

The Mobility and Embodiment of
Modern Yoga

Vanessa Salvatore

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By: Vanessa Salvatore

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. Meir Amor	_____	Chair
Dr. Vered Amit	_____	Supervisor
Dr. David Howes	_____	Examiner
Dr. Noel Dyck	_____	Examiner

Approved by _____

Chair of Department of Graduate Program Director

_____ 2013

Dean of Faculty

Abstract

The Mobility and Embodiment of Modern Yoga

Vanessa Salvatore

This thesis examines a yoga collective of primarily students and teachers in Montreal with attention to the circuits of mobility as well as broader interconnections and disjunctures created by global cultural flows. Varying forms of mobility within yoga are identified and studied such as, spatial, bodily, cognitive and conceptual mobility. Within these patterns of mobility the joining of ideas and practices as well as the contradictions that emerge from them are explored, for example between commercialism and the intended spirituality of yoga practice. This research project focuses on common modern postural and meditational yoga practices of today, and briefly looks at the teaching methods and learning practices within the kinesthetic culture of yoga. Further, the ways in which practitioners embody yoga is investigated.

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“The Rishi is coming...”

(Anonymous)

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Chapter 1: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The web of Indra [is a] big net and there [are] all these intersecting [...] vectors and directional forces, [which] is part of this whole web of Indra. [The web consists of] all these places intersecting. At the intersection point there is a little jewel and that jewel is like a crystal, [which] embodies everything and yet it is part of the whole net. Sometimes I think we are looking at one little part of the jewel in the net and we say that's my yoga practice, that's my community or those are my beliefs and yet it's really part of this whole global [net].

This quote is selected from a conversation I had with Tara¹, an advanced yoga teacher. She describes the complexity of modern yoga through recounting the story of Indra's net, a yogic legend. In her description she reveals the interconnections interwoven in today's contemporary yoga practice. The term "modern yoga" derives from research conducted by historian Elizabeth De Michelis (2004). According to De Michelis, modern yoga consists of styles of yoga that have emerged and evolved through the interaction between Western individuals (North-American & European) and Indians over the last 150 years (De Michelis 2004). The practices of modern yoga are mostly comprised of modern postural yoga (MPY), āsana (postural) practice, and modern meditational yoga (MMY), practices solely based on meditation. These are the most popular and common forms of yoga practiced today in Europe and North America. For the sake of simplicity in my account of yoga in Montreal I will refer to modern yoga in this thesis as yoga.

The yoga collective I studied is a small and diverse group of individuals who are involved in yoga on many different levels and who are part of today's transnational anglophone

¹ In order to protect research participants and companies' identities and in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of research participants and companies.

yoga scene: “The forms of yoga that were formulated and transmitted in a dialogical relationship between India and the West through the medium of English” (Singleton 2010: 9). The various actors involved in my study are studio owners, experts, highly trained teachers, and intermediate and beginner level teachers and students. Being a yoga student and teacher myself I have been heavily implicated in yoga in Montreal for several years. I became interested in understanding the role yoga played in practitioners’ lives and felt studying yoga from an anthropological perspective would permit me to go beyond learning about yoga in a training context. To properly comprehend and situate yoga both historically and most especially in terms of contemporary practices, I approach yoga through a focus on globalization, mobility and embodiment. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring and understanding the lived experience of yoga practitioners in hopes of uncovering the existing interconnections between global proceedings and local developments.

One of the major outcomes of globalization is the increase in movement and circulation of goods, information, people and cultures. As a result individuals and societies have more accessibility and contact with far flung places, ideas and commodities. Furthermore, the disjunctures between different forms of movement and interconnection mean that the course of developments that take shape from these interconnections are critically unpredictable. Drawing upon the literature on globalization the term interconnection here is used to refer to the connection between two or more variables that meet and merge or that influence one another. For example, the yoga practiced by my interlocutors is a style of yoga that has emerged from the encounter and exchanges between the international physical culture movement and modern Hindu yoga (Singleton 2010). I discovered in my own research on yoga in Montreal that there is a high-level of circulation entailed in the globalization of yoga and yoga spaces are shaped by

varying types of movement. Further, within the same network of transnational anglophone yogis and yoginis there are different approaches and understandings towards yoga, which may vary from person to person and from studio to studio. This anthropological project on yoga is important because it puts forward the following findings:

- 1) There are a range of interconnections in yoga, just as there is also an array of disjunctures. The disjunctures create relationships of tension, but despite the ensuing contradictions, practitioners can still learn and transform themselves through their practice of yoga.
- 2) In addition to Arjun Appadurai's five 'scapes' of globalization, within yoga there is an additional 'scape': the bodyscape.
- 3) Yoga provides some practitioners with a vehicle to find stability and strength in a world that is always moving and therefore continuously changing.

After the methodology chapter the structure of this thesis is divided into three sections. In Chapter 3 I provide key works in the literature on globalization, consumerism, health and fitness and self-help culture to show how they are helpful in understanding and positioning yoga within Montreal. As I outline the theoretical framework for these four subjects I will consider the significance of each of these fields/themes for contemporary practices in yoga. The first set of questions I attempt to answer in my thesis is "What forces introduce and shape yoga in Montreal?" and "How is yoga promoted?". In order to comprehend the various ways in which individuals experience the embodied practice of yoga it is important to draw out the different sources that shape and advocate yoga. For instance, why do a large number of practitioners start practicing yoga for health and fitness purposes? There are several and different responses to this question, however, one reason may be that we live in a culture that strongly encourages individuals to get fit and stay healthy even as yoga is advertised as a fitness activity that helps

individuals meet those particular goals. By way of example, I will elaborate on the four major forces I identified earlier.

In Chapter 4, I delve into the anthropological and related research on mobility to navigate my way through the various types of mobilities occurring in yoga and experienced by its practitioners. Mobility theories are central to yoga because they provide a framework for understanding yoga in its many different forms of movement, which include spatial, bodily, cognitive and conceptual mobility. I also examine the manner(s) in which yoga offers contemporary societies new experiences and notions of ‘home’ as well as spiritual practices that can be carried out in a world that is continually in motion and regularly changing. As I will show in chapter 4, many of my interlocutors practice yoga for spiritual reasons and they contend that a sense of belonging can be found in yoga. The research questions that are explored from this section of my study are the following “Can yoga voyages today be considered contemporary forms of pilgrimage?” and “What type of mobilities are prevalent in yoga?”.

Lastly, in situating yoga as well as tracing the kinds of mobilities with which it is associated, I am interested in understanding how practitioners experience yoga as a form of embodied practice. To consider this last set of issues, I present a number of anthropological writings on leisure and embodiment (Alter 2000, 2004; Anderson 2003; Broch 2000; Coleman & Kohn 2007; Downey 2005a; Dyck 2000, 2003; Kohn 2007, 2008; Rapport 2007; Samudra 2008; Wieschiolek 2003; Wulff 2003). The concept of embodiment drawn from this literature is useful because it considers the various aspects that constitute the embodiment of a leisure activity, such as how leisure activities are taught and learned, the nature of the discourses that circulate in practice settings, the social exchanges occurring between practitioners as well as the principles and teachings of a leisure activity that are being applied outside of the practice room. In Chapter

5 I compare yoga to other leisure activities, notably aikido, capoeira and silat training, and kinesthetic cultures such as dance. Within this comparison, I ask similar questions established in the literature: “How do practitioners learn yoga?”, “What is the yoga culture?” and “How does yoga influence practitioners lives and perhaps even change them?”.

The following will provide more details on the literature and theories I have utilized in my study of yoga in order to give background information and theoretical clarification for the ethnographic analysis that will follow in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Globalization

Interconnections:

Over the last 30 years, there has been a major upsurge of writing about globalization in anthropology and related disciplines (Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1989, Inda & Rosaldo 2002, Iyer 2000, Kostogriz 2006, Tsing 2000). This work has focused on the effects of globalization with anthropologists being particularly concerned with the global cultural flows (what is being exchanged), the interconnections created amongst different cultural groups through these global flows, and the impact these have in peoples everyday life (Tsing 2000 & Inda and Rosaldo 2002). The concept of ‘global cultural flows’ is defined by scholars as the high-level of international movements of people, cultures and commodities that have in turn changed and restructured individuals personal and collective identities as well as their daily lives and local cultures (Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1989, Inda & Rosaldo 2002, Iyer 2000, Kostogriz 2006, Tsing 2000).

Among the best known of these analyses within anthropology, Arjun Appadurai’s paradigm of globalization focuses on five major types of global flows which he terms:

ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, fianancescapes, and ideoscapes. The five dimensions are named ‘scapes’ in order to represent the fluidity and continuous change in each dimension that is being exchanged be it culture, media, technology, finances, or ideas. Appadurai’s (1996) conceptualisation of global cultural flows treats these as the main building blocks or ‘social imaginaries’ that create the realities of globalization in which we currently live. The social imagination is:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (imaginaire) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which no more and no less real than collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media (Appadurai 1996: 4).

Appadurai places a lot of importance on the imagination and believes it is a social practice that is utilised to navigate and manage complex cultural transactions occurring between social groups (Appadurai 1996). When a number of my interlocutors described how they discovered and learned about yoga it became evident that yoga was introduced by virtue of the global cultural flows identified by Appadurai. For example, some of the first encounters my yoga practitioners had with yoga was by reading about it in books or seeing images of yoga poses in magazines. One of my research participants admitted that she was inspired by the pop star Madonna, who in the 1990’s was heavily involved and promoted yoga. Others were introduced to yoga by Canadians who had travelled to India, learned and practiced yoga, and shared the yoga practice when they returned to their primary residency with friends or whoever was interested. In fact, there are Montreal legends of “secret” yoga groups who would gather in basement homes or dance studios to practice yoga.

Clearly global cultural flows have and continue to influence and shape contemporary yoga practices and collectives as they are the primary means in which interconnections are created and exercised. In learning about Appadurai's theory and about Singleton's (2010) research it became apparent in my project that numerous types of yoga would in fact exist due to global cultural flows. For instance, the interconnections created between dance and yoga. Many dancers were introduced or practiced yoga as a means to keep their bodies strong and flexible. With time dancers who practiced both bodily practices decided to combine the two and offer dance-yoga classes. There are other varying forms of yoga such as acro-yoga or laughter-yoga that are a result of the injection and merging of different 'scapes': "A morphology [...] of scapes that shape themselves in different national and transnational contexts"(Appadurai 1996: 53).

Anthropologist Anna Tsing complements Appadurai's work in that she gives ample information about how these global cultural flows came into being and played a central role in reshaping and producing increased interconnections amongst countries, cultures and people. Tsing (2000) defines globalization as a world that is always in motion thus always changing and always in the making. She notes the major projects of modernization that have taken place since World War II and depicts the various players involved in global programs for the future. As such, Tsing (2000) writes about the numerous development policies and multiple international projects geared towards making globality. As mentioned above, she attends to the accelerated interconnections that were created between people and places, made possible by the exchange of cultural resources (global flows).

In her research, Tsing (2000) also writes about the circulation and confluences associated with global cultural flows and the approach anthropologists have taken to study them. For instance, in studying globalization anthropologists have discovered the increased contemporary

mobility and range that exists within cultures today (467). In identifying the circulation of yoga goods, ideas and practitioners I discovered the interconnections that have been established between yoga and other globalized developments such as consumerism. Additionally, there are what Tsing refers to as “modes of cultural interconnections” in the local yoga spaces in Montreal and abroad (Tsing 2000: 467). According to Tsing, modes of cultural interconnections are what stimulate individuals to travel from different far away locales to meet and get together in one distinct place, which is often the case with yoga. For example, a yoga collective may be composed of practitioners who have different cultural backgrounds and in fact it is quite common that the members of yoga collectives are often not originally from city where the mode of yoga cultural interconnection is situated. For example, in Mysore, India hundreds of yoga practitioners from other countries meet to practice yoga. Mysore is precisely the place where yoga interconnections are created and from where other developments begin to form. For instance, yoga teachers who go to Mysore regularly bring back the lessons they learn to the studios they teach in. Some even open their own yoga studio in other cities.

Like Tsing, Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo define globalization as “the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact, and linkages and persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (2002: 2). In addition, Inda & Rosaldo like Tsing also write about the role of anthropologists in studying globalization. These authors point out that anthropologists are not only researching and writing about the situated and conjunctural nature of globalisation as written about by Appadurai, but that they are also concerned with the social experiences of individuals living in localities that are being reshaped by global connections (Inda & Rosaldo 2002). Thus like Hannerz, Inda and Rosaldo are concerned with the ways in which localised spaces are affected by global cultural flows whose

effects are experienced in various ways in different local spaces. Furthermore, Inda & Rosaldo (2002) also argue that globalisation includes the reorganisation of time and space. Due to technology and other modern developments, world-wide exchanges take less time and cross smaller distances. As a consequence these speeded interconnections generated by global flows bring cultures in closer contact. The possibility of being in connection and sharing information and experiences with individuals and collectives who live in far off places is feasible. In fact, many of my interlocutors are in regular contact with fellow practitioners through social networks such as Facebook and Skype. Moreover, several of my research participants are members of online meditation communities and follow or write yoga blogs. Evidently, modern technology permits more global cultural flows to circulate.

Inda and Rosaldo (2002) claim that culture is highly mobile (“a world of culture in motion”) and in studying globalization and deterritorialized cultures they put forward the concept that global cultural flows are reintroduced and imbued into social and cultural locales; cultures are not simply deterritorialized but reterritorialized: “The term refers to this process of reinscribing culture in new time-space contexts, of relocalizing it in specific cultural environments” (11-12). Inda and Rosaldo’s notion of cultural mobility and reterritorialization lend insight to the high level of mobility and diversity existent in yoga culture. Thus yoga varies from one country to another, for example Canada vs. China, and also from one period of time to another. For instance, during the 1970s, the practice of yoga in North America became part of the New Age movement and was involved in the developments of Alternative Medicine where as in the 1990’s yoga’s popularity rose due to the interest of pop stars practicing and promoting yoga while at the same time becoming a staple in the health and fitness industry (De Michelis 2004, Philips 2009). In my own research yoga cultures also differed from studio to studio.

