global destination for yoga. The influential academic, Mircea Eliade, studied yoga in Rishikesh and his “interpretations of Yoga, developed through his association with DasGupta and Sivananda, have been among the most influential in determining how the wider world has come to understand the meaning of Yoga.”¹⁷⁵ Also, Sivananda’s disciple, Swami Satchidananda, was the opening speaker at the Woodstock Festival in 1969 and the founder of both Yogaville and Integral Yoga in America. Many transactions taking place, indeed—the originality or meaning of yoga has been rescripted and re-evaluated throughout history in terms of specific events. In our present American setting, yoga can be thought of as defined by “maneuvers of unequal forces” in combination with “utopian points of reference.”¹⁷⁶

As this brief overview has shown, yoga as a philosophy and practice is not a singular entity but a contextualized amalgamation of understanding within specific historical, social, and geographical locations. Furthermore, it is not and has never been immune to various degrees of interpretation, reform, sectarianism, and commodification

¹⁷³ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 169.

¹⁷⁴ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 43.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁶ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Kindle loc. 446.

by Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Just as yoga cannot be represented as a static dialectic of orthodox and heterodox practices, neither can we ascribe to it any indisputable etymology or ontology. The qualification of *The Yoga Sutras* as the primary source for English speaking yogis today, even as it spends little time dealing with *asana* practice, illustrates the coterminous nature of authority and knowledge in constructing tradition. The principal sources for interpreting yoga in America have been determined to be authoritative by the people in charge of writing Western history.

Americans today spend enormous amounts of money on yoga and yoga-related products. The complex and shifting amalgamation of yoga has adapted itself to the American cultural situation in unique and polysemous ways. Its roots here are deeper than one would think, and its current manifestations involve multiple and often unequal transactions between Western notions of capitalism and consumerism and Hindu religious and cultural beliefs. While I will return to many of the ideas and peoples vaguely touched upon here, the point I am trying to make is that there are many yogas, and yet yoga in America is a specific translation that may only be understood through a comparative and critically historical methodology. As de Certeau points out,

We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization . . . our investigation is concerned with this difference.¹⁷⁷

I am concerned with this difference, but I am also concerned beyond the notion of difference. I am concerned with the overlap.

¹⁷⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter sets up the theories and methodologies that are implicitly and explicitly applied to this project. I think with theorists such as Deleuze, Bhabha, Bourdieu, Soja, Smith, Chidester, and Baudrillard because of the fact that defining and understanding an American yoga is a messy process. Furthermore, definitional categories of yoga, Tantra, and even Hinduism are multiple and contentious. It is also because of this that I apply a comparative method that recognizes the artificiality and contextually located motivations that define and divide people. As Smith notes, “In culture, there is no text, it is all commentary; that there is no primordium, it is all history; that all is application . . . we are dealing with historical processes of reinterpretation.”¹⁷⁸ Because of this, it is necessary to responsibly engage in scholarship that crosses periods of time, academic boundaries, and the binaries of religious and secular. Anusara and Sridaiva display the inherent theoretical and methodological muddling necessary for understanding a multilayered and transactional American yogic identity, and it is because of this that I continue to weave this genealogical narrative of movement.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 253.

Chapter Three: Yoga and Tantra: Remembering the Past, Understanding the Present

We Hindus are specially endowed with, and distinguished for, the Yoga faculty, which is nothing but this power of spiritual communion and absorption [. . .] Waving the magic wand of Yoga . . . we command Europe to enter into the heart of Asia, and Asia to enter into the mind of Europe, and they obey us, and we instantly realize within ourselves a European Asia and an Asiatic Europe, a commingling of oriental and occidental ideas and principles.¹⁷⁹

Introduction

John Friend was asked at the first Anusara Grand Gathering in 2009 to determine whether Anusara yoga is a method or a philosophy. He said that it is both: a method to take one deeper into one's own heart and guide one toward the revelation of an underlying philosophy that is Tantric.¹⁸⁰ He further said that Tantric philosophy is very positive and life affirming; it sees everything in nature and everything within us as part of one tapestry—boundless awareness and boundless creativity.¹⁸¹ In Tantric philosophy, Friend said, we “honor spirit based on our vision that life is good.”¹⁸² What does this mean, and how are yoga and Tantra being defined and used by Friend to promote his American yogic product? This chapter explores the definitional relationship of yoga and

¹⁷⁹ Mark Singleton in Debra Diamond, ed., *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2013), 96.

¹⁸⁰ Yoga Journal, *Yoga Journal's John Friend's Anusara Yoga Grand Gathering*, performed by John Friend (Bayview Entertainment / Widowmaker, 2009), DVD.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Swartz, “The Yoga Mogul.”

Tantra within the context of India and argues that the yoga tradition of the United States reflects the muddling of terms at the local level and in transaction with global forces of power and economy. Because the identity of yoga in America is difficult to place, I create my narrative in a palimpsestic manner and use multiple theorists to help me think through complexity rather than disentangle through artificial categorization.

There are many styles of yoga being practiced in contemporary America, but Anusara and Sridaiva provide the most compelling examples in their particular dislocations and reorientations of notions of yoga and Tantra. Anusara creates a simulacrum of yoga authenticity rooted by Kashmir Shaivism and Siddha yoga marketed in specific ways that appeal to an American audience. Friend places emphasis on Tantra as grounding his philosophy, yet expresses Tantra through the very contemporary American language of individuality, choice, and freedom. An article in the *New York Times Magazine* states that

Friend's niche is to be less exotic than some yogis while being more spiritual than the most commercial ones. He calls himself Anusara's general manager, as opposed to its guru. He doesn't wear a turban like some Kundalini Yoga teachers, or his hair exceedingly long, like David Life, a founder of Jivamukti Yoga. Nor does he define the spiritual aspects of Yoga the way some schools do—he doesn't press students to embrace animal rights or to chant for extended periods. And he doesn't stick to the same sequence each time in class. On the other hand, Friend brings in enough spirituality and gentleness to differentiate himself from the hot and heavy Yoga types [Baron Baptiste and Bikram Choudry] . . . Friend's persona is that of an easygoing guy with an easygoing Yoga—except when it comes to business. Friend is not above a little intraYoga competitive trash talk to make his point: People know about physically oriented Yoga, he said, “but as we grow they are going to learn about Anusara. Then people can choose—either they are going to go to a fast-food joint or a fine restaurant.”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Swartz, “The Yoga Mogul.”

It is the way that he brands his yoga to be simultaneously fun, spiritual, and rigorous that makes Anusara marketable to many American demographics. Sridaiva adds to the discussion as it moves the conversation further away from Indian markers and grounds the practice of yoga explicitly in the American milieu of lifestyle consumption.

The examples of Jivamukti and Baptiste yoga, briefly mentioned above, also provide extremes on the American yogic spectrum. Jivamukti, for instance, takes seriously the *yamas* and *niyamas* of *The Yoga Sutras* and expects its practitioners to adhere to specific moral and ethical codes. This strict allegiance to guidelines (veganism, for instance), while attractive to some, alienates others by its denial of individual choice in lifestyle and practice. One of my yoga students recently told me that she was very attracted to the Jivamukti *asana* practice, but her father owns a cattle ranch and she could never give up her beef allegiance for a yoga allegiance—and thank goodness she doesn't have to! On the other side of the spectrum, the power yoga of Baron Baptiste (son of yoga pioneers Walt and Magana Baptiste) removed the spiritual aspects of yoga altogether. He provides “a means to access the powerful benefits of yoga practice . . . without the mysticism and new-agey overtones.”¹⁸⁴ Rather than dealing with the complicated nature of yoga, Baptiste chooses to categorize the philosophical or spiritual aspects of yoga as mystical or New Age, and by doing so, in a sense, dismisses them altogether. The removal of the spiritual marker of yoga narrows the scope of participation to *asana* practice rather than incorporating philosophical nuances of Indian spirituality—even via an American “translation.” Anusara yoga embodies multiple historically located

¹⁸⁴ “Baron Baptiste,” *Baptiste Yoga*, accessed April 10, 2014, <https://www.baronbaptiste.com/about/baron-baptiste/>.

and contemporary spiritual and physical traditions. As Singleton tells us, “the strategy of claiming an ancient and primordial past is not new, modern forms of yoga nonetheless emphasize and express it in non-normative and innovative ways—often according to the transmission, authority, and experience of the individual guru.”¹⁸⁵ This innovation is what I am interested in tracing through the changing historical record of yoga and tantra.

Anusara: The Palimpsestic Mapping of a Mashup

Anusara yoga provides an example of the first major American yoga school that does not connect itself specifically to Indian yogic lineage.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, Anusara continuously authenticates and explains itself as philosophically Tantric. Friend explains his own alignment with Tantra:

After studying everything, tantra is not only the most elegant and sophisticated system, but it’s the one that aligns with my heart because it sees that the very essence of life is joy or love and that there’s a goodness to life. Freedom is at the essence of everyone and everything. That is super fundamental tantric philosophy. For me, it’s just yes!¹⁸⁷

This statement exemplifies the locatedness of language and tradition, and how Tantra in America must be explored both in relationship and on its own terms. The categories of Indian and American and secular and religious are all important to the discussion of Anusara as American yoga, yet none of these spaces exists in isolation. In terms of postmodern American yoga or Tantra, translation is also anything but clear. Exploring the current popularity of postural yoga in America as mashup creates a particular metaphor

¹⁸⁵ Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg, eds., *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Kindle loc. 229.

¹⁸⁶ Vanessa Grigoriadis, “Karma Crash,” *New York Magazine*, April 15, 2012, <http://nymag.com/news/features/john-friend-yoga-2012-4/>.

¹⁸⁷ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 50.

that visualizes the postmodern hyperreality of connect and disconnect embodied in the historical. It also allows for the layering of rhythms, and reflects back the quantifiable yet never complete negotiation of splicing and combining in the art of creating a particular sound. As Mathew Remski tells us, yoga in America “collects the raw beats of the past and brands them, transparently, with the pulse of the present”—a remix.¹⁸⁸

I believe that Anusara yoga is more than a remix of the past; rather, it is a mashup that both uses and references the past to reflect the present context.¹⁸⁹ Anusara yoga is a series of borrowings, ellipses, and embellishments set to the track of twenty-first-century America. In music, a mashup is the blending together of multiple songs, creating a layering effect wherein the use of pieces of already existing vocal and instrumental tracks are intentionally interwoven together; they are transformed from their original content into something new. Anusara yoga reflects the taking apart or fragmentation of multiple histories and traditions and displays the process of splicing them back together in order to appeal to a contemporary American audience. Some of the tracks that are sampled are incredibly familiar to the average American, while others remain foreign or hidden beneath catchy beats. Furthermore, music is fluid by nature and continually building on the past and innovating in the present; so is American yoga. Anusara is an especially interesting case study of the identity of an American Tantra-inspired postural yoga system because of its conscious mashup between the physical, material, spiritual, and mystical aesthetics of India and America.

¹⁸⁸ Remski, *Threads of Yoga*, 20.

¹⁸⁹ This is the first instance I have seen of anyone using the term “mashup” theoretically. Lee Gilmore, *Theater in a Crowded Fire: Ritual and Spirituality at Burning Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

While Anusara is inherently an example of an American yogic mashup, it also readily acknowledges Tantric philosophy, crediting both Gurumayi Chidvilasananda and Kashmir Shaivism in its formation. It is because of this, and the fluidity of definitional categories of yoga and Tantra, that I include a genealogy within this chapter. I also acknowledge that, in tracing a genealogy of Anusara as both Tantric and yogic, I am unable to provide a clear or linear progression of history. This lack of linearity means that I must think in new ways that allow for the recognition of several voices and moments in histories of transaction to account for contemporary Anusara.¹⁹⁰

Ian Reader's work on pilgrimage provides a space of comparison to view religious and secular categories of reality as existing and shifting among porous boundaries. Reader "draws attention to how pilgrimages are embedded in a context of markets, consumer activity, publicity and promotion, and how they operate not just in the marketplace but through it."¹⁹¹ Yogis in America are not different in their affiliations with economy. Amy Ippoliti notes this blurring of multiple spaces and identities: "[I]t is stunning to see how deeply Anusara has been woven into people's lives . . . we were programmed to protect the Anusara 'brand' and 'technology.'"¹⁹² Branding and authenticity are linked to how American yogic identity is displayed and transacted. The recognition of particular narratives and histories of yoga and Tantra (and the omission of

¹⁹⁰ Transaction is again understood in the multiple as it incorporates relationship, bodies, and transnational moves of power and economy.

¹⁹¹ Ian Reader, *Pilgrimage in the Marketplace*, Routledge Studies in Religion, Travel, and Tourism (New York: Routledge, 2014), 8.

¹⁹² Amy Ippoliti, "Heart Wide Open," *Yoga Journal*, November 2010, 63–65.

others) provides clues into Anusara yoga's identity formation, as well as a window into understanding the broad development of a distinctly American yoga.

I argue that the Tantric perspective of embodiment is more appealing to the American public than the "classical" Patanjali perspective of yoga. For example, Anusara focuses on a non-dual Shiva/Shakti Tantric philosophy rather the dualistic philosophy proposed in *The Yoga Sutras*. Why? When I lecture on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* in yoga studios and explain that Patanjali viewed the material body as nothing more than a "sack" of mucous and bile, I get a lot of perplexed looks. Furthermore, when I tell them that Patanjali's "Yoga tradition does not consider the body a suitable place to seek happiness for those interested in enlightenment," the disconnect between *Yoga Sutra* philosophy and American practice becomes palpable.¹⁹³ At the same time, when discussing notions of Tantra, I explain the self as divinity and the body as an expression of this divinity. The students are excited and identify enthusiastically with Tantric ideology. Why is it that an American yoga situates its philosophical outlook in *The Yoga Sutras*, but sees itself more clearly in notions of non-dual Tantra?

Maps, Nation States, and Tracings

By understanding the map of American yoga as a moving palimpsest of tracing and erasing, I am able to view the layering and fragmenting of histories and cultures as they create themselves and each other; yoga is "recombinatorial and radically open [in] perspective"—a thirding.¹⁹⁴ Yoga may be understood as exemplifying the Deleuzian

¹⁹³ Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, 180–81.

¹⁹⁴ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

notion of exteriority (he terms it the “war machine”) that stands outside of the nation state, and yet is in many ways created by and beholden to state power. For Deleuze,

[t]he war machine’s form of exteriority is such that it exists only in its own metamorphoses; it exists in an industrial innovation as well as in a technological invention, in a commercial circuit as well as a religious creation, in all flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State. It is in terms not of independence, but of coexistence and competition in a perpetual field of interaction, that we must conceive of exteriority and interiority.

While I appreciate Deleuze’s argument and find many of the elements of the war machine fit for understanding an American yoga, I find the language of war machine problematic. The movement of yoga in America would see itself more in terms of a love machine than a war machine. Yoga, as term and practice in the modern period, has continually been negotiated and renegotiated by the interactions between nation states as well as beyond their manufactured lines. In other words, all borders from the smallest to the largest are created and recreated in terms of historic and socio-cultural forces in transaction.

I prefer to think of Tantra and yoga in terms of palimpsestic map. A palimpsest is the result of the removal and rewriting of text on a document many times. The palimpsestic map provides a metaphor for the layering, the mashup, and the movement of Tantra and yoga in forming a selective and unstable American yogic identity. On a map,

places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve . . . in this place that is a palimpsest, subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it.¹⁹⁵

By looking beyond the boundaries of static and two-dimensional mappings, we can see previously scraped off layers and the markings of boundaries that have been rewritten, as

¹⁹⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Kindle loc. 1663 and 1667.

well as these layers as existing in transaction. Like a palimpsest, through time or innovation faint remains of spaces that have been lost become visible again—so it is in yoga and Tantra. Scholars today have access to technology such as visual spectral imaging that help to decipher palimpsests and uncover fragments of what has been obscured.

The imaginary boundaries of nation states and the modes of bordering that are employed at various times have an enormous impact on how yogic and Tantric identity function. Daniel Boyarin helps us to see this when he states that “borders themselves are not given but constructed by power to mask hybridity, to occlude and disown it: hybridity itself is the disowned other.”¹⁹⁶ The created boundaries of yoga in America and India are of utmost importance, yet the tensions and relationships of history and culture beyond these categories must also be given due respect. Without understanding yoga in its Indian and American contexts, and in conversation, I am not able to account for how the American narrative of yoga is distinct. A comparative discourse on yoga in America must continue to locate itself in the narrative of its own situatedness—a *habitus* of history, space, and place. It must also account for the interactions that exist outside of binary or contained dialogue as “rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without ‘counting’ it” and that can “be explored only by legwork.”¹⁹⁷ The creation of an American yogic identity occurs on the ground and is thereby explainable and explorable only by applying both an ethnographic and a critically historical lense.

¹⁹⁶ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 371.

Moving among the various textual, cultural, and social contexts of the creation of Anusara means that I must focus my discussion while also continuously accounting for broad occurrences of socio-historical transnational interaction. By holding tension among many fragmented transactions occurring in local and the global spaces, I illustrate the layered nature of individual and national identities, as well as the relationships that are crucial to their continual realignment within a moving socialized subjectivity. As I have noted, this socialized subjectivity is found by recognizing the located nature of American yoga—its *habitus*—and the current globalized *habitus* of postmodern overload and fragmentation—its hyperreality. This work demonstrates how the character of yoga in America finds its distinctiveness in the way it arranges its mashup of custom and innovation (while also writing its own story of past, present, and future).

John Friend Creates a Style of Yoga

Friend's website states that his yoga education includes Samkhya, Advaita Vedanta, Vajrayana Buddhism, non-dual Hindu Tantric schools, Taoism, Sufism, Kabbalah, Theosophy, Wicca, anatomy and kinesiology, quantum physics, sacred geometry, and psychology.¹⁹⁸ This particular pastiche of influences, specific to Friend and his construction of Anusara, shows that, for American yoga, dialectical polarity and linear continuity no longer serve as singular accounts of cataloging the world; rather, the path becomes scattered and interpretation exists as multiple and indeterminate.¹⁹⁹ The result is more than simply a hybrid of India and America or what is considered secular

¹⁹⁸ "Yoga Education," *John Friend Sridaiva Yoga*, accessed April 26, 2015, <http://www.johnfriend.us/yoga-education>.

¹⁹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 16.

and religious; rather, an entirely new space is created that reflects and is shaped by the entanglements of the *habitus* and hyperreality.

Habitus and Hyperreal: Yoga in Translation

The first Universal Principle of Alignment in Anusara, “open to grace and connect to the divine,” proves confusing. What divine and whose grace are we talking about? Exploring yoga in the present, as well as well as in multiple versions of the past, it becomes evident that the answer to this question shifts. The language of grace and divine, in a typical American Anusara class, is translated via the Western *habitus* of Christianity in combination with a hyperreal mashup of Tantra, yoga, New Age, and various other commercialized spiritual traditions. The American Judeo-Christian *habitus* is further implicated by individual subjectivity in understanding and rewriting yogic and Tantric history. For instance, the ability to access the Internet and thereby collect information in a subjective and fractured manner changes the ways in which knowledge is both collected and dispersed; “truth” is acentered and nonlinear. As Soja argues, “[I]t thus becomes more urgent than ever to keep our contemporary consciousness of spatialit—our critical geographical imagination—creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions, and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope.”²⁰⁰ This does not mean, however, that people do not try to control the narrative. There are countless copyright and patent issues within the story of modern transnational yoga along with the ever multiplying branding of identity and lifestyle consumption.

²⁰⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2.

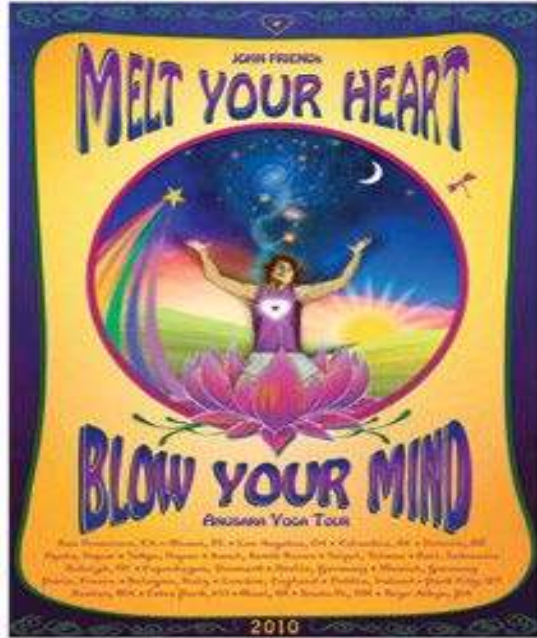


Figure 5. Melt Your Heart Blow Your Mind Anusara Tour Poster 2010

The Anusara poster for the 2010 tour, Melt Your Heart Blow Your Mind, visually depicts the hyperreality of Friend’s Tantric message (see Figure 5).²⁰¹ While the poster is reminiscent of a Grateful Dead concert, Friend’s association of melting with the heart may be connected to his philosophical relationship with Tantra, and more specifically to the Kashmir Shaivism. The language of melting the heart and expansion are used by Abhinavagupta and Friend to describe an awareness of the interconnectedness and divinity in all things. Abhinavagupta’s theory of *rasa* is especially pertinent to the discourse, as he links the sensitive viewer of art, able to taste the detachment of enlightenment “through melting, expansion, and radiance.” Abhinavagupta speaks predominantly about artistic expression, while Friend uses the language to help his

²⁰¹ Promotional materials from the Melt Your Heart Blow Your Mind tour found on the Anusara website, January 15, 2013.

students move more deeply into physical postures.²⁰² Friend's promotional materials for his 2010 tour show how his connections to Tantra are both real and in many ways a hyperreal of translation and practice. The Tantra of Kashmir Shaivism and the Shiva/Shakti Tantra of Anusara are both forms of a real Tantra (people practicing on the ground); however, they would not necessarily recognize one another's realities in iconography or performance.

Friend states that “for me it is always about making things sacred, that is remembering, knowing my heart connection with everyone around me—the deeper meaning of the spirit that has an intentionality that makes it sacred.”²⁰³ He continuously refers to Tantra to understand and promote his style of yoga. Furthermore, he not only promotes his message from the vantage point of spirituality, but he also “aims to take over the world” through capitalistic ambitions.²⁰⁴ By looking at how Tantra has been, and is currently, defined by Friend, we are able to get a better picture of an American yogic identity displayed through constructed and located authenticities of subjective agency. In other words, we see how Friend produces and disseminates his brand through subjective and located reinventions of Indian markers of authenticity.

²⁰² Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 3.

²⁰³ Jñānagarbha, *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths: An Eighth Century Handbook of Madhyamaka Philosophy*, SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

²⁰⁴ “John Friend Returns to Declare His Own ‘Epic Comeback Story’—To Be Bigger Than Anusara Ever Was,” January 9, 2014, <http://yogadork.com/2014/01/09/john-friend-returns-to-declare-his-own-epic-comeback-story-to-be-bigger-than-anusara-ever-was/>.

Tantra and Its Relationship to Yoga: The Mapping of Multiple Definitions

A look at various definitions of Tantra helps to demonstrate that, like yoga, Tantra is hard to pin down or categorize in any sort of uniform manner (even from a supposed origin). Rather, Tantra is a fluid signifier among moving transactions of power, economy, and discourse: a simulacrum, a negotiation, and a performance.²⁰⁵ Friend's Shiva/Shakti Tantric approach is in direct conversation with Indian Tantric texts and spiritual habits, and, at the same time, it is completely novel.

I begin with an introduction to Tantra as it is directly connected to the ways in which yoga is understood in today's American yoga climate. Tantra's historical record in India is complex, as it is found in the myriad philosophies of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain schools but is also unclear in its exact origins. Contemporary Tantra in America thus continues a long tradition of diversity and innovation in text and practice. What is clear is that the first iterations of Tantra appear within the landscape of what is now known as India.

The Sanskrit word *Tantra* first appears in the *Rig* and *Atharva* Vedas (1500–1000 BCE), yet its use on the ground has remained a shifting concept. Debra Diamond argues that “the meaning of Tantra is never fixed or singular, but is the complex result of the encounter between indigenous traditions and scholarly imagination—an encounter that has from the beginning been closely tied to specific historical, intellectual, and political interests.”²⁰⁶ Within the Indian continent, Tantra has spread itself rhizomatically, from East to West and North to South. This geographical spreading has in turn created multiple

²⁰⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

²⁰⁶ Diamond, *Yoga*, 27.

layers of shared and incongruent beliefs, customs, and practices. Furthermore, the esoteric and contrasting nature of Tantra makes any ontological assumptions and linear accounts futile renderings, an incomplete picture of a multiplicity of what may stand for or describe Tantra. In looking at the relationship of the Indian context of yoga to contemporary America, I rely heavily on the textual, cultural, and social contexts of Anusara and its fragmented genealogy. I also recognize that, although I view Tantra as palimpsestic and incomplete, I once again translate, historicize, and categorize it subjectively in order to describe its contemporary relationship to yoga in America. While I recognize this, my hope is to model scholarship that is both self-conscious of its limitations and open to exploring the multiple and scattered—scholarship rooted in movement.

Defining Tantra and Yoga “In Theory”

This chapter is concerned with the complicated nature of the Indian context of yoga and Tantra and their role in helping to identify an American yogic identity. While I situate Tantra, I also necessarily include a variety of overlapping categories of Tantric, yogic, and cultural histories, practitioners, philosophies, and theoretical tools. Bourdieu and Baudrillard aid me here in showing that there is not a simple lineage of yoga or Tantra. The modern mind may desire clear progressions of linear thought and easily defined categories, but it is more interesting and accurate to think of yoga and Tantra within moving and located relationships. Bourdieu (through the concept of *habitus*) reminds us to localize our fragmented understandings and subjective translations. Baudrillard locates our current notions of Tantra as a hyperreality of ambivalence and authenticity. The notion of simulacrum, as understood by Baudrillard and Deleuze, also

helps situate Tantra and yoga as phenomena within contexts, between contexts, and as something more than either. In contemporary America, we observe in multiplicity, make choices rhizomatically, and represent identity through a mashup of translation. In other words, Anusara is situated in the now, yet it pulls from a variety of places in creating and explaining its identity.

The conversations of yoga and Tantra are not static or stable, but rather change to accommodate a multiplicity of locatedness. It is by understanding this movement, and by looking at how the definition of Tantra has been rewritten in transaction with yoga, that I am able to situate these terms within the context of an American yoga identity. At the same time, the recognition of the lack of ontological essence is not meant to lessen the effect of yoga on its American practitioners. Rather, it helps explain how subjectivity and disparity interact with and influence larger currents of thought and practice as they are situated within the world, and in constant tension with places, spaces, and modes of power. Yoga and Tantra in America are “constructed around a disparity, a difference . . . the simulacrum implies great dimensions, depths, and distances which the observer cannot dominate.”²⁰⁷ It is because the observer cannot comprehend the discourse in full that I must inhabit many different places of yogic and Tantric scholarship and practice.

Like yoga in the historic present, the term Tantra is used to refer to a broad set of contradictory modes of belief and custom. Tantra presents a contextually moving set of practices/discourses; it also provides a clear link, and a starting point, to examine Anusara as demonstrative of American yoga. The plasticity and moving contexts of both

²⁰⁷ David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), xx.

Tantra and yoga define multiple routes of similarity and dissimilarity, as well as the lived realities of complexly constructed narratives. Friend states that his principles of Shiva/Shakti Tantra condense a series of principles, from both right- and left-handed Tantra, to understand and answer metaphysical questions, such as what is this world, who are we, what is enfoldment of Spirit into embodiment?²⁰⁸

Defining Tantra and Yoga in Visual and Aesthetic Practice

Perceptions of Tantric yoga as historic, authentic, and embodied are important in telling us how the identity of an American yoga functions (in terms of representation and demonstration). An examination of the documented historical realities of Tantric yogis in India also allows us to see the rhizomatic nature of a genealogy of yoga in America. The embodied history of Tantra begins, as Geoffrey Samuel tells us, with the Pashupatas. I speak of the Pashupatas as representing a proto-Tantric yogi because it is important to understand how Tantra has been authenticated within India as well as how its narrative is continued today in the American setting. The behaviors of the Pashupatas, historically placed around 100 CE, represent an embodied Tantra; however, their style of spiritual aesthetics and antinomian behavior is not characteristic of what one expects to find in the average Tantric-inspired American yoga class today.²⁰⁹ The yoga aesthetic of America today deals more with the branding and consumption of yoga in terms of outward displays of fashion rather than outward displays of austerity and/or antinomian practices. Shri Kaundinya, in his sixth-century commentary on the *Pashupata Sutra*, the

²⁰⁸ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

²⁰⁹ Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 240, 241.

Panchartha Bhashya, states that the Pashupata yogi “should appear as though mad, like a pauper, his body covered with filth, letting his beard, nails and hair grow long, without any bodily care. Hereby he cuts himself off from the estates (*varna*) and stages of life (*ashramas*), and the power of dispassion is produced.”²¹⁰

While the physical descriptors of Pashupatas do not apply to most self-proclaimed Tantric yogis in America today, these same Tantric American yogis often identify with the principles of Pashupata philosophy. The fifth-century commentary of Kaundinya on the *Pasupata Sutra* explains the five principles of the Pashupatas as “*karma* (effect), *katana* (cause), *yoga* (meditation), *vidhi* (practice), and *duhkanta* (end of sorrows).”²¹¹ These notions are familiar to the advanced practitioner of contemporary yoga in America, who builds on traditionally yogic and Tantric notions while omitting and rearranging them to fit American aesthetics. This rearrangement of aesthetics goes beyond bodily display and also refers to the redefining of yogic terms. For instance, I recently attended a yoga class in which the teacher’s theme was practice (*abhyasa*). She translated this term as “taking baby steps toward a goal” and related it directly to getting into more advanced or specific physical postures. While this definition does relate to the notion of *abhyasa*, it is also very much a translation made to fit American ways of understanding the world rather than *The Yoga Sutra’s* definition of *abhyasa* as “the effort to concentrate the mind.”²¹² As Chidester proclaims, “If the history of comparative religion is truly to be a

²¹⁰ “Yogic Identities: Tradition and Transformation,” *Freer | Sackler*, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.asia.si.edu/research/articles/yogic-identites.asp>.

²¹¹ Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 31.

²¹² Bryant, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, 563.

history, it must be a narrative of historically situated discourses and practices of comparison that is sensitive to their practical implications in the world.”²¹³ This is why it is important to look critically at the aesthetics of practice and discourse in various moments of yogic and Tantric history. This helps to place its contemporary American manifestations and to locate it as a moving discourse of practice and appearance.

The physical and the visual are important elements in the discussion of how yogis are imagined as well as display themselves through dress and practice. The modern yogic scholar James Mallinson addresses the pragmatic on-the-ground aesthetics of *hatha* yoga. He provides moments of relationship on the rhizomatic and palimpsestic map of historical yoga as he contextualizes the aesthetic practices of yogis during different historical time periods in India. Mallinson notes that the first millennium “ascetic archetype” of a yogi was one in which “Yogis have long matted hair and beards, are naked or nearly so, and smear their bodies with ashes.”²¹⁴ He notes that today’s yogis might find more in common with the Mughal-era yogis who were known to “wear hooped earrings, sit around smoldering fires, and drink suspensions of cannabis” than with earlier *hatha* iterations.²¹⁵ The current American yogi archetype includes a mashup of symbols of Asia and America, a hyperreality and a simulacrum that picks and chooses its moments of history and forms of practice to appeal to specific notions of lifestyle and consumption. This American hyperreality does not refer to yogis in terms of the hundreds of thousands of Mughal-era yogis who “fired musked, traded in horses, and occasionally

²¹³ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, xiv.

²¹⁴ James Mallinson in Diamond, *Yoga*, 69.

²¹⁵ “Yogic Identities.”

drank the blood of their enemies at the behest of the ‘kings’” or as the “most readily recognizable institutional faces of militant asceticism,” but instead as peaceful and meditative saints striving for enlightenment.²¹⁶ William Pinch notes that “weapons (and the art of violence) were part of a *shatkiyoga* repertoire that centered on harnessing supernatural forces both within and beyond the human body . . . the key objective was victory over death, self, transformation, elevation, of becoming a God.”²¹⁷

The violent and powerful aesthetic of the yogi has been wholly replaced in the American marketplace by illustrations of the peaceful and self-evolved (healthy, fit, and socially conscious) yogi who wears mala beads and expensive yoga pants. For example, mala beads are currently sold at the retailer Lululemon (for \$108). The company includes a video on their website entitled “how to use mala beads.” The instructor of the video and founder of the Mala Collective, Ashley Wray, states that,

[w]ith malas, at first I wore it because it was pretty, but it’s like an onion peeling away. There are so many different layers and you can dive as deep into it as you want. Now I wear my malas everyday for a different reason. I wear them as a reminder for intentions that I’ve set, or for what I’m manifesting. And I use them to help me in meditation, to count my mantras and help me find that inner stillness . . . when I meditate I tend to use ones like I am love, I am enough, I am grounded—English, simple and easy. Or just Om.²¹⁸

The self-identifying aesthetics of the contemporary American yogi illustrates a particular lifestyle consumption of excess, choice, and commodification. Mala beads no longer stand for specific forms or norms of religiosity.

²¹⁶ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 223, 225.

²¹⁷ William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society, vol. 12 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10, 15.

²¹⁸ Kate MacLennan, “5 Minutes with Ashley Wray of the Mala Collective,” *The Blog, Lululemon*, December 8, 2014, <http://blog.lululemon.com/lululemon-mala-collective-mala-beads?icid=ecb;USmalaquadblogbox;wk47;122514>.

The brand helps to define what kind of yogic identity the yogi hopes to display, and the social status of the yogi is earned through the aesthetic of the lifestyle consumption rather than the sword (see Figure 6).²¹⁹ Even non-yogis often display themselves and their status as yogis by what they display on their bodies.

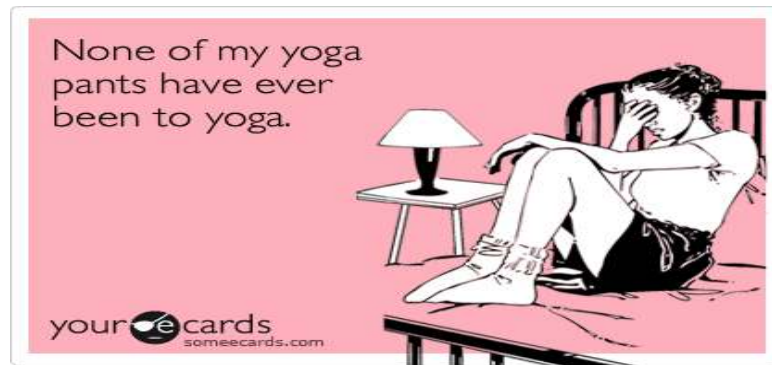


Figure 6. None of My Yoga Pants Have Ever Been to Yoga Image

As I have stated repeatedly, there are rhizomatic links between contemporary American yoga (how it is interpreted and practiced) as well as moments of severe disconnect and fissures of context from the Indian landscape.

Like yoga, the term Tantra is used to refer to disparate and even contradictory modes of belief and custom. Deleuze helps us make sense of this as he notes that “the simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates both original and copy . . . it renders the notion of hierarchy impossible in relation to the idea of the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, and the determination of value.”²²⁰ In postmodern America, this undoing leads to both hybridity and individual choice, while also creating an anxiety that needs/wants to fix history and make sense of the identity of

²¹⁹ “None of My Yoga Pants Have Ever Been to Yoga,” *Someecards*, accessed April 21, 2014, <http://www.someecards.com/usercards/viewcard/MjAxMS1mMWEzYTdjMjFhZmJhYzZmM2>.

²²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *October 27* (Winter 1983): 53.

self by doing. Furthermore, the identity of an American yoga problematizes narratives of ownership.

American yoga both idealizes and identifies itself with Asian philosophies of yoga and Tantra, but does so through a relationship of disassociation—a layering of pasts written in the mode of hyperreal postmodern. The specific commodification and marketing of spirituality in America removes socio-politico-historic contexts, and instead creates a message of clever and affirming sound bites from a variety of cultural spaces and places. For example, the clothing company Spiritual Gangster (“yoga inspired clothing for high vibration living”) states on the “About Us” section of its website that “Spiritual Gangster represents a new generation of yogis who seek balance between the ancient practice of yoga and our modern world.”²²¹ Its clothing displays messages such as “Blessed,” “Magical,” “Namaste,” and “I’m Just Here for the Savasana.” The company incorporates popular imagery and slogans from categories of India and America to brand and sell its product identity. In essence, it is the combination of freedom of choice, transactions of commerce and consumption, the branding of authentic individuality, entertainment, and physical practice that help to define an American yoga. Furthermore, it is through consumption that Americans present their identities and their social values.

Defining Tantra as Text and Map

Tantra, understood as a shifting category, is found in material textual sources in the early centuries CE. Hugh Urban posits that the oldest concrete textual examples of Tantra, the *Gujyasamaja Tantra* and the *Hevajra Tantra*, date from the third to the eighth

²²¹ Deleuze and Krauss, “Plato and the Simulacrum.”

centuries CE.²²² In these texts, Tantra is not explained comprehensively; rather, “it simply refers to a kind of text, and thus to one of the many elements that comprise the path to liberation, neither more nor less important than the other meditations, rites, or initiations.”²²³ Tantra has always been defined in multiple ways. Today, the most common understanding of Tantra in the West is that of neo-Tantra: this easily established categorical definition is comforting to the modern mind, but not able to fully account for the intermixing of numerous forms of knowledge and practice among Indian and Western traditions of belief and custom.²²⁴ At the same time, simply saying that Tantra can mean a lot of things does not help us in attempting to understand its stated and/or overstated connections to Anusara and the larger America yoga community.

Sthaneshwar Timalisina defines what might be labeled the bottom layer of the palimpsestic map of Tantra as

the religious practices emerging in the Indian sub-continent that predominantly worship goddesses identified as ‘power’ (*sakti*). It is secretive in nature, shares practices within the close circles identified as ‘families’ (*kula*), is transgressive of the societal ethos and norms, and introduces diverse images in visualization practices.

Monier Williams’ definition lies in the indecipherable and lost borders of Western imagination, as he finds Sanskrit references of Tantra “to denote everything from an army, row, number or series . . . to a magical device or diagram (often synonymous with *yantra*) to a drug or chief remedy.”²²⁵ Texts or maps often provide helpful guidelines for

²²² Urban, *Tantra*, 29.

²²³ Ibid., 30.

²²⁴ N. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion: An Historical, Ritualistic, and Philosophical Study*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 19.

²²⁵ Urban, *Tantra*, 26.

Western modern categorization, yet the palimpsestic map accounts for the revisiting of often erased borders and calls out for a more nuanced look at how interior and exterior are negotiated through transaction.

Anusara and Sridaiva create their historical narrative as they interact with a specifically American market of lifestyle commodity and branding. It is this process that both locates the spiritual and physical traditions of Tantra and yoga as well as dictates the discourse. Anusara removes the ritual density and antinomian behaviors of *hatha* and Tantra and replaces them with images of positivity and self-help. As Anusara “makes” yoga and Tantra fit into the American *habitus*, it has commodified both of these terms and changed their relationship to both religion and spirituality for the purposes of consumption. Vincent Miller argues:

Commodification has two interrelated consequences for religion. First, elements of religious traditions are fragmented into discrete, free-floating signifiers abstracted from their interconnections with other doctrines, symbols, and practices. This abstraction of elements from their traditions weakens their ability to impact the concrete practice of daily life. Deprived of their coherence with a broader network of beliefs, they are more readily put to other uses, as shallow signifiers of whatever religious sentiments we desire. The second consequence concerns practice. When abstracted from their conditions of production—that is, from their communities of origin—practices are deprived of their links to the institutional and communal setting in which they shape the daily lives of religious practices.²²⁶

While I agree with Miller, I do not lament the abstraction of some pure tradition, but rather agree with Reader in his view of secular and commodity as always involved in how religion and/or spirituality function in the world. In the hyperreal milieu of a contemporary America, situated within the global postmodern, “the problem lies not in

²²⁶ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 3.

getting the tradition right, or being open to any voice, but in how the contents of tradition are engaged and put to use.”²²⁷

Tantra, explored by way of palimpsestic mapping, illustrates how “borders are often constructed acts of discursive (and too often actual) violence, especially violence against those who embody the instability of our constructed essences, of our terrifying bleedings into each other.”²²⁸ The mixing and rewriting of borders of Tantra may be seen both in the Indian landscape as well as how it has moved and reshaped its boundaries in the West. Furthermore, as this is a comparative project, “The question of boundaries is the first to be encountered . . . To draw a boundary around anything is to define, analyse, and reconstruct it.” It is the process of creating boundaries that defines identities, and the continual splintering of these identities in America that makes their functioning rhizomatic rather than arborescent.²²⁹ I am especially interested in how the American identity of a Tantric yoga creates this difference, how American yoga crosses boundaries of global, local, and historical processes while redefining the boundaries as a fluid and contested narrative.

The selection of definitions used here is intentional in its incongruency and also meant to illustrate the ways in which American yoga’s definition of Tantra is a mashup of ideas that involve moments of authenticity in combination with dialogues of invention. The discourse of the post is important here in helping to recognize how we understand

²²⁷ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 3.

²²⁸ Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xiv.

²²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

our world from within our own situatedness, and at the same time rewrite the narratives of current history to reflect a moving past.

Tantra, Yoga, and the Transactions of Colonialism

Islam and Yoga in Transaction

The inclusion of Muslim rule in parts of India (roughly twelfth to sixteenth centuries) not only affected the history of Tantra and yoga, but also crossed boundaries of Islamic spirituality and political rule. The encounter with Islam influenced the history of Tantra and yoga in complicated and multitudinous ways. As White notes, “[T]here are no historical reports of details of the the practice of *hatha* yoga until Islamic interpretations begin to appear in the fifteenth century.”²³⁰ Furthermore, the close relationship, in discourse and practice, between Islamic mystics and Hindu yogis in India led to the later European colonialist confusion and blending of these two traditions. As Singleton states, “[O]ften confused with the Mohammedan fakir, the yogi came to symbolize all that was wrong in certain tributaries of the Hindu religion.”²³¹ Muslim rulers and thinkers also spread the material and philosophical culture of yoga as they recorded the practices of yoga textually and in image. The scholar al-Biruni (1048 CE) wrote a discourse on Indian culture and science as well as translated a version of *The Yoga Sutras* into Arabic, and the first treatise to illustrate yoga postures in a systematic way is an Islamic text entitled the *Bahr al-hayat* (Ocean of Life).²³² Furthermore, this text was composed around the same time that Turkish armies were invading Bengal (1212), and was later translated into

²³⁰ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 265.

²³¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 4.

²³² Diamond, *Yoga*, 151.

Persian by a Sufi master, Muhammad Ghwath Gwaliyiri, in the sixteenth century: “The long history of Muslim interest in the philosophy and practice of yoga is a helpful corrective to the blinders that are often brought to the understanding of religion; defined in purely scriptural terms without reference to history and sociology.”²³³ By authenticating yoga or Tantra as monolithic, we fail to see the transactions that create both social narratives and social boundaries. Although Muslims are not often mentioned in the process of creating modern postural yoga, Islam is crucial to the larger colonial project of transaction that came to directly define modern transnational yoga and thereby the American derivative of this phenomenon.

Colonialism in India: Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries

By the 1600s, a variety of political powers were at play in India, including Hindu Rajas, Mughal Emperors, and the British East India Company. These groups were known to hire bands of mercenary yogis to aid in protection as well as to display and deploy power. “Militant asceticism furnished trade networks, social opportunities, and equality without caste hindrance,” and from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries the Nath Yogis were “supernatural power brokers of medieval India,” helping to control trade routes within Northern India, becoming even so powerful as to challenge the British East India Company.²³⁴ This meant, for some, a reversal of previous ascetic rejection to participating in the social and material/consumer world. It also meant the realignment of the terms yoga and Tantra with the body, the world, and with power dynamics. White shares that,

²³³ Carl Ernst in Diamond, *Yoga*, 66.

²³⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 40.

[w]ell before Gorakhnath's time, several early and important works—including the Bhagavad Gita, Maitri Upanishad, Yoga Sutras, Yoga Vasistha, and a Jain work titled *The Bhaktis*—had employed the term *yogi* to denote the ideal subject or agent of Yoga practice. In these works, the *yogi* was portrayed as a person broadly embodying the virtues of conventional types of Yoga practice: meditating, renouncing, wandering, and seeking to find God within. This is the image most modern people have of India's yogis: peaceful, meditative holy men, living in harmony with nature in hermitages and caves, and on mountaintops. With the advent of Tantra, however this idealized image of *yogi* was replaced by a darker one, which has persisted down to the present day in rural South Asia.²³⁵

The encounter with European colonialism has in large part been responsible for the removal of Tantra from modern transnational yoga discourse: “Modern, translation yoga was and is predominantly an anglophone phenomenon . . . greatly informed by the textual vision of Orientalist and anglo-Indian scholarship of the late nineteenth century.”²³⁶

Because of this, I feel it necessary to include a cursory discourse of European colonialism in the creation of an American yogic identity.

European/British Colonialism

The colonial period within India reshaped the understandings of yoga and Tantra in its outward manifestations as well as its sectarian affiliations. It has long been demonstrated that the colonial and Christian encounters in India gave rise to the self-conscious and nationalistic neo-Vedanta of rational religion promoted by Hindu reformers and Tantric apologists such as Sir John Woodroffe.²³⁷ The British interaction with *hatha* yoga was the first catalyst in the removal of the Shaivite renouncer traditions and Tantric physiology from the physical and psychological culture of transnational yoga.

²³⁵ David Gordon White in Diamond, *Yoga*, 40.

²³⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 9.

²³⁷ Urban, *Tantra*, 135.

Both European assumptions and commentaries about yoga have helped to create its global identity. As White points out, a standard training text for officials of the East India Company noted the following concerning yogis:

They spend their time day and night recalling their God to memory, and, by holding in their breath for a long time, live for hundreds of years; by reason of their strict austerities (yoga), their earthly garment (i.e., their body) is so light, that they fly in the air and float on the water, and by the power of their actions, they can cause their souls to flee away whenever they please, assume whatever form they like, enter the body of another person, and tell all the news of the hidden world; from putting copper in ashes, they can turn it into gold, and by the power of their magic, fascinate the hearts of the whole world; they can make a sick man, on the point of death, well in one moment, and can instantaneously understand the hearts of other people, and their custom is to have no cares or acquaintances; it is true that “the jogi is no man’s friend”; and although, in magic and sorcery, alchemy and chemistry, “Sannyasis” have great skill, still the art of the jogis in these matters is more widely famous.²³⁸

These practices, as well as the religious discourses of the yogi, were at odds with the colonial project. European travelogues not only confused Muslim “fakirs” and Hindu yogis, but they also considered these yogis with a mixture of horror and fascination.

White argues that the “British were forced to acknowledge the ascetic orders as their economic, political and even moral rivals for the wealth, power and soul of India.”²³⁹

While considering them rivals, they also deemed them unworthy of being compared to European understandings of the world. Pinch notes that

the modern state in India could not countenance recalcitrant sadhus wandering about the countryside armed, dangerous, often naked, and claiming to represent an alternate locus of authority. The Company needed a modern sadhu: a priestly monk unconcerned with worldly power and given over to religious contemplation and prayer.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 238.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

²⁴⁰ Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, 25.

Within this climate, *hatha* yoga was determined to be immoral, barbaric, and a source of entertainment rather than spirituality: “The performance of yogic postural austerities was the most visible and vaunted emblem of Indian religious folly, and as yogis increasingly took to exhibitionism as a means of livelihood, this association became consolidated in the popular imagination.”²⁴¹ In addition, colonialist and orientalist scholarship played a role in determining and speaking for authentic versus inauthentic forms of yoga. For instance, while the renouncer tradition is still very much a part of Hinduism within India, it has not been a central feature of yogic understanding in America. Overall, the colonial interaction with Yoga is in many ways responsible for how it has been portrayed and disseminated in the West.

The Hindu refashioning of yoga by such figures as Vivekananda and Krishnamacharya provides a direct and legitimate connection to how contemporary yoga is an innovative enterprise. Singleton argues that “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 Vivekananda onward.”²⁴² While this is true, in one sense of understanding modern transnational yoga, I believe that Western yoga’s, and specifically American yoga’s, identity is more complicated than this simple lineage.

The influence of the British on yoga cannot be overstated in terms of its self understanding, as well as its boundary of the “other” created through transactions of

²⁴¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 39.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

power, economy, and knowledge. The 1891 British Imperial Census listed yogis under the category of “Miscellaneous and Disreputable Vagrants,” and a survey conducted by H. A. Rose of the tribes and castes of northwest India describes the yogi in the following language:

That miscellaneous assortment of low caste *faquirs* and fortune-tellers, both Hindu and Musalman . . . are known commonly as *Jogis*. Every rascally beggar who pretends to be able to tell fortunes or to practice astrological and necromantic arts, in however small a degree, buys himself a drum and calls himself, and is called by others, a *Jogi* . . . They are a thoroughly vagabond set, and wander about the country beating a drum and begging, practicing surgery and physic in a small way, writing charms, telling fortunes, and practicing exorcism and divination; or, sitting in the villages, eke out their earnings from these occupations by the offerings made at the local schirnes of the malevolent godlins of the Sayads and Musalman saints; for the *Jogi* is so impure that he will eat the offerings made at the shrine.²⁴³

The colonization of India by the British resulted in an arbitrary mapping of both Indian peoples and Indian culture. While the British constructed otherness of “the Indian” based on categorizations of fixity, and in terms of “exotic” racial/cultural/ historical differences, the Indians also responded to this mapping: “The colonized Indians did not always try to correct or extend the Orientalists in their own diffused way, they tried to create an alternative language of discourse. This was their anti-colonialism.”²⁴⁴ Nandy, in his account of colonialism in India, demonstrates the movement that occurs between the colonizer and colonized and the space that is created out of this dynamic. It is not simply a colonial versus anti-colonial discourse, but a space created beyond the binary of encountering other, a thirding. Mignolo tells us that “the colonial difference is the space

²⁴³ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 240.

²⁴⁴ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2009), xvii.

where local histories inventing and implementing global designs meet local histories, the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored.”²⁴⁵ While we hear people in America today constantly refer to themselves as yogis, the Nath Yogis are the only South Asian order to self identify as such, and their relationship with the colonial project and with what we know of yoga today is less than analogous to the yogi seen as passive, female, and seated in a lotus position.²⁴⁶ For instance, “[T]he *hatha* yogin has always been an agent of ritual pollution for caste Hindus,” even prior to European interpretation.²⁴⁷ This was, in part, due to the fact that yogi personas were often peasant males rather than members of the priestly class.²⁴⁸

White and Flood have noted that the colonial project lauded the Vedic period as a golden age, by both Hindu reformers and Orientalist scholars, while the medieval period of Tantric flourishing stood for the primitive and abhorrent side of Hinduism. The colonial imaginations in dealing with Tantra and yoga represented broad repressions and fetishizations of Western religious and cultural identity (Victorian, Protestant) coupled with subjective Indian relationships to the categories constructed for them through the colonial process (effeminate, spiritual, etc.). In Vasu’s translations of the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Siva Samhita*, entitled *The Yoga Sastra*, he speaks of the Shaivic yogis as “those hideous specimens of humanity who parade through our streets bedaubed with dirt and ash-frightening the children, and exhorting money from timid and good natured

²⁴⁵ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, xxv.

²⁴⁶ White, *Sinister Yogis*.

²⁴⁷ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 7.

²⁴⁸ White, *Sinister Yogis*, 231.

fold”; although they might be thought of as yogis in India, “all true Yogis renounce any fraternity with these.”²⁴⁹ We find a further example of the layering, erasures, confusion, and infusion of *habitus* in the discourse of yoga and Tantra promoted by Vivekananda.

Vivekananda represents an embodied example of the transactions of internal and external colonialism of the Indian subject, formulated through the stereotyping of colonial difference, and colored by the politics of nation states. As Spivak notes, “nationalism negotiates with the most private in the interest of controlling the public sphere.”²⁵⁰ In terms of yoga, the physical manifestation of the yoga body as Shaivic ascetic was replaced, through the redefinition of yoga, by both Vivekananda and Orientalist scholars of the time, who “tended to admire what they saw as the rational, philosophical, and contemplative aspects of yoga while condemning the obnoxious behavior and queer ascetic practices of the yogis themselves.”²⁵¹ As for his opinion of *hatha* yoga, Vivekananda states that “we have nothing to do with it here, because its practices are very difficult, and cannot be learned in a day . . . the chief aim and result of *hatha* Yoga—‘to make men live long’ and endow them with perfect health—is an inferior goal to the seeker after spiritual.” Vivekananda in a sense provides the track while Krishnamacharya lends the beat to an American postural yoga.

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) is considered the grandfather of modern yoga. His dissemination of yoga is important for transnational modern yoga but also for the ways in which yoga is understood in America today, which will be discussed further

²⁴⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 46.

²⁵⁰ Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, 57.

²⁵¹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 35.

in the next chapter. He is often quoted in America with his statement that “the yoga practice must be adapted to suit the period, location, and specific requirements of the individual.”²⁵² This statement alone allows for the type of fluidity and choice needed to make yoga successful in the American marketplace. Singleton poses that this new yoga creation was “rooted in Brahminical tradition but molded by the eclectic physical culture zeitgeist” of Krishnamacharya’s time. He was the grandson of the head of a Vaishnavite learning center in Southern India and developed his concepts of yoga through the royal gymnastics program at the Mysore Palace (Jaganmohan). Krishnamacharya wrote the *Yoga Markaranda* in 1934 in an effort to answer all questions about yoga; however, it was mostly concerned with the presentation of 38 *asanas* and their sequences or *vinyasas*.²⁵³ Although disputed by Krishnamacharya, it is said that he developed his own version of *hatha* yoga out of a fusion of Hindu tradition and transnational physical culture.²⁵⁴ The official history of Astanga Vinyasa holds that

Krishnamacharya learned the system from his Himalayan guru Rammohan Brahmachari on the basis of a five-thousand-year-old text by Vamana Rishi, called *Yoga Kurunta*. On his return to India from Tibet, Krishnamacharya “discovered” the text in a Calcutta library, transcribed it, and then taught it verbatim to his students.²⁵⁵

This text remains “lost,” as well as other ancient sources of Krishnamacharya’s teachings. The foundational sequences of Suryanamaskar A and B form the basis of the Mysore yoga style as well as most contemporary yoga styles in America. Pattabhi Jois claims that

²⁵² Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 188.

²⁵³ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 339.

²⁵⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 179.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

the Vedas describe the suryanamaskar sequences as taught perfectly by Krishnamacharya, but the location in the Vedas is not elaborated upon.

Krishnamacharya's questionable sources of yoga authority and legitimation do not take away from the fact that his contributions were valuable and inclusive of yoga techniques such as *bandha*, *pranayama*, and *mudra*. Krishnamacharya's influence in the Indian setting was the catalyst for the explosion of multiple styles of yoga practice in America, many that trace their lineage directly to Mysore.²⁵⁶

Krishnamacharya, while providing much of the spark for yoga in the West, also speaks to the need for a renewed Indian interest in yoga. In his *Yoga Makaranda*, Krishnamacharya states that

foreigners steal away either knowingly or unknowingly, many great works and techniques from our land, and then pretend to have discovered them by themselves. Thereafter, they bring these back here and sell them to us . . . If we sleep further, a day may come when foreigners may become our teachers for Yoga practice also.²⁵⁷

Paradoxically, it is Krishnamacharya's students Pattabhi Jois and BKS Iyengar who are most responsible for how yoga is experienced in America.

While the relationship between the physical culture movement, nationalism, and yoga has been taken up by many scholars, what I find interesting is the promotion of the body as strong in nationalistic terms, over and above the creation of a strong body for that attainment of *siddhis* (supernatural powers). I believe that the selectivity of categorization when understanding yoga and Tantra in America must be seen within the context and

²⁵⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 188.

²⁵⁷ Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, *Yoga Makaranda: The Nectar of Yoga* (Swathi Soft Solutions, 2013), Kindle loc. 2162.

processes of a variety of transactions between East and West and in the creation of new narratives that stem from this relationship. As Strauss argues,

A kind of cognitive dissonance is created in the efforts to maintain both Western (Cartesian) and Hindu understandings of yoga: the idea of embodied knowledge, knowledge obtained through bodily experience, is in some way contrary to, or unexplained by 'rational' models based on separation of subject and object.²⁵⁸

While Krishnamacharya is crucial in understanding modern transnational yoga, the discussion of Anusara and Sridaiva serve to narrow a larger discourse of moving parts. As I have stated previously, Anusara yoga is an American form of yoga that connects itself directly to Tantra.

Tracing Anusara: Defining and Redefining Tantra for an American Audience

Anusara places itself as Tantric and broadens its translation through the contemporary market of American consumptive spirituality and secular exercise. The secular and the sacred not only rub up against one another, but also define one another in motion. Douglas Brooks' ten-point polythetic definition of Tantra helps understand the ways in which Anusara yoga may be broadly classified as a Tantric practice as well as how it does not conform to the implied categories of Tantra. Brooks, like this project, follows the comparative methodology of Smith:

Tantra is best interpreted in relation to other terms or categories that arise in Indian tradition. The term's significance is found not in its etymological or metaphorical meanings, nor in reference to a unique defining quality or characteristic. Rather, Tantra—and Tantrism, the abstract noun created by scholars to refer to Tantric texts and traditions—is defined most accurately by developing an understanding of oppositional social, political, and religious relations and structures. The key to definition is the formulation of a method by which we can identify Tantric characteristics while, at the same time, provisionally distinguish the Tantric from the non-Tantric. The generic attributes

²⁵⁸ Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 121.

that define Tantrism, are in their historical contexts, part of a larger network of social and religious relations in India.²⁵⁹

It is by looking at Brooks' "polythetic mode of classification" that I am able to account for the Tantric aspects in Anusara yoga as well as begin to explain the creative overlapping, and the new spaces that are created. Brooks distinguishes the features of Tantra as follows:

1. Tantric sources are not part of the conventional canon of Hindu scriptures. Rather, they are "additional" and esoteric both as a canon of Hindu sources and as a class of practices, concepts, and traditions.
2. Tantrism teaches special forms of Yoga and spiritual discipline.
3. Tantrics are at once theists and philosophical nondualists.
4. Tantrism involves elaborate speculations on the nature of sound and specifies the ritual use of mantras to bring about soteriological and worldly aims.
5. In addition to the use of mantras and physical, anthropomorphic forms of divinity in ritual worship, Tantrics also include in their worship other symbolic elements especially diagrammatical representations known as yantras, mandalas, or cakras.
6. Tantrics, like other Hindus, place an extraordinary emphasis on the authority of the teacher (guru).
7. Tantric spirituality employs ritual and meditative practices that entail a variety of forms of bipolar symbology.
8. Tantra is not only secret (*rahasya*) in the sense that the gurus restrict its most spiritually efficacious teachings to those they deem qualified, it is expeditious and dangerous—a "lightning bolt vehicle" (*vajrayana*), as Buddhists call it, not easily controlled or mastered.
9. Tantrics use conventionally prohibited substances in ritual, such as liquor and meat, and engage in antinomian practices for spiritual and material ends including sexual intercourse outside the legitimate, Dharmic, boundaries of marriage.

²⁵⁹ Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

10. Tantrism's most distinctive feature, though not as often cited as the controversial use of intoxicants, sex and other sensual aids is initiation (diksa) in which the established criteria of caste and gender are not the primary tests of qualification (adhikara) for sadhana.²⁶⁰

Even a cursory glance makes it obvious that Anusara, as an American-inspired form of Tantric yoga, is beholden to its spiritual past and inventive in its current translation and practice of Indian spirituality. There are parts of this multifaceted definition that very much fit with Anusara, and others, such as the boundaries of caste/gender or the secrecy of teachings, that are either irrelevant or impractical today. By defining Tantra as multiple, Brooks allows for the kind of fluidity needed to observe the moving concept of Tantra rather than articulating a monolithic and static phenomenon: "Tantrism presents before the Hindu imagination both new and old sets of symbols and ideals . . . they dare to use symbols in bold and innovative ways and refuse to accept that human are limited to single points of view."²⁶¹ So does the American layering of Tantra as it moves amongst and within the American yoga discourse.

Friend grounds his philosophy in Tantra and defines his system as broad-based Shiva/Shakti Tantra that looks for the good in ourselves and in others while revealing the beauty and the divine in all of us. Furthermore, in Tantra this beauty may be manifested physically. In Anusara the body is seen as a pulsing physicalized consciousness, the body is an expression of the heart, and everyone may connect to the joy of universal consciousness. The world is often described by Friend as a "pulsing tapestry of energy," with the Shakti of each individual heart as part of this tapestry. The phrase "shine your

²⁶⁰ Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 6.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55–71.

heart and express your individual freedom” is often heard in Anusara classes. As Friend says, “Anusara just means flow in the wake and the pulse of the Shakti—let the Shakti lead the way and get into its stream or current and enjoy the ride.”²⁶² For Friend, it is not the transgressive nor the self-rejecting antinomian practices of Tantra that are promoted, or even acknowledged, but rather the simplified non-dual notion of divinity as occupying everything. The individual represents the totality and individual divinity is both masked and able to be uncovered (an awakening of Shakti through postural practice).

Enlightenment is accessible to all and waiting to be revealed to the individual on the yoga mat.

Friend’s language may be traced to Tantric and yogic thought, New Age philosophy, and Christian evangelical self-help language, and thereby reflects the mashup style of yoga I have been arguing for, a continual mapping of ideas that are subjective, selective, and fluid. We thus have a palimpsest that explores multiple connections of history in fractured moments, where embodied beings live and interact with their world. This is the space that I find most interesting, as well as the most difficult to define. The binary is necessary for comparison; however, the opening up of new space allows the researcher to “set aside the demands to make an either/or choice, and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and logic, one that not only permits but encourages a creative combination of postmodern and modernist perspective.”²⁶³ The theory and method of this project, in its use of genealogy, reflects the modernist reality of binary and linear mappings to create and explain the world. I aim to go beyond this by complicating “easy”

²⁶² Darren John Main, *Yoga and the Path of the Urban Mystic* (New York: iUniverse Star, 2007), 185, 194.