According to Ulf Hannerz (1989) we are currently living in a world where cultures are much less bounded and autonomous than they might once have been. Like Tsing and Appadurai, Hannerz argues that global cultural flows reshape cultures and in doing so stimulate new and reshape their social meanings. As such, Hannerz believes that global homogenization isn't possible because like Appadurai he argues that what emerges and develops when global cultural flows are integrated in local spaces is unpredictable. In addition, Hannerz explains and applies the centre-periphery theory to cultures such that "there is a cultural production in the periphery which is somehow in response to the political and economic dominance of the centre" (Hannerz 1989: 38). Therefore, in vital ways cultural and politico-economic centers configure and inform cultural production taking place on the periphery. However, there are differences between urban national centres: for example, in Paris, the centre is best known for its contributions to high-culture, food and fashion where as the United States is better known for its contributions in science, technology and pop culture. Further, Hannerz looks at how global cultural flows have an impact on the centre-periphery relationship, and in some cases, the happenings occurring on the peripheries are more popular and dominant than the functions of the centre. Hannerz's emphasis on centre-periphery relations can be related to contemporary yoga. For example, the popularity and global spread of yoga demonstrates how a cultural production of the periphery can influence and be imported into major political and economic centres (Hannerz 1989: 38). On the other hand when this occurs the centre may then reshape the practice of yoga, as for example in the the high-level of consumerism involved in contemporary yoga.

All in all, in yoga interconnections emerge and are created by the circulation and confluences of global cultural flows. Further, local yoga spaces and developments are shaped by the effects of globalization and the merging of varying 'scapes'. An example of this would be the

primary yoga studio where I did my participant observation where there is a merging of modern postural yoga (MPY) and Tibetan Buddhism. The practitioners and teachers come from other provinces or countries to Montreal and many have had differing experiences of yoga abroad. As mentioned previously, yoga culture is consequently transnational, highly mobile and diverse. However, theorists such as Appadurai have also noted to the unpredictability of the effects and shape of global cultural flows. Thereby, the developments and outcomes of global cultural flows are as much due to disjunctures as they are to interconnections. Hence this leads to the question “what types of effects do disjunctures have on contemporary yoga”?

Disjunctures:

Disjunctures occur when global cultural flows meet or overlap and produce either explicit conflicts or more subtle divergences. What is fascinating about Appadurai’s theory of globalization is the unpredictability in the ways in which the five major cultural flows that he identifies, arise, develop and evolve in different geographical areas and cultures. As a result, disjunctures emerge when these five forms of movement and interconnection are reformulated, reproduced and utilized in varying contexts, circumstances and times. Appadurai (1996) also notes that another outcome of such disjunctures is that there are new markets being produced for deterritorialized populations such as new travel and media markets. New markets arise from disjunctures when there is a growing gap between ‘scapes’ that either needs to be filled or that creates an opening for new opportunities. Appadurai (1996) gives the example of bringing “labouring populations into [...] lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies” (54). In yoga, for example, new businesses and merchandise (ie; yoga clothing) is a result of a disjuncture.

The consumerism and business of yoga is one of the major disjunctures within yoga culture. In considering the interaction between globalization and yoga it quickly becomes apparent that yoga goods and services are one of the principal global cultural flows of yoga. In fact, John Philp's (2009) research on the yoga industry in America reveals the models of business and media marketing that have been introduced into yoga, and demonstrates how the commercialisation of yoga has developed into a profitable industry. Philps (2009) critiques the yoga industry by showing how yoga has been altered to fit social and cultural norms. Further, he also points to the hypocrisies that exist within the big business of yoga. In my study on yoga, I draw on Philp's work to illustrate the confusion and tension yoga practitioners experience when confronted with and asked to discuss the commodification of yoga. Yoga practitioners cannot avoid grappling with and negotiate the level of consumerism in their yoga practice in several ways, such as deciding whether or not to buy into the popular yoga attire that is being advertised. Additionally, yoga business owners are faced with interrelated apprehensions as well as pressures as they are trying to find a balance between running a business and providing a service or good that is spiritual. What a yoga studio or yoga business is offering and how it is being promoted is often questioned by the owners, employees and/or clients, and in some instances disjunctures seem to create relations that are strenuous and perhaps even unprincipled.

In her study on corporations and branding, Naomi Klein (1999) demonstrates that profitable and successful businesses are those that exercise integrative marketing strategies. Some of these would include financing local events, promoting and putting together community activities, and utilising lifestyle and identity logos ('identity commercial co-optation') to sell products and services. In my study of yoga I uncover and identify some of the integrative marketing strategies utilised by viable yoga studios and businesses in Montreal. For example, it

seems that the success and survival of a yoga studio or business is partly based on the utilisation of integrative marketing strategies that are similar to or have been launched before by yoga clothing retailers. Carlie Charlene Stokes (2010) demonstrates how profitable and popular a Canadian company can become when it incorporates health ideologies and lifestyle branding techniques to sell yoga apparel: “Robert Crawford coined the term healthism to refer to this dominant ideology that places much responsibility on the individual to achieve a level of health while avoiding ill-health. The moral obligation to live a health-promoting lifestyle” (Stokes 2008: ii). In fact, health ideologies and lifestyle branding techniques constitute and are part of the integrative marketing strategies Klein discusses.

Another disjuncture in yoga is found in its relationship with the fitness and health industry. One of the main teachings in yoga is to know and accept one self in the moment and as one is, which is different from the primary message fostered in the fitness and health culture. In the latter, the primary objective is to “improve” and take care of one self by becoming fit and healthy. Sociologist Roberta Sassatelli’s (1999) work on fitness gyms and consumer culture reveals how gyms (commercial institutions) are a site of production for a widely advertised and commercialized contemporary icon of success, the fit, slim and toned body. She illustrates the ways in which cultural values such as being fit are integrated into gym practices (ie; working out) and utilized to develop a person’s identity. Sassatelli’s research on fitness, in particular gym culture, drew my attention to the ways in which the relationship between gym culture and yoga shapes and influences the set up of yoga spaces and the types of yoga services offered and promoted. Furthermore, specific cultural values such as being fit and thin are carried into yoga environments and introduced into yoga practices. For example, in some studios pushups have

become part of the yoga sequence being taught. Finally, for a number of practitioners yoga is a means of reaching personal fitness and health goals.

Sociologist Micki McGee's research on America's self-improvement culture and self-help industry illustrates the social and cultural preoccupation with the self. The self has thereby become a site of laboring and continual self-making (McGee 2005). McGee's study is in accordance with the work of Sassatelli, Stokes and Valerie De Courville Nicol in that all three scholars write about the social impact of healthism (ideological constructs of health). As noted earlier, gyms are spaces that encourage and support the continual improvement of the self, and as mentioned previously Stokes shows how health ideologies are integrated into marketing strategies to sell products. De Courville Nicol goes a step further and uncovers the ways in which health ideologies socialize and manage individuals' emotional lives. In her book Social Economies of Fear and Desire De Courville Nicol shows how social life and emotional norms shape individual's emotional experiences, and the choices they make to exercise personal autonomy (agency & self-regulation).

In the article "Governing Citizens Through Self-Help Literature" Heidi Marie Rimke (2000) suggests that "contemporary self-help literature [is] a strategy for enlisting subjects in the pursuit of self-improvement and autonomy" (61). Further, she believes that the preoccupation of the self that is stimulated and promoted by self-help culture and popular psychology are a means of governing citizens. The socialization and management of citizens in this manner is successful in that it continuously coaches individuals to employ "self-help technologies" such as self-monitoring, self-discipline and self-responsibility (Rimke 2000). Rimke supports McGee's notion of self-making as she believes the self is open to perpetual self-invention and ultimately makes one's identity always up for

construction. Furthermore, she also upholds De Courville Nicol's observation; personal agency and autonomy is dependent on the social and cultural forces that influence and manage the emotional lives of citizens.

Along with the fitness and health values, self-help ideals and beliefs also appear in yoga spaces and practices. Some of the motivations behind and reasons why practitioners practice yoga aligns with the aim to self-improve by learning and practicing yoga as a means to master "self-help technologies" and thus take responsibility for one's well-being (emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual). On the other hand yoga has also provided practitioners with skills, principles, and opportunities that has brought about personal and spiritual transformations.

Transformations:

In anthropology communities of practice and pilgrimages have been shown to stimulate personal change and spiritual growth in individuals who participate in either one or both of these phenomena. My research project reveals that both communities of practice and pilgrimage are central and prominent in yoga and they do in fact bring about personal transformations.

Jean Lave argues that learning materializes when an individual becomes a member of a community of practice. According to Lave a community of practice is a group of people who come together because of a common interest and who share either a craft, profession, or activity (Lave & Wenger 1991). In sharing a common pursuit and gathering together on a regular basis to exchange knowledge and gain experience, members of the group inevitably learn from each other, which is termed by Lave and Wenger as 'situated learning'. Moreover, members of the group have the opportunity to develop skills and grow on a personal and professional level (Lave

& Wenger 1991). Lave's research has led her to study various African & Yucatan Mayan contexts in which learning and skill development is acquired through apprenticeships. In turn, she also examines the contemporary "forms of socially organized activity [that] become salient sites of learning" in America (Lave 1991:65). Lave's definition of 'community of practice' is applied to my study on yoga and indicates that yoga practitioners are learning and developing skills in communities of practice as they are engaging and sharing a practice that is transformative. There are numerous and varying reasons why the yoga practice may be transformative, for the purpose of this thesis I suggest that practitioners change and grow through communities of practice and also by way of yogic pilgrimages.

Anthropologist Victor Turner is a pioneer in his field and has set the stage as well as provided anthropologists with a plethora of information on the study of pilgrimages. He has conducted extensive research on major European religious pilgrimage shrines and formulated the theory of liminality. There are three phases of liminality: separation, limen, and aggregation. Turner believes these phases of liminality are rites of passage (transition), which give pilgrims the opportunity to unleash their potentiality. Moreover, pilgrimages bring forth experiences that are deemed to be transformative (Turner 1974). Pilgrimages are transformative in that

a pilgrim is an initiand, entering into a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu. Homologous with the ordeals of tribal initiation are the trials, tribulations, and even temptations of the pilgrim's way. And at the end the pilgrim, like the novice, is exposed to powerful [and changing experiences], the beneficial effect of which depends on the zeal and pertinacity of his quest (Turner & Turner 1978:8).

Further, pilgrimages also permit the crossing of borders and grant individuals the possibility of embarking on a journey that releases them from the restrictions and structures that normally bind them at home (primary residency) (Turner & Turner 1978).

Simon Coleman (2007) draws from the work of Victor Turner and examines the social process and purposeful movement in pilgrimages. Coleman refers to pilgrimage destinations as centers where people, objects and cultures converge. These sites “come to be through gathering together some surprising cultural materials, including forms of movement and the construction of itineraries, as well as ideologically charged notions of localisation and translation” (Coleman 2007: 322). In the article “Meanings of Movement, Place and Home at Walsingham” Coleman shows how a pilgrimage site can come to be viewed as a second home for many visiting pilgrims. His study on the Catholic pilgrimage site of Walsingham in England depicts the relationship between pilgrims and local institutions as well as collectivities. Coleman (2000) suggests that there is a process of localization that occurs in pilgrimage sites: “certain pilgrimage groups 'locate' themselves within the spatial and ideological arenas [...] such groups adopt specific 'localising strategies' in relation to the social and material field of the [site]. Localisation, as I describe it, involves the invocation of spatial and temporal symbolism as well as particular forms of interaction with social and material contexts. It involves the pilgrim finding elements of 'home' in the pilgrimage site and/or associated activities” (156). Therefore, Coleman (2000) demonstrates how a place (pilgrimage destination) and its culture (created by both the pilgrims and locals) offers individuals and groups of people forms of belonging and spaces where personal change is possible.

Sarah Strauss’s research on transnational yoga supports the work of Turner and Coleman. Strauss maps the mobilities of transnational yoga and in so doing demonstrates that yoga voyages are special forms of travel and yoga sites are places, which many pilgrims consider ‘home’. Moreover, she applies the concept of a matrix to explain the interactions that occur in yoga transnational spaces:

a matrix allows us to describe contingent locations for social interaction, in which actors who call other places 'home' meet on a regular or irregular bases and create social worlds which in turn have implications for other arenas of sociocultural life [...] A matrix can be virtual or located in geographically defined space [...] we can define any kind of socio-cultural form without resorting to the need for a physical boundary (Strauss 2000: 168-69).

The descriptions and feelings given by my research participants who have embarked on a yoga pilgrimage once or even annually resonates strongly with the findings of Turner, Coleman and Strauss. More often than not the voyage has been transformative, sometimes even life-changing, and practitioners have discovered and continue to return to a community of practice where a deep sense of belonging has been established. These places or experiences that represent home continue to be prevalent and with practitioners where ever they might travel to or be afterwards. In addition, I will suggest here that feelings of belonging and a sense of home can be found in bodily mobility (movement).

Bodyscape

Bodily mobility:

In this thesis I explore notions of bodily mobility, which is defined as the movement of the body/bodies. Bodily mobility covers several types of movement. They are the following:

- 1) Spatial movements, for example, traveling to practice yoga.
- 2) Physical movements in one locale. This pertains to āsana (physical postures), which includes the movement of muscles, bones and organs (inner body movement).