²⁶³ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

categorizations of difference and by exploring palimpsestic and rhizomatic mappings of yoga and Tantra in transaction to understand the American mashup style of yoga.

The *hatha* yoga found in the tenth to thirteenth centuries, as compared the *hatha* yoga found at the Wanderlust festival in Tahoe, California, engages directly with material, aesthetic, and metaphysical notions of the body and its relationship to the world. The *hatha* yoga practiced at the Wanderlust festival in California represents identities of belief and practice that are disparate, disjointed, and relative in their relationships to one another and to any historically locatable Indian notions of yoga. Anusara reflects one uncovering of multiple layers of a particular palimpsestic map—a way of tracing the identities of yoga and Tantra as they overlay and obscure several historically located moments of Tantric and yogic practice.

It is important to note that the Tantric notions promoted in Anusara stem predominantly from the Siddha yoga rendering of Tantra linked to Kashmir Shaivism, “a remystification of the world,” with the focus placed on such themes as the “grace” and “morality” of the guru, initiation, *shaktipat* (*kundalini*), *bhakti*, and meditation. The inclusive, individualistic, and universal notions of Kashmir Shaivism are given precedence in Anusara, while the more transgressive and esoteric components of Kashmir Shaivism, such as ritualized sex (even with one’s own mother), are excluded.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Tantric message is made accessible to the masses within the marketplace. Friend states that he has been studying Tantra for over twenty years and relates it to “a never-ending art project in which you get more skillful at living—Tantra

²⁶⁴ Jain, “Branding Yoga.”

can show you how” as you learn to “take a profaned place and shift it to a sacred space. You can take something that’s ugly and start to manifest and reform it, transform it so you remember that there is the supreme—this is Tantra.”²⁶⁵ While Friend promotes a simplified Shiva/Shakti version of multiple modes of Indian and Tantric thought, his philosophy must also be placed within America’s present day *habitus* rather than the location of Kashmir Shaivism’s beginnings.

Contextualizing Kashmir Shaivism

Abhinavagupta and Kashmir Shaivism represent the Tantric starting point in mapping a genealogy of Anusara. Scholars today attempt to understand the traditions of Abhinavagupta and Kashmir Shaivism as a synthesis of non-dual Tantric traditions taken from a variety of lineages (*Trika, Krama, Kaula*). Abhinavagupta’s work is culturally embedded in multiple systems of esoteric knowledge and lineages of tradition guarded by the intimate relationships of gurus and disciples. Furthermore, the ability to interpret these texts must be seen as contextual and piecemeal. Take, for instance, the fact that we know barely anything about Kashmir from the second to the ninth centuries or the fact that half of Abhinavagupta’s writings have been lost.²⁶⁶

Abhinavagupta completed over thirty works of philosophy, his most important being a compendium and exegesis of many Shaivic schools, including *Trika, Krama*, and *Kaula* traditions.²⁶⁷ We now refer and categorize these intersections of Shaivic and

²⁶⁵ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

²⁶⁶ Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva*, 18.

²⁶⁷ In the *Trika* system there are three energies: para (supreme), apara (difference), and parapara (identity in difference), and everything exists in these three energies whether material or spiritual. The *Trika* system

Tantric thought as Kashmir Shaivism. This matters because the notion of “pure” has always been suspect; boundaries are created and are in motion. Kashmir Shaivism does not develop in a vacuum; it is a layering and splicing of dense and complicated theology and ritual that combines overlapping schools. To trace anything back to a pure Kashmir Shaivism reflects a process of simulacrum, all the way down.

Abhinavagupta was affected by his cultural embeddedness and by his subjective gaze when synthesizing a variety of traditions. He was also unclear in terms of rigid definitional categorization. The muddling of multiple philosophies by Abhinavagupta shows that the layering of cultural practice occurs in tension with notions of subjectivity, objectivity, and narrative. Urban surmises that “later commentators, such as Ksemaraja, attempted to resolve these apparent contradictions and confusions in Abhinavagupta’s work by trying to differentiate, organize, and hierarchize the various schools of Tantra, *Krama*, *Kula*, *Trika*, and so on, in a somewhat clearer way.”²⁶⁸ Urban argues, in keeping with Abhinavagupta, “for an equally decentered and pluralized view of Tantra. Rather than search for some single thread that runs through all the many traditions . . . perhaps it would be more useful to think of all of these as many overlapping fibers.” The distillation and layering of philosophy by Abhinavagupta reflects the subjectivity and translation created in any process of classification. As Paul Muller Ortega tells us:

The area of Kashmir traditionally was a stronghold for diverse Brahmanical and Buddhist groups. Thus it is not surprising that the horizon of Abhinavagupta’s “Shaiva theology” (as Alper terms it) has as important components the various “philosophies” of Vedanta, Samkhya, Patanjala Yoga, Nyaya, as well as several

has four offshoots: Pratyabhijna, Kula, Krama, and Spanda (Swami Lakshmanjoo, *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme*, ed. John Hughes, 2nd ed. [Culver City, CA: Universal Shaiva Fellowship, 1988], 129).

²⁶⁸ Urban, *Tantra*, 227.

varieties of Buddhism, including Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Yogacara, and Madhyamika . . . The theological intricacies, the density of ritual, and the yogic and tantric complexities of non-dual Kashmiri Shaivism are the result of long centuries of evolution. Unfortunately, we know very little about these centuries. In tracing the appearance of various Shaiva groups, we do not encounter a linear, evolutionary progression . . .²⁶⁹

A linear or evolutionary progression is a modernist wish for clarity rather than the reality of how Kashmiri Shaivism, yoga, and Tantra have been created and disseminated. Within the American climate, it is important to “keep our contemporary consciousness of spatiality—our critical geographical imagination—creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions; and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope.”²⁷⁰

This is not only the “postmodern condition,” but is a way to view history as situated within the present. Traditions not only move with history, but they are also selectively forgotten, incorporated, removed, replaced, or combined to make sense within socio-historical transactions of self and other. In other words, the modern telling of yoga’s history is linear and categorizable, while the reality of the world is messy, layered, and always in motion. American yoga has always been a broader conversation of transaction.

Hatha and Tantra in Relationship

I continue to move between historical periods and images of Tantra and yoga to help show how a definition of an American yoga is created and muddled by the process of disconnect and the subjectivity of “social, historical, and spatial interdependence.”²⁷¹

Like Abhinavagupta, the founder of the Nath Yogis, Gorakhnath, both classified and

²⁶⁹ Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva*, 25–27.

²⁷⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2.

²⁷¹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

systematized earlier forms of thought into what is now understood as *hatha* yoga. White argues that, around the time Abhinavagupta was developing and systematizing Kashmir Saivism, the “Yoga of forceful exertion” was emerging as expounded in the *Yogavasistha* and the *Goraksa Sataka*.²⁷² The *hatha* yoga practices of the Naths indicate connections between the ascetic goals of groups like the Pashupatas, and the goals of bodily perfection found in postural yoga today. These yogis were associated with the practice of (*hatha*) forceful yoga and also with magical stories of yogic super powers. As Donald Lopez notes,

[t]he Nath Siddha who imitates Siva in his practice of Yoga, wears ashes on his body . . . the burning energy born of the practice of *hatha* Yoga internally incinerates the gross, mortal body, tempers and purifies the subtle yogic body, and ultimately gives rise to the perfected, immortal, and supernaturally powerful body that is the Nath Siddha’s goal.²⁷³

The period between the tenth and twelfth centuries may be characterized by the overlap between Saivism, Tantrism, and the doctrines of the Siddhas (perfect yogis). Most of the early teachings pertaining to *hatha* yoga came out of Shaiva Tantras, where *hatha* (forceful) was defined by its antinomian practices and its concept of “the union of the internal sun (ha) and moon (tha), which symbolically indicated the goal of the system.”²⁷⁴

The foundational texts of *hatha* yoga are attributed to Gorakhnath, and include both “Sanskrit-language treatises and a vernacular corpus of mystic poetry on yogic experience.”²⁷⁵ The Nath Yogis became very powerful symbols in the culture of Northern

²⁷² White, *Yoga in Practice*, 15.

²⁷³ Lopez, *Religions of India in Practice*, 401.

²⁷⁴ Eliade, *Yoga*, 229.

²⁷⁵ Diamond, *Yoga*, 38.

India, and “at the height of their power between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, they appeared frequently in the writings of north Indian poet-saints (*sants*) like Kabir and Guru Nanak, who generally castigated them for their arrogance and obsession with worldly power.”²⁷⁶ The Nath Yogis of the medieval period were not only thought to be powerful as adepts of bodily practice and worldly power (with the ability to acquire and unleash esoteric powers), they were also influential social beings. As Lopez tells us,

[t]hrough the application of “violent force” (*hatha*) in his yogic practice, the yogi succeeds in reversing the natural trends of aging, disease, and death, and channels his energy, seed, and breath upward against the normal flow of bodily processes. In so doing, he rejuvenates himself—growing younger instead of older—and realizes all manner of other powers that flaunt the laws of nature, culminating in bodily immortality.²⁷⁷

Both Abhinavagupta and Gorakhnath lived in Northern India and were responsible for redefining and complicating the definitions of yoga and Tantra in the Indian context.

The *Gorksasataka* (Hundred Verses of Goraksha), written around 1400 CE, is the first text to speak to breath control and to a technique for stimulating the coiled goddess at the base of the spine known as *Kundalini* or *saravaticalana*, “the stimulation of Sarasvati.”²⁷⁸ This text, along with the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Gherandasamhita* (1650 CE), and the *Sivasamhita* (1750 CE) deal with the physical practices of *asana* and *pranayama*, as well as abstract Tantric concepts. The *Hathapradipika* (Light on *Hatha*) 1.17 lists the benefits of *hatha* yoga on the body as freedom from disease (*sthairyam*,

²⁷⁶ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 18.

²⁷⁷ Lopez, *Religions of India in Practice*, 400.

²⁷⁸ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 257.

arogya) and lightness of limb (*angalaghanam*).²⁷⁹ At the same time, these texts are in response to the more esoteric and initiation-based practices of Tantra. As Mallinson notes,

[m]uch of *hatha yoga*'s development can be seen as a reaction against the exclusivity and complexity of Tantric cults and practices. The esoteric physiology of Tantra is taken as the template for the human body, but the means of accessing and controlling the energies and substances within has become purely physical. The only external aid necessary is a guru qualified to teach *hatha yoga*'s practices. There is no need for Tantra's elaborate initiations, nor the secret mandalas and mantras passed down within occult Tantric lineages, nor elaborate ritual paraphernalia, including the infamous *pancamakara* or "five Ms": *madya* ("wine"), *mamsa* ("meat"), *matsya* ("fish"), *mudra* ("hand gestures"), and *maithuna* ("sex"). As is made clear in the last verse of the *Goraksasataka*, alternatives for these can be found within the body of the yogi . . . In contrast to the usual conceptions of Tantric liberation, however, the latter can be achieved while alive, in a body immortalized by means of *hatha yoga*.²⁸⁰

Hatha texts posit that, by using bodily techniques such as breathwork, bandhas, and mudras, one can reach reach Tantric goals of supernatural powers and liberation.²⁸¹ To do this, the "yogi is to sit in a correct posture, stimulate Sarasvati, and control breath with *kumbhaka*s and *bandhas*."²⁸² As Alter argues, "even though the three texts are intensely physical, in their focus on magical power and conquering death they are, in many ways, more abstract, mystical, and explicitly oriented toward the occult than the *Yoga Sutra*."²⁸³ These texts also appear more in line with contemporary American yoga than *The Yoga Sutras* in terms of postural practice, bodily awareness and materiality, and the notion of

²⁷⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 33.

²⁸⁰ White, *Yoga in Practice*, 257.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁸³ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 22.

the subtle body; still, the more mystical and abstract concepts have not been as easily reconciled within modern notions of science and rationality.

The link between the *asanas* that we practice today in America and the physical postures described in *hatha* yoga texts are rhizomatically related. For instance, while one of these early texts asserts that there are eighty-four lakh (8,400,000) *asanas*, they only describe two seated postures.²⁸⁴ There is evidence that peacock pose (*mayurasana*), lotus pose (*padmasana*), and thunderbolt pose (*vajrasana*) look the same today as they did in the early common era, but what purpose they served and why differ greatly in the contemporary American yogic culture.²⁸⁵

The *Hathapradipika* is the first text to describe non-seated meditation positions such as *mayurasana* and *kukkutasana* for the practices of *hatha* yoga.²⁸⁶ Overall, the physical dimensions of yoga have been continuously developed, discussed, and innovated through various notions of asceticism and athleticism, and always in relationship to location. There is visual evidence of difficult postures of the body and ascetic practices, such as inverting or immobilizing the body, in the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, and also in many accounts of Mughal travelers and kings. Austerity practices of the *Upanishads* are also linked to and innovated through the historical processes of tantra and *hatha* yoga and their relationship to more worldly goals (perfection of the body, etc.). It is clear that yogic postural practices were originally practiced and developed in conversation, among various sects and also between many cultural and religious groups. James Mallinson

²⁸⁴ Diamond, *Yoga*, 150, 176.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

notes that the earliest practitioners of *hatha* were not sectarian in nature and that the earliest texts of *hatha* yoga declare, “Whether a Brahmin, an ascetic, a Buddhist, a Jain, a Skull-Bearer or a materialist, the wise one who is endowed with faith and constantly devoted to the practice of [*hatha*] Yoga will attain complete success.”²⁸⁷

Diamond tells us that the close relationship between the Naths and *hatha* yoga involves the internalization of the external practices and rituals of Tantra by “synthesizing two earlier yogic traditions: physical techniques for retaining semen and visualization techniques for raising energy (*Kundalini*) through the subtle body.”²⁸⁸ The notion of the subtle body is found within the Tantric and *hatha* yoga systems and is crucial in understanding how past and present day yogis view the subtle body—the *chakras*, *nadis*, the sheaths of the body, and the heart as the container of the true self (especially in Abhinavagupta’s conception). The number of *chakras* contained within the subtle body varies among *hatha* traditions. The incorporation of Tantric yoga into the *hatha* paradigm is crucial to understanding the development and overlap between asceticism and the body:

As taught in its root texts, which were composed between the fifth and tenth centuries CE, Tantric Yoga consists for the most part of meditations on a series of progressively more subtle elements, a progression represented in some Kaula Tantric texts from the tenth century onward by the visualization of the ascent of the serpent goddess Kuṇḍalinī through a series of wheels (*cakras*) or lotuses (*padmas*) located along the body’s central column.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ “Yogic Identities.”

²⁸⁸ Diamond, *Yoga*, 128.

²⁸⁹ “Yogic Identities.”

The connections between the subtle body practices of *hatha* yoga and contemporary American yoga are not completely lost. American postural classes on the *chakra* series are popular offerings at yoga studios and involve the teacher explaining the *chakras* through physical *asana* practice. These classes provide an introduction to a Tantric account of anatomy, and for many American yogis the *chakras* represent the most well-known notion of the metaphysical yogic subtle body. A popular guide for these teachers (used in some teacher trainings) is the book entitled *Eastern Body/Western Mind*. Below is the description found on Amazon.com:²⁹⁰

In EASTERN BODY, WESTERN MIND, *chakra* authority Anodea Judith brought a fresh approach to the Yoga-based Eastern *chakra* system, adapting it to the Western framework of Jungian psychology, somatic therapy, childhood developmental theory, and metaphysics . . . Arranged schematically, the book uses the inherent structure of the *chakra* system as a map upon which to chart our Western understanding of individual development . . . EASTERN BODY, WESTERN MIND seamlessly merges the East and West, science and philosophy, and psychology and spirituality into a compelling interpretation of the *chakra* system and its relevance for Westerners today.²⁹¹

This book illustrates once again the translation, distillation, and mashup involved the conceptualization of Hindu traditions of bodily practice and spirituality within present day America, as bridging authentic and inauthentic as well as traditional and innovative forms of knowledge. The ritual and metaphysical associations of the *chakra* system in medieval ritual practice, for instance, are reappropriated in the contemporary American context to fit individualistic and modernist notions: “Reflecting Nath goals, each *chakra* is presented as a focus for meditation that yields a specific attainment—such as universal

²⁹⁰ I am intentionally using a quote from Amazon as it provides a better illustration of the muddling of popular, secular, and religious culture and language.

²⁹¹ Krishnamacharya, *Yoga Makaranda*, Kindle loc. 2162.

admiration, release from the cycle of rebirth, or supernatural abilities.”²⁹² Reflecting American goals, each *chakra* is presented as a meditation on self with or without a connection to the notion of Divine, and in relationship to personal development/self-help goals.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how moving conceptions of Tantra and yoga have been understood in the Indian context. The nonlinear process of a fragmented genealogy and palimpsestic mapping provides glimpses into the variety of spaces that have contributed to the identity of an American yoga as it has moved within the Indian landscape: “In the course of the past thirty years, yoga has been transformed more than at any time since the advent of *hatha* yoga in the tenth and eleventh centuries.”²⁹³ The way that yoga and yogis have been defined within America has also changed and shifted between enmity and widespread approval. The next chapter is concerned with the creation of a uniquely American yoga within the American setting. Through the study of broad histories of modern transnational purchase and a focus on Anusara, we begin to see how yoga in America is beholden to its (anything but simple or pure) Indian past, and is directly situated in its translation of the present. Furthermore, the creation of Friend’s new system of yoga, Sridaiva, begs the question of whether or not yoga will remain beholden to any specific yogic or Tantric past or become something completely novel as it continues to remake itself in the American setting. Friend’s ideas of Tantra are the result of the collision of many worlds as both real and hyperreal constructs. John Friend

²⁹² Diamond, *Yoga*, 166.

²⁹³ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, 21.

references Tantra in almost every class I have ever attended of his and it is clear that he firmly believes in a Tantric narrative of the world. However, Friend's Tantra is also completely located in the American *habitus*. Friend notes that Tantra is "freedom to choose how you are going to co-create and co-artist with this supreme energy," as well as being a "very affirming, positive, all encompassing inclusive view."²⁹⁴ Friend has come to this understanding of Tantra not in any direct or objective manner, but rather through his transactions with the people and texts of many worlds.

²⁹⁴ Grant, "John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga."

Chapter Four: Coming to America: From Boston Brahmins to Vino and Vinyasa

I started to study when I was a boy, and every teacher becomes part of this great method. Iyengar, Jois, and other renowned teachers, and from each of these great teachers many teachers just live lives that inspire me and become part of the great lineage of Anusara yoga. Gurumaya Chidvilasanada—almost a tangible there that is transmitted through Anusara . . . why is it important to honor tradition—turning away from an ocean of knowledge to a puddle. The traditions go back thousands of years . . . lineage how to navigate to the very essence of being, and I just think that it is a mistake, an unfortunate ignorance to think that they don't need a teacher. I am quite a student of studying the past in every regard—consciousness and philosophy both East and West and seeing the development and then making my own decisions about what is useful and what not I discard, if I want somebody to find happiness in their life there is a means and I want this to go faster and that is the job of the teacher—I know I have a map I want to be able to give them the map, look at the map and tell me if they can make it better.²⁹⁵

Introduction

The climate of contemporary American yoga is contentious in multiple ways. Questions of authenticity, authority, commercialization, and cooption dominate the discussion of its place and its definition within America. For example, *Yoga: The Art of Visual Transformation*, a display at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, includes the work of Chiraag Bhakta. His exhibit #Whitepeopledoingyoga visually documents yoga in America from the 1960s to the 1980s. Bhakta explains his work as “a reflection of my personal relationship as an Indian American with yoga and its migration to today’s Western context, the hashtag symbolizing the commercialization and the

²⁹⁵ Yoga Journal, *Yoga Journal’s John Friend’s Anusara Yoga Grand Gathering*.

commodification of a culture.” Bhakta further states that the history of yoga takes a “sharp turn” as it “enters a new level of commercialization in the West, the \$27 billion dollar yoga industry has rebranded a complex and rich discipline to make it easier to sell yoga as a line of products.”²⁹⁶ At the same time, the lines that Bhakta draws between the commodification of yoga and his involvement in the American practice of yoga are not rigid. He states that he is himself a practitioner of yoga in the San Francisco Bay area and does not have a problem with yoga being popular; rather, it is the way in which yoga is done in America that he sees as a problem. He notes, “It’s fascinating to me that this ancient practice from my culture is being mined and then appropriated and commodified, while removing everyone that looks like me” and that “[t]he philosophy of yoga is the dissolution of one’s ego—and the irony is that there’s so much ego being attached to all of this.”²⁹⁷ To prove his point he adds statistics, demonstrating the ubiquity of white women gracing the covers of popular magazines such as *Yoga Journal*.

I agree with Bhakta that American yoga celebrates a specific demographic as well as the self or ego. It is this innovation of promoting the self that has led to the proliferation of yoga styles in America today. Yoga in America is experienced as moving in tandem with consumer desires that overlap dichotomous notions of fun/strict or secular/religious. It depends on who is doing the telling. For example, the popular supermodel turned yoga teacher, Tara Stiles, asserts that her goal is “to promote yoga in a

²⁹⁶ Kishwer Vikaas, “*Pardon My Hindi AKA Chiraag Bhakta Talks #WhitePeopleDoingYoga,” *The Aerogram*, March 31, 2014, <http://theaerogram.com/talking-whitepeopledoingyoga-chiraag-bhakta-aka-pardonmyhindi/>.

²⁹⁷ Karen Macklin, “Beautiful Path to Now – Page 5,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.sfbg.com/2014/02/25/beautiful-path-now?page=0,4>.

fun way, and not the way it's been promoted for the last 50 years in America, which [is] so rigid.”²⁹⁸



Figure 7. W Hotel Ad Campaign, FIT with Tara Stiles

Stiles created four yoga workouts for the W Hotel: Need a Boost, Feeling Jet Lagged, Big Night Out, and Need to Recover, which include helpful suggestions such as, “try dancer pose for an instant surge of vitality.”²⁹⁹ The advertising and branding for her yoga program includes Figure 7 above in which Stiles is depicted in bridge pose wearing a leather mini skirt and heels, surrounded by champagne bottles.³⁰⁰ This visual telling of yoga demonstrates that yoga in America cannot be separated from the media and its brand-created messages. The Global Brand Leader of the W Hotels, Paul James, states that

²⁹⁸ Kirsten Fleming, “Celebrity Posers Have Yoga World in a Twist,” *New York Post*, May 28, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2014/05/28/look-at-me-celebs-take-over-yoga-world-with-public-poses/>.

²⁹⁹ “W Hotels Worldwide Strikes a Pose with Yoga Rebel Tara Stiles,” *Business Wire*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20140528006017/en/Hotels-Worldwide-Strikes-Pose-Yoga-Rebel-Tara#.U4yTmcYVxuY>.

³⁰⁰ W Ad Campaign image used with permission of public domain.

[t]he W guest has a true “work hard, play hard” mentality and wants to look fabulous yet have fun while getting fit . . . through our partnership with Tara Stiles, we’ve created an energetic program designed to celebrate the body and provide 24/7 access to an interactive workout that can easily be incorporated into the busiest of jet-setting lifestyles.³⁰¹

This description, as well as the imagery, of the W Hotel’s yoga program begs the question: what does this have to do with yoga, and how does yoga constitute a fun and fabulous fitness program? Is yoga in America simply a hashtagable fitness routine and/or buzzword that stands for the celebration of athletic-looking branded white bodies that commodify an ancient practice? Is the purpose of yoga to be fit and glamorous? Furthermore, what happens with lineage, gurus, and egos when they are played out on the American stage? Is yoga in America all cheap commodity and usurpation of tradition?

I argue that there is more to yoga in America than irreverent displays of consumer culture; however, the commodification, branding, and consumptive attributes of yoga are also crucial aspects in understanding an American yogic identity. The brands that Americans consume inform lifestyle and showcase identity. Looking at this issue in the shallows of consumer culture as well as in the depths of yogic history and philosophy allows for an examination of how we got to this point, to this particular telling of American yoga, and this narrative is important because the past layers the present. In order to understand the picture of women posing as displays in the storefronts of Lululemon, or Tara Stiles doing yoga in a leather miniskirt, we must look at the development of a yogic *habitus* in America, as well as at transactions occurring between India and the United States, both past and present.

³⁰¹ “W Hotels Worldwide Strikes a Pose with Yoga Rebel Tara Stiles.”

Shreena Ghandi's work helps to place the history of yoga in America and its relationship to such movements as Transcendentalism and Theosophy, as well as to material culture in the writings of *Yoga Journal* and *India Abroad*. Ghandi demonstrates the ways in which "intellectual debate and lived practice intersect," as well as applies the metaphor of rhizome.³⁰² Ghandi states that "yoga has become a commodity, and when a rhizome becomes a commodity, it refracts in as many directions as the market can sustain."³⁰³ Her explanation of the importance of Vivekananda, Pierre and Theos Bernard, Yogananda, and the variety of different forms of yoga introduced to the American marketplace also helps to map the identity of this practice in the United States. At the same time, she, like most other modern scholars of yoga, fails to recognize the importance of yoga to American yogis themselves.³⁰⁴ The growing practice of yoga in America is not only commodity and commercialization, but also undertaken as a serious pursuit that goes beyond brands and styles of yoga clothing or yoga mats. While the message is branded in a variety of ways, it is also a lifestyle and identity for many practitioners.

This chapter provides a layered genealogical mapping of the history of postural yoga in transaction, from the Indian to the American context, and further located by the example of Anusara. By weaving these two stories together, I demonstrate how yoga in

³⁰² Shreena Niketa Divyakant Gandhi, "Translating, Practicing, and Commodifying Yoga in the U.S." (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2009), 33, <http://0-search.proquest.com.bianca.penlib.du.edu/docview/746585824?accountid=14608>.

³⁰³ Ibid., 43.

³⁰⁴ Other modern yogic scholars, such as Mark Singleton, Elizabeth De Michelis, and Joseph Alter, have also added to this discussion. More popular texts such as *The Great Oom*, *American Veda*, and *The Subtle Body* provide helpful contextualization in witnessing the changing landscape of an historical American yoga.

America is chaotic and varied, while at the same time unique to this setting in its modes of lifestyle consumption.

It is obvious that most of the yoga practiced in America is *asana*-based. Because of yoga's association with postural practice, I begin with understanding the *asana*-based mapping of yoga as it moves to America. Anusara provides an example of one particular telling of authentication, lineage, philosophy, and innovation of American yoga.

Additionally, placing Anusara helps to explain the varieties of yoga and their developments as existing within and among multiple transactions of local and global proportions. Looking at public figures of modern postural yoga such as Krishnamacharya, Iyengar, Pierre and Theos Bernard, Indra Devi, Muktananda, and John Friend also show the moving subjectivity of yogic definition and the placement of yoga as "authentic fake."³⁰⁵

Chidester argues that, "at work and at play, human authenticity is at stake in American religion and popular culture . . . mediated through popular culture as ordinary leisure and entertainment but also as human possibility and experimentation."³⁰⁶ He goes on to explain that both religion and popular culture focus desire, form communities, and facilitate exchanges that classify, orient and negotiate the world.³⁰⁷ Because of this, the work of yoga as both religion and popular culture is a serious endeavor that must not be dismissed as mere commodity or shallow consumptive practice. As a moving and locatable practice of "fake authenticity," yoga negotiates "the myriad intersections

³⁰⁵ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 18.

between human subjectivity and social collectivity.”³⁰⁸ What interests me is how notions of “real” yoga have shifted and adapted to create an incredibly diverse and thriving American yogic cultural climate. Today, the United States’ yogic market is often seen validating itself through the creation of supposed linear relationships to lineage, guru, or specific modes of practice and “struggles over legitimate ownership of sacred symbols.”³⁰⁹

For example, popular teachers such Kino MacGregor present a direct link to the Indian teachings of Krishnamacharya. MacGregor is a certified Ashtanga teacher who has studied with Pattabhi and Sharath Jois for over a decade. While MacGregor’s dedication and lineage provide both legitimation and authenticity to her teachings and practice, the way in which she presents the message, as well as the mode of transmission, is that of “authentic fake”:

I am a bad Ashtangi. I wear small shorts and mascara. I’m not a natural blonde. I color my hair and blowdry it, even while in India. I’m also vain and I love beautiful and sometimes expensive things. I’ve been called an Ashtanga cheerleader, a slutty yoga teacher (I’m married), a good businesswoman (as if that’s a derogatory term for a yoga teacher), and a sell-out for fame and fortune . . . In the mad rush to success I have produced five Ashtanga Yoga DVDs, written two books, started a line of yoga products, filmed online yoga classes, taught in over 100 different cities all over the world, co-founded a yoga center on Miami Beach (Miami Life Center) and founded Miami Yoga Magazine. I’ve figured out how to use social media and build an online presence, dare I say my own “brand.” I tweet, blog, vlog, and film for my YouTube Channel . . . But I’m also a good Ashtangi. I practice six days a week and follow the guidelines for practice as best I can from my teachers Sri K. Pattabhi Jois and R. Sharath Jois in Mysore.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 119.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹⁰ Kino MacGregor, “Confessions of a Loved & Hated Ashtangi,” *Elephant Journal*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2013/02/confessions-of-a-loved-hated-ashtangi-kino-macgregor/>.

Kino MacGregor is very much an authentic yogi in her own right. At the same time, the definition of who is and who is not a yogi depends on who is doing the defining and from what perspective. It is my argument that commentaries of “real” move and recreate themselves as they mashup time and space, as they collide to create novel beats out of old tracks and invigorated by new intentions. In other words, yoga in America is hyperreal.

Krishnamacharya as the “Father of Modern Yoga”

Much of what Americans know of current postural-based yoga leads back to the singular figure of Krishnamacharya. He is one of the main reasons that the term yoga in the West is often associated with the physical practice of *asana*. Also, his particular socio-historical placement provides a cultural window into the changing landscape of yoga during British colonialism in India. At the time of Krishnamacharya’s birth in 1888, Western notions of education, medicine, sports, and masculinity were generally promoted over native Indian traditions. By the height of British rule in India, colonial notions of supremacy circulated in a global empire on which “the sun never set.” “Modernization” and compliance with Western understandings of the world in India stemmed from the rhetoric of colonial superiority. At the same time for yoga, the global physical culture movement helped to propel yoga into its current iterations of posture and practice. Mark Singleton and others have argued for the importance of the European physical culture movement in creating modern yoga. The impact of the colonial project cannot be

overstated in how yoga has come to be understood in America today.³¹¹ At the same time, yoga's spiritual underpinnings must not be forgotten as foundational to its dissemination.

Krishnamacharya's yogic developments did not occur in a vacuum, and the seeds of the current modern yogic explosion were being sown throughout India. For instance, between 1888 and 1896, Aurobindo Ghose returned to India with an education from Cambridge in England, Vivekananda visited the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the modern Olympic Games took place, and Paramahansa Yogananda was born. All of these events, as well as the people involved, are critical to the telling of how yoga both came to America and became American in its displays of identity.

There are multiple subjective narratives that one could tell of yoga; however, these perspectives must also be clothed in the *habitus* in which they were created and transacted with the world. The predominantly posture-based yoga that is practiced in America today is linked, in a rhizomatic manner, to figures living within the language of particular historical discourses and narratives of power and economy. As McClintock tells us, “[P]ower is seldom adjudicated evenly—different social situations are overdetermined for race, for gender, for class, or for each in turn . . . no social category should remain invisible with respect to an analysis of empire.”³¹² The imbalances of power and the contested histories that led to the current telling of yoga in America are influenced by various connections of subjective, collective, textual, practical, and

³¹¹ There are multiple texts that have addressed the issue of colonialism and India. Authors I have consulted for this work include Gayatri Spivak, Ashis Nandy, Homi Bhabha, Hugh Urban, Gavin Flood, Peter Gottshalk, Nicholas Dirks, Richard King, Walter Mignolo, Amartya Sen, and Anne McClintock.

³¹² “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

institutionalized forms of power. The figure of Krishnamacharya is illustrative of the importance of one's subjective engagement with the world in tandem with larger global forces of power and transaction. He provides critical genealogical insight to the story of yoga in America and its *asana* leanings as well as to the reason why postural yoga in America is linked to specific texts and institutions.

Krishnamacharya learned about yoga at the age of 5 from his father, who traced their familial lineage directly to Nathamuni. An influential proponent of both Vaishnavism and yoga, Nathamuni lived in the ninth century and was affiliated with the Sri Vaishnava Sampradayam as well as the author of the lost yogic text *Yoga Rahasya*.³¹³ Krishnamacharya's father died when he was 10; he went to Mysore where his great grandfather served as both Pontiff of the Parakala Math in Mysore City and the spiritual teacher to the king.³¹⁴ The Parakala Math in Mysore is the headquarters of an ancient south Indian Sri Vaishnava sect that has been connected to the royal family of Mysore, the Wodeyars, since the beginning of their rule in 1399. Krishnamacharya was educated in the teachings of South Indian Sri Vaishnavism, and he brought this heritage with him in his references to notions of authentic yogic philosophy. Today, the Parakala Math is run by the secular government as a heritage center, yet it is still occupied by the priestly order—another layering.

³¹³ Kausthub Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi: The Legacy of T. Krishnamacharya* (New York: North Point Press, 2011).

³¹⁴ The BrahmaTantra Parakala Math is an ancient South Indian Sri Vaisnava sect that follows the teachings of Sri Ramanuja. They have had a relationship with the Wodeyar family in Mysore since 1399 and still monitor royal ceremonies today.

At 16, Krishnamacharya received a vision at Alvar Tirunagari from Nathamuni, who recited the entire *Yoga Rahasya* to him. This, in combination with his relationship to the Parakala Math in Mysore, provided the spiritual underpinnings for modern postural yoga while also legitimizing its synthesis and spread to new markets outside of the philosophical realm. According to Kausthub Desikachar, the *Yoga Rahasya* that was recited to Krishnamacharya in a vision helped to spread yoga to the West, as well as to the female population as it elaborated on “how to adapt yoga to different stages of life, the importance of yoga for women, especially pregnant women, and the role of yoga in healing, among other topics.”³¹⁵ Prior to the influence of Krishnamacharya, yoga was a practice almost exclusively for males, and this text not only provided authentication, but also an explanation of yoga as a practice for both genders.

Krishnamacharya’s yogic education was vast, and he continued his studies at Patna University (where he completed exams on Samkhya and Yoga) and possibly with his guru Rama Mohana Brahmachari in Manasrovar Tibet. After studying with Brahmachari for seven and a half years, the teacher told him, “I am happy with your educational progress . . . now go back to society and lead the life of a married man and spread the message of yoga. This is the *Guru Dakshina* I want for what I have taught you.”³¹⁶ Krishnamacharya was a very good disciple and, as *Yoga Journal* states in its article, *The Legacy of Krishnamacharya*,

³¹⁵ Sundara Blair and Cheryl Deer, “Yoga of Love: Unwind Relationship Patterns Using *Asana*,” *Yoga Pod Boulder*, accessed September 18, 2014, <http://boulder.yogapodcommunity.com/schedule/workshops-events/yoga-of-love/>.

³¹⁶ Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi*, 52.

Whether you practice the dynamic series of Pattabhi Jois, the refined alignments of BKS Iyengar, the classical postures of Indra Devi, or the customized Vinyasa [of Desikachar], your practice stems from one source: a five-foot, two-inch Brahmin born more than one hundred years ago in a small South Indian village.³¹⁷

The teachings, style, and approach to the spiritual aspects of yoga in America are tied to the way in which Krishnamacharya layered the practice. He not only opened the door to yoga for females, but he also allowed for a more liberal accounting of its connections to religion and spirituality. As one of his students, Patricia Miller notes, “He instructed students to close their eyes and observe the space between the brows, and then said, ‘Think of God. If not God, the sun. If not the sun, your parents.’” Krishnamacharya set only one condition, explains Miller, “[t]hat we acknowledge a power greater than ourselves.”³¹⁸ His grandson Kasthub Desikachar comments,

As a master of many philosophical traditions, Krishnamacharya understood that spirituality was different from religion. Religion was one kind of spiritual practice, but it was not the only one. By refusing to open the door to religious discrimination, he opened the door of yoga to everyone.³¹⁹

The notion of spirituality as separate from religion resonated with many Western practitioners. This removal of the necessity of the religious aspects of yoga also allowed for a yoga in America that blurs the lines between secular and/or religious practice. Today, yoga occurs in settings that range from yogic ashrams to Christian churches to school gymnasiums to corporate offices and government buildings. The nature of yoga’s

³¹⁷ Fernando Pages Ruiz, “Krishnamacharya’s Legacy: Modern Yoga’s Inventor,” *Yoga Journal*, August 28, 2007, <http://www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/465>.

³¹⁸ Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi*, 167.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

boundary crossing has allowed it to brand an American yogic lifestyle that is both fluid and multiple.

Krishnamacharya's biography, as well as his continual reconfiguring of what yoga is and what it stands for, exemplifies the mashup of transactions of individuals, genders, geography, culture, and history occurring at the local level, the global level, and in between. His story provides an important layer to the story of yoga in America.

Krishnamacharya was born under British control in 1888, and even in a short sampling of his life we can see the rhizomatic tracings that add to the palimpsestic map of modern yoga. He was educated in Sri Vaishnavism and traveled the country in the 1920s, giving yoga demonstrations to an often disinterested public, developed a yoga program for young people at the Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore, lost his position at the palace under the new modern political leadership of Indian independence, achieved personal international fame and dedication by his famous students (Indra Devi, Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar, TKV Desikachar), and today is revered as the grandfather of modern yoga.

The yoga that Krishnamacharya disseminated, and the current disseminations of John Friend, account for changing historical circumstances and transactions of culture, politics, and power. Krishnamacharya legitimated himself, and yoga, in ways that have been revered by some and speculated upon by others. For instance, inconsistencies surrounding the origins of his style of yoga and mysterious lost or forgotten texts have led to skepticism within the academy. Singleton strongly argues that Krishnamacharya's Mysore style was the direct result of the European physical culture movement rather than to text or tradition. Singleton states that "Mysore had, by the time Krishnamacharya

arrived, become a pan-Indian hub of physical culture revivalism.”³²⁰ Furthermore, he adds that Krishnamacharya may have invoked a number of “lost” texts such as the *Yoga Rahasya* of Sri Nathamuni and the *Yoga Kurunta* to legitimate the sequences and postures in his style of yoga as well as to authorize changing dynamics.³²¹ At the same time, Krishnamacharya was an incredibly educated man in both yoga philosophy and yoga practice; thus it is unfair to give all of the credit of modern day yoga to the Western national culture movement. Overall, the nuanced biography of Krishnamacharya provides a window into the ways in which understanding and authenticating yoga has always been in part subjective, contextual, and a combination of both fragmentation and synthesis. Furthermore, the beginnings of modern yoga as placed within the story of Krishnamacharya shows the creation of a yogic identity as an innovative and moving concept. As I have noted, questions of authenticity, authority, commercialization, and cooption dominate the discussion of yoga its place and its definition within America. Krishnamacharya dealt with these issues and authenticated his practice of yoga in ways that include both authority and commercialization.

In many ways, Krishnamacharya is responsible for the creation of a hybrid of East and West as he began to train multiple demographics of people (not just young and male) as well as people of varying cultural heritages. While Krishnamacharya produced the foundation for American *asana* practice within an Indian landscape of rendering authenticity, the historical climate of the United States remains a moving map of tracings as it engrains itself within this particular historical moment. Because I am discussing

³²⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 175.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

contemporary American yoga, and thereby a largely physical representation of yoga, I situate my discussion within the world of *asana*, yet at the same time remain aware of all of the multiple discussions that also provide beats to the track of American yoga.

The American dictation of authority and commercialization has been spun from a different direction than Krishnamacharya's telling, but this does not make American yoga necessarily less or more true or false to the people practicing it. It is not the question of Krishnamacharya's yoga as real, or yoga in America as more or less real that interests me; I find it much more interesting to understand how the specific mashup of Krishnamacharya's understandings of "real" yoga intersect with located socio-historical mappings such as colonialism, the rise of the physical culture movement, rampant nationalism, transnational travel and power dynamics, modes of Indian religious thought, and sectarian allegiances to Vaishnavism.

Lineage and Legitimation

The whole man is approached and touched by yoga. Life becomes brighter, nobler, grander and happier; mind becomes keen, calm, peaceful and emotionally satisfied and the body clean, vital, strong.

—P. A. Bernard, 1906

The late eighteenth century is a crucial time period for the development and creation of an American yogic identity layered by such movements as Theosophy, New Thought, and Transcendentalism. Many academics have dealt with these movements and moments including Catherine Albanese, Mark Singleton, Leigh Eric Schmidt, Philip Gura, Arthur Christy, Shreena Ghandi, and Robert C. Fuller. As Sarah Strauss points out, the New Age also dates back to the late eighteenth century and contains the principles of "self-actualization, healing, connection with self and nature, freedom, and a methodology

for achieving all of the above.”³²² Ralph Waldo Emerson is credited for making Hindu thought accessible in his many publications, while Thoreau is famous for stating that he practiced yoga during his stay at Walden Pond. While the physical practice of yoga as *asana* was a subcultural phenomenon in the American market up to the first half of the twentieth century, philosophers and academics in America, along with the students of Krishnamacharya in India, were busy preparing for the proliferation of yoga’s future popularity in America. As Williamson observes, “In the same way that Bengali intellectuals had clothed Western ideas in Sanskrit language—so Emerson clothed Hindu ideas in English words. Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and New Thought.”³²³ The late 1800s provided the groundwork of transaction and tension between dualities of imagined boundaries and layers of history, culture, and power dynamics. Smith tells us,

Meaning is made possible by difference. Yet thought seeks to bring together what thought necessarily takes apart by means of a dynamic process of disassemblage and reassemblage, which results in an object no longer natural but rather social, no longer factual but rather intellectual. Relations are discovered and reconstituted through projects of differentiation.³²⁴

Yoga began to take shape by way of marketing history and culture in which multiple Indian times and spaces of yoga become a commodity for consumption.

If Theosophist and Transcendentalist forays into Eastern religion lent the philosophical groundwork for understanding an American imaginary of yoga in the late 1800s, the likes of Theos and Pierre Bernard lent the physical groundwork for

³²² Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 118.

³²³ Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 27.

³²⁴ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 246.

understanding America's obsession with postural practice. One of the first Americans to introduce both *hatha* yoga and Tantra to a larger public was Pierre Bernard. Pierre Bernard, as well as his nephew Theos, represent what Chidester calls authentic fakes: really real and truly fake, "a point of entry into the meaning, power, and values at work in the production and consumption of authentic fakes in American popular culture . . . simultaneously simulations and the real thing."³²⁵ While Chidester discusses this topic in America from the perspective of secular corporations and places such as Disney and Coca-Cola, the same tensions can be found in the American yoga scene. For instance, the debate about what yoga really is can be found everywhere. Yoga is discussed in tense multiplicities and as singular overarching truths, categorized as a secular act that looks religious or a religious act that has been sanitized and secularized, plotted ad nauseam along a continuum of secular and religious experience. Furthermore, the descriptions of this experience have changed and have been mapped to represent a palimpsest of yogic definition that can argue for any of these scenarios. While this may not make the subject of yoga easy to define, it does make tracing its linkable histories a fascinating dialogue of overlapping dynamics of power and context.

Robert Love's biography of Pierre Bernard demonstrates how an authentically fake American yogi provides clarity and confusion to the story of "how yoga became American, how it grew in influence as it intersected with Freemasons, hypnotists, vaudeville, doyennes, modern dancers, English spies, and Gilded Age families."³²⁶ Born Perry Baker in Leon, Iowa, in 1876, Bernard studied with Sylvais Hamati (a mysterious

³²⁵ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 246.

³²⁶ Robert Love, *The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America* (New York: Viking, 2010), 5.

Syrian-Indian Tantric yogi he met in Nebraska) for many years and founded the Tantrik Order of America in San Francisco in 1905. In 1912, Bernard described the Tantrik Order's mission as

a body of men, Yogis, who for their evolution, for their happiness, follow a certain system, a certain science of Life, which being in accordance with nature is best suited to bring about the consummation which everybody desires, happiness . . . The purpose of human happiness is the purpose of yoga.³²⁷

While Western-educated Swamis from India such as Vivekananda were arriving in the United States and teaching a more Christianized and mental yoga practice influenced by colonialism and British Victorian notions of morality, Bernard was teaching a yoga of the body and backing it up by Tantric philosophy rather than Vedanta. He was also innovating the American practices of yoga and Tantra to be understood in a more simplistic and entertaining manner.

Embodiment and Sexuality in Tantra and Yoga

As Chidester notes of America, “as material site, malleable substance, and shifting field of relations, the body is situated at the center of the production and consumption of religion and popular culture.”³²⁸ To further illustrate the situatedness of yoga and Tantra as embodied, one only has to look at the notion of yoga's relationship to sexual *habitus*. The embodied character of yoga and Tantra was not embraced by early American popular culture. From the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, the bodily practices of yoga were not only considered subcultural or countercultural, but also against an American “normative religious standard that was

³²⁷ Love, *The Great Oom*, 87.

³²⁸ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 24.

characterized by a subordination of the body to the soul, [one that] especially denounced sexual pleasure, which it considered an obstacle to spiritual development.”³²⁹

In May of 1915, after having his students pledge secrecy in blood, Bernard gave a lecture discussing such taboo topics as orgasm and oral sex (at the time punishable by up to twenty years in prison). Furthermore, he introduced to his students the notion that sex could be sacred. Today, notions of bodily pleasure as associated with freedom and sacrality in yoga and Tantra are both widespread and widely accepted. Andrea Jain states that “not only was the sacralization of the body present in this early system of modern yoga but it was also so significant to that system that martyrdom occurred on its behalf.”³³⁰ Today the linkages between yoga, Tantra, and sex can be found throughout our culture. In the 2013 *Women’s Health Big Book of Yoga*, there is an entire section devoted to sex. Yoga Pod, a popular and well-respected yoga studio in the Denver/Boulder area (with many teachers recently featured in the pages of *Yoga Journal*), held a workshop on September 21, 2014, entitled Yoga for Better Sex. As it states on the website,

We’ll teach you the 7 keys to making sex ecstatic and transcendent, plus deeply connective, pleasurable, and nourishing, even in long-term partnership. You’ll get to practice each of the 7 keys in your yoga practice and learn which you do naturally and which are your areas to grow.³³¹

³²⁹ Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 22.

³³⁰ Andrea R. Jain, “Mystics, Gymnasts, Sexologists, and Other Yogis: Divergence and Collectivity in the History of Modern Yoga,” *Religious Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (2011): 19–23, doi:10.1111/j.1748-0922.2010.01478.x.

³³¹ Blair and Deer, “Yoga of Love.”

The identity of yoga and Tantra, and thereby its market value to culture, functions under a very different socio-historical *habitus* today than that of Pierre or Theos Bernard. The body and its relationship to these practices are interwoven and made accessible using a shifting, yet norm-producing, cultural toolkit that produces a new map or narrative of truth and authenticity. Today, the simulacrum of multiple modes of thought and historical time periods makes layering realities readily accessible. This layering happens through fractured social and spiritual modes of communication in transaction with the virtual worlds of the Internet, on-the-ground interactions, and the normative cultural messaging of the media. People have access to so much information at all times that they are both distracted by and shaped by sound bites rather than by wholesale narratives of the world. Chidester argues that religion and popular culture in America are characterized by embodiment and by high levels of anxiety, distraction, and stress.³³² He notes that “the term religion seems appropriate because it signals a certain quality of attention, desire, and even reverence for sacred materiality . . . a plastic religion that is simultaneously spiritual and physical.”³³³ This merging of spiritual and physical is especially evident in the practices of American yoga. In essence, “drawn into the service of transmitting religion, the media of popular culture presents both new possibilities and new limits for the practice of religion.”³³⁴

Notions of yoga as taboo and/or normative have also been reconfigured in contemporary America. The reclamation of yoga as individualistic, choice-driven, sexual,

³³² Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 5.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 34, 63.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

and embodied is displayed in the example of the Orgasmic Meditation (OM) movement. This movement consciously relates its practices of reaching orgasm to the philosophies of Buddhism and yoga. The New York office director of One Taste Orgasmic Meditation states that “OM involves a sexual practice that includes pleasure at times, but it’s not a practice that is designed simply about pleasure . . . It’s the opposite of hedonistic—more of a personal growth path, than a pleasure-seeking path.”³³⁵ The founder and former Buddhist nun-in-training, Nicole Daedone, popularized the practice when she gave a TED talk (“Orgasm: The Cure for Hunger in the Western Woman”) explaining how “she herself, an academic who doesn’t like woo woo,” became enlightened by an orgasm given by a man she met at a party.³³⁶ Daedone specifically relates the practice of a female achieving orgasm by another human to yoga and meditation, a practice that cultivates a necessary connection and focus: “Buddhism is very simple. You focus, and when you focus you have access to things that you otherwise don’t. There isn’t much of the Hallmark romance, it’s just a very simple practice and makes it incredibly potent.”³³⁷ The story of yoga in America, and thereby its relationship to both Tantra and sex, was and continues to change according to how the body is marketed and consumed.

³³⁵ Jodie Gummow, “The Sexy New Fad for Mindful Living: Orgasmic Meditation,” *Salon*, March 26, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/03/26/orgasmic_meditation_the_latest_craze_for_a_holistic_sexual_awakenin_g_partner/.

³³⁶ “TEDxSF – Nicole Daedone – Orgasm: The Cure for Hunger in the Western Woman,” YouTube video, posted by “TEDx Talks,” June 11, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9QVq0EM6g4&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³³⁷ Vanessa Butler, “Birds & Bullwhips: Slow Sex & The Female Orgasm,” *Playboy*, March 27, 2013, <http://www.playboy.com/articles/birds-bullwhips-slow-sex-the-female-orgasm>.

Materiality has always been involved in conversations surrounding yoga and Tantra, but it has taken on an especially important role in the current American *habitus*.

As Chidester tells us,

[i]n American popular culture, plasticity has characterized a certain disposition toward the body, a tendency to regard the human body as a malleable, moldable substance that can be shaped into different forms. Body building, body piercing, and weight-loss programs designed for “losing one’s way to salvation” have molded the body according to the demands of a plastic religion that is simultaneously spiritual and physical.

The body, sexuality, and charisma not only place the yogic narrative in American culture, but also display its marketing message. One of the first American yoga businessmen to combine notions of Tantric spirituality, the divinity of the body, entertainment, and business acumen was Pierre Bernard. Bernard said of himself, “I’m a curious combination of the business man and the religious scholar . . . a man of common sense in love with beauty.”³³⁸ This description provides a worthy example of an American identity of yoga that both includes and blurs the lines between pleasure seeking, materialism, and spirituality.

Business, Beauty, and Charisma

Friend also exemplifies the qualities of charismatic authority, spiritual seeking, business savvy, and worldly aspirations. He is also similar to Bernard in his ability to lecture on a wide variety of subjects in an accessible manner. Furthermore, his ability to pull from a diversity of topics, marked by links to multiple notions of authenticity and authority, make him and his brand commercially marketable. Appealing to various sides of yoga and Tantra and providing perspectives that emphasize marketability over and

³³⁸ Love, *The Great Oom*, 5.

above strict discipline or notions of sexual celibacy are prevalent in American yoga: “Popular culture operates at the intersection of new technologies of cultural production, new modes of cultural consumption, and new strategies for imagining human possibility.”³³⁹ Yoga culture celebrates an endlessly subjective approach to yoga and Tantra that exists through moving encounters and overlapping transactions of virtual worlds and practices of being in the world. The work of Matthew Remski addresses this issue in his remix of *The Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali:

Demystifying Patanjali is like unlocking the phone and open sourcing its code so that everyone can play with it, altering its values, and perhaps its very purpose. It changes from a product into an object of “never finished.” We have moved from an “exegetical” mode, in which our goal is to render old ideas with faith and reverence, to a “hermeneutic” mode, in which we are reflecting as much upon the old ideas as we are upon how we respond to them, and how we use them in the present tense.

It is not that yoga in America is not serious, or only about commercialism and the body (sexual and/or exercise), but rather that it is made consumptive for multiple audiences in “an endless round of self-referential co-advertisements.”³⁴⁰ In many ways, yoga is reflective of the way in which we engage with our entire cultural and historical milieu, through the economy of innovation.

For example, the goal of Anusara (and possibly its recipe for success) is to align to the “vision of looking at goodness in people.”³⁴¹ It creates an environment in which students “get a deeper experience of self love, and self respect, and self honor.”³⁴²

³³⁹ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 29.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁴¹ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

³⁴² *Ibid.*

Anusara teachers are known for providing an inspirational dharma talk and/or theme to the practice so that the student not only has a physical experience but also a personal one. The orientation of American yoga is especially concerned with the individual ego and the ability to brand oneself and one's lifestyle. In grounding this notion of overlap in the larger American imagination, there is both synergy and disconnect in how yoga is embodied as a spiritual practice and a business practice. From Bernard to Friend, combining charisma and knowledge to appeal to and reference a variety of traditions is part of the American yoga story.³⁴³ One of Bernard's teachers and friends, a woman named Cheerie, said of him: "He understood how to Westernize this ancient philosophy, making it more useful and practical . . . to show visitors that yoga succeeded materially as well as spiritually. Unlike the swamis of India, our guru believed in material success as well as spiritual enlightenment."³⁴⁴ From my experiences in speaking with many American yogis, the notions of material success, self-fulfillment, and spiritual enlightenment have become enmeshed with one another.

Krishnamacharya, Bernard, and Friend all recognized that, in order to spread yoga, they had to appeal to new and changing audiences. Krishnamacharya was located in Mysore in the Parakhala Math and therefore took a very monastic and orthodox approach to yoga. Bernard was a serious yoga practitioner and at the same time beholden to providing "the idly wealthy with recreation, parties, and celebrity buzz . . . to advance

³⁴³ Love, *The Great Oom*, 112.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

the *hatha* yoga cause.”³⁴⁵ Friend finds his market in the combination of physical yoga and spirituality to make it so that “when you go to Anusara class you touch spirit.”³⁴⁶

The level of focus on the individual ego and the constant need to be entertained are especially prevalent in the American yoga climate. On a recent trip to India, I visited multiple yoga studios and ashrams, both in Rishikesh and in Mysore. The postural yoga I experienced in India was primarily limited to *hatha* or Ashtanga; there was no music, no fashion statements by the teachers (most were men and in track pants or basketball shorts), and no extraneous conversation or joking. One of the studios that I frequented multiple times was the Shivayogapeeth with locations on both sides of the Laxman Jhula bridge in Rishikesh. The class was taught in English and Sanskrit and was, for the most part, aligned with the primary series of Ashtanga, minus a few poses and with the addition of a few others. Most of the students appeared to be beginners with a handful of experienced practitioners. The variety of abilities was similar to classes I have experienced in yoga studios and at major yoga festivals in America. While the population of students was relatively similar, there were definitive differences in style and approach by the teachers. Some of these included the rigorous nature of the Ashtanga primary series (no iterations of the oft heard “take child pose if you need to anytime”), *pranayama* and chanting were both heavily incorporated, and advanced poses were expected to be done by students without question as well as without alignment cues or modifications. When many people tried, and most failed, to do *chakrasana* (rolling wheel/backwards somersault), the teacher looked perplexed and stated, “If you don’t do it right, your neck

³⁴⁵ Love, *The Great Oom*, 143.

³⁴⁶ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

will hurt for three days—try to do it right.” Neither the ego of the teacher nor the ego of the student seemed to be important in the Indian yoga context.

In contrast, sensitivity to the individual and a culture of entertainment is paramount in American yoga, as it developed “in response to transnational cultural developments . . . a consumer oriented approach to worldviews and practices as individuals choose from a variety of such to construct individual lifestyles.”³⁴⁷ To be attractive to the choice-oriented American consumer, it is necessary to cater to the individual so that the consumer may choose a specific yoga brand from among a plethora of options. For instance, it is much more common for students to be praised for their practice and abilities than it is for student to be told that they are wrong or performing poorly in an American yoga class. Also, in an American market saturated with yoga teachers, one has to stand out by being charismatic or bringing something fun, new, or different to the yoga scene. The May 2015 *Yoga Journal* includes an article called “Yoga Rebels” that discusses five teachers in America who are “shaking things up with fresh ideas that break the norm.”³⁴⁸ These styles of unconventional yoga include Bhakti Boogie yoga, a mixing of “slow-flow hatha, Kundalini, vinyasa yoga, animalistic movements, and partner interactions”; Wang Bo, the combination of “tai chi, yoga, and kung fu”; and Holy Yoga as a vinyasa class, “with a distinctly Christian point of view.”³⁴⁹ Each style of yoga above markets to niche demographics of consumers in novel and innovative ways.

³⁴⁷ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5291.

³⁴⁸ Melinda Dodd, “Yoga Rebels: 5 Teachers Who May Change How You Think About Yoga,” *Yoga Journal*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.yogajournal.com/slideshow/5-teachers-may-change-way-think-yoga/>.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

The lifestyle branding of the individual teacher is important in a mediatized American climate of yogic saturation.³⁵⁰ There are a variety of ways to display identity and brand oneself within yoga: creative flows, lineage, alignment, rigor, humor, temperament, physique, or music selection, to name a few. The landscape of yoga in America has continued to create its palimpsestic narrative through the medium that most appeals to its market. Today, this market is larger and more diverse than ever before with countless styles of yoga available for consumption. For instance, Tara Stiles calls her yoga style a “movement that ignites freedom” rather than yoga. She adds that she took out the word “yoga” a few years ago and “no one has noticed.”³⁵¹ Stiles brands herself as a “yoga rebel” who “eschews traditional Hindu texts for a more pragmatic goal of getting healthy” or, in her words, “Forget about being Zen and start feeling fabulous.”³⁵²

The Market and Its Makers

The list below illustrates the variety of popular and trademarked yoga practices in America today (as well as their founders):

-Acro: Jenny Sauer-Klein; Jason Nemer; gymnastics training

-Aerial: Christopher Harrison

-Ananda: Swami Kriyananda; Yogananda

-Anusara: John Friend; Iyengar; Krishnamacharya

-Ashtanga: Pattabhi Jois; Krishnamacharya

³⁵⁰ Mediatization is the process in which societies become dependent upon the production and consumption of the discourses of mass media.

³⁵¹ Fleming, “Celebrity Posers Have Yoga World in a Twist.”

³⁵² Sarah Thompson, “Strala Yoga’s Zen Rebel,” *Financial Review*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.afr.com/it-pro/strala-yogas-zen-rebel-20141106-jzx7d>.

- Baptiste:** Baron Baptiste; Walt and Magana Baptiste; Desikachar; Krishnamacharya
- Bikram:** Bikram; Bishnu Ghosh; Paramhansa Yogananda; Sri Yuketeshwar
- CorePower:** Trevor Tice; Vinyasa; Krishnamacharya
- Dharma Mittra:** Dharma Mittra; Swami Kaileshananda
- Forrest:** Anna Forrest; Native American Traditions
- Integrative Yoga Therapy:** Joseph Le Page
- Integral:** Sri Swami Satchidananda
- ISHTA:** Alan Finger; Sivananda; Barati
- Iyengar:** BKS Iyengar; Krishnamacharya
- Jivamukti:** Shannon and David Life; Pattabhi Jois; Krishnamacharya
- Kali Ray Tri:** Kaliji
- Kripalu:** Amrit Desai; Swami Kripaluvananda
- Kundalini:** Yogi Bhahan (3HO); Bhai Faleh Sigh; Guru Nanak
- Nidra:** Swami Satyananda Saraswati; Swami Sivananda
- Para:** Rod Stryker; Pandit Rajmani
- Power:** Beryl Bender Birch; Pattabhi Jois; Krishnamacharya
- Prajna:** Tias Little; Iyengar; Krishnamacharya
- Restorative:** Judith Hansen Lasater; Iyengar; Krishnamacharya
- Rocket:** Larry Graham; Pattabhi Jois; Krishnamacharya
- Sivananda:** Sivananda; Swami Vishnu Devananda
- Svaroop:** Rama Berch (Swami Nirmalananda); Muktananda
- SUP (Standup Paddleboard):** No definitive founder

-Prana Flow: Shiva Rea; Vinyasa Flow; Pattabhi Jois; Krishnamacharya

-Viniyoga: Gary Kraftsow; Desikachar; Krishnamacharya

-Vinyasa Flow: Pattabhi Jois; Iyengar; Viniyoga; Krishnamacharya

-Therapy: Larry Payne; Richard Millar; Liliias Folan

-White Lotus: Ganga White; Tracey Rich

-Yee: Rodney Yee; Iyengar; Krishnamacharya

I include this list as further example of the diversity of yoga practices and styles in America as well as their connections or lack thereof to Indian teachers and lineages. Furthermore, this multiplicity of yoga practices can be traced back to the early yoga proponents in America. Indra Devi opened her first yoga studio in Hollywood in 1947, stressing yoga as breath linked with movement. For Devi, “*Hatha* yoga contained all that you needed to know for perfect health, peace of mind, and spiritual realization; it was the only yoga suited to busy modern lives; and it would be dangerous for her to convey anything of a spiritual matter. (You needed a guru for that).”³⁵³ Stefanie Syman argues that

yoga’s phases have a rhythm, one that loosely follows the dialectics of the broader culture. If the 1950s were a time of contraction, at least in American letters, the 1960s were a diastolic period, a time of expansion and experimentation, of giddy abandonment.³⁵⁴

The story of yoga in America is a shifting narrative of yogic meditation, physical practice, and spiritual exercise. Yoga in America is also couched in a culture of individual entrepreneurialism and consumer choice.