I suggest adding an additional scape to Appadurai's five scapes, that of the bodyscape². My research project reveals that the interactions and exchanges between cultures through global

² The suggestion of 'bodyscape' as a term derives from Professor Vered Amit.

flows are largely based on the movement of bodies. The interconnections and disjunctures created by globalization occurs both in pilgrimages and in communities of practice through the movement and meeting of bodies. For the purposes of this thesis I focus on the bodily mobility practitioners experience in communities of practice.

Movement & Embodiment in Communities of Practice:

There are numerous forms of movement (spatial, bodily, cognitively, conceptually) in communities of practice like yoga. These varying types of mobility are consistently circulating in training spaces and are being embodied by its practitioners. The study of leisure activities such as martial arts, dance and even sports is a relatively new field of study in anthropology. The primary focus in studying leisure is to understand how individuals embody a discipline and how they acquire knowledge about a kinesthetic culture through bodily movement and practice. The term embodiment covers a number of aspects including how practitioners learn and integrate the information and practice taught to them, as well as how the principles and lessons obtained in practice shape and effect practitioners personal lives, identity and bodies. Further, in this field of study there has been an exploration of the shared as well as individual bodily experiences (somatic and sensory). My exploration of bodily mobility in yoga draws on Marcel Mauss's theory of techniques of the body.

Mauss's examination of the techniques of the body brings forth an important anthropological discovery: that bodily techniques are not innate but are rather learned and shaped by an individual's environment, upbringing, and social and cultural context. He provides numerous examples such as the difference between how Polynesians and Americans swim or the dissimilarity in how English and French troops dig. Mauss (1973) demonstrates that each society

has its own body etiquette and body language. I propose that each leisure activity like yoga also has its own body etiquette and language, for example, in yoga sitting with a straight back is important. Mauss also points out that there are numerous and different ways in learning specific techniques of the body. Moreover, they are often achieved through imitation and practice, which my study shows is the primary teaching method in yoga. Other researchers such as Greg Downey have subsequently included the notion of body techniques in their analysis of leisure activities. Downey applies Mauss's concept and identifies the bodily techniques learnt in capoeira, for instance learning how to use one's hands as feet. In his study of capoeira, Downey discusses in detail how capoeira practitioners learn techniques of the body and shows how their bodies slowly change with practice.

Another anthropologist, Tamara Kohn, writes in her article titled "The Aikido Body: Expression of Group Identities and Self-Discovery in Martial Arts Training" about the philosophy of movement and the body language accompanying bodily mobility in aikido. She notes the ways in which a leisure activity, in this case aikido, can serve as a training ground for identity formation. New ideas of the body circulate in these practice settings and they are eventually adopted and integrated into practitioners' more general bodily movements and ways of being. According to Kohn, the body is socially situated and inscribed and as such the body is the instrument through which meaning is derived. Nigel Rapport's case study of Bob, a hospital porter who is also a bodybuilder, supports Kohn's findings. Through his recounting of Bob's narrative, Rapport demonstrates that bodybuilding has not only transformed his body, but also shaped his identity: "Bob Hume might be employed as a porter at Constance Hospital, but he is also a bodybuilder. And it is as a bodybuilder [...] that he fills out his porter's uniform and occupies the plant, fulfilling his portering duties. In the process he calls into question any plain

differentiating between work and leisure” (Rapport 2010:23). As in capoeira, aikido and bodybuilding, in yoga specific body techniques are taught, learned and practiced. Through these leisure activities individuals are discovering their own agency in making a leisure activity meaningful and an avenue for transformation.

As demonstrated above, the movement of the body (bodyscape) is a means to teach, learn, be in connection with oneself and others, and transform. Additionally, what yoga brings, which is different from other leisure activities is its own culture of the senses. Yoga provides practitioners with methods for exploring the inner body, which I call the “inner milieu”. David Howes’ (2006) research on the senses makes clear that a sensory experience is a skill. Furthermore, Howes notes that any skill can be cultivated in a setting that brings forth an education of the senses (Howes 2006). In Chapter 4 I propose and explore the idea that yoga provides practitioners with a new sensory experience, one that permits individuals to feel and be in tune with bodily movements and sensations that are not regularly or highly promoted in modern day cultures and societies. Furthermore, I suggest that what comes with bodily mobility is cognitive and conceptual mobility and within these mobilities we find new meanings and notions of home.

Bodyscape and Home:

Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998) write about old notions of home and demonstrate how the concept of ‘home’ no longer refers to a fixed and stationary environment. Additionally, they show how the construction of identity was previously based on notions of fixity (Rapport & Dawson 1998). Global cultural flows have changed the meaning of home and identity and are therefore no longer defined as it once were. Moreover, Rapport and Dawson (1998) show the importance and pivotal role that movement plays in constructing our contemporary social

experiences, environments, and relations (self and others): “Not only can one be at home in movement, but that movement can be one’s very home. One’s identity is formed on the move” (27). Moreover, their research suggests that within a world of movement there exists a cognitive home:

Now we have ‘creolizing’ and ‘compressing’ cultures and ‘hybridizing’ identities in a ‘synchronizing’ global society. Part of this reconceptualization pertains significantly to notions of home; part- and- parcel of this conceptual shift is a recognition that not only can one be at home in movement, but that movement can be one’s very home. One’s identity is ‘formed on the move’: a ‘migrant’s tale of ‘stuttering’ transitions and heterogeneities’. And the personal myths and rituals that one carries on one’s journey through life (that carry one through a life course) need not fix one’s perspective on any still centre outside one’s (moving) self [...] One is at home not in a thing or a place but ‘in life’ being lived in movement’ and in an ‘untold story (Nigel & Rapport 1998: 27-28).

In the article “Ways of Mind-Walking: Reading, Writing, Painting” Ingold (2010) draws out and compares the visual aspects involved in reading, writing, and painting. He demonstrates the ways in which these activities form walking paths within the mind; “walk in the terrain of [the] imagination” (Ingold 2010b: 16). Ingold’s notion describes the possibility of travel within the mind and illustrates how activities such as painting stimulate cognitive travel, which in fact awakens the senses of the body in a fashion similar to the effects of physical activities (ie; yoga or travelling). Rapport and Dawson’s concept of the cognitive home fits well with Ingold’s notion of mind-walking. Both arguments draw our attention to how both internal and external factors influence individuals’ experiences, development and feelings of belonging. Home and travel are not solely based on environment and spatial movement but can as well be experienced through cognitive explorations.

In my study of yoga a number of interlocutors reported feeling a sense of home and belonging, which frequently arose in practice or after training. Even though some felt that upon entering the yoga studio they were home, many were not able to specify a specific location or

time that defined this notion of home. As Rapport and Ingold point out, today home originates and exists on a cognitive level, which seems to be prevalent in yoga. Additionally, I suggest that home and feelings of belonging in yoga are found in movement and in the body.

Stability and Strength in a World of Movement

In every unfolding moment, in any meeting with any person, even in meeting ourselves, everything is complete [...] everything is interdependent [...] yoga is not something we seek outside of ourselves or a willful attempt at union, but the recognition, in the present moment, of the unification of life (Stone 2008:8).

Throughout his book The Inner Tradition of Yoga, Michael Stone (2008) puts forward the idea that the movements and happenings of and in the world (universe) lie within you (in the body and mind). He continuously reminds readers that the world (including humans) is always moving and changing, and within those movements and changes we are still and always interconnected. A re-occurring theme in my research was that in practicing yoga individuals were cultivating awareness and strength. These qualities helped practitioners find stability in societies that are constantly in motion and metamorphosis. What is interesting about yoga is that as individuals acquire strength and stability to sustain oneself in a world that is ever changing, they are also finding stillness and peace as they come to realize that their bodies and minds reflect and undergo the same movements and transformations of the universe.

Jaida Kim Samudra's study of White Crane Silat, a Chinese Indonesian Martial Art, looks at the notion of 'thick participation' in kinesthetic cultures and shared bodily practices. Thick participation is the concept that the body and bodily practices embody culture and reveal the ways in which individuals engage and live socially (Samudra 2008). Samudra (2008) suggests that the body is "a tool of inquiry and a vector of knowledge [and that] cultural information is recorded in [our] own bodies" (666). This rings true in my own study of yoga in

that with time I saw the yoga practice room as a mirror that reflected back at me the social circumstances we live in and global cultural flows that we are affected by.

De Michelis (2004) supports Stone and Samudra's claims. In her research on yoga she notes:

Ultimately, the MPY practitioner embodies, and is trained to perceive, the identity of microcosm and macrocosm: At this subtlest level, when we are able to observe the workings of rajas, tamas, and sattva in one toe, and to adjust the flow of energy in idā, pingalā and susumnā (the three principals of nādis or energy channels) the macrocosmic order of natures is perceived in even the smallest aspects. And when the student then learns how the minutest modifications of a toe can modify the whole āsana, he is observing how the microcosm relates to the whole, and the organic completeness of the universal structure is grasped (256).

Conclusion- Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

My review of literature in anthropology and related disciplines on globalization, mobility and embodiment is intended to cultivate a perspective on yoga that will clearly display the relationship between global proceedings and local developments. Hence in my thesis I will demonstrate through the lived experienced of yoga practitioners in Montreal that global cultural flows have created a variety of interconnections and disjunctures in yoga. Furthermore, I demonstrate that despite the ensuing contradictions practitioners face in their yoga practice they are developing skills that can lead to personal transformation and possibly spiritual growth. Additionally I draw on Appadurai's five 'scapes' of globalization to suggest that an additional 'scape', that of 'bodyscape' can provide a useful vehicle within to comprehend contemporary flows within yoga. As previously mentioned, yoga bodies are one of the major components of global cultural flows; bodies are continuously moving, meeting and exchanging information, practices, and materials in varying ways across the globe. Finally, I suggest that yoga is a vehicle

utilized by practitioners to acquire more than flexibility and relaxation but to find stability and strength in a world that is in constant motion and always in amendment.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Field Site(s)

Over the course of five months of fieldwork my field sites consisted of a large Canadian yoga conference held in Toronto, Ontario, a local Montreal yoga festival, a three-day yoga workshop in Vancouver, British Columbia and several yoga studios located in the down town area of Montreal. I decided to attend a number of yoga workshops and classes so that I could observe varying yoga contexts. In doing so, I drew out the main subject matters that seemed pertinent and congruent in yoga. Furthermore, going to both the large yoga conference in Toronto and the local Montreal yoga festival, permitted me to compare and take note of the similarities and differences between a large-scale versus small-scale yoga event as well as international versus local yoga function. Additionally, I signed up for specific workshops so that I could gather information and experience from not only students and teachers, but also from a few yoga experts. Lastly, the various field sites gave me the opportunity to experience firsthand the spatial mobility in yoga within Canada and witness the diversity in styles of yoga, practice environments, and practitioners.

Population

The population with which I worked consisted mainly of yoga teachers and students that practice modern postural yoga and modern meditational yoga. They belong to the transnational

anglophone yoga collective as described by Singleton (2010)³. I encountered both teachers and students in all the yoga contexts in which I participated. Teachers are encouraged to keep up a regular practice and to continue training with other teachers in order to further develop as both a student and teacher. Therefore, it is quite common to witness teachers practicing side by side with students. However, workshops and specific training sessions tend to attract more teachers whereas yoga classes and conference activities are likely to be filled mostly with students. The yoga classes and conference participants included both men and women but the majority tended to be female. In addition, all interview participants were female except for one male. The range in age of all the people I encountered in my research on yoga were between 20 to 50 years old. There were a few exceptions in that most of the yoga experts were above the age of 65. In my thesis, I refer to individuals who have thirty years or more of experience in yoga as yoga experts. The types of individuals that participated in my research included yoga teachers, students, studio owners and experts.

The population I encountered through participant observation in British Columbia and Ontario were people (including teachers and students) with whom I had not been previously acquainted and who showed up for each session was unpredictable. Thus, at the beginning of each yoga session that I attended I'd write a brief description of the participants in order to get an idea of the yoga clientele. However, in Montreal the primary yoga studio and a few other studios I attended were occupied with yoga students and teachers I was acquainted with because of my previous training as a student and my career as a yoga teacher. My previous involvement in some of Montreal's yoga groups provided both significant advantages and disadvantages. Gathering research participants and acquiring permission to participate in yoga workshops and classes was

³ “The forms of yoga that were formulated and transmitted in a dialogical relationship between India and the West through the medium of English” (Singleton 2010: 9).

relatively easy since most studio owners, teachers and students were familiar with me and I had a good contact base. Further, there was a high-level of willingness and enthusiasm from various individuals I contacted who agreed to participate in this project. In fact, many of my interlocutors were pleased to have a person to talk to about their yoga experiences. Moreover, many research participants were interested in learning more about the academic study of yoga and felt that it was an important contribution to yoga. On the other hand, I was entering yoga training spaces in which I was already known and sharing yoga practices with other practitioners who knew me but now with a new vantage point and role, that of a researcher. I kept reminding myself while participating that I was there to learn about yoga from a new perspective. Taken as a whole, however, I found that in spite of some of these challenges, my previous experience as a yoga teacher and student was advantageous because I was able to reflect on and compare my various experience of yoga in the different positions of a student, teacher, and researcher.

Qualitative Research

I conducted qualitative research in my anthropological study of yoga, which consisted of participant observation, three yoga guides⁴, interviews and an expert group. I scheduled and conducted fifteen individual interviews and I facilitated three expert group meetings. I carried out participant observation in all the field sites I mentioned above. During my participant observation, interviews, and facilitation of expert group meetings I collected data and took field notes. After participant observation activities, interviews and meetings I transcribed, reviewed and systematically put together a project file for my thesis. In addition, prior to each participant

⁴ For further explanation please go to page 39 where the term 'yoga guides is defined.

observation activity I sought verbal consent and prior to each interview and expert group meeting I asked participants to sign a consent form.

Participant observation is an excellent method for investigating yoga practices, circumstances and the interchanges between practitioners because it permits the researcher to experience as well as observe the subject being studied directly. Interviews complimented my participant observation as well as my literature review because it allowed me to probe, in a more focused way, topics pertaining to my research. Moreover, the interviews also gave me the opportunity to gather more information and gain further insights on what I had observed in my participant observation and read.

Participant Observation:

At the three-day yoga conference in Toronto I registered to participate in four three-hour workshops. The workshops were led by a yoga expert, a yoga teacher who had over 30 years of yoga experience and trained with some well-known yoga masters like Yogiraj Sri Swami Satchidanandaji. The subjects of the workshops varied. Some focused on the spiritual aspects of yoga while others were about the yoga sutras⁵. There were yoga training workshops that taught meditation practices and discussed the healing features of yoga, and there was also a considerable amount of sessions that concentrated on physical postures and how to master difficult poses like hand stand. The four workshops I attended were with the same yoga expert. I wanted to gather information from a person who had been heavily involved in yoga in America for a long period of time. This would allow me to understand yoga from a more experienced perspective, which I felt was important because yoga experts have already faced some of the

⁵ Sutra is an aphorism (or line, rule, formula) or a collection of such aphorisms in the form of a manual or, more broadly, a text in Hinduism. Literally it means a thread or line that holds things together and is derived from the verbal root siv-, meaning to sew (Stone 2008).

challenges as well as negotiated the contradictions in yoga. Further, it seems that yoga experts are also those that have learned to adapt and grow in terms of personal development from their yoga practice. Between the conference workshops I attended a tradeshow where I looked at the exhibitions, observed yoga demonstrations, and learned about the yoga services and products offered and sold by the vendors. I also took into account the social exchanges that occurred in the venue, interacted with vendors by asking questions, participated in the demonstrations, and discreetly took notes. The tradeshow was of particular interest because it gave me a snapshot of the different features of yoga as well as the varying relationships yoga has developed with other sectors such as the health industry.

In June 2012, I attended the opening ceremony of the first local yoga festival in Montreal that was open to the public. There I interacted with audience members by asking questions and sharing my experience. In addition, I participated in festival activities and took field notes during and after the event. Like the Toronto yoga conference the festival provided me with a picture of the Montreal yoga scene and of the diversity amongst yoga participants. In addition, I was also exposed to the numerous styles of yoga within Montreal.

At the three-day workshop held by a expert teacher from India in British Columbia, I mostly carried out participant observation. I took fieldnotes and interacted with students and the teacher on a regular basis. I also took field notes during and after the event. This event was pertinent in that it also gave me the opportunity to practice with, learn and ask questions with an expert whose training is solely based in India, but who has travelled the world to teach yoga. In addition, the workshop was held in a small town in British Columbia rather than in a major city like Toronto and Montreal. Thus, I compared the experience of learning and practicing yoga in a

less heavily urbanized setting amongst a small group of practitioners versus being in a large group in a cosmopolitan area.

Much of my fieldwork was conducted at a popular and well-known Montreal yoga studio, which focuses primarily on modern postural yoga as well as modern meditational yoga. I decided to conduct most of my fieldwork at this primary studio for several reasons:

- 1) It is a renowned Montreal studio.
- 2) It provides a large yoga student base.
- 3) It has well-trained and experienced teachers.
- 4) The studio's primary teacher is a yoga expert.
- 5) The studio is accessibly located in the heart of down-town Montreal.

As a participant observer at this main yoga studio, I attended two yoga classes a week over a four month period (16 weeks). I arrived at the studio thirty minutes prior to the commencement of each class to observe students entering the studio and to watch them settle in. In addition, I also stayed after the lesson to spend some time in the studio lounge, which enabled me to examine the social interactions that took place in common areas. The same participant observation format was conducted during the workshops I described earlier. However the time spent in workshops was longer (2hrs for class participation versus 8hrs for workshop participation) and I also had the opportunity to have lunch with research participants. I kept myself open to initiating informal interviews while participating in classes, workshops and spending time with yoga practitioners including my yoga guides.

Finally, I went to a number of yoga studios across the city and attended class with my yoga guides, which will be explained further below.

Yoga Guides:

I selected three females who practice yoga, two are teachers (one advanced, one intermediate) and the other is an intermediate student, to be my yoga guides. I decided to have yoga guides as an opportunity to learn about the experiences and perspectives of three practitioners who are operating at different levels of practice. I followed them through the circuit of yoga activities in which they participated and I took part in the same yoga activities they attended, which consisted of yoga classes, workshops, events, and social gatherings. These three yoga guides were followed throughout the period of my fieldwork.

Interviews & Focus Group:

I conducted a total of fifteen semi-formal interviews that were qualitative in nature and lasted anywhere from 1 to 2 hours. I asked mostly open-ended questions, an approach that proved productive in stimulating free flowing dialogue with these interviewees. Interviews allowed me to ask participants questions about the history of their involvement in yoga, and to gather detailed information on subjects that touched upon my research project, like the impact of globalization. The questions I prepared for the interviews as well as the focus group (more information below) were based on broad categories and sub-categories (see table below):

Broad-Categories	Sub-Categories
General background of interviewee	Transnationalism
Globalization	Consumerism
Mobility	Self-Help
Embodiment	Fitness and Health
Personal yoga history	Learning yoga
Discovery of yoga	Teaching yoga
	Spirituality

Most interviews were conducted either in public spaces like coffee shops or in the private homes of the interviewees. Research participants with whom I was already acquainted were invited to my residence for interviews. As mentioned previously all interview participants were female except for one male and their ages ranged from 20 to 50 years old, however the majority fell within the age range of 25-35. I did not explicitly take into account a person's gender when recruiting interviewees. The gender distribution of the interviewees reflected the fact that there are more females practicing yoga than there are males. All interviewees were yoga teachers except for three who were students. I decided to primarily interview yoga teachers for the following reasons:

- 1) They have more experience in and knowledge of yoga.
- 2) They had been involved in a yoga collective(s) for an extended period of time.
- 3) They underwent substantial training to become a teacher.
- 4) They were more likely to have had experience in negotiating their yoga practice and developing a personal relationship to yoga that fits their lifestyle.

I organized a focus group of yoga teachers (4 participants) and held three 2-hour meetings over the course of my fieldwork. I decided to include only teachers in this focus group as an opportunity to give them a space where they could feel free to express themselves and not feel obliged to respond according to the usual yoga teacher etiquette. It is quite common for yoga teachers to keep their opinions and knowledge about yoga to a minimum when asked to speak in front of students. In fact, yoga teachers are often reluctant to participate in discussions where students or newer teachers are involved. Experienced teachers are trained to respect students'

process of yoga discovery and they are coached to give students the space to find their own answers to questions, so most teachers will listen rather than provide responses. More importantly, experienced yoga teachers are careful and selective when it comes to sharing their knowledge about yoga. The reason being is that new or beginner students as well as teachers tend to misinterpret and apply the information they've heard incorrectly. In some cases, students have learned about advanced practices and have employed them before being fully ready. This has had many negative consequences such as injuries, teaching a practice incorrectly, and misunderstanding the information given. These are the motives behind why I decided to put together a group specifically for experienced teachers. At the meetings of this group of teachers I presented a theme and a set of questions pertaining to the meeting's theme. Participants were given time to reflect on and discuss the topic at hand. I was responsible for facilitating the group discussion.

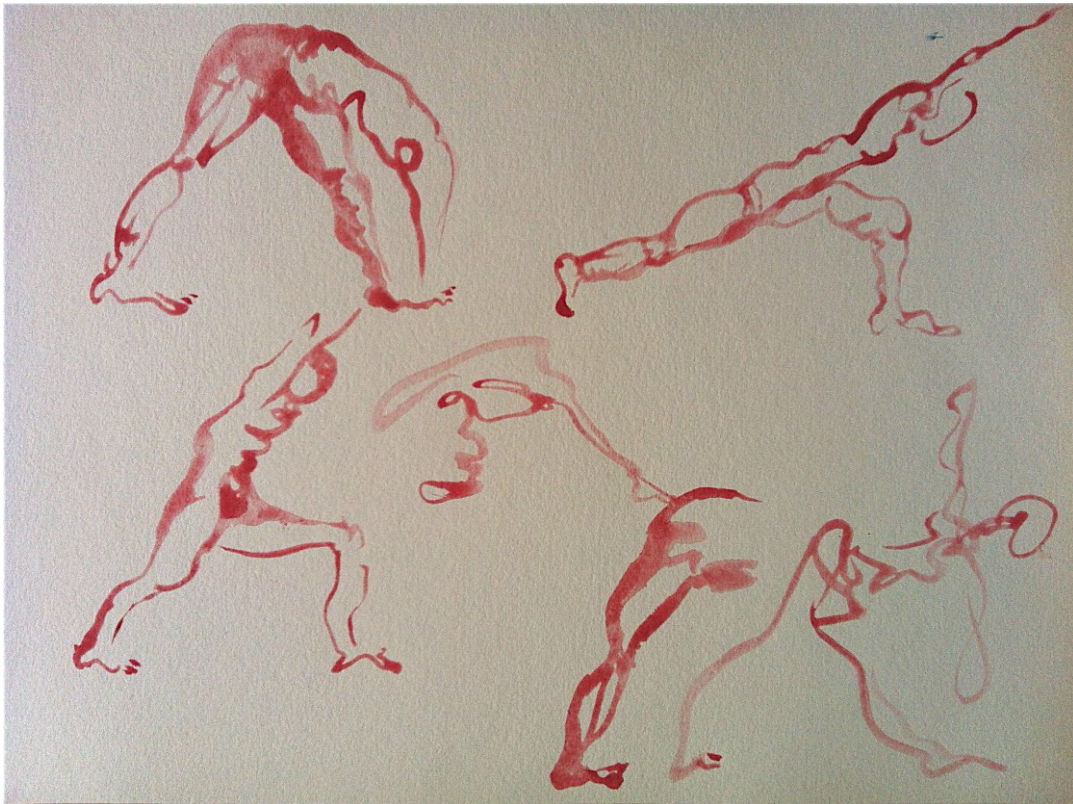
Research Timetable

<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>	<u>September</u>
Participant observation conducted at Yoga Conference in Toronto (4 workshops + Tradeshow) Field notes	Met with Yoga Guides and got their consent	Focus Group Meeting Participant observation conducted at primary yoga studio begins Field notes Followed Yoga Guides Attended Yoga Festival	Focus Group Meeting Participant observation conducted at yoga studio continues Field notes Followed Yoga Guides	Focus Group Meeting Participant observation conducted at yoga studio continues Field notes Followed Yoga Guides	Wrapped up participant observation at primary yoga studio Put together file project Wrapped up with Yoga Guides Attended three day Yoga Workshop in Vancouver
Sent email to yoga studio for permission to do fieldwork and waited for confirmation. Sent e-mail to Yoga Guides to get their consent.	Put together the Focus Group and organized first meeting. Sent e-mail for interviews (Individual)	Interviews conducted and transcriptions.	More interviews conducted and transcriptions	More interviews conducted and transcriptions	Last interviews conducted and transcriptions

Ethics

All participants involved in the research project were informed about my research prior to participating. I asked for verbal consent prior to every activity in which I was involved as a participant observer. Before each interview and expert group meeting I gave participants a consent form to sign. For all consent forms signed, participant(s) were given either a hard or

electronic copy. Those who decided to partake in the activities, group of teachers, yoga guides or interviews were involved on a volunteer basis. Informant confidentiality has been maintained in the research project and in the writing of the thesis. Participants were also informed and reminded that they had the choice to withdraw from my research project at any time, and that if they did, any of the material I had gathered from them would not be used in my research. In addition, in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of research participants. Further, I do the same for the names of organisations, businesses or studios that might be too easily identified by participants.



Chapter 3: Positioning Contemporary Yoga

(Artist: Ondine Guralnick)

My research on yoga in Montreal focuses on multiple frameworks - globalization, consumerism, health and fitness, and self-help - that shape and help position this embodied practice. In this chapter, I will outline the influences and respective effects of these frameworks on the practice of yoga as well as on the lived experiences of yoga practitioners.

The effects of globalization on yoga practice in the West are clearly seen in the historical formation of yoga collectives as well as in its past and current rituals of teaching and learning (Singleton 2010). The increase in global cultural flows over the last century has resulted in the emergence of newer forms of yoga; an additional blending and merging of differing practices

and ideas. As these global cultural flows have entered local spaces in Montreal, practitioners are discovering contemporary modes of being interconnected with others and are becoming members of more spatially extended communities (online and transnational). In addition, yogic ideas, commodities and practices are circulating at a much faster rate, and therefore are more accessible, as they are disseminated widely through retail and media networks.

In looking at the consumerism surrounding yoga I will draw attention to the implementation of integrative marketing strategies (at both global and local levels) that have made yoga popular and the industry profitable. This has been made possible by virtue of more discreet methods of branding, and by tailoring yoga to Western beliefs and ideals. Thus, I will show how yoga is marketed and point to the large amount of yoga products available and sold. I will also present the ways in which my research participants acknowledge the commodification of yoga even while they continue to derive meaning and seek spirituality through yoga products, concepts and practices.

As consumer culture plays an influential role in shaping contemporary yoga so also do the health and fitness as well as the self-help industries. For example, the most popular exercise class in gyms is yoga and the majority of students are attending to meet fitness and health goals. To demonstrate this I will examine the ways in which yoga is utilized for health and fitness purposes and self-development aims. I will briefly draw some parallels between gym and yoga cultures, and depict the similarities between these two leisure activities. For example, the belief in being fully responsible for one's health and well-being is promoted in both the health/fitness and the self-help industries, which persuades consumers to purchase commodities that purportedly aid in their self-development.

In sum, yoga has been shaped by these four major social contexts: globalization, consumerism, health and fitness, and self-help culture. In learning about the relationship between these mentioned frameworks and yoga I hope to assist readers to contextualize and better understand the practice of yoga in Montreal.