³⁵³ Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 73.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

The 1960s in the United States provided a redefining of boundaries and a change of momentum for the reterritorialization of yoga in America. In 1965, the quota on Indian immigrants was lifted and a new era of Eastern spiritual leaders reterritorialized the American landscape. 1968 was proclaimed by *Time Magazine* to be the Year of the Guru, and featured Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on the cover. Jane Iwamura points out that the period of the '50s, '60s, and '70s provided widespread exposure to the East as “[p]opular media documented these traditions not only as they were practiced in Asia but also as they were transplanted, transformed, and taken up by Anglo practitioners in the United States.”³⁵⁵ She further states that Asian religions were both seen as exotica and stereotyped to reflect a particular image of “the icon of the Oriental monk—his spiritual commitment, his calm demeanor, his Asian face, his manner of dress, and most obviously—his peculiar gendered character; a hyperreal.”³⁵⁶ The interactions of celebrities such as The Beatles and Allen Ginsburg with yoga and Tantra also reformulated ideas about Indian spirituality in the American context. Today, this narrative is not specific to what a spiritual master from Asia should be and do, but also what Americans should be and do as they practice yoga. These hyperreal stereotypes work with a layered reality of present day practices and how mass media and consumption have helped to map out this territory. While I am unable to describe the lineages of all of the popular and trademarked yoga styles listed above, I find it especially important to include the narrative of BKS Iyengar.

³⁵⁵ Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

BKS Iyengar as the “Father” of Anusara Postural Alignment

Now you are no longer fragmented. Let the rays of your intelligence spread throughout your asana; let your mind spread throughout the asana; let your consciousness grace the asana so you are in this undivided state. There’s no duality.”

—BKS Iyengar³⁵⁷

It is most important to locate Iyengar within this discussion, as his school directly influenced John Friend and the creation of Anusara yoga. Furthermore, as Fred Smith argues, “[F]or the last sixty-five years, BKS Iyengar has been the most visible and influential figure in the development and expansion of *hatha* yoga.”³⁵⁸ Suzanne Newcombe adds that, in 2004, he was named one of *Time Magazine*’s one hundred most influential people in the world, and “the way Iyengar institutionalized his charisma was a direct contributing factor to his system’s worldwide popularization.”³⁵⁹ Iyengar was a South Indian Srivaishnava Brahmin like his guru Krishnamacharya. He considered Patanjali and Vyasa to be his most influential teachers in his yogic developments.³⁶⁰ Smith notes that he “almost never mentions the more tantric aspects of *hatha* yoga that become part of the standard discourse of yoga from the twelfth century onward.”³⁶¹ Iyengar was also an advocate of hard work and self-effort in yoga practice as well as a staunch dualist in his philosophical outlook. He created a system of yogic certification and education that included thirteen levels of yogic training, almost exclusively postural.

³⁵⁷ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Iyengar: The Yoga Master*, ed. Kofi Busia (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), Kindle loc. 1247.

³⁵⁸ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 3099.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle loc. 3915 and 4023.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Kindle loc. 3279.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Kindle loc. 3404.

He did not require his students to display any devotional commitment to yogic philosophy and continuously asserted that his status was human rather than divine.³⁶²

Iyengar's yogic training with Krishnamacharya was both brief and contentious, and much of his instruction came from personal experiences with his own body. Iyengar is famous for often remarking that his temple is his body and his *asana* his prayer. Alter states that "Iyengar yoga is dependent on the magical transmutation of quantum physics: the real possibility of the impossible. To manipulate the body is not to reflect reality, but to transform it."³⁶³ He was a devout practitioner of physical *asana* and practiced advanced postures well into his nineties. The Iyengar style consists of continuously moving toward precise alignment felt experientially within the body, strict training programs for teachers, the adjustment of yoga for therapeutic purposes, and the inclusion of props to help students achieve proper positioning. The elements that Iyengar introduced into modern yoga are largely present today, and I have seldom entered a yoga studio where his props and alignment cues have not been incorporated. Furthermore, his *Light on Yoga*, published in 1965, provided the first real physical *asana* manual for individual consumption. Elizabeth De Michelis states that Iyengar yoga is "arguably the most influential and widespread school of Modern Postural Yoga worldwide."³⁶⁴

Iyengar has now become a worldwide brand, but was reluctant about America and Americans at first. Iyengar faced a great deal of cultural shock and palpable difference in *habitus* upon his first arrival in America in 1956. Invited by the Standard Oil heiress

³⁶² Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 3338.

³⁶³ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 25.

³⁶⁴ Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga* (London: Continuum, 2005).

Rebekah Harkess, he noted, “Americans were interested in the three W’s . . . wealth, women, and wine. I was taken aback to see how the way of life conflicted with my own country. I thought twice about coming back.”³⁶⁵ He did not return to the United States until 1973, but he did spend a great deal of time in London working on his notoriously stringent teacher-training program that stressed bodily alignment and levels of certification. In 1970, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) sanctioned the first official Iyengar teacher-training program. The ILEA also shaped the Iyengar yoga discourse as they required that he focus his teachings on the physical aspects of yoga rather than religion and spirituality and that he place emphasis on safety and the yogic health benefits of fitness and flexibility.³⁶⁶ Iyengar’s system was revolutionary, as his students helped him create a teacher-training syllabus that allowed for the dissemination of his trainings without the necessity of his personal presence. The teacher-training format that Iyengar created has been widely adopted in the contemporary American yogic context, replacing the traditional Indian one-on-one relationship of guru and disciple. Unlike the program propounded by Pattabhi Jois, in the Iyengar system one does not have to travel to India to be certified. Furthermore, large groups of people can be trained at one time in a cohesive manner rather than by personal instruction or esoteric modes of initiation.

When Iyengar did return to the US in 1973, it was to teach at the Ann Arbor, Michigan, YMCA. As Singleton notes, “No organization had a greater influence on the

³⁶⁵ Iyengar, *Iyengar*, Kindle loc. 16.

³⁶⁶ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 4142.

international diffusion of physical culture than the YMCA.”³⁶⁷ The inclusion of yoga at the YMCA furthered yoga’s dispersion into popular American culture while also adding to yoga’s definitional ambiguities. Friend and Judith Hanson Lasater, the founder of *Yoga Journal*, both got their yoga start at the YMCA. In the Iyengar tradition, it is stressed that the practice of yoga must be felt by the body, not simply known by the intellect (a complete reversal from Vivekananda). As Lasater puts it, “Guruji never lets any of his students forget that yoga is about one subject in particular: understanding our own natures is the method to understand self and the underlying divinity of the universe.”³⁶⁸ Iyengar’s focus on embodiment and the individual discovery of divinity may also be reasons for his popularity in the West. As Fred Smith notes in *Gurus of Modern Yoga*,

Mr. Iyengar has shifted his own comportment from the model of the harsh master manifested by Krishnamacharya to one who is stern but eminently approachable, his established students have shifted their stance from one of reserved practicality with extreme skepticism of the cultural accouterments of Indian yoga to one of growing admiration for the vision and cultural narratives that still demarcate yoga, despite the eclectic roots that Singleton, Sjoman, and others have correctly noted.³⁶⁹

The combination of physical rigor and necessity of individual experience put forth by Iyengar relates to the *asana* of Anusara and yoga as they move further into the realm of freedom of self-expression. Iyengar furthers the narrative of an American yogic identity as he, unlike Krishnamacharya, traveled to the United States, provided new forms of yogic training in “culturally comfortable” settings such as the YMCA, provided a practical guide and training manual with visual aids for individual practice, and, overall,

³⁶⁷ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 91.

³⁶⁸ Iyengar, *Iyengar*, Kindle loc. 1082.

³⁶⁹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 3376.

made the practice of yoga more accessible through the use of props and by his modes of training teachers.

Iyengar is crucial to the development of Anusara as representative of a physical-based American yoga with a structured training system. Friend was a student of Iyengar for many years and earned both a junior intermediate teaching certificate from Iyengar and served on the Board of Directors of the Iyengar Yoga National Association of the United States from 1990 to 1995. Friend left Iyengar in 1995: “Finally I realized that I was not fully aligned with Mr. Iyengar’s philosophy and method, so it was not dharmic of me to continue to use his name to describe my teaching style.” In essence, “Friend wanted a kinder, gentler yoga school—though his critics say he simply wanted to build his own empire, and grafted a touchy-feely teaching method onto what remains, essentially, Iyengar yoga.”³⁷⁰ Williamson adds that “Friend began to develop his own style of yoga when he realized that his approach stood in contrast to that of his teacher, Iyengar, who embraced the philosophy of Samkhya found in the *Yoga Sutras*.”³⁷¹ Friend utilized Iyengar’s anatomic alignment principles and linked them with an understanding of Tantra that he gleaned predominantly through Siddha yoga. Anusara was to be a postural yoga style that incorporated the Tantric teachings that he learned from his most influential teacher, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda. It is because Friend provided a synthesis of Iyengar *asana* with Tantric philosophy that I find it is necessary to look at both the lineage of postural practice and Tantric practice within America. Furthermore, because

³⁷⁰ Swartz, “The Yoga Mogul.”

³⁷¹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5749.

Friend situates his Tantric spiritual lineage within Siddha yoga, it is necessary to discuss this rhizomatic linkage.

Siddha Yoga: Situating Spirituality and Ego

The entire issue of mapping and comprehending the meaning of a canon in guru-centered mystical traditions, such as Siddha Yoga, is largely uncharted scholarly territory. We will need multiple perspectives to appreciate the complex materials and nuanced situations under consideration; and we will need methods and models for understanding that have not before been applied . . . it is difficult to even speak of “the Siddha tradition” as if it were a unified body of ideas and practices. Rather there are siddhas and siddha traditions in which there are many common sources and familiar strategies for understanding and interpreting scriptures.³⁷²

“Siddha Yoga is based on ideas and practices primarily derived from tantra and promising God-realization through the ‘grace’ of the guru.”³⁷³ It is in the Siddha yoga movement that Friend found the underpinning spiritual heritage to complement the principles of his Iyengar-inspired *asana* alignment. Siddha yoga grounds itself in the Tantric philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, especially the notion that the material world is not illusory but rather a part of a larger consciousness. Siddha yoga also places strong emphasis on the guru-disciple relationship; the *Guru Gita* text is chanted daily in Siddha ashrams to promote devotion and surrender by the disciple.³⁷⁴ The practitioner comes to know that everything is Shiva, and this allows for the realization that “the path of understanding lies not in rejecting the world but in recognizing the ultimate value of everything one encounters.”³⁷⁵ While this dissertation is not a theological exegesis into

³⁷² Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Meditation Revolution: A History and Theology of the Siddha Yoga Lineage* (South Fallsburg, NY: Agama Press, 1997), 277.

³⁷³ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5160.

³⁷⁴ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 15.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

Siddha yoga, it does rely upon such scholarship to provide interpretation and insight in understanding the identity of a Tantric American yoga identity. Friend describes Tantra as it is introduced in the seventh and eighth centuries, as “not a dualism, body, mind, emotions, just different vibrations of spectacular supreme energy reverberating with the highest delight, boundlessly free in its creativity.”³⁷⁶ He also defines Tantra as

[w]hatever language can be an alignment that life is good, a very goodness at the essence of our hearts . . . a never ending art project in which you get more skillful at living . . . laundry can take you to a place of wild freedom . . . you can find it magically everywhere . . . any circumstance, you can take a profaned place and shift it to a sacred space, you can take something that’s ugly and start to manifest and reform it, transform it so you remember that there is the supreme—this is Tantra.³⁷⁷

The all-positive vision of Anusara includes historical notions of Tantra, neo-Tantra, and New Age philosophy, as well as appeals to individualistic notions of freedom and self-expression. Friend states, “I use technologies that are actually very ancient, in so many ways very, very sophisticated and also incredibly eloquent; a philosophy for the twenty-first century.”³⁷⁸ He both grounds his knowledge base in tradition and at the same time transforms its message.

In Tantra, it is the guru who defines authority and canon, rather than strict allegiance to specific texts. The theological subjectivity of guru-centered traditions (which one could argue is also the case in Anusara) provides the opening for subjective and individual choice in the consumer market of American yoga. The ability of the Tantric guru traditions to rebrand, simplify, and innovate is continued in the American

³⁷⁶ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

³⁷⁷ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

milieu of fracturing and lifestyle branding. As Jain states, Muktananda “consciously constructed a unique persona and set of tantric spiritual commodities that he packaged as Siddha yoga . . . selecting from the teachings of Nityananda [his guru] and from Vedanta and Kashmir Saivism.”³⁷⁹ Brooks adds that

the guru is free to affirm, reject, or even ignore specifics on the grounds that such teachings are not appropriate or skillful means (upaya) either to lineage in the current times, or even on an individual basis . . . and [furthermore] draw freely upon resources that suit their spiritual agenda and meet their ethical standards.³⁸⁰

Friend appears to intentionally follow the map of multiple sources to describe his personal Tantric and yogic philosophy. Muktananda, the founder of Siddha yoga, like Friend, “publicly embraced the exoteric, popular dimensions of tantra rather than the esoteric antinomian dimensions [and] went out in search of disciples, actively marketing Siddha Yoga, which was now immediately accessible to vast numbers of spiritual seekers.”³⁸¹ Both Muktananda and Friend serve as examples of how unclear boundaries and exoteric and esoteric practices are linked to more straightforward business practices, existing as simplistic brand messages and colored by larger social and historical complexities.

Friend’s brand of Anusara, like Siddha yoga, includes a consumptive Tantric spirituality of physical and material abundance in which “Tantra has everything to do with yoga, that’s all I teach is Tantra.”³⁸² Friend claims to have developed his personal philosophical view, Shiva/Shakti Tantra, by picking from essential teachings found in the

³⁷⁹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5303.

³⁸⁰ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 285–87.

³⁸¹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5187.

³⁸² Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

right- and left-handed traditions as a “system or technology for delight or ecstasy.”³⁸³ He, like his predecessors—Krishnamacharya, Iyengar, Mutkananda, and Chidvilasananda—subjectively innovates yoga and Tantra in ways that allow it to be applied to any number of already existing religious viewpoints and philosophies. The mainstreaming and marketing of Mutkananda, the alignment and teacher-training methods of Iyengar, and the spiritual practices of Tantra all tell us the ways in which people have adapted and innovated yoga to suit their environments. Muktananda also provided an example for Friend of an entrepreneurial guru who created a charismatic persona as well as “spiritual wares that were attractive to large target audiences of late twentieth century spiritual seekers.”³⁸⁴

Muktananda

When you compare yourself with your own real Self, you become greater and greater and greater. This is continuous expansion. There is no moment that is dull when you compare yourself with your own greatness.³⁸⁵

Muktananda was born in Karnataka in 1908 and became an initiate into the Sarasvati Order of Dasanami Sannyasa in the mid 1920s. On August 15, 1947 (India’s Independence Day from Britain), Swami Muktananda received *shaktipat* initiation from his guru Bhagawan Nityananda. Muktananda came to the United States in 1970 and “appears to have decided to make *shaktipat* the centerpiece of a worldwide movement of

³⁸³ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

³⁸⁴ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5187.

³⁸⁵ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 149.

spiritual awakening, which later he was to call, quite forthrightly, the ‘meditation revolution.’”³⁸⁶

While Muktananda’s first visit to the United States was successful, it was his second visit in 1974 that catapulted Siddha yoga into popular American culture. Because of the growing popularity of Muktananda’s trademark dissemination of *shaktipat* to anyone who wanted it, he began offering Intensives to streamline the process. Intensives were “choreographed retreats hosted by the guru and his devoted disciples” that provided a time efficient, cost effective, and easily consumptive way to market and dispense *shaktipat*.³⁸⁷ For Muktananda, *shaktipat* is a process in which the transmission of spiritual power and knowledge occurs as an initiation from guru to student. Swami Chidvilasanda describes it by saying that “the Guru transmits his own fully awakened energy into the seeker, and the seeker’s own inner energy, the *kundalini*, is awakened in turn. Thus, the process of Siddha Yoga begins to unfold.”³⁸⁸ *Shaktipat* has been a documented phenomenon since the sixth or seventh century but was first discussed in terms of sophisticated theoretical concepts by Abhinavagupta in the tenth century.³⁸⁹ Williamson, a scholar and former practitioner of Siddha yoga, notes the effect that Muktananda’s *shaktipat* Intensive had on her:

[B]y the time I left that [Siddha yoga] intensive, I felt like a different person than the one who had arrived at the ashram just three days earlier. I returned home to my normal duties as a mother and housewife, but all the activities I performed seemed infused with a sense of holiness. I felt as though cooking dinner was an

³⁸⁶ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 410.

³⁸⁷ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5169 and 5377.

³⁸⁸ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 409.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 430.

act of worship, and when I bathed my two young daughters, it was as if God was giving God a bath. My experience was not uncommon. Muktananda affected thousands of people in a similar way. Lives were very literally transformed overnight.³⁹⁰

The first Siddha Yoga Meditation Intensive took place in Aspen, Colorado, in 1974.³⁹¹ Intensives allowed large groups of people to receive *shaktipat* in a weekend course with fairly little commitment. One of the major precepts Westerners found especially appealing was the understanding of everyday life as sacred. Furthermore, in order to receive *shaktipat*, seekers did not have to travel to India or spend large amounts of time with themselves or their gurus; rather, they only had to be in Muktananda's presence for a short period to reap the benefits of Siddha yoga. Jain argues that "Muktananda transformed the world of his disciples not only through *shaktipat* but also through the transfer (if not always direct) contact with his powerful persona . . . the paragon of virtue, the transmitter of power and knowledge, and the perfected master."³⁹²

During the rest of Muktananda's lifetime, the movement continued to flourish. Muktananda died in 1982 after naming a brother and sister as his two successors, Nityananda and Chidvilasananda. This pair had a major falling out in 1985, and today SYDA (Siddha Yoga Dham of America) recognizes only Gurumayi Chidvilasananda as the sole heir or Muktananda's teachings.³⁹³ In public, Gurumayi often speaks in English (unlike Muktananda) and is known for her charisma and ability to call upon and distill

³⁹⁰ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 107.

³⁹¹ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 92.

³⁹² Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5393.

³⁹³ Lis Harris, "O Guru, Guru, Guru," *The New Yorker*, November 14, 1994, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/11/14/o-guru-guru-guru>.

multiple traditions to illustrate her point. In 1989, Friend traveled to India, where he met Gurumayi and was given *shaktipat* by her in Ganeshpuri. Friend credits Chidvilasanada with helping him to hone his teaching skills. After receiving *shaktipat* he began a long-term relationship with Siddha yoga, eventually teaching *hatha* yoga at the Shree Muktananda Ashram in New York. Before Friend's involvement, *hatha* was not highly marketed nor sought out in Siddha yoga. As Brooks tells us, "a physically oriented practice is not considered a requirement on the path of Siddha yoga." It is once *kundalini* has been awakened that "other yogas and practices are developed and cultivated as a natural and sometimes spontaneous consequence of this initiation."³⁹⁴ In other words, *asana*-based yoga practice may or may not be an effect of the awakening of *shaktipat* by Muktananda, but it is not a requirement for realizing the true self. It was with Friend, known for his humor, alignment cues, and creative sequencing that *hatha* yoga began to thrive in Siddha yoga.³⁹⁵ Friend's "style of teaching with humor softened the intensity that had permeated the ashram, adding a quality of lightness and fun."³⁹⁶

The Siddha yoga movement flourished in the late 1980s and early 1990s and grew to include more than five hundred meditation centers and ten live-in ashrams.³⁹⁷ The SYDA Foundation in South Fallsburg, New York, also created "standards, structures, and systems of accountability" such as "courses, teacher-training programs, and departments

³⁹⁴ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 448.

³⁹⁵ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 123.

³⁹⁶ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5722.

³⁹⁷ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 121.

for the publication of Siddha Yoga books.”³⁹⁸ The success of the Shree Muktananda Ashram in New York also led to the founding of the Teachers and Scholars Department and the creation of “Siddha Yoga Scholars” such as Douglas Brooks (Tantra in South India), John Grimes (Advaita Vedanta), Paul Muller Ortega (Kashmir Shaivism), and William Mahoney (Muktananda Indological Research Institute). These scholars helped to authenticate and explain Siddha yoga to Western practitioners and to shape the spiritual precepts found in Anusara; Douglas Brooks even helped create the name Anusara.³⁹⁹ The ashram also allowed practitioners to cultivate a disciplined lifestyle and to participate in spiritual practices for an extended period of time in a supportive environment.⁴⁰⁰ It was, in a sense, India “light.” The journalist and Siddha yoga practitioner Penny Clyne notes, “What impresses me about Siddha Yoga in the 1980s and 1990s is that you can get into a wonderful state not only by being around the teacher, but by being around the students.”⁴⁰¹ A community was created around the boundaries of discipline, guru, and the sacred. Anusara also aimed to create community through “rituals of the body” and a “spiritual system that provides comfort to those who have become alienated from traditional institutional religion.”⁴⁰²

The same dynamic can be seen in today’s American yoga festivals and immersions. While they may or may not imply sacred space, these festivals are often

³⁹⁸ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5419 and 5432.

³⁹⁹ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 123.

⁴⁰⁰ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 103.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁰² Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5767.

marketed in terms of fun, freedom, and wellness rather than discipline or religious experience. As David Chidester argues, religion is a term for “ways of being a human person in a human place,” and “[s]ince being a person also requires being in a place, religion entails discourses and practices for creating sacred space, as a zone of inclusion but also as a boundary for excluding others.”⁴⁰³ The same goes for yoga in America as it serves to create community, to create boundaries, and at the same time to be inclusive of its continuous fracturing into novel forms. American yoga, like Anusara, follows the tradition of Siddha yoga as “traditionalist by their ‘acceptance’ of the inclusive canon, and reformers who adapt, adopt, and reshape these sources beyond ‘original’ boundaries.”⁴⁰⁴ What is different is the ways in which Americans are creating and identifying with these boundaries while at the same time simplifying them to make them more accessible or marketable.

Sexual Scandal, Tantra, and the Cliché of the Modern Yoga Guru

The scandals of Muktananda and Friend illustrate how understandings of yoga and Tantra influence the ways in which the power of the guru is displayed and understood. Sarah Caldwell argues that the Kula path teaches the primary importance of the body as the essential tool of *sadhana*: “[I]ts theology is entirely embodied, experiential, made real in the flesh.”⁴⁰⁵ It appears that Muktananda and John Friend took the experiential nature of Tantra to heart in their teachings as well as through their more

⁴⁰³ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, viii.

⁴⁰⁴ Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 289.

⁴⁰⁵ Sarah Caldwell, “The Heart of the Secret: A Personal and Scholarly Encounter with Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 5, no. 1 (2001): 45–46, doi:10.1525/nr.2001.5.1.9.

esoteric and sexual practices involving bodily flesh. Caldwell notes that Muktananda felt he could “move effortlessly among all forms of tantric sadhana, picking from regimes of austere discipline, ecstatic devotion, formless direct perception of the absolute, and sexual intercourse with young women in his ashram.”⁴⁰⁶ Jain adds that “Muktananda kept secret what he knew would offend the modern, urban, democratic idealists to whom he marketed, primarily because of what would be perceived as the exploitation of women and girls.”⁴⁰⁷ While the esoteric practices of Tantra were not publicly extolled by Muktananda, in private he engaged in occult Tantric sexual practices.

In 1981, Swami Stan Trout wrote an open letter to his guru, Muktananda, charging him with molesting a number of his female disciples. He notes that, “like all of us, Muktananda was only human. And, like all men who worship power, he was inevitably corrupted and destroyed by it.”⁴⁰⁸ The reactions of the girls and women themselves to Muktananda’s acts range from revulsion to reverence. Today there remains a deep wound in the Siddha yoga community over the allegations against Muktananda. At the same time, his sexual misconduct was kept within the exclusive and insular boundaries of Siddha until 1994, when *New Yorker* magazine journalist Lis Harris published a piece on the financial, sexual, and physical abuses of Muktananda and Siddha yoga.⁴⁰⁹ One account of reactions to the scandal is that “Muktananda had established his claim to authority. Disciples of Siddha Yoga, therefore, did not denounce Muktananda,

⁴⁰⁶ Caldwell, “The Heart of the Secret,” 35.

⁴⁰⁷ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5485.

⁴⁰⁸ Stan Trout, “Letter From a Former Swami,” [www.LeavingSiddhaYoga.net](http://www.leavingsiddhayoga.net), accessed September 2014, <http://www.leavingsiddhayoga.net/secret.htm>.

⁴⁰⁹ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 126.

but they did not legitimate his transgressive actions either. Rather, they simply adopted a strategy of denial.”⁴¹⁰ Even the “Siddha Yoga Scholars” involved in writing *Meditation Revolution* failed to include the sexual misconduct of Muktananda in the telling of the Siddha yoga movement.

In the case of Muktananda, Tantric ritual is the most often heard as an excuse for the unconventional and illegal sexual behavior he engaged in near the end of his life. As Williamson puts it,

It is important to examine this teenage period of Mukunda’s life to understand how prevalent Tantric and occult practices were—and continue to be in India. We have examined the Christian missionary and British educational influence on the development of Neo-Hinduism, with its emphasis on Vedanta and a “rational approach” to religion. However Tantra, fortune-telling, occult arts, and the development of yogic powers were and are also widespread.⁴¹¹

Muktananda is often described as living between the worlds of a guru-driven and Tantric India and a Puritan America in which his abuses of power and role as a guru are to be understood differently. Caldwell argues that “Kaulism denies antagonism between sensuous joy and spiritual bliss. Baba was directly identifying himself with the subject of this medieval portrait of the greatest guru of the Kaula Shiva lineage—Abhinavagupta.”⁴¹² Today, Muktananda’s legacy of sexual misconduct is a topic debated fluidly, moving between the realms of sexual predatory rape and Tantric ritual practice. Muktananda was no longer alive when the *New Yorker* article documenting his sexual misconduct came out, so he never publicly addressed his alleged misdeeds.

⁴¹⁰ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5496.

⁴¹¹ Urban, *Tantra*, 152.

⁴¹² Caldwell, “The Heart of the Secret,” 13.

While Stan Trout wrote a personal letter to Muktananda about the guru's sexual misconduct, Friend's indiscretions were made public in the virtual world of the Internet. Muktananda was also protected by the denial of sexual misconduct by Siddha yoga leadership and disciples, while Friend was immediately shunned by both practitioners and teachers of Anusara. Furthermore, Muktananda and Friend both built their personas on representations of virtue and ideas of their status as above human error; it is because of this that their faults were all the more painful for their followers to swallow. Friend, unlike Muktananda, never claimed to be a guru; however, "witnessing the devastation felt by many followers of the Anusara path, it appears that Friend played a stronger 'guru role'" than he, and scholars such as Williamson, imply. The charismatic leadership roles of Muktananda and Friend created many of the problems that other charismatic movements have encountered: scandals involving abuse of power at the physical and material level.

In 2012, Anusara was rocked by an anonymous post by a former employee, accusing Friend of sleeping with married students, participating in a Wiccan coven, smoking marijuana, and freezing the pensions of his senior teachers. These indiscretions were not only viewed by a much larger and less insular audience, but were also commented on in social and mainstream media. Friend had carefully and explicitly marketed himself to a wide audience, and he branded his style on positivity and ethics. His actions directly reflected on not only himself, but also on his entire system. In contemporary America there is a direct relationship between the production, the consumption, and the formation of yogic identity. Notions of authenticity are created by transactions in the marketplace of historical, material, and virtual narratives. Prior to

2012, Friend presented himself publicly as if he and his yogic philosophy were beyond ethical reproach. He states, “I don’t have different ethics for business, integrity with our yoga and our business makes us successful in bringing brightness and empowerment . . . that is a consistent story. I am happy for people to look closely at the organization, a lot of goodness in our intention.”⁴¹³

When the website *www.JFExposed.com* appeared on February 3, 2012, it stated that its purpose was “a wakeup call to John Friend to be true to his own philosophies and expectations of integrity.”⁴¹⁴ The expectation of integrity for his personal conduct did not derive from the same *habitus* as Muktananda’s, who came from a guru-based tradition in India where there is “a complete unquestioning, obedience to the master.”⁴¹⁵ Even after allegations about Muktananda came out, he “was considered the perfect model of what all disciples strove to be, especially for monastic disciples, who were expected to be celibate and to perfectly conform to rigorous standards of ethical behavior.”⁴¹⁶ Friend acknowledges that “when you put someone in a position as a guru, you are making them a king . . . in retrospect I helped create a relationship where people saw me in an elevated position, where there is such a power differential that people can end up feeling conned

⁴¹³ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

⁴¹⁴ “John Friend, Head of Anusara: The Accusations,” *YogaDork*, February 3, 2012, <http://yogadork.com/2012/02/03/john-friend-head-of-anusara-wiccan-leader-sexual-deviant-pension-withholding-homewrecker-the-accusations/>.

⁴¹⁵ Caldwell, “The Heart of the Secret,” 37.

⁴¹⁶ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5407.

or hoaxed or betrayed.”⁴¹⁷ While the reactions to Muktananda and Friend differed, both of their yoga systems suffered from their indiscretions.

Friend not only describes his scandal as a modern day “witch-hunt,” but he also ties his public scandal to the success Anusara has had as a business, bringing in millions of dollars of revenue a year. He argues that “they wanted to use the name and make six figures and not pay back . . . I picked the really ambitious people to be on top and they knocked me out at the end of the day.”⁴¹⁸ The combination of spiritual and worldly goals found in Anusara led to an atmosphere of competition within the teaching community. Friend notes that this competition was in part the reason he was removed from his powerful position in Anusara.⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, rather than taking responsibility for his actions, Friend blames his own upbeat and friendly teaching style in confusing his life with his students’ problems, lifestyles, and attitudes.⁴²⁰ He notes that it is because of the conflation of his actions with Anusara that his followers had such a hard time with his indiscretions and took them as a personal affront.

Friend created Anusara as a lifestyle brand directly associated with his own behavior; it is because of this that he was so readily demonized. He branded himself and his company’s authenticity with terms like, “grace, divine flow, *shri*, beauty, and goodness.”⁴²¹ Because the identity of yoga in America is in part the desire to experience

⁴¹⁷ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

⁴¹⁸ Joel Warner, “The Fallen Guru,” *Westword*, January 9–15, 2014, <http://digitalissue.denverwestword.com/publication/index.php?i=191330&m=&l=&p=6&pre=>.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 6051.

authenticity, many people in America felt as though they had been personally conned and cheated when Friend did not live up to the standards of his brand or to his status as a guru. The fact that Muktananda's sexual conquests were not consensual and took place with young women while Friend's relationships were with consenting women (who may or may not have been married) does not change how Friend's ethics have discredited Anusara in the hyperreal American market. Yoga exists in America as arborescent and rhizomatic, as "mass media creates new configurations of intimacy and attachment that have profoundly affected our epistemological sense."⁴²² Friend created his vision of Anusara in his selection of positive and ethical modes of teaching: a delight of senses and self at the highest level, "Eastern spirituality as 'stylized religion' and consumable object."⁴²³ Friend also branded himself personally as the model of Anusara's lifestyle. Because lifestyle informs consumption, the lifestyle of Friend no longer became something to define oneself by or have affinity toward.

Conclusion

Yoga figures and their branded identities represent the changing landscape of American yoga, how it is both marketed and practiced through shifting notions of authenticity and innovation. In examining Krishnamacharya, Iyengar, and Muktananda, I have shown yoga in transaction and transition between India and the United States. Figures such as Pierre Bernard, Indra Devi, and Tara Stiles provide context to the Americanization of yoga. By looking at how yoga is imagined in terms of modes of lineage and legitimation, as well as how the market of yoga in the United States

⁴²² Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 8.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

functions, I have uncovered both the complexity of the multiple yoga narratives and also how they move. I believe the consumptive and inventive aspect of an American yoga should not be understood as a positive or a negative, but rather as illustrating how cultures build on the past and innovate in the present. The relationship of yoga to the authority of a guru, the proclivity for gurus to misbehave, and the ability of Americans to reinvent themselves in new and novel ways provide both the nuance and situatedness of the genealogical story of an American yogic identity.