Globalization

The effects of globalization play a major role amongst the English speaking yoga practitioners of Montreal that participated in my project, as they present opportunities for practitioners to meet and practice together across the globe. Many Montreal teachers and practitioners organize and attend yoga retreats abroad. Additionally, visiting instructors (from different countries) regularly give workshops and are involved in teacher training programs in the city. Cultural anthropologist Sarah Strauss conducted considerable research on transnational communities of yoga and she outlines the global flows of people, ideas, practices and commodities that have made yoga both popular and widely available (Strauss 1992). Similarly, global flows and transnationalism are also very much part of local yoga spaces in cities such as Montreal (Canada).

Advances in technology (Internet & telecommunications) and various means of transportation (planes, trains, etc.), have enabled dispersed yoga practitioners to more effectively share practices and connections. Arjun Appa⁶durai writes extensively about mass globalization. In his work he deconstructs the various global flows and shows the influences they've had on cultures and individuals sense of being as well as the sense of place in the world: "For with the advent of the steamship, the automobile, airplane, the camera, the computer, and the telephone, we have entered in an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant

⁶ In order to protect research participants and companies' identities and in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of research participants and companies.

from ourselves” (Appadurai 1996, 47). A few of my research participants have travelled to places such as India and Bali to practice yoga in large transnational communities of yoga. When these interlocutors describe their experiences and the relationships they’ve developed through travel and transnational encounters they seem to be strongly attached to a group of people and a place abroad. Moreover, they keep in contact with their international peers through social networks like Facebook.

Jackson, for example, one of the participants in my study, who is a full time yoga teacher, travels annually to India to practice with members of his international meditation association. Jackson feels that his worldwide meditation collective is a “real global community. People [are] from everywhere; Miami, Los Angeles, Montreal to Rome” he says. He explains that the participants of his ‘meditation community’ are frequently in contact. They have a conference call once a month, which is specifically organized “to sustain the energy, to connect and to have conversation around spiritual topics”. They are also in contact every 3rd Sunday of the month from 6h00 to 7h00 when they participate in an international hour of peace put together by the organization. Members living in varying countries practice and join together by sitting in meditation during the scheduled time despite the spatial distance and time difference between them. In fact, Jackson is not the only research participant who connects with his yoga peers through global cultural flows. For instance, other Montreal yoga teachers who took part in my research belong to meditation groups that meet online on a weekly basis through Skype.

Another example of how global cultural flows influence the lives of yoga practitioners is Joanna⁷. She is originally from the West Coast of Canada. Like Jackson, she also travels to India annually and trains in a transnational community of yoga:

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Ever since I can remember I have been interested in different tools for self discovery and expansion of thought. I believe this is what led me to meditation and the practice of yoga āsana in my adolescence. Always active, āsana was a great complement to my other physical activities, and meditation a tool for calming and focusing my busy mind. At 19 I took my first trip to India to study more deeply and intensely the practice and philosophy of yoga. That first trip took me to a number of Ashrams in Southern India, I developed a keen desire to know more about the history, language and culture surrounding yoga. This fascination led me to complete my studies in Asian religion and South Asia and to make several subsequent trips to India.

For several years, she would save enough money throughout the year to afford a trip to India for three (3) months (usually during the Winter period). Her stay consisted of practicing yoga several hours each day with the same group of people. When Joanna speaks of her experiences in India, she compares her experience in a transnational yoga community to being in a ‘slow cooker’, i.e. an intense period of time living and practicing daily with an international group of individuals:

I mean every trip has been different from the flights to the immigration issues to the experience in Mysore to the practice itself [...] it’s very intense on many levels. [Also] India is modernizing really quickly and that part has been really interesting to watch over the years [...] just how fast it’s changing [...] there is such a big community in Mysore of Western [practitioners] from all over the place that you develop your own little culture with that group.

Joanna’s trips made her realize that globalization is evident in countries like India in the global South. The global cultural flows introduced yoga to Joanna and gave her the means to seek and practice yoga in India. Moreover, it also had significant impacts on the Indian villages she regularly visited.

Inda and Rosaldo echo Joanna’s observation that global flows take different forms and have differential impacts in varying countries. In fact, they criticize the view that globalization leads to the homogenization of non-Western cultures, and believe that global cultural flows of goods, ideas, and various types of models (for example, business and spiritual) are shared between Western and non-Western countries (Inda & Rosaldo 2007). Furthermore, they identify

some of the false assumptions associated with globalization. One such example is the notion that Western culture necessarily dominates people in the Global South and that the influential relationship between these two parties is unilateral (nIda & Rosaldo 2007).

In keeping with these points, Singleton's (2010) research on the origin of āsana (physical postures) in yoga displays the Western and non-Western collaborations that took place in India during the 1930's and onwards. Singleton reveals how yoga techniques, philosophies, and modern ideas of the body from different parts of the world were put together to create a newer system of yoga, that of 'modern yoga'. In the last 30 years, there has been a proliferation of newer forms of yoga such as, hot yoga, dance yoga, acro yoga and laughter yoga. All of these exist and are practiced in Montreal. These more recent types of yoga are also a product of merging ideas and disciplines from a number of countries across the globe.

The views of research participants about newer styles of yoga varied. For instance, April⁸ who runs a popular and lucrative yoga studio in Montreal, is enthusiastic about exploring yoga in its many forms:

I'm part of that fusion [...] I really truly believe that at the root of yoga is a connection to creativity [...] some of the practices that I find really, really interesting and the teachers I find really, really interesting are ones that are connected to what I would refer to as improvisation [...] I feel like that connects it to yoga and I think we practice techniques to develop an understanding of something and yoga in itself is a technique of perceiving the moment and learning to be in response and in connection to the moment [...] I think that anything that re-inspires creativity is a really valid thing within yoga and one that I think can create a sense of individuality within the practice and help it evolve.

Paula⁹ (yoga teacher), however, feels differently than April about these emerging styles forms of yoga:

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No one really has a claim on yoga or what it is and to say you do is silly, but then on the other hand I feel like the definition is not so broad that anything under the sun can be called yoga. It has to have limitations, it has to have boundaries. It has to be defined. [If] yoga doesn't connect to any philosophical or historical lineage other than the physical practice, for me [it] takes the practice out of context.

In an attempt to not de-contextualize yoga, Paula places importance on and takes her time to explain the details of movement and alignment to her students, and feels the need to educate students about yoga's history and traditions.

All in all the globalization of yoga has made it well known and highly practiced in places all over the world including Montreal. In addition, it has stimulated practitioners to travel and seek yoga in foreign countries. The circulation of yoga and its practitioners has transformed local and distant spaces and in turn has made them part of a more global set of relations.

Interconnection

Globalization seems to be the driving force behind bringing individuals from different countries together and as a result stimulates the formation of collectives like yoga. Appadurai (1996) suggests that there are five (5) dimensions to global cultural flows, which he terms as (a) ethnoscaples, (b) mediascaples, (c) technoscaples, (d) financescaples, (e) ideoscaples (1996). These five (5) dimensions create what Appadurai calls imagined worlds, which are "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 1996: 51). Individuals and groups of people may be in connection with each other through one or more of the five scaples mentioned. Yoga brings dispersed individuals into contact as a result of sharing common practices and beliefs. In fact, the idea of unity is a frequent symbol within yoga.

In her article, “The Global Situation,” Anna Tsing speaks of the interconnections existent in new globalisms and the impact of global cultural flows: “interconnection is created through circulation. Many things are said to circulate, ranging from people to money; cultures to information; and television programs, to international protocols, to the process called globalization itself” (Tsing, 2000, 462). She supports the view that the circulation of goods, ideas and people exposes and brings cultures in connection. However, while these global interconnections may result in more frequent and speeded up interactions between people as discussed by Tsing, the result might be a fairly tenuous or superficial type of linkage.

That being said, a number of my interlocutors questioned the impacts of globalization on yoga and wonder if the practice is being de-contextualized from its historical and philosophical underpinnings. For example, Tara is a long time practitioner who travels the world practicing and learning meditation and yoga with renowned teachers. Her knowledge and experience is preserved and only shared if the situation calls for it. While visiting Tara at her home we sipped her delicious home-made ice tea and discussed my research. She explained why she felt that the interconnections created by globalization are trivial:

It’s sort of like the illusion of being over committed so its [an] illusion of connection by being very busy or by being connected to many things but not deeply connected to any one thing maybe and that’s a proposal and I don’t know if that is true but I think when we deeply connect to something [either] a practice or a person that sense of separation starts to crumble.

Thus Tara fears practitioners are having “diluted” experiences of yoga in that they are misapprehending the meanings underlying the yoga practice.

Like Tara, Sandra¹⁰, another one of the participants in my study, is also ambivalent about the influences exerted by globalization on her practice of yoga. On the one hand, her travels allow her to be part of and connect with a community of practitioners that encompass a wide variety of cultures and languages. Yet, on the other hand, she feels there is also a danger posed by the mixtures afforded by globalization: “If you put everything in the same bag, it can be so mixed up that any kind of yoga goes, like weight loss yoga”. Sandra puts a lot of effort in trying to find a work-life balance. When she is not working at the office she is painting, writing poetry, cooking and practicing yoga. She enjoys spending time with friends and especially enjoys having them over for dinner, going to concerts or attending dance performances. But Sandra worries that the global cultural flows shaping modern yoga are producing fusions that may not hold much meaning or credibility.

As presented by Apparadai and Tsing, global cultural flows have quickly augmented and created new modes of interconnection amongst people. In doing so, transnational and online communities are taking shape, individuals are learning about other cultures more readily and local spaces (ie; landscapes and yoga studios) are changing. Although the level of interconnection amongst people is more plausible and accessible due to the effects of globalization, there is a fear that the yogic sense of interconnection may be lost in translation (in circulation).

Indra’s Net:

The theory of the koshas and the Indian myth of Indra’s net describe the yogic principle of interconnection (Stone 2008). Strauss, Stone and Tara (research participant) all refer to this legend:

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It conceives of the abode of Indra, the Hindu god of space in which there is a net that stretches infinitely in all directions. At every intersection of the net there is a jewel so highly polished and perfect that it reflects every other jewel in the net. Each and every jewel in the web is intimately connected with every other jewel so that any change of the pattern in the web is replicated throughout every sector and layer of its system. The entire net is interconnected and interdependent. When any jewel in the net is touched, all other jewels in any node are affected. This speaks to the hidden interconnectedness and interdependency of everything and everyone in the universe (Stone 2008:101).

Strauss (2000) relates these jewels in Indra's net as intersecting vectors with directional forces; a matrix made up of spheres of activity. She utilizes the concept of a matrix to represent the social interactions occurring amongst individuals joining together in a place, be it geographical or virtual. Moreover, Strauss (2000) strongly believes that it is these exchanges that create a socio-cultural life. The interconnection produced in transnational spaces are transcending previous social and cultural boundaries such as, "the ways people's lives, as well as the 'social lives of things' literally cross paths and shape practices" (Strauss 2000: 171). There is a high-level of mobility found within yoga spaces in which practitioners come together to practice.

The kośas are defined as different sheaths (5 layers¹¹) that enfold into each other, which constitute the mind and body of a person (Stone 2008). Stone mentions in his book The Inner Tradition of Yoga that most practitioners believe their minds and bodies are solid and fixed, however he demonstrates that with practice they begin to learn that the mind and body is constantly changing (2008). Essentially, what is stable amongst continuous change is the inevitability of movement. Like Strauss, Stone (2008) also believes that "all of these sheathes work together, like a lexicon or matrix, and [that] the theory of the kośas describes [...]"

¹¹ "The sheaths are of five layers... They consist of (1) annamaya kośa, made up of bones, tendons, muscle group, and other gross or dense masses; (2) prānamaya kośa, the physiological sheath, made up of the circulatory system including the respiratory, nervous, lymphatic, and immune systems; (3) Manomaya kośa, the psychological sheath, which includes the mind, feelings, and the processes that organize experience; (4) vijñānamaya kośa, the frame responsible for intellect and wisdom; and (5) ānandamaya kośa,...the sense of the body when one feels that the body is simply a form of energy or impersonal flow" (Stone 2008: 97).

interconnection” (2008: 98). In speaking of the legend of Indra and of the kośas, I would like to suggest that they reflect the major global cultural flows existent today. The effects of globalization on yoga are that it perpetually shapes the yoga practice and the ways in which yoga collectives join together and stay connected. In fact, for practitioners the mobility that surrounds the practice is the common ground they share and the means through which they unite.

The English-speaking yoga community in Montreal, which is truly international in origin, is a good example. 80% of the participants who took part in my research are not from the province of Quebec, Canada. They come from the United States, China, Latin America, Europe and other provinces of Canada. These yoga spaces in Montreal are the intersecting vectors Strauss writes about. They are where international citizens meet and where social and cultural boundaries dissipate. The sharing of a yoga practice brings people from different walks of life together and unites them for brief moments on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. The experiences sought in these spaces shape and form practitioners’ lives as well as relationships. As Strauss (2000) indicates, these spaces are intersecting vectors with directional forces.

In the next subsection, we will explore market-driven globalization within the consumerism of yoga.

Consumerism

In recent years yoga has become a commodity suitable for the masses. This became evident during my fieldwork as I came across a large variety of products associated with yoga including books (popular purchase), DVD’s, CD’s, props (blocks, straps, mats, blankets, cushions, bolsters), clothing (big seller), posters, cards, and statues of deities. There is also a substantial range of related books available, with topics that range from yoga as medicine (Science) to yoga

as a type of a fitness activity and part of one's health plan (take home manuals). With each yoga product line there are numerous purchase options for every commodity available in the yoga market.