Chapter Five: Identifying an American Yoga: Merging Profit and Purpose

I realize that my claims about my new understanding of postural alignment can sound outrageously unbelievable under the terrible circumstances of me and so many others losing so much due to the scandal . . . I realize that some former students feel offended and even hoaxed if I state that Sridaiva now describes the optimal template more precisely and simply than any other alignment model I have ever used . . . people want me to continue to suffer. But you know what? I want to improve and I am going to try to evolve. I want to show them the guy they tried to knock out completely is not only back, but he's back with something revolutionary.

—John Friend⁴²⁴

Introduction

Jared Farmer argues in his article, “Americanasana,” that America has replaced India as “the center of creativity” in yogic reinvention.⁴²⁵ This chapter looks at the ways in which American yoga’s unique identity is presented through constructed and located authenticities and placed among an American *habitus* of lifestyle consumption. At play in American yoga are layerings of intentional and unintentional commodification and cooption of physical, spiritual, and commercial practices:

[I]f you want to go deep into the yoga practice there is more yoga probably in the west than even the east and the depth of it is quite good . . . people from the east are coming to the west—the west has taken the practice/path of yoga and used its innovative perception to take the practice to another level or a level applicable to 21st century society.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Warner, “The Fallen Guru.”

⁴²⁵ Jared Farmer, “Americanasana,” *Reviews in American History* 40, no. 1 (2012): 145–58.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

America's yoga is an authentic product, fake replica, and hyperreal mashup. This yoga's identity is found in transactions of the local and the global and layered by conversation and translation. Pasts and presents not only interact, but they also transact in ways that create new spaces of defining and understanding. These transactions of yoga intersect consumer capitalism, historical and present day transnational interaction, and the practice of yoga being intimately linked to bodies in action across space and place. I do not believe that the translations and transactions of yoga can be qualified in categories of positive or negative; instead, yoga in America is complicated by the entire spectrum of yogic experience. Practitioners in the contemporary United States have redefined and renegotiated the boundaries of yoga to suit their particular cultural *habitus*. In essence, American yoga is a particular mashup of historical and social transaction that has resulted in a particularly consumptive quality of marketing and imagery. This quality of yogic consumption also involves the entrepreneurial branding of individual authenticity. Americans define themselves by what they do (lifestyle) and showcase this by what they buy (consumption).

This chapter views the continued fracturing and readjustment of American yogic identity as it is rhizomatically remembered, manufactured, disseminated, and embodied. By looking at the production, dissemination, and consumption of American yoga, I demonstrate it as *authentic* in its own right. American yoga is a consumptive performance that transforms the values and practices of its Indic origins in ways that appeal to the largest target market of consumers. Miller reminds us that a tradition's meanings and

practices are defined by the ways in which they are engaged by people.⁴²⁷ Yoga is involved in the public realm and exists as rhizome, moving between continual reification and splintering. While the media may display a somewhat reified version of yoga, seen from the panoptic gaze of the cultural imagery, this work examines the fractured root structures and how their movements interact with imaginings of objectivity and narrative. In the American *habitus* of brand culture, subjective and collective truth is produced via the experience of subjective authenticity. Modes of being and doing are gathered from layerings of local subjectivity and global transactions that are more individualized and choice-oriented than ever before. The ubiquity of advertising and access to social media has changed the ways that we understand ourselves and interact with one another.

The previous four chapters have been concerned with the complex nature of defining an American yogic identity as rhizomatic and varied rather than linear and monolithic. They have also created an intentionally messy genealogy that points to the ways in which yoga and Tantra have traveled between historical and geographical dichotomies rather than being bounded by them. This chapter builds on this critical historical genealogy to illustrate the on-the-ground practices of a uniquely American yoga. John Friend's removal from Anusara and his creation of a new form of yoga, Sridaiva, are illustrative of this yogic culture of individuality and excess. I begin by looking at yoga media and virtual culture, then move to the broader picture of the production of yoga in America by examining such issues as patents and privacy, the creation and breakdown of yogic boundaries, and the defining of yoga brands through

⁴²⁷ Miller, *Consuming Religion*.

modes of American media, marketing, and advertising. I also speak to lifestyle branding and commodification, especially through the example of Lululemon. I discuss people and styles of yoga such as Kino MacGregor, Rod Styer, Kathryn Budig, John Friend, CorePower Yoga, and YogaGlo; I also locate this discourse in a subjective manner of understanding. I continue the narrative of Anusara as it unfolds within Friend's new style of Sridaiva and as it addresses larger markers of American yogic identity.

Virtual Culture: Media and Brand Identity

Yogic identities in America are displayed through mediatized bodies and clothing brands, showcased and discussed in online spaces, and advertised via hashtags such as #iwillwhatiwant (Budig) or the ubiquitous #yogaeverydamnday. The notion of value in American yoga—value for whom and value to what purpose—is crucial to the discussion of its identity. The subjective practices of American yogis are to be valued in their own right, yet must be understood as part of larger cultural and historical understandings and locations. The media is pervasive and influential in depicting the validity of a brand's message. The termination of Friend's affiliation with Anusara occurred in the public realm of social media and led to the loss of recognizable brand identity as well as renegotiations of boundary and exclusivity in Anusara. There is still a website entitled *Boycott John Friend's Sridaiva Yoga Facebook Page*, warning that "John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga, and now the head of Sridaiva Yoga, is a self-described 'master manipulator.' An unethical man who has violated the trust of teachers, students, and employees. BUYER BEWARE!"⁴²⁸ The language used is telling of the ways in which

⁴²⁸ "Boycott John Friend's Sridaiva Yoga," *Facebook*, accessed December 5, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-John-Friends-Sridaiva-Yoga/321660381267230>.

Friend's behavior has resulted in emotional reactions, how it has affected his community, and how it is displayed through forms of consumption. While Anusara still exists, many of its previously celebrated teachers have publicly distanced themselves from both Friend and Anusara. For instance, Elena Brower does not state in her online YogaGlo biography that she has extensive training in Anusara yoga; rather, Brower notes that "Elena has studied with master teachers since 1997, and has been teaching yoga and meditation since 1999."⁴²⁹ This is in direct contrast to the credit she gives Friend in her resignation letter to Anusara:

This past week, after over a decade, I've chosen to resign my Anusara yoga certification, in order to honour the method by hereby dispelling any confusion about what I'm teaching. While my work is entirely informed by the brilliant Universal Principles of Anusara as designed by John Friend, my process is decidedly touched by other potent understandings. My teaching will not change; I continue to serve your heart, right from my own, with deep gratitude. Virayoga studio will continue to flourish as it is, populated with all of our beloved Anusara teachers, adding a few more offerings in traditions such as Iyengar and vinyasa for the new year.

Thank You, John. I will forever be your student. As I move forward as a student of the world, I will always be informed by the past eleven years with the highest gratitude. **Thank you for all the years you've studied, devised, written, planned and articulated the method of Anusara yoga.** Thank you for teaching me how to let my heart speak. Thank you for teaching me how to stand up for myself. **Thank you for teaching me how to talk about Universal Love, and mean it.** And for showing me why it's important to share that understanding with anyone who'd care to listen.

Thank you for teaching me how to welcome myself to a strong, challenging, meticulous, playful practice, and how to make it mine. **Thank you for being the catalyst for several of the best friendships I will ever know in this lifetime.** Thank you for supporting me through a few very strong times. Thank you for trusting me with a few of yours. Thank you for teaching me about radical generosity (especially and particularly how to have a basket at the end of a retreat

⁴²⁹ "Elena Brower," *YogaGlo*, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.yogaglo.com/teacher-31-Elena-Brower.html>.

to collect tips for the workers at the venue! The best!). Most importantly, **thank you for teaching me how to SERVE.**

P.S. To my peers since the early days in the Anusara world: LOVE YOU, thank you. Huge respect for each of you. From the beginning, you've unwaveringly supported and held me; this moment is no exception. I am bathed in your love, presence and wisdom in these days.

With gratitude,
E⁴³⁰

Brower's resignation letter and her biography for YogaGlo demonstrate that people's affiliations change as their perceptions of the value of brand identity change. Anusara went from being one of the most celebrated forms of yoga in America (and the world) to a style that many no longer want to be associated with. Anusara teacher, Amy Ippoliti, notes that people wove their "socio-spiritual identities into Anusara and made it a central force in their lives as well as a method for making a living."⁴³¹ Friend, as the leader of Anusara, played a powerful role in many people's lives. Many of Friend's teachers not only believed in and disseminated his teachings, but they also focused their personal lives and their communities around Anusara. For many, the fallout from Anusara was a very painful experience of identity loss at the individual and communal level. Today, the brand of Anusara is more associated with Friend's dishonesty than with the yoga system that he built. Williamson correctly foreshadows the downfall of Anusara when she notes that, "[i]f Anusara continues to facilitate this type of interaction [a heart connection] and collaboration [with Siddha yoga scholars] while still maintaining the integrity of the

⁴³⁰ "Anusara Exodus: Elena Brower Exits After 10 Years, Christina Sell Retires Certification," *YogaDork*, November 1, 2011, <http://yogadork.com/2011/11/01/anusara-exodus-elena-brower-exits-after-10-years-christina-sell-retires-certification/>.

⁴³¹ Ippoliti, "Heart Wide Open."

system Friend developed, then it is likely that it will sustain itself.”⁴³² Because Friend lost his integrity and thereby the integrity of the system, it became impossible for his product to remain viable in the marketplace of American yoga. Today Anusara is rarely heard mentioned in the American yogic conversation.

Yoga is often an important identity marker for the people who practice it. Because yoga’s character in America is fluid, it allows for the continual reinvention and negotiation of its identities, forms of practice, and modes of yogic personalities. Friend has recently created a new style of yoga that further deterritorializes itself from Indian yoga language and alignment. Friend’s ability to repackage himself and a new brand of yoga “with something better than I had before”⁴³³ demonstrates the ways in which American yoga is entrepreneurial and amenable to multiplicity. The explanation of Sridaiva below comes from John Friend’s personal website:

Sridaiva

A life practice of healthy body-mind posture
a paradigm-shifting alignment system
which can be applied to yoga, dance, athletics,
any physical movement—sitting, standing, and walking,
particularly any posture that you most commonly assume throughout your day.

*

Take charge and be self-accountable for your own health
through optimal posture and a positive mindset.
Learn a universal geometric template
a Bow-Spring alignment for your torso and spine
To take your yoga practice to the next level,
Increase your performance in any sport,
Provide highly effective therapeutic healing to all parts of your body-mind.
Understand and recognize your personal alignment imbalances,
Become aware of your individual postural habits,
which are intrinsic to your chronic aches, pains, ailments, and other health issues.

⁴³² Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 6083.

⁴³³ Warner, “The Fallen Guru.”

Remold and recalibrate
the curvature of your myofascia and the energetic shape of your body-mind
into an optimal template for vibrant health and positive attitude.
Create powerfully uplifted glutes, and tapered, curvy waistline,
Long and strong core and abdominals,
Balanced neck, throat and jaw
into your 70's!
embody healthy posture into your 80's, 90's and beyond.⁴³⁴

Friend started Sridaiva in 2013 and declared in 2014 that this school is “more impactful than Anusara ever was.”⁴³⁵ The creation of the new school of Sridaiva illustrates the subjective and individualistic understanding of American yoga and its relationship to identity, commodity, and consumption. Sridaiva is an American brand of yoga that has no teaching roots within the Indian heritage of modern yogic alignment and further removes its direct association with Indian spiritual lineages such as Siddha. As the quote above demonstrates, Sridaiva is not simply yoga, but a “life practice . . . for vibrant health and a positive attitude.” His message is meant for a broad market and indicative of the current American *habitus* of health, wellness, and self-accountability rather than accountability to a tradition or a guru.

The national culture of America is not one of linear traditions or monolithic narratives; rather, America is a culture of advertising messages and media sound bites. We are on average exposed to 3,000 messages a day and tens of thousands of product options.⁴³⁶ With so much choice, brand affinity becomes an important way to display one's values and status. Juliet Schor, in *Born to Buy*, notes of American children: “More

⁴³⁴ “Sridaiva: A Life Practice,” *John Friend Sridaiva Yoga*, January 5, 2014, <http://www.johnfriend.us/sridaiva-a-life-practice/>.

⁴³⁵ Warner, “The Fallen Guru.”

⁴³⁶ Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.: How Corporate America Blurs the Line Between What We Buy, Who We Are, and Those We Help* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 3.

children here than anywhere else in the world believe that their clothes and brands describe who they are and define their social status. American kids display more brand affinity than their counterparts anywhere else in the world.”⁴³⁷ Yoga in America reflects a consumptive lifestyle in an atmosphere of subjective reinvention and a merging of profit and personal purpose; it is a brand, a business, and an identity practice.

The Production of Yoga in America

The production of American yoga is entrepreneurial, branded, business oriented, and marketed for consumption. Take, for instance, the fact that yoga talent agencies exist, such as YAMA Talent in New York:

YAMA Talent is the world’s first management company, booking agency and consulting firm dedicated to nurturing the careers of yoga teachers. We develop, secure and manage a variety of opportunities and relationships for our clients, including those in the traditional yoga space—conferences, festivals, master classes, workshops, lectures, immersions, intensives, teacher trainings and retreats, as well as opportunities and relationships in the rapidly diversifying yoga space—mass media (television/film/DVD & publishing/digital), product endorsements, and modeling. We realized that the very same tools and market knowledge we use on behalf of individual yoga teachers are also viable and powerful for other verticals of the yoga industry. Our Consulting Department provides customized strategy for: individual teachers, yoga studios, and brands on an hourly packaged basis or via our teleconference series. We provide the business skills, savvy and infrastructure needed to support the yoga industry. If your business is yoga, YAMA Talent is for you.⁴³⁸

Yoga in America cannot be separated from its business practices and modes of capital. I do not present the example of YAMA Talent as a simple critique of American yoga or to show how it is “selling out,” but rather to demonstrate that it is not possible to separate the message from the marketing in an American cultural milieu that is heavily mediatized

⁴³⁷ Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 13.

⁴³⁸ “What We Do,” *YAMA Talent*, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://yamatalent.com/what-we-do>.

and materialized. As Vincent Miller argues, “[C]ultural commodities, like literal products, are characterized by abstraction and reification; they are abstracted from their conditions of production, presented as objects valuable in themselves.”⁴³⁹ The commodity of yoga in America functions in ways that are completely novel, displayed along a nonlinear continuum of multiple productions, disseminations, and consumptions. Arundhati Baitmangalkar notes in her article, “Yoga in America vs. Yoga in India,” that “America is a nation that seems to have an excess of everything, and yoga is no exception.”⁴⁴⁰ Baitmangalkar, as a recent transplant from South India to Seattle, goes on to state her five main observations of the differences between yoga in India and yoga in America:

1. Yoga in America is more popular among the masses than in India.
2. The yoga teacher-student dynamic in India is drastically different than in the US.
3. The teaching styles vary greatly between India and America.
4. The combination of yoga and fashion in the US is not present in India.
5. The popularity of hot yoga in the US contrasts with its rarity in India.⁴⁴¹

She concludes, “I do appreciate though that different things work for different people. Like the Bhagavad Gita says, ‘there are as many yogas as there are people.’”⁴⁴² This statement reflects the mashup of American yoga culture that Baitmangalkar finds both “exciting for a yoga geek” and unsettling in its diversity.⁴⁴³ Yoga in America displays

⁴³⁹ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 72.

⁴⁴⁰ Arundhati Baitmangalkar, “Yoga in India vs. Yoga in America,” *India Currents*, October 5, 2014, <https://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/2014/10/05/yoga-india-vs-yoga-america>.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

itself differently than in India. Yet in denying the popularity and relevance of yoga in America for the people practicing it, we not only fail to see how yoga is enacted on the ground, but also how it is important to the people who are engaging with the practice. The prevalence of fashion, the diversity of teaching styles, and the teacher/student dynamic all reflect the American culture of superfluity—a culture that moves between reification and splintering as it continuously creates and breaks down its boundaries via such avenues. Examples include everything from the creation of niche yoga communities (think Star Wars yoga) or the ubiquity of YouTube video demonstrations of yoga.⁴⁴⁴

As I have argued, yoga has been deterritorialized from its Indian landscape and reterritorialized in American soil in ways that both link to its past and provide innovative imaginings in its present. One cannot ignore that yoga has been repackaged, recreated, and often consciously removed from its roots in India. American culture continually designs and produces identity through both the marketing and consumption of branded identity. These brands also bring along with them narratives of specific value, rendering located messages rather than larger stories of messy and uneven transactions. While yoga in America provides benefits for practitioners, its normative face in the media often “depoliticizes issues by putting a pleasant face on complex problems.”⁴⁴⁵ Marketing and branding often lead to oversimplifications and cooptions of the dissemination of cultural and religious discourse. The history and ownership of yoga are contested conversations that occur at the individual, local, global, and virtual levels.

⁴⁴⁴ “Portland Man Offers ‘Star Wars’ Yoga Class,” *KTVB.com*, September 28, 2012, <http://www.ktvb.com/story/news/local/regional/2014/06/30/11821677/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, xiv.

American Yoga: Patents, Privacy, and Boundary

The oversimplification of yoga in America as a one-way transaction of cultural appropriation or commodity does not provide enough nuance to the ways in which cultures interact and adopt from one another. American yoga is part of an ongoing process of recreation that pulls from multiple narratives rather than a singular essence. Furthermore, there is no singular essence of yoga or Tantra to draw from; it always exists in transaction. As a practitioner of yoga, I have witnessed many people dedicated to the physical practice of yoga as well as to understanding its multiplicity of historical and spiritual narratives. What is missing today in the larger narrative of American yoga is the fact that, in the popular yoga marketplace, yoga capital appeals to as many national consumers as possible rather than to historical, geographic, or spiritual/religious memory.

Miller argues that there are three facts that misdirect consumer desire: “the decline of traditional social and cultural markers of identity and belonging, the rise of advertising, and the increasing complexity of commercial products.”⁴⁴⁶ He goes on to argue that “consumer desire is similar in form to traditional religious desires. It resembles more profound longings for transcendence, justice, and self-transformation.”⁴⁴⁷ The novelty of yoga displayed via branded bodies and mass consumption in the hyperreal milieu of late capitalism is evident in the symbolic language of authentic brand experience. This experience is now not only located in spaces but also moves beyond authentic face-to-face contact into the realm of the virtual. For example, I can now become familiar with not only the public persona of “yogalebrities,” but I can also get a

⁴⁴⁶ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 119.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

sense of their private lives as I view their pictures on social media websites such as Instagram. Through such imagery and short comments or #hashtags, I come to know the names of their significant others, their pets, or what their bedrooms look like. This new thirding of connectivity allows for a disjointed picture of yoga and yoga teachers in America as both accessible and hyperreal.

What is of utmost importance in the American marketplace of yoga is how consumers identify with the brand. One way identity is created is by the consumption of brands that signify a consumer's perception of self, and how the consumer displays this self and status to society. Yoga has been packaged in America in direct relationship with the desire to display specific qualities such as health and wellness. The brand image is crucial in an American milieu that often unproblematically combines business models of late capitalism, multiple modes of spirituality, modern notions of science, and individual entrepreneurialism in the production of authenticity.

Deepak Chopra's brand connotes health and wellness, while his authority is legitimated through his background in Indian and Western methods of science and spirituality. His most recent book, *The Future of God*, discusses a new study about the positive effects of meditation and mindfulness.⁴⁴⁸ He noted in a recent lecture that one of the reasons this study is especially legitimate is that it was conducted at Harvard University and not simply at his own research facility.⁴⁴⁹ Chopra produces his brand identity through a narrative that includes himself as an Americanized Indian, an Ivy League medical doctor, and a New Age self-help guru. He has made a fortune by

⁴⁴⁸ Lecture I attended of Deepak Chopra's at the Mile Hi Church, Lakewood, CO, November 17, 2014.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

combining a variety of Indian and Western modes of philosophy and science into a mashup consumable for American understanding. His many books appeal to the American *habitus* of health and wellness through titles such as *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old; Perfect Health; and Self Power*. He also legitimates and brands himself using modes of holistic health such as yoga and meditation. He places himself within the realm of popular health culture, with links to Oprah Winfrey and Tara Stiles, among others. Chopra provides an important example of the promotion and branding of Indian modes of thought reworked for American appeal.

I argue that, rather than a wholesale and conscious delinking of yoga from Hinduism, as the Take Back Yoga movement proffers, Chopra, and more broadly the identity of American yoga, consciously and unconsciously creates multiple narratives, hyperrealities pulled from many histories and applied subjectively in movements of fragmented space and place. While the removal of the religious and cultural aspects of yoga is at times a conscious move (Tara Stiles or CorePower), there are also many yogis that respect and strive to understand yoga's past. The discourse of yoga in America is not simply neo-Orientalist, but rather layered in its creation of memory and narrative. The discourse of yoga is also a multidimensional conversation occurring in new spaces of competing notions of authenticity. Furthermore, competition is not necessarily problematic, but rather a part of the business of yoga, the branding of individuality, and the desire for choice that exists in America today. What is created is a new space, a place not defined by the dichotomy of India and America, but rather a variety of conversations in an overlapping and vibrant mapping of discourse and practice. This space may be thought of in terms of Soja's Thirdspace, a "term that attempts to capture what is actually

a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas events, appearances, and meanings.”⁴⁵⁰ Popular or impactful yoga teachers range in their offerings from highly spiritual, such as Kia Miller, to strictly anatomically focused, such as Tiffany Cruikshank. Yoga in America is a palimpsest of body, mind, tradition, and practice. It occurs in movement rather than as a bounded phenomenon.

Professor Aseem Shukla, board member of the American Hindu Foundation, states in an article entitled “The Theft of Yoga” that “Chopra is perhaps the most prominent exponent of the art of ‘How to Deconstruct, Repackage and Sell Hindu Philosophy Without Calling it Hindu!’”⁴⁵¹ Chopra titles his response to Shukla, “Sorry Your Patent on Yoga Has Run Out.” The titles of these articles alone illustrate the problematics of categorizing yoga as Hindu, the functioning of yoga in a global marketplace, and the complex location of yoga in contemporary America. The use of language such as “theft” and “patent” in these articles reaffirms that the postmodern global *habitus* of ownership and consumption is inextricable from the story of yoga in America. The often-stated example of Bikram Choudhry trying to patent his yoga postures and the creation of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library by the Indian government in 2001 raises questions about who “owns” yoga and what such ownership would look like.

Attempts to create boundaries in yoga occur at the individual level of trademarking styles and operate in virtual spaces of media and also in the global spaces

⁴⁵⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2.

⁴⁵¹ David Waters, “Shukla and Chopra: The Great Yoga Debate,” *FaithStreet*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2010/04/30/shukla-and-chopra-the-great-yoga-debate/4379>.

of nationalism and transnationalism. Chidester reminds us of relevant historical context: “Notions of cultural authenticity, developed in eighteenth century England, became fixated on originality, authorship, and copyright. Simultaneously cultural and legal, these indicators of authenticity could in principle be adjudicated in a court of law.”⁴⁵² The use of the word “patent” also provides clues into the dynamics of yoga exclusivity and yoga boundary in the national and transnational forum. Patent derives from the Latin *patere*, to lay open or to make accessible to the public. In practice, a patent has to do with granting exclusive intellectual property rights. Today, notions of exclusivity in the virtual realm of knowledge make boundaries harder to delineate. The public and private are no longer easily separated from one another. This blurring occurs in layered transactions and points to examples of the continual reification and fracturing of yoga in America. As Jain points out in *Selling Yoga*, the lesson to be learned is that “yoga is malleable.”⁴⁵³ The role of a yoga patent would be to create exclusivity and brand identity in a climate that is forever trying to blur any clear lines. Furthermore, the overlap of boundaries of yoga and consumption create novel relationships of experience and authenticity of yoga as a simulacral simulation.

⁴⁵² Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 188.

⁴⁵³ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 41.

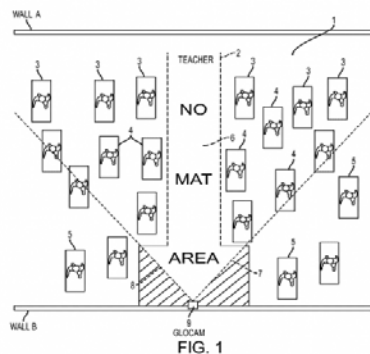


Figure 8. YogaGlo Patent Image

Figure 8 above displays the layout of a YogaGlo class in its patent application.⁴⁵⁴

YogaGlo is a popular online yoga class forum that includes many of the most well-known “yogalebrities” in America. It also provides classes from yoga scholars such as Christopher Chapple and Douglas Brooks. The goal of a YogaGlo class is to create a distinctive “experience of participating in a real class with real students even though the viewer is not actually present in the class.”⁴⁵⁵ Multiple styles and perspectives are presented, ranging from *hatha*, Ashtanga, Iyengar, Kundalini, and Vinyasa to Hindu philosophy and theology. The experience of YogaGlo is virtual and mobile; one can log on from one’s computer and participate at anytime and from anywhere. Within this process of transaction, the experience of authenticity becomes subjective, multifarious, and part of both the private and public domains. YogaGlo can be accessed with an Internet connection and 18 dollars per month. It allows students contact with multiple expert teachers, classes, styles, and philosophies of yoga like never before. At the same

⁴⁵⁴ “Firestorm After YogaGlo Moves to Patent Online Yoga Class Setup,” *YogaDork*, September 24, 2013, <http://yogadork.com/2013/09/24/firestorm-after-yogaglo-moves-to-patent-online-yoga-class-setup/>.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

time, teachers are able to project their messages and also market their yogic offerings to a wider audience.

One of the most popular yoga teachers today is Kathryn Budig. She relates her success not only to her talent as a teacher, but also to her ability to work hard on the business side of yoga. A *Forbes* magazine article entitled “Evolving Passion into Business” discusses Budig’s success:

[O]ver time, in building her brand and own career, she’s had to realize her worth and command what she knew she deserved—and what she didn’t. “Remain humble without losing your confidence. That’s how I keep my yoga and business balanced. Basically, you won’t see me striking lotus pose for McDonald’s anytime soon.”⁴⁵⁶

The brand that Budig creates is reflective of her notion of authenticity as rooted in Ashtanga and adapted to “her image in the ‘yoga world’ as a teacher whose style is loving, challenging and accessible all at the same time.”⁴⁵⁷ It is the experience that she provides her students, in person and through the medium of social media, that makes her brand authentic. Budig is also known for famously posing nude for the company Toe Sox and for being the first yoga ambassador for the athletic brand Under Armour. Budig was brought in to provide an example of an “authentic” yoga body for the 2014 *Yoga Journal* body issue. In her *Yoga Journal* interview, she is praised for showing pictures that display her cellulite. On Budig’s *Yoga Journal* Instagram account #loveyourbody she states, “I want you to find a stick-it note and write an amazing positive affirmation and slap it onto the area where you feel most insecure. Take a picture and share it, loud and

⁴⁵⁶ Stephanie Taylor Christensen, “Evolving Passion Into Business: Yoga’s Kathryn Budig,” *Forbes*, January 5, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephaniechristensen/2012/01/05/evolving-passion-into-business-yogas-kathyrn-budig/>.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

proud! You're gorgeous and perfect, and I'm not just blowing smoke up your arse."⁴⁵⁸

Budig displays authenticity not only because of her willingness to display her authentic yoga body, but also because she empowers others to do so as well. Her yoga body reifies complex boundaries of what an American yogi should look like: young, thin, blonde, and flexible. The idea of rendering authenticity is part of the experience economy that Joseph Pines argues for in his TedX talk, "What Consumers Want."⁴⁵⁹ Joseph Pine argues:

And now, with the experience economy, it's about rendering authenticity. Rendering authenticity—and the keyword is "rendering." Right? Rendering, because you have to get your consumers—as business people—to perceive your offerings as authentic. Because there is a basic paradox: no one can have an inauthentic experience, but no business can supply one. Because all businesses are man-made objects; all business is involved with money; all business is a matter of using machinery, and all those things make something inauthentic. So, how do you render authenticity, is the question. Are you rendering authenticity?⁴⁶⁰

Budig renders an authenticity that is approachable and vulnerable in the ways in which she brands herself. In the contemporary United States, we show our value of brands through consumption and dedication both materially and physically. Yoga has thousands of years of history and maps of identity that locate it in various times and places. Today the location of yoga occurs in transaction. The yoga business in America is a multi-billion-dollar industry that sells everything from equipment to apparel to yoga retreats in exotic locations. Budig states that, even though yoga is a business, "[i]t all comes back to intention—if you do a job just for the money, it's never going to serve you or make you

⁴⁵⁸ Kathryn Budig's Facebook page, accessed October 28, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/kathrynbudigyoga/photos/a.10153352703910702.1073741827.162704285701/10154565922980702/>.

⁴⁵⁹ Joseph Pine, "What Consumers Want," *TED* (subtitles and transcript), accessed October 27, 2014, http://www.ted.com/talks/joseph_pine_on_what_consumers_want/transcript.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

happy. If you find what you love, do your best at it. But stand up for yourself.”⁴⁶¹ She clearly loves yoga and lives it everyday while also being a brand and a businesswoman.

Americans create notions of authenticity by what they consume in the marketplace of historical, material, and virtual narratives. The current cultural landscape of America combines individual choice with modes of branding through simplification and systemization. An example of this normative systemization of yoga is found in the popular yoga chain, CorePower. The goal of CorePower is to become the first national yoga chain and to make “yoga accessible and friendly, as well as offering a consistent experience.” As Trevor Tice, the founder of CorePower, states, “Howard Schultz created the coffee culture in America and we are doing that with yoga.” CorePower was founded in 2002 and hopes to have over a hundred studios throughout the country by 2015. Tice intentionally associates CorePower as a brand that does not deal in the “cult of personality.” As Tice notes, CorePower “is not a person; it’s a brand.” He adds, “[W]e are not there to preach. It’s a secular practice. There is no connection to religion.”⁴⁶² In essence, CorePower represents authenticity in the institutionalization of yoga to the corporate fitness extreme. Every CorePower franchise is built to be similar so that, wherever members go in the country, they can have the same experience. Tice correlates his brand to Starbucks (fancy McDonaldization effect) in its ability to offer consistency and positive experience. When arguing for the consumptive experience of America, Pine observes,

⁴⁶¹ Christensen, “Evolving Passion Into Business.”

⁴⁶² Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, 14.

that's why you have companies like Starbucks, right, that don't advertise at all. They said, you want to know who we are, you have to come experience us . . . because of that authentic experience, you can charge two, three, four, five dollars for a cup of coffee. So, authenticity is becoming the new consumer sensibility.⁴⁶³

Tice also makes sure that his students are getting a workout that “kicks your ass.”