In conducting my research I quickly became aware of the mass consumerism behind yoga and learned about the innumerable "yogic" commodities offered to the eager shopper. In her book No Logo, Naomi Klein critiques corporate globalization. She outlines the integrative strategies corporations implement in local spaces to sell products and make profit: "If consumers are like roaches, then marketers must forever be dreaming up new concoctions for industrial-strength Raid. And nineties marketers being on a more advanced rung of the sponsorship spiral, have dutifully come up with clever and intrusive new selling techniques to do just that" (Klein 2000, 9). Yoga products and services are sold by marketing pitches that promote the benefits and rewards of yoga practice such as a great body, relaxation, impeccable health and peace of mind. For example, a recent book on yoga found on bookshop shelves is entitled, "Slim, Calm, Sexy Yoga". The yoga industry's success is in all likelihood due at least in part to these kinds of marketing strategies. The benefits of yoga are heavily promoted making it a popular and sellable product.

John Philps leaves the beaten path with his documentary and book about the yoga industry in America. In his critique of the commercialization of yoga he displays the paradoxes within the Western yoga industry: "[Yoga is] to the workout junky, it's a "low impact" health regimen. To type-A stockbroker, it's all about stress relief and a shot at "centeredness". And to the spiritually inclined, yoga offers a path of small, slow steps toward enlightenment" (Philp 2009, 1). In this quote Philps shows how yoga is a commodity and demonstrates that it is sold as

a product suitable for all predicaments and every person. Furthermore, many different aspects of the yoga practice (ie; spirituality) are exploited in an effort at marketing it.

Thus products, including books, may be promoted on the basis of the spiritual and philosophical attributes of yoga, even as these attributes are being systematically stripped from the practice. Yoga products and ideas marketed in this fashion can in turn influence the type of training offered by studios and teachers. For example, yoga is widely practiced in Montreal in fitness and studio settings. The main focus in most of these classes is the performance and perfection of the physical practice (*āsana*) and attainment of the health benefits it promises. Lesson plans within these kinds of yoga classes are rarely based on the ethical and philosophical principles of yoga. The most information students receive about these fundamental yogic beliefs is a brief lecture or a moral objective usually given at the beginning of the session. Therefore, this leads to the question: “How are yoga classes and trainings promoted?”

Since there are already many articles and books that have been published about the presentation and marketing of yoga, I will focus this chapter on the integrative marketing strategies used within the commercialization and commodification of yoga. These include events, classes, workshops and teacher training programs. The term integrative is used to demonstrate the ways in which promotion and selling are merged into the social and cultural experiences of yoga. I’m also interested in briefly examining consumerism as a form of meaning-making and will argue that shopping for yoga goods and services involves more than merely obtaining items and generating profit.

Modern Yoga Conference:

Interested in learning about yoga workshops and vendors, I attended an annual yoga conference held in Toronto, Canada. Participants have the opportunity to participate in one or more of the

130 available yoga workshops, and to visit a show room consisting of 150 exhibitors publicizing yoga-related products and services. As I walk into the venue, a staff member directs me to a large table located in the main lounge. An older woman with reddish short hair wearing a white blouse and dress pants, gives me a yoga pass. Printed on the back of the badge is my name, ID number and the list of the workshops I signed up for. I am told to wear the pass around my neck at all times and I am handed a bar of dark chocolate, a map of the building, and a ticket for a goodie bag, which I have to pick up in the show room.

Upon entering the tradeshow, two young and friendly women in their twenties greet me. In the centre of the room, there is a large demonstration space where free yoga classes are being given. The aisles of exhibitors are laid out around this section. Additionally, masseuses and other types of body workers are offering treatments to paying clients in a designated area overflowing with thick red and blue mats. Three food vendors and the washrooms are located at the back of this enormous and packed room filled with numerous retailers and shoppers. People are swarming in and along the passages like bees gathering the last drops of spring's nectar. It is difficult for me to comfortably stand or walk without bumping into someone. I take a few deep breaths and eventually settle into the flurry of impulse buying, information overload, and the hustle and bustle of shopping.

Quite a few exhibitors are selling yoga clothing items ranging from esoteric/Indian apparel to more Western hippy looking articles (tie dyes and head bands). The latest style of yoga wear is also available, tight clothing designed for looking and being fit. Lastly, independent designers are offering unique and "cool" hand made yoga attire. Some exhibitors attempt selling useless-looking products, which I describe these goods as "cash grabs". The merchandiser is trying to make money off poorly manufactured articles that do not enhance the practitioner's

practice or understanding of yoga. These products include balance bracelets that promise physical flexibility by simply wearing a plastic band around your wrist while 'toe sox' are foot garments that have a rubber pattern glued onto the bottom of the fabric that is supposed to prevent practitioners from slipping off their mats. A contradiction in terms, considering yoga is meant to be practiced bare-foot. A wide-range of merchandise including, herbs, books, DVDS, water bottles, teas, tarot cards, jewellery, self-massage props, soul symbols (music instruments), special skin creams, vitamins, oils, low glycemic sugars are being sampled and offered up for sale. Most of these items promote good health and personal well-being.

I pass by a few educational displays informing attendees about topics such as quantum physics, environmental consciousness, healthy living and meditation. I stop at a small booth. It's relatively simple and there is little for sale besides a few books, cards, and bookmarks. These few items are placed on a tiny square desk with a white cloth. As I look at their pamphlet, the exhibitor proposes to give me a meditation demonstration for a donation. "I only have 25 cents on me," I say. "That's o.k." she responds, choosing to share her practice with me despite the fact that I have very little money to offer. We are slightly hidden from the crowd as we sit on the floor face to face in a corner next to the table. She begins by teaching me an "awareness consciousness" practice in which I listen to her instruction, I place my hand on my heart, close my eyes, and find my resting breath, exhale while saying, "saa rooo". I locate my resting breath again and inhale while saying "va gaum". She explains that these sounds came to her principal teacher when he was in a deep meditative state, and that they had no origin of meaning aside from stimulating the body's vibrations. This form of meditation is based on sound, sense, and breath.

Upon completing the meditation she asks, “How do you feel?” I look up at her, smile and respond, “I feel relaxed.” “How do you feel being at a big yoga tradeshow when most booths are selling merchandise while you are not?” I inquire. She replies, “even if we are a small light amongst many big flashy lights we are here to share our message.” In turn, I reply, “it seems that more and more people are attracted to the flashy lights.” “The individuals who visit our booth are the ones that our teachings are for. We are a non-profit and are looking to share our meditation practice with those who are interested and can benefit from it,” she explains. Before leaving her to continue my browsing, the exhibitor shows me the primary book written by her teacher and suggests I take a minute to read a few quotes. I follow her recommendation and continue on my way. This encounter struck me as different from the interactions I had with the other vendors. While walking, the noise and crowded room seemed almost non-existent. I felt very calm. The meditation encounter prompts me to remember that the lessons and practice of yoga are truly experienced in human relationships and are not solely based on money or material.

I continue to browse and discover truly creative products. I see a sukhāsana chair which is a seating device specifically designed for individuals who wish to sit in a cross-legged position. Then my heart jumps as I see an array of colourful knitted fabric lying across a long table. I quickly walk over to ask the retailer a few questions. I learn that Namati is a small local business founded by two sisters. They knit yoga bags specially made to hold yoga mats. Every color under the rainbow is available. I also come across ergonomically designed egg-shaped yoga props intended to support the body in physical postures. Unexpectedly, a woman with a big smile calls me over to pick up my yoga goodie bag. I am delighted. I gather my adult-version of a kinder egg surprise and go to the back of the room where there are no vendors. I sit on the

floor with my back leaning against the wall. With excitement, I look through all of my treats. I am thrilled and my smile grows bigger and bigger as I continue to open my gifts. I feel like a little girl opening presents on Christmas morning. I am given a Glaceau Smart Water bottle (vapour distilled water with minerals), a bag of Christie's Brown Rice Crisps, a sample of raw shelled hemp seeds, an Olba nose inhaler, pamphlets, vegetable and fruit juice recipes, a small book titled "The Perfection of Yoga", and a Sweat Equity magazine (Yoga, Fitness, Lifestyle). I drink some water and eat my chocolate before heading back into the shopping madness.

I continue to scan the room and can't help but feel puzzled and bewildered by some of the exhibitors here. I wonder why they are participating in this event. How does yoga relate to a dentistry practice? I decide to approach the dentist who is standing at her booth giving away pamphlets advertising her services (Mercury free dentistry, Digital radiography, Orthodontics) as well as her book titled Your Mouth: The Gateway to a Healthier You. She clues me in by telling me that yoga philosophy promotes the cleanliness of a healthy mouth and so she is at the conference for this reason.

The clientele attending the workshops at the conference is comprised mainly of middle-aged as well as younger women. However, the broader population visiting the tradeshow is more diverse in terms of age and gender. There are more men visiting the showroom than participating in the workshops. Many of the yoga training workshop participants are longstanding yoga students and teachers (a large proportion) while the conference also draws newcomers interested in learning about yoga. Accordingly some of the shoppers simply walked in off the street. Philp (2009) notes that a 2005 survey demonstrates that 72.3% of Canadian yoga practitioners are women and only 27.7% are men, 44.7% are between the ages of 18 to 34 years old and 41% are

35 to 54 years old. With the rise of globalisation, over the last 15 years, yoga has become a \$27 billion dollar international industry (Horton & Harvey 2012).

Participant Feedback on the Consumerism of Yoga:

Among the people who participated in my study, a few didn't feel that the commercialization of yoga posed a problem. In fact, they believe consumerism is embedded in Western culture. They think that a positive outcome of marketing yoga as a commodity is that it encourages more people to try and practice yoga. Others among my interlocutors felt differently. Paula, the yoga teacher who educates students about yoga's history, perceives the consumerism surrounding yoga as not fully informing the buyer about the complexity and depth of the practice. She feels that marketers cherry pick elements of yoga to sell it, thus unmooring the practice from its history and philosophical roots as well as failing to present yoga as a holistic system. Additionally, she believes yoga is being shaped by what she calls a "post-modern phenomenon" of educating individuals with sound bites of information, which consequently further enhances the fragmentation of yoga. Furthermore, the spiritual aspects of yoga are also commercialised, which Paula refers to as 'spiritual commodification' as did several other of my interlocutors.

Similar to Paula, Pina¹² questions the consumerism surrounding yoga. Pina is originally from Mexico, but has been living in Montreal for several years, She works as a research-assistant and has just recently started teaching yoga. Pina tries her best to keep her yoga practice free from commercial influences. She often wonders why practitioners buy into the marketing schemes:

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“The problem is that for me, yoga [...] well there is no way it can be represented in a product. It’s not because you are wearing Lululemon pants that you can actually do lotus. No matter what you can wear [...] I don’t think that it has anything to do with yoga in itself. That’s a social thing, it’s social and cultural and maybe human, but it’s not yoga.” While speaking about her experience with yoga, her eyes occasionally fill up with tears as she candidly expresses the importance of her practice and how it touches her heart. Pina states, “my yoga practice had always been given to me.” The idea of yoga being consumed as a product seems unbelievable to her: “It does kind of sound weird when people talk about yoga as something that you buy.” Her yoga experience continues to flourish because of the reciprocal human-relationships she has based on yoga. They consist of learning and teaching and do not involve the purchase of many items or services besides a mat. In addition, she thanks her principal teacher for always being critical of the consumerism within yoga. It helps her to focus on her personal experience of yoga and on the relationships she is developing in her yoga collective.

Flora¹³, another of the participants in my study, views the commodification of yoga from a different perspective. She is an urban yogini who I see riding her bike regularly across town. She enjoys simple pleasures like sipping a warm cup of almond milk with raw cacao. I recall an evening where she and I attended a birthday dinner at a snazzy restaurant in the old port. While savouring the taste of a fine white wine, she engaged in an animated conversation with a new acquaintance, making witty comments and laughing hysterically. Flora feels that the level of consumerism involved in yoga goes beyond the marketing strategies implemented by corporations. She believes it reveals a deeper societal need as, “people are silently asking for something to ground them.” Additionally, the commercialization of yoga contributes to the

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development of a false premise that most buyers take literally. Yoga is promoted as an answer to everything and as a practice that will cure all pains and diseases when it is not, nor can it be, suitable for every person. Flora argues that an individual's yoga practice needs to be customized according to the person's needs and body type rather than sold as a standardized practice for all.

For Joanna, the transnational yogini, these public representations of yoga prompt inner turmoil. Yoga these days is wearing a commercial disguise:

I do have a real problem with yoga in the consuming mentality that we have brought to it, and I do feel like a lot of these hot yogas, Pilates yoga, dance yoga, all of that stuff is just a new marketing technique. A lot of the time I feel like 'what's going on'? And I kind of feel like there is a lack of essence, and I don't think that there is anything wrong with what these [new styles of yoga] are, I just sometimes feel like they should be called what they are.

Additionally, Joanna feels an enormous amount of pressure to actively promote herself as a yoga teacher when all she really wants to do is to teach. "I just want to teach yoga, I don't want to be promoting myself, creating this identity of some sort of yoga teacher. But to avoid doing that, well I'm not really sure that's a productive choice for me, for my career," she questions. I ask her if developing her own business as a yoga teacher consists of branding herself by using marketing strategies and consumer tactics? She responds, "I do struggle with that and to this day I still don't have a website [...] at the end of the day I just like to teach and I hope my teaching speaks for itself and that maybe I will never be that teacher that travels and has hundreds of students in my class or across the world [...] but the part I have a really hard time with is that I do feel there are a lot of teachers out there that are travelling and teaching that are business people not teachers."

The consumerism of yoga extends beyond selling products, it also involves teacher, studio, and style trademarks. Yoga studios are becoming commercial spaces when more lucrative yoga goods such as teacher training programs become the core focus of the business. Teacher training programs offer a more focused learning experience of yoga than general classes and workshops

do while also providing students with teaching skills and a certificate to enter the job market. They are popular and bring in large amounts of revenue. However, according to Klein, “branding becomes troubling [...] when the balance tips dramatically in favor of the sponsoring brand, stripping the hosting culture of its inherent value and treating it as little more than a promotional tool” (2000: 39). This leads me to ask “How much branding and promotion is involved in yoga studio programs in Montreal?”