CorePower's target market is urban-professionals aged 25 to 35; these professionals find comfort in knowing what to expect when they attend a CorePower class—physical exercise rather than spiritual exercise. What makes American yoga unique is its continual movement between static and fractured modes of being. As CorePower has continued to grow, many of its teachers and more experienced students have found the restrictions of CorePower limiting. Because of this they have left to follow other styles, to deepen their understanding of yoga beyond exercise, or to perhaps invent their own style. At a recent teacher training, the students asked me whether I thought CorePower was “good” or “bad.” I told them that it depends. For instance, most of the students and teachers in the training had started their yoga practice at CorePower and argued that it was their “gateway drug” to yoga. Krishnamacharya was himself a yogic innovator and his *guru daksina* was to spread the message of yoga, whether that meant public demonstrations or the inclusion of previously excluded groups. At the same time, there are inherent problematics in how CorePower promotes yoga. It is important to recognize the point of view of such groups as the Take Back Yoga movement who strive for the recognition of yoga as both rooted in Hinduism and as beyond secular exercise. Because yoga in America is characterized by a palimpsestic hyperreality, it is important that a variety of viewpoints are recognized in its narrative of layered authenticity.

⁴⁶³ Pine, “What Consumers Want.”

Dissemination

The Hyperreal Landscape of American Media and Marketing

American yoga exists in the realm of hyperreal media culture. The average American is exposed to 3,000 marketing messages a day in “a media environment . . . fragmented into hundreds, some would say thousands, of media options.”⁴⁶⁴ Naomi Klein argues that our current branding strategies have blurred the public and private, a “loss of space [that] happens inside the individual, a colonization not of physical space but of mental space.”⁴⁶⁵ I argue that branding is a colonizing experience of the mental, physical, and the geographical. We are bombarded with brand imagery that communicates stories about material objects, “the brand—the logo, the mythology, the meaning—is the product,” and “we imagine these brands to reflect not only our taste in products but also our personal values.”⁴⁶⁶ It is important to note how advertising based on identity and storytelling has shaped the yoga market and its accountability to agency. The famous adman David Ogilvy defines a brand as “the intangible sum of a product’s attributes: its name, packaging and price, its history, its reputation and the way it is advertised.”⁴⁶⁷ Because brands communicate specific values people want to know and identify with the brands that they buy, they want a valuable experience from the product.

The ability to create brand affinity is important in a yoga market saturated with messages. Advertising executives have found that a brand’s identity, disseminated

⁴⁶⁴ Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, 3, xiii.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

through image and emotional response, is the most effective way to “break through the media clutter.”⁴⁶⁸ With so many messages displayed in the market, it is necessary to categorize communication into segments of consumer attraction and demographics. Yoga is often placed in a category of marketing known as LOHAS (lifestyle of health and sustainability). This group is defined as “cultural creative, conscious consumers, or LOHASians” who realize their “power to sway the market and make it more environmentally and socially conscious.”⁴⁶⁹ Because of this, LOHASians play an influential role in the way in which the yoga message is disseminated, understood, and reflected. In turn, brand managers are impelled to keep the brand relevant and provide a relationship to the specific product as it relates to their target market (in this particular case, white and upper-middle-class females). Examples of brand identity in the yoga realm include styles and teachers such as Budig or MacGregor, and also yoga mats, clothing lines, DVDs, and props, among others.

Sarah Banet-Weiser, in *Authentic TM: Politics in a Brand Culture*, notes that financial success is part of our spiritual narrative, one in which “care of the self is expressed as a particular kind of ‘freedom’ . . . buying good is being good,” and lifestyle is stressed over strict ritual practices.⁴⁷⁰ A particular kind of freedom of identity exists in America that involves “spiritualizing the corporate system.”⁴⁷¹ The brand therefore becomes more authentic as it is marketed and experienced by the consumer. In essence,

⁴⁶⁸ Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, 3.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁷⁰ Banet-Weiser, *Authentic TM*, 176.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

the market predicts the experience, and the way that we experience is by investing not only our time but also our capital.⁴⁷² Yoga is not just a display of commodification, but also shows how commodity interacts with our culture at every level: “Yoga brands are saturated with meaning insofar as they signify what consumers deem valuable.”⁴⁷³ Furthermore, the brand is an outward projection of perceived lifestyle affiliation and identity.

The Embodiment of American Yogic Identity

In contemporary America, the body is worshipped; perfection in the physical is linked to notions of the transcendent. Chidester notes that “as material site, malleable substance, and shifting field of relations, the body is situated at the center of the production and consumption of religion and popular culture . . . basically popular culture is regarded as good if it feels good.”⁴⁷⁴ He adds that “the term *religion* seems appropriate because it signals a certain quality of attention, desire, and even reverence for sacred materiality.”⁴⁷⁵ Furthermore, a return to the body is seen as a necessary response to the alienation of late capitalism and its refusal to remain static or rooted. The body has become a place for Americans to experience themselves as physical and spiritual beings.⁴⁷⁶ Yoga is teaching people through physical exercise how to breathe, how to sit, and how to be with themselves and others in a more connected way. As Darren Main tells

⁴⁷² Jain, “Branding Yoga,” 7.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁷⁴ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 24, 26.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

us, “Rather than trying to deny the body and all its aches, pains, and limitations, the practice of *asana* brings us fully into the body. It allows us to transcend the limits of the body by causing us to realize that the body is not who we are.”⁴⁷⁷ While Main makes a great point, the aesthetics of the physical body are also an important part of American yoga’s identity.

The number of people practicing yoga in America has grown thirty percent in the last six years.⁴⁷⁸ This growth has occurred in an environment where the body is reconfigured to reflect positive identities such as health and wholeness. Yoga has become a status symbol in America. A recent article in *Style* magazine, “Looking Like Money: How Wellness Became the New Luxury Status Symbol,” states,

It’s like the only acceptable lifestyle brag . . . Your fitness regimen of choice says a lot about you. And just like there are Smart Car types and Porsche types, there are yoga types and boot camp types; exercise has become another arena to compare and contrast your personality and lifestyle with others.⁴⁷⁹

It is because of the overlap of culture, commerce, spirituality, and embodied practice that yoga must be understood as more than another phenomenon of hyperactive consumptive postmodernity. People are not only displaying yoga but also experiencing its effects for themselves as individuals and collective communities in greater numbers than ever before. They are using yoga to define who they are and what they do (or want to reflect that they do) in their everyday practice. The identity of yoga in America is hyperreal. As

⁴⁷⁷ Deepshikha Ghosh, ed., “International Yoga Day Needed, Says PM Narendra Modi At UN,” *NDTV.com*, September 27, 2014, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/international-yoga-day-needed-says-pm-narendra-modi-at-un-598827>.

⁴⁷⁸ “Yoga Journal Releases 2012 Yoga in America Market Study.”

⁴⁷⁹ “Herbal Essences TV Spot, ‘Be Everyone You Are,’” *iSpot.tv*, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7MkD/herbal-essences-be-everyone-you-are>.

Jain notes, “what differs today is the extent to which the media saturates consumer cultures, which brings consumers into near-constant contact with advertising and causes yoga products and services to change at a rate never seen before in its history.”⁴⁸⁰

The continual marketing and fracturing of yoga in America is often seen as indicative of its inauthenticity; however, I believe yoga in America should be taken seriously in its inventiveness. As David Chidester argues, we must look at how these “authentic fakes” do authentic work and “generate power and creativity . . . like Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Disney, by enabling people to re-imagine what it is to be a person in a rapidly globalizing human space.”⁴⁸¹ This seriousness is found within modes of branded lifestyle and simplified messages. It is also found in the serious work of yogis doing yoga on the ground. For instance, the Seva or service programs of popular yoga teachers make a pragmatic difference in the world. Cruikshank hosts a service project in India that helps prevent the trafficking of children, and Sean Corn’s global seva challenge has raised 3.5 million dollars through grassroots fundraising. The notion of value for whom and to what purpose is tantamount in understanding the definition and seriousness of American yoga. Today, “celebriyogis” display themselves as a brand and a business in the hyperreal social discourse of lifestyle consumption. They are sponsored or have clothing lines, book deals, and social media hashtags that deal with their subjective knowledge and authentic experience of yoga.

From my own personal experience, the positive brand identity of yoga in America is backed up by the embodied practice of individuals. Yoga often translates into people

⁴⁸⁰ Jain, “Branding Yoga,” 7.

⁴⁸¹ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, ix.

transforming physically and psychologically. I have felt the positivity of community created at yoga festivals and the way in which this subculture in America leans toward acceptance and multiple paths to health and wellness. The secular and the sacred, as well as the real and the virtual, are not mutually exclusive realms in the American yoga landscape. Multiple categories of yogic truth and boundary transact with one another in a narrative of overlapping realities. The uniqueness of American yoga can be found in its diversity as well as its modes of branded packaging.

There are numerous accounts of the positive effects of yoga on people dealing with post-traumatic stress, addiction, and a multitude of other ailments. Carol Horton and Roseanne Harvey present in their work, *21st Century Yoga: Culture, Politics, and Practice*, essays that offer multiple perspectives of yoga from the physical, the social, and the spiritual.⁴⁸² In the essay “Enlightenment 2.0: The American Yoga Experiment,” Julian Walker argues, “I see a pretty radical disconnect between what is taught as ‘yoga philosophy’ and the widespread experience of yoga in America today.” He follows this statement by his assertion that he, like many others, “didn’t come to yoga looking for a new religion,” but that he “came seeking an experiential practice of self-inquiry, physical health, and emotional awareness.”⁴⁸³ The yoga benefits presented by Walker show how yoga is often marketed, produced, and disseminated in contemporary America. As Jain tells us, “branding requires marketers to uniquely package their products by mythologizing them to position them in consumers’ minds . . . yoga signifies self-

⁴⁸² Carol A. Horton and Roseanne Harvey, *21st Century Yoga: Culture, Politics, and Practice* (Chicago: Kleio Books, 2012).

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 34.

development and enables consumers to become people through physical and psychological transformations.”⁴⁸⁴ At the same time, it is not just the brand that matters but also the experience of the brand that people are having. In this particular domain of blurring between the virtual and the lived, experience is key. This experience is often informed by the socialized subjectivities of American Protestant ideologies of choice, freedom, happiness, and desire. The production of value in the yoga climate of North America is determined by how successful the brand is at projecting authenticity of experience, how savvy it is in creating a business model, and how successful it is at entering the popular market of yoga commodity. Chidester asserts that “[a]dvertising-as-religion has turned ‘the fetishism of commodities’ into a way of life. In the symbolic system of modern capitalistic society, which advertising animates, commodities are lively objects . . . of religious regard.”⁴⁸⁵

A new Clairol advertisement illustrates the distance that lies between narrative of yoga commodity and practice in popular yoga culture today. The commercial entitled “Be Everyone You Are” moves through various scenarios (wedding, war, spaceship, manor house, boat ride), showcasing a group of women’s different hair styles while discussing the main character’s statement that she—a self-proclaimed vegan—has gorged herself on pork. The dialogue of her affinity for pork continues until one friend notes that she is “pretty much the opposite of vegan—you’re basically a porkitarian.”⁴⁸⁶ The main character follows with, “I don’t really like labels.” When another friend counters,

⁴⁸⁴ Horton and Harvey, *21st Century Yoga*, 21.

⁴⁸⁵ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 42.

⁴⁸⁶ “Herbal Essences TV Spot, ‘Be Everyone You Are.’”

“Except you like to tell people you are vegan,” the main character replies, “Well, yeah, that makes me sound like the kind of person who does yoga, and I want people to think I do yoga.”⁴⁸⁷ The commercial ends with the slogan “BE EVERYONE YOU ARE” in colorful bold letters. “Everyone you are” is all the identities and selves that are created and selected by self and society. These identities are not isolatable but rather transact with variables presented by different situations and/or circumstances of commodity and practice, not just who we “are” but also the branded and commodified identity that we create for ourselves. As Chidester notes, “the fetish [commodity] is not an object; it is a subject of arguments about the meaning and value in human relations.”⁴⁸⁸

Yoga Selfies, Yoga Lineage, and the Authenticity of American Yoga

If corporate companies and styles of yoga create brands in the virtual and hyperreal American yoga scene, so do individuals via the platform of social media. The particular dissemination of American yoga can be seen in the growing popularity of the *yoga selfie*. The picture of yoga is layered and complex, while the media tends to simplify and categorize it as simple commodity or consumable good. Looking at the trend of the yoga selfie helps to locate the complex and overlapping narratives of yoga as a cultural commodity in transaction. Perhaps the most outlandish promoter of the yoga selfie is celebrity Alec Baldwin’s wife and yoga teacher Hilaria Baldwin. For her “365 Days of Yoga Craziess” campaign in 2014, she posted a picture of herself in a yoga posture every day. Baldwin included in this series a Warrior 2 in heels in front of Tiffany’s and a handstand in front of a Capital One bank ATM as a nod to her husband’s

⁴⁸⁷ “Herbal Essences TV Spot, ‘Be Everyone You Are.’”

⁴⁸⁸ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, 42.

Capital One Venture Card advertisements. Hilaria Baldwin has 66,000 followers on Instagram, was profiled on the popular morning talkshow *Today*, and was also recently on the cover of *Yoga Journal* (not without controversy, of course). Baldwin's campaign illustrates that there is clearly a market for this promotion of yoga. According to one journalist, "The eminently shareable and sometimes controversial pictures show yoga as Ms. Baldwin likes it: fun, athletic and unapologetically sexual."⁴⁸⁹ This is a yoga that is displayed and consumed in very different ways than that of the Indian ascetic living outside of normative society. Baldwin promotes herself and yoga in ways that are not only innovative, but also reflect American culture's obsession with bodily aesthetics.

The yoga selfie demonstrates the way in which the image of yoga is projected in America. It also provides a forum for debate on what a yoga body is supposed to look like as well as what it is supposed to do. The yoga body in America is gendered as female, aged as young, raced as white, and classed as middle to upper. This narrow point of view in the mediascape of yoga does little to illustrate the complexity of its histories and its connections to both normative and antinomian practices. The yoga selfie continually reinforces and adds to the discussion of American yoga as a complicated layering of overlapping stories and sound bites—a mashup. The yoga selfie provides both an objectified gaze toward the stereotypical female looking graceful in advanced postures as well as a mode of empowerment for practitioners.⁴⁹⁰ At the same time, it does not

⁴⁸⁹ Douglas Quenqua, "Hilaria Baldwin Holds Her Center," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/01/fashion/hilaria-baldwin-holds-her-center.html>.

⁴⁹⁰ Once again I have contributed to this phenomenon as well, and, while I have not ever taken a yoga selfie, I have participated in more than one photo shoot with me "performing" yoga postures for the gaze of the camera and therefore its reach beyond me and into the world of social media.

capture the spectrum of everyday practice of yoga, the not-so-glamorous side of yoga, or even its scope of humanity. Selfies represent moments in time in which American yogis promote themselves and their identities as healthy and strong, often within a normative box of stereotypical aesthetics. The problematics of the culture of the yoga selfie can be viewed through the visual display of “A Brief History of Yoga Selfies.”

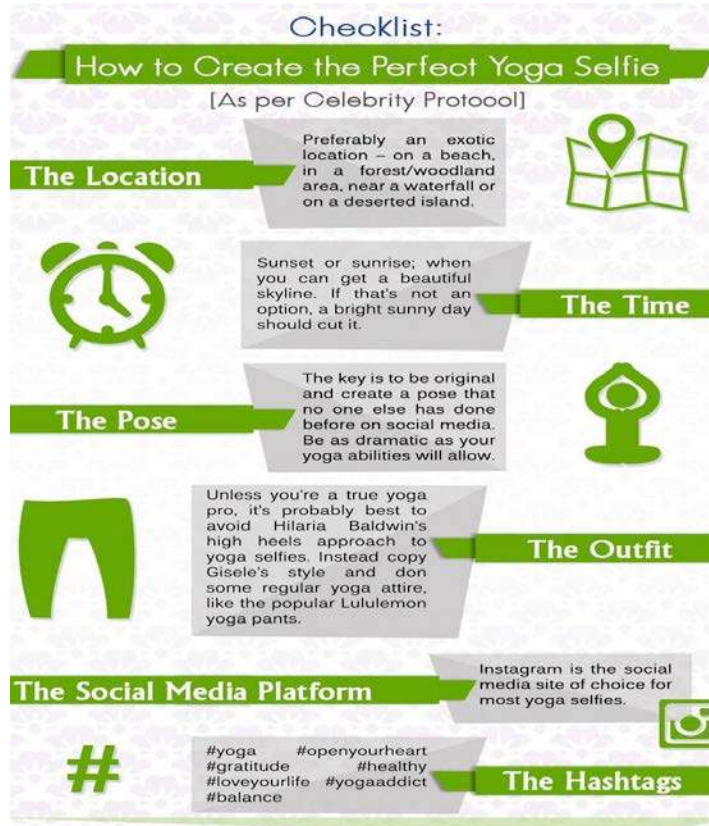


Figure 9. How to Create the Perfect Yoga Selfie

The image in Figure 9 raises the question of whether yoga “showoffs” help motivate others or simply perpetuate the idea that yoga is only for those with advanced practices or a “*Yoga Journal*-worthy body.”⁴⁹¹ There are many conversations to be had about what

⁴⁹¹ “A Brief History Of Yoga Selfies (Infographic),” *MindBodyGreen*, October 5, 2014, <http://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-15563/a-brief-history-of-yoga-selfies-infographic.html>; Fleming, “Celebrity Posers Have Yoga World in a Twist.”

yoga is and does in America, and the yoga selfie provides us with one window in how yoga is creating its current mapping in this landscape.

While I have primarily focused on the materiality and consumptive quality of yoga in America, there are also people who define and categorize yoga's authenticity directly to theoretically locatable gurus or specific Indian yogic traditions. Rod Stryker provides an example of a popular "yogalebrity" who consciously links his yoga brand to "ancient" and "ontological essences" of spiritual and philosophical belief and practice; at the same time, he operates in the postmodern marketplace. He holds that yoga is not merely *asana* and, for him, "just because we are doing *asana* does not mean we are doing yoga."⁴⁹² Stryker produces his yoga narrative from the perspective of his teachers at the Himalayan Institute while also creating his own brand, Para Yoga. Stryker asserts that

Para Yoga is a living link to the ancient sciences of yoga and Tantra. Our mission is to serve these teachings by continuing to be a leading resource for the dissemination of their wisdom, power and capacity to positively affect all aspects of modern life. Our unique approach is to emphasize the light of direct experience, combined with authoritative knowledge and accessibility so that students and teachers of all levels—and society as a whole—are uplifted by yoga and Tantra's time-tested practices, leading to ultimate fulfillment and freedom.⁴⁹³

Stryker finds popular yoga in America problematic because "there is a tremendous amount of innovation with no roots to tradition . . . no unbroken lineage."⁴⁹⁴

In his 2012 talk at Wanderlust, Stryker premised his lecture by saying he "doesn't like talking about politics or authenticity."⁴⁹⁵ He then proceeded to legitimate himself and

⁴⁹² Field notes from Wanderlust 2012, Copper Mountain, CO.

⁴⁹³ "About," on Para Yoga's official website, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.parayoga.com/about>.

⁴⁹⁴ Field notes from Wanderlust 2012, Copper Mountain, CO.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

his authenticity as a teacher by aligning himself to particular traditions and lineages, thereby premising his yoga as more authentic than most popular forms of American yoga. He went on to describe “vignettes” of popular yoga, such as competitive yoga, that he claimed are not representative of any “real seed of yoga.”⁴⁹⁶ He argued that this current yoga is a “symptom of a lack of tradition . . . [T]raditions are valuable because [of] time-tested knowledge.”⁴⁹⁷ For Stryker, broken lineages and innovative modes of authenticity pollute the message of true yoga (even though competitive yoga began in India rather than America). Stryker, while arguing for tradition and lineage, also participates in the contemporary consumptive process of American yoga. He markets himself and his brand Para Yoga, participates in social media, and is a successful traveling yogi and businessman. Stryker teaches at major festivals and large immersions and is a participant in the upcoming August 2015 conference on the Business of Yoga #YogaBiz in Los Angeles. He is also a dedicated and longtime practitioner and a devotee to his guru, Pandit Rajmani Tigunait. His interactions with the dissemination of yoga in the marketplace do not detract from his knowledge, his experience, or his credibility, but rather show how American yoga has layered its identity and notions of authenticity.

The entrepreneurial and individual production of yoga brands and their consumption in popular culture are not separate from the spiritual ideology of late capitalism. The title of Rod Stryker’s book, for example, *The Four Desires: Creating a Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom*, hits on every major buzzword in the popular and profitable health and therapeutic market. I state this not to fault him but

⁴⁹⁶ Field notes from Wanderlust 2012, Copper Mountain, CO.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

rather to make the point that he has himself transacted and translated the traditions of yoga in order to convey and display them within an American consumptive and capitalistic marketplace. Furthermore, the current head of the Himalayan Institute and Stryker's guru, Pandit Rajnami Tigunait, recently wrote a new take on *The Yoga Sutras* in order to make it more accessible and understandable for Westerners. Is this tradition or innovation? What does it mean when Stryker's own teacher engages in new ways of producing and disseminating yoga?

As Jain also reminds us, "not all consumption is for hedonistic and material aims."⁴⁹⁸ What Stryker is missing in his analysis is that fragmentation is inherent in American yoga. While there are roots to yoga traditions in India, they have become layered and mashed up in this landscape so that they are no longer easily defined in a linear or monolithic manner. They cross and overlap and are uprooted and replanted in new soil. Furthermore, like many other scholars have argued (Singleton, Alter, De Michelis, Jain, etc.), much of modern yoga has been created in transaction with modernity and its relationships to power structures and colonialism. While Stryker is correct to point to the disconnect or deterritorialization of yoga from India, and the problematics surrounding this accommodation or cooption, he is missing the crucial dynamism of yoga that has always moved amongst multiple points of locatedness. Yoga as a term and a practice is always, and has always been, a broken stream of multiple conversations and histories in dialogue.

⁴⁹⁸ Jain comment at the 2014 American Academy of Religion Conference.

The discourse of yoga as multiple and innovative should not be looked at as indiscriminately good or bad or right or wrong. Rather, it reflects the hyperreality and *habitus* of American culture as it interacts with the fragments of global narratives. These fragments display how advertising, ashrams, exercise, and business are intertwined in the story of American yoga. I believe it is important to honor both the historicity of yoga as it has moved through time, but also give credence to how it has adapted itself and innovated its practices to appeal to new and different segments of the population.

Yoga is both a part of an American therapeutic culture of the self and also a remedy for the disjunction and alienation that our culture experiences. Miller states that,

in its desire for self-fulfillment and freedom of choice to meet its own needs, the therapeutic self is the consumer self. Its own engagement with the world is one of choosing the goods most consonant with its own [articular lifestyle]. In this culture, religion, like other commodities, serves to fill in the identity of the consumer. It can do this only insofar as it confirms the fundamental form of the self as consumer.⁴⁹⁹

The “self as consumer” reinforces the idea that who we are is displayed via the body, in the ways that it is advertised, marketed, and made accessible. Products like Apple and Nike are examples of this form of marketing and advertising that creates a symbolic value that surrounds the brand and guides choices toward perceived lifestyle markers.

Lifestyle Branding and Commodification

Antonio Marazza and Stefania Saviolo argue that “Lifestyle Brands describe who we are, what we believe, what tribe we belong to. They communicate our status and our aspirations. They indicate the way we deal with our life and sometimes reflect our own

⁴⁹⁹ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 88.

unconscious.”⁵⁰⁰ A lifestyle brand is not only produced to meet the demands of consumer interests, opinions, and attitudes (*habitus*), but also influences the agency of individuals through fragmented transactions of social media. In order for a lifestyle brand to be successful, it must proffer an ideology that resonates with the way in which the consumer lives or would like to live his or her life. To put this in another context, Harold Koda, curator in charge of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, discusses Ralph Lauren’s role in fashion:

He has created an American history that never existed. It’s through an idealizing lens that he views American social history. He creates an idea that is reflected in every single aspect of its representation. Not only is it a woman in a black cashmere turtleneck and black wool trousers with a black beret, but behind her, she is standing in an environment that is a contemporary vision of an urbane haute bohemia that supports the dressing, at every level, down to what is on the nightstand. The detailing in terms of his constructions of these fantasies is what makes them seem documentary. For instance, when we look at a Southwest collection, we think, ‘That’s how they dress in the Southwest,’ but they never dressed with such panache.⁵⁰¹

The incorporation of the myth of lifestyle branding has affected the way in which yoga is disseminated and understood in American culture. Einstein argues that brand communities “participate in rituals and traditions related to the brand and they retain a sense of moral responsibility to others who are part of their community.”⁵⁰² The Lululemon brand creates a community surrounding notions of health and wellness by sponsoring yoga classes for their employees and offering free yoga classes in their stores. They also expand their community by participating in and sponsoring major yoga

⁵⁰⁰ Stefania Saviolo, *Lifestyle Brands: A Guide to Aspirational Marketing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 60.

⁵⁰¹ Marc Karimzadeh, Amy Wicks, and Robert Murphy, “Inventing a Lifestyle Brand: Explaining the Art of Dream-Weaving,” *WWD* 194, no. 79 (October 15, 2007), 46S.

⁵⁰² Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, 14, 188.

festivals and events such as Wanderlust. As Saviolo notes, “communication for Lifestyle Brands is primarily the art of storytelling and inspiration.”⁵⁰³ While I continually critique yoga in America, I also recognize both the level of my participation in as well as my positive associations with American yoga. Yoga in America must be viewed in relationship with a brand culture that transacts with yoga at the individual and communal levels.

Lifestyle Branding: The Case of Lululemon

Lululemon is a yoga and athletic wear brand that was started in 1998 by Chip Wilson. The company went public in 2007, and in 2008 “sold \$350 million worth of apparel in 113 stores.”⁵⁰⁴ Lululemon has for many years been known for its quality of yoga pants and for its programs of yoga community building. Recently, Lululemon has come under fire for the waning quality of its product (some of the popular pant styles were found to be too sheer) and for the message being promoted by Wilson. The myth of lifestyle branding created by Wilson has resulted in the success of his company as well as his removal from its brand image.

Wilson has been critiqued for his use of the philosophy of Ayn Rand, his ties (and paid trips for employees) to the self-help group (often labeled cult) the Landmark Forum, and for his public comments of racial and gender discrimination. “The Forum,” as its website says, “‘is specifically designed to bring about positive and permanent shifts in the quality of your life’—in just three days. It’s an institutionalized self-help program, geared

⁵⁰³ Saviolo, *Lifestyle Brands*, 72.

⁵⁰⁴ “Lust for Lulu,” *NYPmag.com*, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://nymag.com/shopping/features/58082/index1.html>.

to people who feel weighed down by something in their past, which is to say, pretty much everybody.”⁵⁰⁵ Satire comedian Stephen Colbert highlights the hypocrisy of the man behind the positive and health-centered message of Lululemon. Colbert looks at Wilson’s sexism, racism, and weightism on a segment of the *Colbert Report* entitled “Alpha Dog.” Colbert spoofs Wilson’s views on women and birth control, the meaning behind the name Lululemon, and his most recent fallacy on Bloomberg when he stated that Lululemon’s yoga pants “don’t work for some women’s bodies . . . it’s really about the rubbing through the thighs, how much pressure is there over a period of time, how much they use it.”⁵⁰⁶ Colbert’s spoof adds that Wilson told a journalist he named the company Lululemon because “L doesn’t exist in Japanese phonetics and it’s funny to watch them say it.”⁵⁰⁷ If the racist etymology of the name Lululemon is not enough to devalue his brand, then his exclusion of “women whose thighs rub together” is especially toxic to its authentic credibility amongst women.

Lululemon also serves to further communicate the message of yoga in novel and controversial ways. It has saturated its brand with meaning while also attempting to remain relevant, sometimes to the point of controversy. A recent campaign by Lululemon reconfigures the *yamas* and *niyamas* of *The Yoga Sutras* for marketing purposes. In doing so, this campaign redefines *brahmacharya* as

(moderation, non-excess). This yama, or yogic philosophy, teaches us to recognize that moment of “just enough” so we don’t move past it into

⁵⁰⁵ “Lust for Lulu.”

⁵⁰⁶ Hayley Peterson, “8 Outrageous Remarks By Lululemon Founder Chip Wilson,” *Business Insider*, December 10, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/outrageous-remarks-by-lululemon-founder-chip-wilson-2013-12>.

⁵⁰⁷ “Lust for Lulu.”

uncomfortable excess. Maybe it is pushing away the plate of French fries or using pent-up energy for a run. By focusing inward, we keep our bodies healthy and energetic. (And hey, there are some things we're better off avoiding altogether.) Where in your life could you practice moderation?

On the front of the bag, the word *brahmacharya* is spelled out in Cheetos, cookies, licorice, condoms, joints, cigarettes, alcohol, and even needles (see Figure 10).⁵⁰⁸ This redefinition and rebranding of *brahmacharya* not only disconnects it from the myriad traditions of yoga philosophy but may also offend those who take *brahmacharya* seriously.



Figure 10. Lululemon Brahmacharya Bag Image

In her article for *Huffington Post*, “What the F*ck was Lululemon Thinking?”, Carolyn Gregoire notes:

I’m no purist when it comes to yoga: Many, if not most, modern-day yogis in the West practice their *asana* in a secular and fitness-oriented context without aim or desire for spiritual growth, and that’s totally fine. But trivializing and misusing a sacred tradition to sell luxury (not to mention sizeist) yoga clothing is not only embarrassing, it’s offensive. And as a sloppy injection of the language and practices of one culture into another, it’s a form of cultural imperialism.

⁵⁰⁸ The image depicts a bag received from the Lululemon store in Cherry Creek, Denver, December 2013.

“*Brahmacharya* makes us think twice and listen to what our mind and body deserves,” Wei wrote. “If you catch me at the grocery store staring at a bag of chips it’s because that’s the new me battling with myself, making choices and practicing *Brahmacharya*.”⁵⁰⁹

She brings up many important points about the trivialization and cultural imperialism that is at play in American yoga. American yoga is often branded and disseminated in ways that ignore multiple power dynamics, including size, class, gender, race, and the cooption of culture. This use of *brahmacharya* highlights the connection between the consumption of material and the discipline of yoga as ascetic practice. As Carlie Stokes argues in her thesis, “Lululemon deflects attention away from their strategic business practices by claiming that the company is ‘working to make the world a better place.’”⁵¹⁰

Consumption

The relationship between consumption and spirituality is a tense narrative in the discourse of American yoga. As Reader argues, this tension reflects

a wider problem in studies of religion in general, which have often displayed a tendency or perhaps a wish to make demarcations between what is perceived of as pertaining to religion—which thereby becomes conceived of in idealized terms and placed in a special category of the sacred—and the everyday realities of existence . . . seeming widespread wish among those involved in the study of religion to set it apart from the everyday.⁵¹¹

While academics tend to set religion apart from the everyday, in doing so they also relegate important popular practices to categories of tawdry consumerism rather than

⁵⁰⁹ Carolyn Gregoire, “What the F*ck Was Lululemon Thinking?” *Huffington Post*, October 22, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carolyn-gregoire/what-the-fck-was-lululemon-thinking_b_4138754.html ; “Lululemon ‘Brahmacharya’ Shopping Bags Depict Junk Food, Needles, Condoms and Alcohol to Promote ‘Moderation,’” *YogaDork*, October 24, 2013, <http://yogadork.com/2013/10/24/lululemon-brahmacharya-shopping-bags-depict-junk-food-needles-condoms-and-alcohol-to-promote-moderation/>.