Views about teacher training programs among the yoga teachers who participated in my research varied. These views ranged from the view that they are useful for serious practitioners and yoga teachers who want to enhance their understanding, instruction-vocabulary and practice of āsana to a claim that they are primarily a money grab. Joanna, for example, thinks that if teacher training programs would be promoted as simple workshops rather than as accreditation programs, they would not be as sought after. That being said many of these buyers are not only interested in the process of learning yoga, but in what they will receive after the training such as a certificate, a title, and a vocation.

Classes, Workshops, Teacher Training Programs:

Classes, workshops and teacher training programs constitute the main sources of revenue for yoga studios. Successful studios have a large student body and offer yearly yoga training workshops. Without these annual sums of money, operating and managing a yoga studio might not be feasible. A teacher-training program usually costs between \$3,000-5,000 and on average recruits between 10 to 30 students per term. The popularity and success of a studio is based on providing practitioners with sessions founded on the most widely marketed values and goals such as āsana, health, and relaxation. Consequently, the subtle and less exercise oriented yoga lessons are not as well liked and are not “sellers”. For instance, teachers mentioned that there are

very few or no participants taking part in lessons designed around such practices as ethics, meditation and breathing exercises. In one of our interviews, April, the studio owner says “I can teach a class that’s sort of more subtle and then a class that’s slightly little sweaty and tough, and people are much more likely to like the sweaty class.”

Negotiating the level of consumerism in a studio’s culture can be challenging for its directors. The decision is often swayed by how much money is needed to make the business financially viable. April tries to counter this problem by teaching the depth of yoga in her classes, and by exposing her students to a range of experienced, well known, and well-respected teachers. Although she acknowledges that she may be training more teachers than the yoga job market demands, her involvement in a foundation that helps extend yoga into under-privileged communities provides an alternative set of opportunities for new instructors to teach. Moreover, studios frequently offer sliding scale fees and scholarships for students who cannot afford the classes, workshops or teacher training programs.

Despite the attempts to make yoga and its more subtle practices more available (ie; lower costs) yoga studios are employing integrative marketing strategies to promote their studios and keep their business alive. Sponsoring or putting together community events are advertising tactics utilized by companies and local yoga studios to attract paying clients. These community events seem to serve a dual purpose, which may be contradictory. They are seeking to make a contribution to the communities in which they reside while at the same time they are involved in the type of marketing that expands a company’s or studio’s profile (brand) (Klein 2000).

Integrative Marketing Strategies:

The marketing strategies to sell yoga are devised along the lines of what Klein calls “commercial co-optation of identity politics”. Companies adopt approaches such as antiracist campaigns and

feminist-themed ads adapted to current social and cultural concerns and values as a means of marketing their products (Klein 2000: 360-61). Mary¹⁴, a yoga teacher from the Prairies living in Montreal, started her yoga career by teaching at a local studio and becoming a LaLaLime¹⁵ Ambassador. Ambassadors are yoga teachers that accept to teach free yoga classes at a retail store in exchange for clothes and an opportunity to market themselves on the company's website and shop. She describes her experience as an ambassador as mixed and surprising:

I really felt a strong sense of community at Lalalime that I didn't have [at the previous studio I taught at [...]] I kind of had mixed feelings about Lalalime; I rarely bought their clothes because it was so expensive so I had some tension going into it, but I also knew a lot of lovely individuals who had been with that big company. But then it had the shadow corporate thing over top and there were some things I experienced while I was there that when my year term was up I was really happy [...]] I didn't realize the impact of being an ambassador would have on my students. I kind of naively didn't realize that when I started being associated with Lalalime and wearing more of their clothes because they were given to me that my students would then go out and buy them!

There were good reasons why Mary participated in the ambassador program. For example, she received free clothes, saved money and reduced her time doing laundry. Moreover, a part of her felt she was giving back to the community by teaching free yoga classes. Mary was aware that many university students attended sponsored yoga classes at LaLalime and so it fit her belief to regularly support pay as you go yoga programs. Despite her good intentions and the benefits that came with being an Ambassador Mary didn't agree or anticipate the sweeping influence these marketing strategies had on her students.

¹⁴ In order to protect research participants and companies' identities and in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of research participants and companies.

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Laura¹⁶, a yoga teacher who took part in my fieldwork, worked as a vendor for a yoga retailer several times and in different shops across Canada. She depicted her experience working with colleagues as fun, energetic and community-oriented. The popularity of the brand increased. It became fashionable and the standard apparel for many yoga practitioners. Laura's last contract stirred up confusion and conflicting emotion: "I found it frustrating to be in an environment where we are talking about health and participating in community when there are bags of Dorritos and candy canes in the back for staff to snack on, and everybody is on their blackberrys texting about whoever wore what." Additionally, Laura was shocked to realise that store managers sought out new venues to exploit as a means of marketing the clothes: "if you want celebrities you to go the MAA [elite gym located down town Montreal...] if you want the clothes to be seen that is where you go." She was under the impression she worked for a company that was more concerned with the well-being of individuals and being part of a local community. She didn't realise that their primary goal is to sell clothes and that taking part in yoga activities and collectives is their effective and profitable marketing strategy. As a matter of fact, staff members taking yoga classes are encouraged to give coupons to yoga students who they notice are not wearing the company's attire.

I, as both a researcher and yoga practitioner, also have mixed feelings towards the discreet marketing strategies utilised by yoga retailers. Here is an example that illustrates my confusion about yoga branding.

As I walked along the aisles at the yoga tradeshow in Toronto, a woman dressed in a white cotton robe waved at me and made a hand gesture to walk over to her. She smiled and cheerfully asked if I was interested in taking break from my yoga shopping. She suggested I take

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my clothes off and hang out in the nude lounge. She emphasized that it was an opportunity for me to really let loose and relax. I quickly declined and turned around. She placed her hand on my shoulder and convinced me to take a look before deciding. “Okay, I’ll take a look, but I’m not sure I’ll do it,” I replied. I hesitantly walked into the lounge. I felt nervous and prepared myself to run out. As I entered the lobby I saw people sitting on the couches, eating snacks and talking in pairs of two or groups of three/four. To my surprise, no one was naked! It was an April Fool’s prank put together by the staff who worked for the retailer sponsoring the lounge. I was fooled. I chuckled as I gladly sat on the chesterfield and helped myself to a few treats.

The decor in this space was simple but modern: white sofas, navy blue carpets, standing lamps, fake plants, bookshelves and a huge screen projector featuring a movie. It was an ideal hang out spot for trade show visitors. There were large laminated photos of yoga teachers hanging on the walls. Staff members gave visitors hand outs about goal planning exercises (personal and work). A hostess, wearing black tights and an indigo top made by the retailer, sat beside me and we chatted. She told me she loved working for this retailer because she agreed with their philosophy and benefited from the employee workshops and activities. Actually, she was thinking of becoming a yoga teacher and was in the midst of choosing a teacher training program. “Which workshops have you attended?” she asked. I named a few and reverted the question back to her. She participated in a Vinyasa flow session taught by a famous travelling teacher who is the Shakira¹⁷ of the yoga world, a real yoga rockstar. The conversation changed gears as we began talking about more personal matters such as our experiences living in our hometowns and family. I enjoyed hanging out in the sponsored lounge and speaking with the hostess yet at the same time I questioned the intention of the retailer. Was this encounter really just intended to provide me (or another trade show visitor) with an opportunity to take a break

¹⁷ Shakira is a famous Colombian singer and songwriter.

from shopping or was it designed to win me over or keep me faithful to a particular brand of yoga clothing?

Here is another example of a yoga retailer employing integrative marketing strategies to sell goods. In July 2012, a Montreal yoga retail company put on a free yoga event that occurred outdoors in a touristic site and attracted hundreds of people. All the participants wore white garments. Prior to the event, videos and articles appeared online and in newspapers. This montage included a commercial consisting of images of attendees practicing yoga. While dance music played in the background, the spokesperson (a popular local yoga teacher) spoke about the importance and meaning of the event. As she shared her thoughts, staff members behind her happily set up the merchandise shop with clothes and accessories. This one-day yoga event symbolized union and peace as it also evasively promoted a particular brand of merchandise.

Since the commercialization of yoga is prominent and powerful, a number of yoga teachers in Montreal employ different strategies to reduce the influence of consumerism upon their students. They may discuss the commercialization and appropriation of yoga in class or workshops. Tania¹⁸, for example, who is a yoga teacher and blogger pointed out in one of our conversations that she doesn't look like your stereotypical yoga teacher (tall, slender and always in tights). She is curvy and happily wears her 1950's haircut and dark frame glasses. Tania strives to make yoga more local and less global by taking part in organizing an annual Montreal festival that brings together regional yoga teachers and yoga businesses. The goal of this festival is to bring different members of the yoga community together through grass roots community organizing and event planning. Surprisingly, she mentioned that even at this community event, regional vendors sold a large amount of products, and participants enthusiastically shopped. The

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consumption of yoga goods is as much in demand at a small-scale local yoga festival as it is at a large yoga tradeshow.

Tania also writes daily on her yoga blog. Her goal is to encourage readers to reflect on and assess the commodification of yoga. She also pokes fun at the celebrity culture around it: “For me part of my blog is not necessarily to negotiate [consumerism] but is actually to call it out [...] I think it’s part of the community of people online who are part of it. We are kind of like watch dogs seeing how it’s being used, pointing it out and calling it out. And sometimes it means confronting teachers”. In 2009, on her blog Tania confronted a celebrity yoga teacher who became a spokesperson for a large multi-million dollar sports company. The campaign promoted a clothing brand by offering yoga classes named after the company’s trademark. It abruptly came to an end with Tania’s online confrontation and the discussions that followed. Moreover, Tania tries to give a voice to yoga projects that do not get noticed in mainstream media by writing about them on her blog. This is the manner in which Tania, a yoga teacher, blogger and practitioner strives to lessen the impact of integrative marketing strategies employed to sell yoga.

Conclusion - Consumerism and Yoga:

The billion-dollar yoga industry is comprised of a multitude of businesses selling a large variety of merchandise (creative to practical). The global companies in this industry are those deploying integrative marketing strategies to expand their brand. Additionally, these branding approaches are being implemented on a smaller scale and local level in Montreal, in the form of teacher and studio trademarks, for example. As such, teachers and studio owners are confronted with the pressure to meet consumer needs and run a financially viable business. Lastly, yoga practitioners have no choice but to grapple and negotiate the consumerism surrounding yoga. Some simply accept that this kind of consumerism is an unavoidable feature of the larger environment in

which they are practising while others make the effort to develop a critical self awareness when viewing a yoga ad, purchasing a product, or attending class.

While yoga is clearly shaped by a measure of consumerism, this is not always a mindless form of consumption. It is important to keep in mind that there may be meaningful reasons, values and morals behind the buying habits of consumers and the actions of businesses. Individuals may also be investing in yoga in hopes of achieving non-material and non-profit objectives. For example, I remember the day I decided to invest in a quality yoga mat. I accounted for the expensive purchase by reflecting and assessing my level of dedication, yoga practice and yoga status. Since I had been practicing yoga for over 5 (five) years with the same yoga mat, was heavily involved in my yoga collective and am a yoga teacher I felt the buy was well deserved and earned. The investment was not only a reward but it also represented the yoga journey I had traveled, and it symbolised my renewed commitment to yoga. For example, many yoga teachers who spend money to travel to India annually are investing in a spiritual practice rather than in a travel experience or vacation. In the act of consuming there is love and devotion, an idea expressed by Daniel Miller (1998) in his studies of materialism and the relationships people develop to objects and people. Miller believes that material culture provides a social space for individuals to discover, test, and take on a variety of identities. I have observed individuals within my fieldwork act in accordance with Miller's theory of shopping. In both the yoga tradeshow and local Montreal yoga festival people are buying into yoga for different and more personal reasons.

Health & Fitness

Health ideologies are undeniably incorporated into several forms of yoga, from forms of marketing as previously illustrated with the conference vendors to practitioners taking up yoga for fitness purposes and health benefits.

Several research participants mentioned that their yoga practice began with an interest in finding an exercise regimen and as a result they experienced a sense of well-being and improved health such as, gaining strength, flexibility, and feeling less stressed. Additionally, some practitioners claim to have healed old injuries. Upon conducting my research I noticed the influential power of healthism on yoga, which is to advocate individual responsibility to achieve health, and the moral obligation to live and have a healthy lifestyle. In her research on emotional socialization and management, De Courville Nicol outlines the ways in which individuals self-regulate within the social structures that influence their capacities and levels of autonomy: “Healthism rests upon and promotes one of the most important moral norms of contemporary era - the expectation that one can and should affect the outcome of one’s life course as a free individual,” (De Courville Nicol 2011: 233). The history of the yoga āsana demonstrates that there is a longstanding marriage between yoga and healthism, and that political and national factors play a significant role in bringing them together (Singleton 2010).

As mentioned some research participants reported that they practice yoga to achieve and maintain a level of fitness whereas others felt that yoga is not a fitness activity. Tara, the experienced yoga teacher who travels the world, believes that when “people [are] wanting to use their yoga to get their workout and to get their fitness fix, [it] is in many ways a misapplication of the practice [...] it’s a set up because it is not what it was meant to be. So people get disappointed when they don’t get a physical workout, missing the more subtle aspect of the practice [...] there are other ways you can get your fitness”. Joanna, who referred to her

transnational yoga experience as being in a slow cooker, also felt that practicing yoga - especially mysore ashtanga yoga classes - in order to get fit is a bad choice: “Go to cross fit, go to the gym because there are far more effective ways to get fit. It’s just not an effective way for fitness. It’s a lot of time, you are spending two hours of your day doing this, you could do a fitness practice in a much shorter length of time”. The health and fitness model of North America has evidently influenced the ways in which yoga is presented and the possible reasons why some individuals take up yoga.