⁵¹⁰ Carlie Charlene Stokes, “Healthist Ideologies: The Case of Lululemon Athletica” (master’s thesis, Queen’s University, 2008).

⁵¹¹ Reader, *Pilgrimage in the Marketplace*, 12.

regarding them as important in explaining how human beings perceive and act within the world. In the United States, the notion of subjective agency is paramount, as consumption is part of our identity. Like Chidester's examples of authentic fakes—Disney or baseball in America—yoga is “doing real religious work in forging a community, focusing desire, and facilitating exchange in ways that look just like religion.”⁵¹² At the same time, yoga in America needs to be critically examined and problematized in its consumptive practices.

Self-Development as Sacred: The Yoga Festival

Wanderlust Festivals are all-out, ecstatic celebrations. We bring together the world's leading yoga teachers, top musical acts, renowned speakers, exquisite chefs, and thrilling performers, weaving together an experience that surprises and delights. Whether you're exploring our multi-day mountaintop adventures or gathering for a daylong urban retreat, Wanderlust events are an opportunity to unplug from the ordinary and discover the extraordinary. These are yoga events that start on your mat and get under skin. It goes in your ears and comes dancing out your fingers and toes. Eyes drink beauty and hearts fill with community. You sip and swallow straight to your soul. Bring a friend or make a whole group of new ones. From early morning meditations to all-night *chakra*-spinning musical performances, come practice and party in the most awe-inspiring locations in the world.⁵¹³

The notion of collective sacred space, along with the consumptive aspects of yoga in America, can be seen in the example of the yoga festival. The lack of boundary between sacred and profane in combination with the diversity of choice in experience at these festivals highlights the American yogic culture. Wanderlust, for example, is an interesting fusion of “practice and party” where one can delve into the physical and spiritual aspects of yoga through lectures and *asana* practice or find a party atmosphere at

⁵¹² Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, viii.

⁵¹³ Wanderlust's Facebook page, accessed January 2, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/events/605135842919264/>.

the Wanderlust pool or evening wine tastings and concert venues. Furthermore, this diversity is not only found at Wanderlust, but also in the variety of yoga festivals offered. In Colorado alone, one may attend Wanderlust, the Denver Chant Festival, Bhakti Fest, Hanuman Festival, the Telluride Yoga Festival, Yoga Journal Live, Eagle Yoga Festival, and Arise Music Fest. All of these spaces bring together yogis and master teachers to immerse themselves in the experience of yoga for a day or a weekend. These festivals also include yoga markets that promote yogic lifestyle brands through the dissemination of free samples and the selling of yoga-related products. For instance, The Yoga Journal Live Conference in Estes Park, Colorado (September 14–21, 2014), was sponsored by such companies as Clean Eating, Luna, MindBody, Ahnu, Newton Running, Bhakti Chai, Silk, YogaVibes, Calyana yoga mats, and Lululemon. All of these brands participated (or hoped to) in the narrative of holistic health projected at yoga festivals. In general, the festival ethos creates an atmosphere of “buying good is being good,” and practitioners often mark their journey by what they bring back as mementos. These include books, yoga apparel, mala beads, and yoga accessories (mats, blocks, straps, meditation cushions, etc.).

This type of consumption is similar to the behaviors that religious pilgrims have engaged in for centuries. When a pilgrim visits a temple or church and purchases a Murti or a Jesus on the Cross, he or she is self-identifying as part of a specific group. In “buying good,” yogis create social capital. Purchasing the experience of a festival not only displays the values of individuals on their bodies by what they buy and wear, but this also creates a narrative of their journeys.

At the 2012 Wanderlust Festival in Copper Mountain, Colorado, I attended a lecture entitled “Festivals and Shifts of Consciousness.” The lecture was given by Dr. Ron Alexander of the Open Mind Institute and Shiva Rea, the founder of the Prana Flow yoga. In his talk, Alexander argued that “dharma is going to be reborn in the West”; we only need to have “an appreciation for joint spiritual practices . . . a unified sacred pause to worship at the great well of being.”⁵¹⁴ Shiva Rea called upon Victor Turner’s notion of “liminal spaces” created by collectivity, “spaces to create states of being.”⁵¹⁵ While Shiva Rea did not give direct credit to Turner, she did echo his statement that social experience has the ability to elicit a sense of sacred collectivity. Simply because the festival setting cannot be easily categorized either as purely consumptive or sacred does not mean that the participants do not have authentic yogic experiences at these events. Again, it depends on who is doing the defining and from what perspective.

At the Anusara Grand Gathering in 2012, Friend denoted a clear boundary when he stated that, for him, the practice of Anusara yoga transcends physicality into the realm of the sacred:

If I am just working out and my mind I just want to build my body to look better than someone else I would not consider it a sacred practice, but if in a forward bend I make an offering, even an offering to myself, or receiving the blessings of my breath or the energy around me—my mind and heart have a feeling of being connected to something bigger, I receive insights and blessings and then offer it back, the practice for me is so sacred—nothing physical or mundane about it.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Field notes from Wanderlust Festival, Copper Mountain, CO, July 2013.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Yoga Journal, *Yoga Journal’s John Friend’s Anusara Yoga Grand Gathering*.

He pairs his particular mashup of the sacred with the physical practice of rigorous *asana*: “The body becomes the axis mundi toward which all levels of reality coalesce and which elevates the physical toward the spiritual.”⁵¹⁷ Friend’s form of embodied Tantra in the practice of yoga can be viewed through his statement that Tantra is the “one view that can cross and interweave philosophies, religions, a variety of cultural aspects; it can literally support a very positive practice.”⁵¹⁸ Williamson notes that, “during the ritual of body movement, Friend often refers to analogies he learned through his study of Kashmir Shaivism . . . everything is made of one consciousness.”⁵¹⁹ Friend’s goal is to make yoga a spiritual practice while at the same time appealing to the contemporary American. For him, Krishnamacharya’s “focus on the body and emphasis on physical form, making it look beautiful which is all great,” demonstrates that “Krishnamacharya had one foot in the old realm and one foot in the new.”⁵²⁰



Figure 11. Hanuman Festival in Boulder, CO, Image

⁵¹⁷ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5823.

⁵¹⁸ “‘The Beauty of Shiva-Shakti Tantra’ John Friend at the Wanderlust’s Speakeasy.”

⁵¹⁹ Singleton and Goldberg, *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Kindle loc. 5835.

⁵²⁰ Grant, “John Friend, What Is Tantra and Hatha Yoga.”

In the last few years, I have attended many large yoga gatherings and festivals such as Hanuman, Wanderlust, Yoga Journal Live, Yoga Rocks the Park, Friday Night Yoga Club, and Bhakti Fest (see Figure 11).⁵²¹ I have found that these venues showcase the consumptive quality of American yoga while also elucidating its unique structures of community, commodity, and practice. Some yogis, like myself, attend for the experience of the lineup of teachers and the chance to practice three to five hours of yoga a day for three days straight. For other yogis, the experience of community, the music, the lectures, the networking opportunities, or even the party might provide the most authentic understanding of their yogic identities. The experience, like the yogi, is simulacral and thereby complicated in its negotiations of identity and authenticity. The yoga festival also demonstrates that Vincent Miller was correct in his assertion that the “boomer generation and its children, ‘value experience over belief, distrust institutions and leaders, stress personal fulfillment yet yearn for community, and are fluid in their allegiances.’”⁵²² The yoga festival allows the consumer to fulfill all of these desires as it provides access to community, to leaders in the field, and to a certain experience that may be transformative yet requires only a minimal time commitment. The format of classes from 8:00 to 5:00 every day with a music lineup at night makes up the typical structure of a yoga festival. There are multiple expert teachers offering a variety of styles and modes of yoga that range from hiking yoga to ecstatic dance. Not only are a variety of *asana*-based classes offered, but there are also lectures on philosophy, business, and spirituality as well as sponsored places to relax and recharge. For instance, at the 2014 Wanderlust in Aspen,

⁵²¹ The image depicts the author at the Hanuman Festival 2014 (pictured third from the left).

⁵²² Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 89.

individuals could stop by The Beauty Bar, sponsored by Garnier, to receive “complimentary mini-facials & skincare consultations.”⁵²³ The Yoga and Activity schedule at Wanderlust 2014 included Downhill Mountain Bike clinics, Finding Your Inner Yoga Ninja, How to Start a Global Movement, Buddha’s Walk, Slackro: Slacking and Acrobatics, Spirit+Success+Abundance, Winederlust, and Photoflow.⁵²⁴ Each of these offerings (on a spectrum of questionably yogic activities) provides opportunities to connect with other self-identified yogis under the broad and porous umbrella of yoga.

The offerings of conferences such as Yoga Journal Live and Wanderlust are not only diverse, but they also point to differing needs of the consumer. At the 2014 Yoga Journal Live conference in Estes Park, Colorado, sessions entitled “The Yoga of Message, Marketing and Money,” led by Sadie Nardini, and “Awakening Shakti: The Inner Goddess as a Path to Transformation,” led by Sally Kempton, were held in the same afternoon. This overlap once again demonstrates the fusing of the spiritual and the material in American yogic culture of diversity.

Sex, the body, and the responsibilities of a yoga teacher are also a part of a social discourse of American yoga. For instance, the 2014 Wanderlust conference included a lecture by Cameron Shayne about the ethics of having sex with his students. He, like Wilson, appears to ascribe to the Ayn Rand philosophy of ethical egoism. Rand writes in *Atlas Shrugged* of “the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the

⁵²³ Wanderlust Activity Booklet given out at the festival, Aspen-Snowmass, CO, July 3–6, 2014.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute.”⁵²⁵ Shayne writes:

The guru/students manipulation—like cocaine—is the symptom of a larger problem; the student’s lack of self worth, identify and voice. Clearly the corrupted guru is a problem, but the student, like the user, is the real disease . . . This projection of responsibility onto the teaching community to think for their students is only dumbing down the students and furthering them from being self-realized. I will not further dull-down the already diminishing intellectual reputation of the yoga community by suggesting that we need to be regulated.

The guru is dead.

Why do we place such responsibility in the hands of a teacher, or guru, or master? Who do you think we are other than a refracted image of ourselves, of our own knowledge, of our own truth? There is nothing special about me, or you, or us. For something to become special something else must take on the quality of ordinary. For something to become brilliant, something else must become dull.

Therefore the very idea that you can project onto sex a special quality that may exist for you, but not for another, is arrogant, assuming and steeped in antiquated dogmatic ideology. By focusing on sex as an isolated part of the whole, we treat sex as if it were the disease, and not simply a symptom. And we further suggest that the act of sex is more or less sacred than any other act.

As with all action, its meaning is assigned by us, created by us, experienced by us and remembered by us. This memory of pain and pleasure that we keep believing in keeps us in the illusion.

Sex does not have to represent a life-long commitment to another person. It can be a shared moment in time that you connect and share a space of love, lust or passion. If we continue to project these antiquated models of morality on sex we can never see it for what it is—simply share space filled with our imagination. Anything humans touch can be painful or pleasurable. What is very real is that pain, pleasure, sex, drugs and rock’n roll are projections of our unconscious desire to experience our selves through the physical body.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Plume, 2003), appendix.

⁵²⁶ Cameron Shayne, “Hot Sex for Real Yogis: Can I Have Sex With My Yoga Teacher?”, *Rebelle Society*, September 18, 2013, <http://www.rebellecommunity.com/2013/09/18/hot-sex-for-real-yogis-can-i-have-sex-with-my-yoga-teacher/>.

Can Cameron Shayne's interpretation of sexual ethics be considered part of an authentic yoga? Is it really viable that any yoga tradition would be okay with his logic? Is the guru dead? The perspective of Cameron Shayne above is illustrative of the fiercely individualistic and hyperreal creation of an American yoga, dictated by consumption, choice, and individual wants and needs.

The entire spectrum of experience can be found in a weekend yoga festival. Whether this consists of adventure, sexuality, spirituality, materiality, ideology, brand marketing (a ridiculous amount of samples are present), values, or ethics depends on individual choice of location. There are so many different interpretations and ways to practice yoga in this culture that is privy to niche marketing and entrepreneurialism. America is a culture that unabashedly merges profit and personal purpose with its understanding of yoga. What is promoted becomes a matter of emphasis in the mode of subjective agency. Vincent Miller reminds us that "we must explore how consumer culture transforms religious belief and practice by transforming the way that people avow, interpret, and employ the beliefs, symbols, values, and practices of their religious traditions."⁵²⁷ If yoga is only a secular practice, how do we explain the popularity of John Friend's spiritual message of Anusara or the growing number of a new generation of seekers traveling to India for both spiritual and personal growth? We have to take seriously what yoga means in conversation and how yoga is perceived as important by its located practices. Overall, the yoga festival further represents a rendering of multiple

⁵²⁷ Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 31.

authenticities of American yoga taking place in a mashup of competing cultural narratives.

Sridaiva #buckthetuck: Merging the Physical, Spiritual, and Commercial

The dissemination of Sridaiva represents an example of how American yoga continually works to rebrand and repurpose itself through modes of excess and choice. Friend promotes his brand to a wider American public by the removal of himself as guru while at the same time marketing Sridaiva as a lifestyle brand that operates in all modes of life. Sridaiva is branded as a system that puts the health of the individual in his or her own hands while providing a paradigm shift in the alignment of yoga by accessing the glutes. The engagement of the glutes is the lynchpin for Sridaiva as a system that rewrites the language and alignment of yoga. John Friend states:

A key to effective learning is for a student to cultivate independent thinking so that they may truly know something through their own direct experience. My teaching style facilitates innovative and lateral thinking to break patterns of limiting beliefs. I encourage students to stay open in mind and body to all potentials (paths or methods) to grow and expand their heart . . . I strongly encourage students to take self-responsibility for their physical health and their emotional and psychological well-being. With loving-kindness and compassion I respect and honor each student, as I celebrate the diversity within life and among all people of the world.⁵²⁸

Sridaiva is innovative in its creation of a new language for the postures that accompany this “paradigm shift of optimal alignment.” Appendage placement is explained through terminology such as bright hands, dome hands, ridgetops, dancer feet, fiesta feet, service-arms, or pull-up bar arms. Physical *asana* poses, rather than Sanskrit names, are rethought: Sea Dragan pose (*makarasana*), Spring Bow pose (*dhanurasana*),

⁵²⁸ “John’s Teaching Style,” *John Friend Sridaiva Yoga*, <http://www.johnfriend.us/johns-teaching-style/>.

and Freedom pose (*ananda balasana*).⁵²⁹ The reworking of yoga language marks the palimpsestic nature of yoga in the American landscape. Sridaiva provides authenticity according to its innovation rather than to historical tradition or lineage. Furthermore, Sridaiva focuses its lifestyle branding on the development of the backside. A large and round bum has become highly desirable and aesthetically valuable in our current culture, as celebrities such as Kim Kardashian or Jennifer Lopez illustrate. There are countless references to the posterior in popular music and other forms of social media. A twenty-year-old from Long Island, Jen Selter, has over a million followers on her Instagram account dedicated solely to her large backside.⁵³⁰ The promotion of both the *derriere* and the rise of fame from displays of the body in social media exemplify how bodycentric our culture is. An article in the culture section of *Vogue*, entitled “We’re Officially in the Era of the Big Booty,” reinforces this point:⁵³¹ “Myra Mendible, a professor at Florida Gulf Coast University, has written extensively about the cultural significance of the female buttocks . . . now the voluptuous backside is, she said, a ‘sign of authenticity,’ a full pert butt ‘shows hard work.’”⁵³² This presents a fascinating connection between bodily perfection and the American yoga scene as it moves in the realm of branding, embodiment, and authenticity. The rhetoric of Sridaiva as developing the backside, therefore, also makes sense in the marketing of a new style of yoga. Sridaiva’s cofounder,

⁵²⁹ “Earth Sequence – Fundamental Poses of Sridaiva,” accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.johnfriend.us/earth-sequence-fundamental-poses-of-sridaiva/>.

⁵³⁰ Dana Schuster, “Instagram Star Has an Envious Rear – and 1.3M Followers,” *New York Post*, January 2, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2014/01/02/instagram-star-jen-selter/>.

⁵³¹ Patricia Garcia, “We’re Officially in the Era of the Big Booty,” *Vogue*, September 9, 2014. <http://www.vogue.com/1342927/booty-in-pop-culture-jennifer-lopez-iggy-azalea/>.

⁵³² Banet-Weiser, *Authentic TM*, 10.

Desi Springer, acts as the body image of Sridaiva with her, as Friend puts it, “very developed backside.”⁵³³

In a separate Sridaiva class I attended on December 1, 2014, Desi Springer’s message was about how we have to stretch ourselves to accept change and accommodate to growth in our yoga postures and practice. She referenced how the alignment changes of Sridaiva provide this place for growth. By bending the knee in all postures one can be ready to “take off” at any time. Springer stated that “there is an animalistic quality to Sridaiva” that allows practitioners less rigid movement and more dynamism in all of the postures. She also moved us into new postures, such as the infinity pose that she and Friend had originated that day in the “Sridaiva lab.”⁵³⁴ Sridaiva is a combination of many of Anusara’s principles but is also completely innovative in its physical positioning and its continual reinterpretation and innovation of yoga. Friend claims that

[t]here are several key similarities and differences between Sridaiva yoga and Anusara yoga. Both schools adhere to general Tantric yoga philosophy, and both have heart-centered, and thematic classes. “Open to the Universal” or “Open to Grace” is essentially the first principle in both alignment systems. While the alignment principles of both systems have a lot of similarities, Sridaiva focuses on specific direction of muscular integration along the insertion to origin of the main muscles in both the appendages and the torso. The gluteus muscles are specifically emphasized in their engagement to help root and abduct the femurs.⁵³⁵

This alignment means in theory that we change for the better when we intentionally engage the glutes at all times, not only developing these muscles more but also changing

⁵³³ Field notes from a Sridaiva class I attended in September 2014.

⁵³⁴ Field notes from class on December 1, 2014.

⁵³⁵ “John Friend Announces New Shri Daiva Yoga: Our Ticket to Divine Destiny,” *YogaDork*, January 14, 2013, <http://yogadork.com/2013/01/14/john-friend-announces-new-shri-daiva-yoga-our-ticket-to-divine-destiny/>.

our posture and ourselves to be more energetic and self-motivated. Friend states of Sridaiva,

On the yoga mat the optimal template is dynamically sustained in transition between each pose and each variation, so that the posture is a true vinyasa flow. It is a moment-to-moment choice on aligning the posture of our body-minds for our health, which we take ultimate responsibility.⁵³⁶

Friend links his radical (in terms of alignment and lineage) system to “truth,” to “health,” and to “individual accountability.” The simplification and systemization of Sridaiva through its 108 postures (54 basic/54 advanced), its rebranding of the language of yoga from Sanskrit to English, and its continual focus on positivity/health/happiness are all indicators of its possible future success in this landscape. The yoga blog, *Yoga Dork*, notes of Friend that “he essentially wants to become the Oprah+Martha Stewart+Tony Robbins magnate of the yoga world . . . so ambitious and positive that guy.”⁵³⁷ The discussion and continual fracturing of yoga in America must be understood as a dialogue rather than a conversation with a beginning and an end. As I stated in Chapter 1, authenticity and transparency no longer adhere to the borders that have been constructed for them. Deleuze’s notion of rhizome and the metaphor of bamboo come to mind for the ways in which yoga has both been formed and continues to innovate in the American religio-secular marketplace. Yoga in America lives in a Thirdspace that is both pregnant with possibility and empty of origin or center. It will be fascinating to see how Sridaiva continues to develop within the hyperreal American *habitus*.

⁵³⁶ “Sridaiva: A Life Practice.”

⁵³⁷ “John Friend Returns to Declare His Own ‘Epic Comeback Story.’”

Conclusion

Jared Farmer is correct in his assertions that yoga in America is a place of creativity and reinvention. American yoga is inherently connected to how American yogis remember, manufacture, and understand the world. This chapter has presented examples of how yoga in America is constructed and located in subjective authenticities and agencies of consumption. The hyperreal landscape of American yoga is displayed by looking at the virtual spaces of mediatized bodies as well as the branding and dissemination of yoga styles, yoga figures, yoga accessories, and yoga clothing. It is also examined by the on-the-ground practices of people engaging with and innovating understandings of what yoga is and also what it stands for. The U.S. culture is one that inherently defines yoga in an overlapping of physical, spiritual, and commercial discourse.

While I have continued to place American yoga within the realm of consumption, I also want to make it clear that yoga is a phenomenon that has deeply affected the people who practice it. The modes and mediums of production, dissemination, and consumption do not adequately tell the story of how yoga moves beyond its created boundaries. The clothes and media representations might be the outward social display of yogic identity, but the real work of yoga will always be subjective and internal as “yoga’s meaning transcends its commodities.”⁵³⁸ Furthermore, the medium through which yoga is normally understood in America is physical *asana*, but in saying this I disclude the variety of ways in which people connect with yoga and its diversity of thought and

⁵³⁸ Jain, “Branding Yoga,” 8.

practice. Yoga is a mashup of multiple subjectivities rather than a monolith or reduceable to a trifecta of consumption, spirituality, and individual desire. The practice of yoga, just like its definition, is fluid, contentious, and continually moving.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Every nation's worldview is shaped by its civilization and philosophical tradition. India's ancient wisdom sees the world as one family. It is in this timeless current of thought that gives India an unwavering belief in multilateralism . . . We can achieve the same level of development, prosperity, and well being without necessarily going down the path of reckless consumption. It doesn't mean that economies will suffer, it will mean that our economies will take on a different character. For us in India, respect for nature is an integral part of spiritualism. We treat nature's bounties as sacred. Yoga is an invaluable gift of our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature. By changing our lifestyles and creating consciousness, it can help us deal with climate change. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day.⁵³⁹

The quote above by India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, illustrates how the boundaries of yoga are continuously negotiated, redrawn, and layered through transactions of national and transnational discourse. In Modi's speech to the United Nations on September 27, 2014, he touched on the Vedic notion of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as family), yoga as a gift of India's ancient tradition, yoga as practice for health and well-being, and yoga as a way to solve climate change; he also included a plea for the adoption of an International Yoga Day (June 21). While Modi rails against the consumptive aspect of yoga (in theory), he also promotes a specific branding and ownership of yoga. The endorsement of yoga as exclusively Indian is not only about

⁵³⁹ "Full Text of PM Narendra Modi's Address at UN General Assembly," *NDTV.com*, September 27, 2014, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/full-text-of-pm-narendra-modi-s-address-at-un-general-assembly-598828>.

yoga's undeniable link to Indian or Hindu heritage, but also about yoga's connection to the \$100 billion dollar global market of alternative medicine. The business, the politics, and the aesthetics of yoga are contested in the realm of American yoga and also in the realm of global materiality and spirituality.

Shripad Yasso Naik, the current minister of Yoga and Traditional Medicine in India, notes, "There is little doubt about yoga being an Indian art form, we're trying to establish to the world that it's ours," and adds, "It's a way of medicine that belongs to India . . . After the British came to India, they suppressed Indian medicine and tried to foist Western medicine on us—that's why traditional medicine could not be promoted."⁵⁴⁰ A *Washington Post* article, "India's New Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Aims to Rebrand and Promote Yoga in India," claims that the Indian government is considering applying a "geographical indication" label or trade protection for yoga, similar to other regionally-specific goods such as Champagne in France.⁵⁴¹ For Modi, it is the reclamation of yoga for India in a capitalistic global economy that determines his interpretation of ownership.

Yoga is a dynamic and relational practice tied to historically shifting global and local religious and cultural worldviews. It is also part of the global world of virtuality, and thereby is affected by its movement as a mashup of commodified consumption. Yoga as a philosophy and practice is not a singular entity but a contextualized amalgamation of

⁵⁴⁰ Harriet Alexander, "India's Yoga Minister Aims to Reclaim Practice from West," *The Telegraph*, December 3, 2014, sec. World, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/11271782/Indias-yoga-minister-aims-to-reclaim-practice-from-West.html>.

⁵⁴¹ Annie Gowen, "India's New Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Aims to Rebrand and Promote Yoga in India," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-new-prime-minister-narendra-modi-wants-to-rebrand-and-promote-yoga-in-india/2014/12/02/7c5291de-7006-11e4-a2c2-478179fd0489_story.html.

understanding within specific historical, social, and geographical locations. It is because of this that I have aimed to both complicate and clarify the discourse of yoga as American as well as its connection to multiple histories and geographies. While this dissertation has been especially interested in exploring the contentious boundedness of an American yoga, I have at the same time been aware of yoga's inability to be contained. I have argued that the historical transactions and understandings of the moving concept of yoga have led to a recognizable and fragmented American yoga, which is at once rooted in its Indic origins and radically transformed in its U.S. manifestations. I have created a genealogy that is palimpsestic and comparative in its explorations of the transactions of Hinduism, yoga, and Tantra as historical, as currently steeped in consumer capitalism, as transnational interaction, and as the practice of yoga being intimately linked to bodies in action across space and place. At the same time, qualities such as the specific branding of "yogalebrities," yoga styles, and yoga fashion define American yoga as unique, inventive, and problematic in its combinations of the material and the spiritual.

This dissertation has also addressed the complex machinations that have led to the formation of an innately American yoga identity. The discontinuous adoption of specific and historicized definitions of yoga has resulted in distinctly American imaginings. I have aimed to keep historical contexts and present lived realities of yoga in tension in order to illustrate the situated nature of how yoga lives in the world. Yoga's roots in the United States are deeper than one would think, and its current manifestations involve multiple and often unequal transactions between American notions of capitalism and consumerism and Indian religious and cultural beliefs. I have attempted to provide a work that does not mourn the loss of an authentic or ontological narrative, but rather displays

how the character of yoga finds its distinctiveness in the way it arranges its mashup of custom and innovation. By looking at the broader historical movements of yoga, as well as locating the discussion within Anusara and Sridaiva, I have clarified and complicated the discourse of yoga in America, while at the same time redefining its specific modes of *habitus* and identity formation within the American landscape.

The current socio-historical American *habitus* is one of lifestyle consumption and subjective authenticity. American yoga displays a particularly consumptive quality of yogic lifestyle that reflects a cultural atmosphere of reinvention and a merging of profit and personal purpose. It celebrates an endlessly subjective and self-referential approach to yoga and Tantra in a supermarket of spiritual choice. In the American landscape, individualized experiences of yoga and Tantra are authentic in of themselves. As Williamson affirms, yoga creates profound and life-changing engagements for the people who practice it.⁵⁴²

The American yogic identity is in flux, continuously fracturing and multiplying into various and novel understandings that relate to yoga's past and to the market value for today's American consumer. This work has examined the moving nature of yoga in the American landscape as a "center of creativity" and as a result of its layered past. Yoga in America is not simply a one-way product of neo-Orientalist commodification; rather, it is created by transactions of intentional and unintentional memory and cultural story. A social discourse of yoga in America is found in mass-marketed messages as well as in individual modes of yogic authenticity. Multiple categories of yogic truth and

⁵⁴² AAR panel proposal.

boundary transact with one another in a narrative of overlapping realities that dismantle multiple histories and traditions. Overall, American yoga reconfigures yoga in a particular way that appeals to contemporary American audiences.

My location as yoga practitioner/scholar has allowed me to provide an insider perspective to American yoga. I have taken classes with almost every teacher discussed in this project, and, while I speak of them mostly in terms of brands, businesses, and modes of consumption, I also find them to be knowledgeable, kind, and serious about their yogic practice. For example, Budig is a genuinely lovely person with a gift for making yoga rigorous and entertaining, and Cruikshank is incredibly well versed on the anatomy of the body and its relationship to postural yoga. Yoga in America is a complicated discourse that cannot be forced into categories of good or bad or right and wrong. Today, “celebriyogis” display themselves as brands and businesses in the hyperreal social discourse of lifestyle consumption. These branded yogic messages and people also bring along with them narratives of specific value, rendering located stories rather than larger pictures of messy and uneven transactions. Yoga in America is a hyperreal, a social discourse of creative and inventive transaction. In America, countless subjective experiences of yoga count as authentic. What needs to continue to be complicated in American yoga is the multiplicity of layerings that pertain to where yoga comes from, how it is understood, who it represents, and what are, if any, its changing boundaries of ownership.

I propose that we move past notions of modern yoga in America to a postmodern American yoga, understood by its history and its current manifestations from a place of fragmented discontinuity. Yoga in America is a wide-ranging phenomenon that embraces

its contradictions and manifests itself in many ways as it moves in a fluid state of becoming rather than a state of fixed meaning. I especially find Soja's notion of Thirdspace helpful for understanding where the practice of an American yoga lives—as a transaction of opening up space rather than a dichotomy of boundary. Furthermore, yoga in America must continue to be looked at comparatively, as it originated in India, has been defined and categorized in the West through the projects of modernity and colonialism, and has itself colonized the United States through various understandings of both its practices and its outcomes. A new way of doing comparative religion should be aware of the constructed boundaries surrounding the discourse being studied, as well as how cultural specificity functions alongside ideologies and assumptions of shared ontology. Anusara and Sridaiva yoga provide an example of the shifting concept of yoga from its Indic origins to its American imaginings in Anusara's self-proclaimed connections to Tantra and Kashmir Saivism, as well as Sridaiva's wholly contemporary American interpretation and practice. These styles of American yoga illustrate Smith's idea that, "In culture, there is no text, it is all commentary; that there is no primordium, it is all history; that all is application . . . we are dealing with historical processes of reinterpretation."⁵⁴³

This research has implications outside of the academic realm in that many Americans are themselves curious about what it is that they are doing when they practice yoga. A 2012 study issued by *Yoga Journal* reported that 20.4 million American adults (8.7 percent of all U.S. adults) practice yoga. In addition, 104.4 million adults (44.4

⁵⁴³ Smith, *Relating Religion*, 253.

percent of the population) indicated they were interested in trying yoga, an increase of 470 percent from 2008.⁵⁴⁴ Because I am the first person to argue for an innately American yogic identity in a culture currently fascinated by this practice, my research is both significant and relevant. I have explored a variety of sources within the realm of popular and academic culture, as yoga in America is consumed and understood differently by multiple demographics. I have also engaged directly with people practicing yoga on the ground and have taken these yogis seriously. I personally identify as an American yogi. I practice postural yoga, own a lot of Lululemon (and have even taught classes there), attend large yoga festivals, and engage with yoga-specific social media. At the same time, I hope to have complicated any simplistic notions of what being an American yogi means by giving credence to the various power structures and dynamics of history, coloniality, and capital that have shaped this definition or this telling of yoga.

⁵⁴⁴ YJ Editor, "New Study Finds More Than 20 Million Yogis in U.S.," *Yoga Journal*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.yogajournal.com/uncategorized/new-study-finds-20-million-yogis-u-s/>.

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