The marketing involved in promoting yoga as a fitness and health option can be problematic. It introduces commercialism into the yoga practice, promotes healthism and may fail to present practitioners with the full spectrum of yoga. For example, magazines use health ideologies to advertise and sell yoga and many ads are geared towards fitness goals and being in shape. We find numerous articles and publicity in magazines that associate yoga with the promise of health. Most of the articles provide practitioners with wellness tips and regimens they can easily learn and apply in their daily lives. In addition, corporations are producing publicities of yoga and fitness to sell their products.

Carlie Charlene Stokes conducted her M.A. research on the healthism ideologies used to sell athletic yoga apparel. She uncovers the entanglement between Lululemon, a multi-billion dollar corporation, and the health and fitness industry (Stokes 2008). She shows how this yoga retailer incorporates health ideologies in their marketing schemes to promote lifestyle brands. Layering the health and fitness model onto yoga to sell products and services (commercial/consumer level) is one way in which this combination has been utilized. The promotion of health and fitness through the practice of yoga has been drawn upon for different purposes.

Joseph S. Alter, whose research has focused on nationalism, health and the body in South Asia, writes about yoga in modern India and explores the relationship between yoga, colonialism and postcolonial transnationalism. He notes that yoga has been “a medium through which the people of India [were] reimagining the relationship between health, modernity, and the body.” When Hindu nationalism re-emerged in the 1980s, yoga was a very strong and influential cultural force (Alter 2004). Additionally, Strauss’s research discusses the implications these ideologies have had for the development of yoga. The “values of health and freedom have shifted in meaning over time, allowing them to popularize” yoga (Strauss 1992: 32). National objectives that attained significance at various times in India such as, having a good international reputation, and finding means of empowering citizens and the country as a whole were pursued through the trade of commodities, one of them being yoga (Strauss 1992).

Singleton’s (2010) review of the history of physical culture in Britain and Europe from the 19th century onwards points to the emphasis placed on fitness and how it was utilized to promote the attainment of a healthy and strong body: “The emphasis on building a beautiful physique through yogic physical culture and, vitally, the spectacle of that physique [...] as well as the pronounced display culture in the wider, international fitness market” (127). Fitness and health was popularized through the spread of organizations like the Salvation Army and YMCA (Singleton 2010). As a result, the movement towards fitness and health that incorporated yoga was led by organized structures such as clubs and gyms. These examples mentioned above illustrate some reasons that extend beyond consumerism and that may have been fueling the promotion of physical fitness activities such as yoga.

The 20th century fitness culture, in particular gym culture, has shaped how yoga is offered and taught to the public. Yoga classes are offered at most, if not all, gyms and is amongst

all of the fitness classes offered (including spinning and aerobics) the most popular and well attended activity. Yoga lessons at gyms and studios are between 45 minutes to an hour and a half, which is similar to providing individuals with a 45 minute aerobic class or an hour and half weight and cardio program at the gym. In addition, the most popular yoga sessions are those perceived to be physically challenging where students work hard and draw sweat. A good workout is often measured by physical symptoms of exertion such as sore muscles and losing weight.

A few teachers felt that offering yoga at gyms and presenting it through a fitness model removed some of yoga's "traditional" and spiritual elements. Many teachers refrain from chanting when teaching in gyms because many students are attending class for fitness purposes and are not interested or turned off by the more subtle practices. Additionally, the student body at the gym is unpredictable. The number of students and previous yoga experience of the group consistently changes. It is different from yoga studios who usually have a core group who attend class regularly. As a result, many yoga instructors tend to teach a different kind of lesson structured to appeal to a clientele who view yoga as a form of fitness. Such a lesson would include a primary focus on the physical aspects of the practice and giving a more general and basic class in order to appease the changing body of students. Both Mary (Lalalime ambassador) and Joanna mentioned they had students at the gym that asked if they could chant at the end of class. They were pleasantly surprised since most students attending a yoga class at the gym discard yoga practices like chanting.

In her book Fitness Culture Roberta Sassatelli, a sociologist researching consumer culture, the sociology of the body, and cultural theory, investigates the cultural relevance of gyms and explores how the commercialization of the body, gender identities and consumerism are implicated. In the course of my fieldwork it became evident that the fitness "mentality" and

consumer gaze present in gym environments is also present in yoga spaces: “The lithe and energetic body, tight and slim, with its firm and toned-up boundaries is a powerful image of contemporary culture, especially as articulated in advertising and consumer culture. Not only has the toned body become a commercial icon, but also the gym has become highly visible as the site where this body is produced” (Sassatelli 1999: 227). This is also the case with yoga sites.

Experienced yoga teachers note the misuse of yoga when employed as a fitness activity or regime, and witness its misuse in yoga classes at gyms, and local yoga studios. Promoting and selling yoga through health ideologies implants the same bodily and health goals in yoga spaces as previously established in gyms. Additionally, medical and scientific influences are also infused into yoga, for instance, medical and scientific studies demonstrating the health benefits of yoga, the training in anatomy instructors receive, the physical fitness recommendations made by doctors to patients, and the health programs offered in hospitals.

Another similarity between practicing yoga and working out at the gym, regardless of consumerism and healthism, is that they are meaning-making activities through which identities are created and de-constructed, and where time is invested in personal development. For example, Nigel Rapport’s research provides an evocative example of the way in which bodybuilding is more than a fitness activity for ‘Bob the Hospital Bodybuilder’. Rapport demonstrates how Bob’s bodybuilding activity plays into his role as a hospital porter and how he utilizes bodybuilding as a means to construct his identity and manage his work and personal environments. In doing so, Rapport explores and shows the relationship between bodybuilding, working as a porter, personal relationships and Bob’s understanding of the self: “It is the project of his personal development and investment - a kind of ‘capital’ to build up and spending - the means and also the manifestation of his being and becoming” (Rapport 2007: 24). In the next

two chapters I will examine in greater detail the meanings and identities associated with yoga. As demonstrated, the ideas and social structures within the health and fitness industry have seeped into yoga spaces and shaped the way yoga is presented and sold in Montreal. Nonetheless, this does not exclude the possibility that yoga can still be practiced for other reasons such as a search for spiritual expression.

Self-Help Culture

By means of that self-fashioning, it is claimed, model citizens can be produced. But it also is arguable that, by means of that self-fashioning, citizenship itself disappears. The public sphere and the public responsibility to which citizenship refers, the interidentified subjectivities to which citizenship has obligations, and on which it depends, are negated by a life of self-help (Rimke 2000: 73).

North America's self-help culture plays an influential role in yoga. In her book Self-Help, Inc. Micki McGee looks at the market and industries of self-improvement and reveals its impact on society and individuals. The self-help culture consists of a discourse mandating continuous self-improvement, intended to further the mastery of self-responsibility and self-control. As in yoga and health, self-help is sold through products and services such as, books, audio, videos, live seminars, and personal coaching (McGee 2005). The self-help industry generates \$2.48-billion-a-year (Ibid), it is thus as profitable in its own right as either the yoga or health and fitness industry. I will briefly show how yoga is being utilized for self-help purposes.

According to De Courville Nicol industries and government bodies create and market social and emotional norms that in affect influence individuals' emotional experiences and lifestyle choices. For example, the emotional norm pair of fear/desire produce emotional experiences associated with people's beliefs in either overcoming a danger and implementing actions to achieve security or in moving away from suffering and seeking pleasure (De Courville

Nicol 2011: 3-7). De Courville Nicol (2011) believes that social/emotional norms such as these are campaigns designed to promote and emotionally socialize individuals. Evidently, the yoga industry also generates its own social and emotional norms as well as a set of specific yogic actions. For example, there are negative affiliations attached to old age and illness in Western culture. In many cases, yoga is viewed as a means of power for individuals to combat aging and poor health. Yoga helps them acquire the promise of well-being that is linked with the yoga practice. As a result it may make practitioners feel or believe they are overcoming a specific fear. In this example it would be the fear of getting old and death. While observing the ways in which social and emotional norms play out in yoga I wonder and ask “What would be the objective in marketing social and emotional norms?”

Heidi Marie Rimke suggests that self-help culture and popular psychology are contemporary forms of governance in which citizens are kept preoccupied with the self:

Self-help is an activity presumed to be voluntary and individualistic. Based upon notions such as choice, autonomy and freedom, self-help relies upon the principle of individuality and entails self-modification and ‘improvement’. These preoccupations with self-liberation and self-enlightenment are the social and political results of a hyper-individuality promoted by an extensive essentialist psychologization of the self in everyday life. Rather than viewing individuals and individualism as the historical product of intersecting social processes and cultural discourses, proponents of the principle of individuality, which is crucial in self-help rhetoric, assume the social world to be the sum aggregation of atomized, autonomous and self-governing individual persons (2000: 62).

Some of the main principles learned in yoga match the philosophy of self-control and self-mastery within the self-help literature. For instance, yoga teaches practitioners to know themselves by developing self-awareness and acquiring self-monitoring skills by virtue of practicing āsana, meditation and prānāyāma (breathing techniques). It supports individuals in developing various forms of personal strength such as learning to live with difficult emotions, working through injuries in practice, and taking responsibility for one’s well-being. Students are

frequently told they can transfer their yoga skills into their daily lives. Furthermore, they are strongly encouraged to be self-disciplined and committed to their yoga practice. The beliefs, skills and social norms of yoga have seemed to serve practitioners well in phases of personal change.

Several research participants discovered yoga while experiencing difficulties in their personal life. Yoga seems to recurrently fulfill a need for emotional support and helps participants through periods of personal transition and development. Practitioners utilize yoga as a tool to develop skills of self-care. The notion of self-discovery (know thyself), self-confidence and self-sufficiency circulating in today's popular psychology is being explored within the framework of yoga, despite the possibility that yoga is not specifically designed for such purposes. The range of circumstances in which yoga serves as a form of self help can vary from helping individuals cope with an eating disorder, an addiction, a mental illness, or trauma to aiding them in their recovery from an accident, injury, illness or surgery. Additionally, yoga is a resource that supports practitioners in subtle ways: the āsana or meditation practice can help students attain an internal calmness and build a level of self-confidence, which permits them to manage emotional stress and relationship difficulties better.

Willow¹⁹, a research participant who moved to Montreal from California, began yoga when she turned forty. Her age is what drove her to begin practicing yoga. She wanted a exercise regimen that kept her fit and youthful. Nevertheless, whenever she spoke of yoga she consistently mentioned the ways in which her practice brought her back to her authentic self:

[...] for the last couple of years I've been using my practice to be a little more mindful, focused about getting back to art work. I used to be an Art Director [...] and I was also doing some of my own art work [...] when I moved here everything

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changed in my life so now it's about getting back to finding this space in my interior and my exterior life to get back to doing that and I find that yoga is my path to get there.

For Danaka²⁰, an interlocutor, yoga spaces are pivotal in providing her psychological support:

I think it's been a psychological support and in a sense the space. I'm very bad at practising on my own because I don't really have that focus, but the spaces that are offered [...] in a sense offer a retreat for me [...] I remember one day I was driving to somebody's class and I heard a song on the radio. When I went to class I was in tears so I went to the [empty] studio next door and just let it go [...] A place where you can go, a space of support, a space of maybe security too or feeling at ease and it's also a space that you can [really] let go.

Danaka is a pilates teacher who practices yoga regularly. She describes herself as anxious and feels she is in need of guided meditation and mindful body movement. She feels yoga provides her with the space and tools to do just that. Both Willow and Danaka practice yoga as a means of taking care of themselves. Pina, the yoga teacher originally from Mexico, feels similarly and explained:

Well I felt completely safe and I think about it now and it was something that I was really needing in my life at that time. I felt what was happening in other aspects of my life, I was feeling absolutely vulnerable in every single thing that I was doing, so this was the only place where I felt that someone was taking care of me and I let go.

These examples derived from my research demonstrate how the skills developed in yoga might be interpreted and understood through self-help concepts as the practice is being employed to achieve goals of well being, be it emotional, mental, physical or spiritual. They correspond with the personal development aims featuring in certain variants of popular psychology.

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Tara contests this application and understanding of yoga and believes that despite the psychological benefits resulting from yoga practice, the objective and aim is spiritual not therapeutic. Unlike the claims of Willow and Danaka (research participants) Tara argues against utilizing and putting yoga in a psychological framework:

[...] yoga was never, it didn't train you, it didn't work the body and the mind psychologically but it worked it deeply as a spiritual practice with the idea that those areas would take care of themselves. So they didn't deny that there were psychological or psychotherapeutic benefits. Those weren't even mentioned [...] but the idea was that a full yoga practice and a balanced practice would bring all the other aspects of someone's life in balance.

As some yoga practitioners, such as Tara, disagree with the use of yoga for self-improvement objectives others are implicated in yoga for precisely this reason. When that is the case, self-help culture shapes an individual's comprehension, experience and utilization of yoga.

A few of my research participants spoke of yoga as a "modern day psychology" and believed it to be a cheaper alternative to seeking therapy. I on the other hand, suggest yoga is part of the self-help culture and it supplements the ideas of popular psychology. For example, there are more and more psychologists who incorporate yoga in their repertoire of helping tools and suggest yoga to clients. Furthermore, there are several hospital programs that include yoga as part of their therapeutic services such as the Hope and Cope Centre, which is a psychosocial support organization affiliated with the Jewish General Hospital. Yoga is included among the activities they offer to cancer survivors.

Nevertheless, despite the ways in which yoga supplements North American self-help culture it also differs from it. Yoga is an introspective practice that can be considered an alternative therapy. It is specifically different in terms of philosophical structure and in the

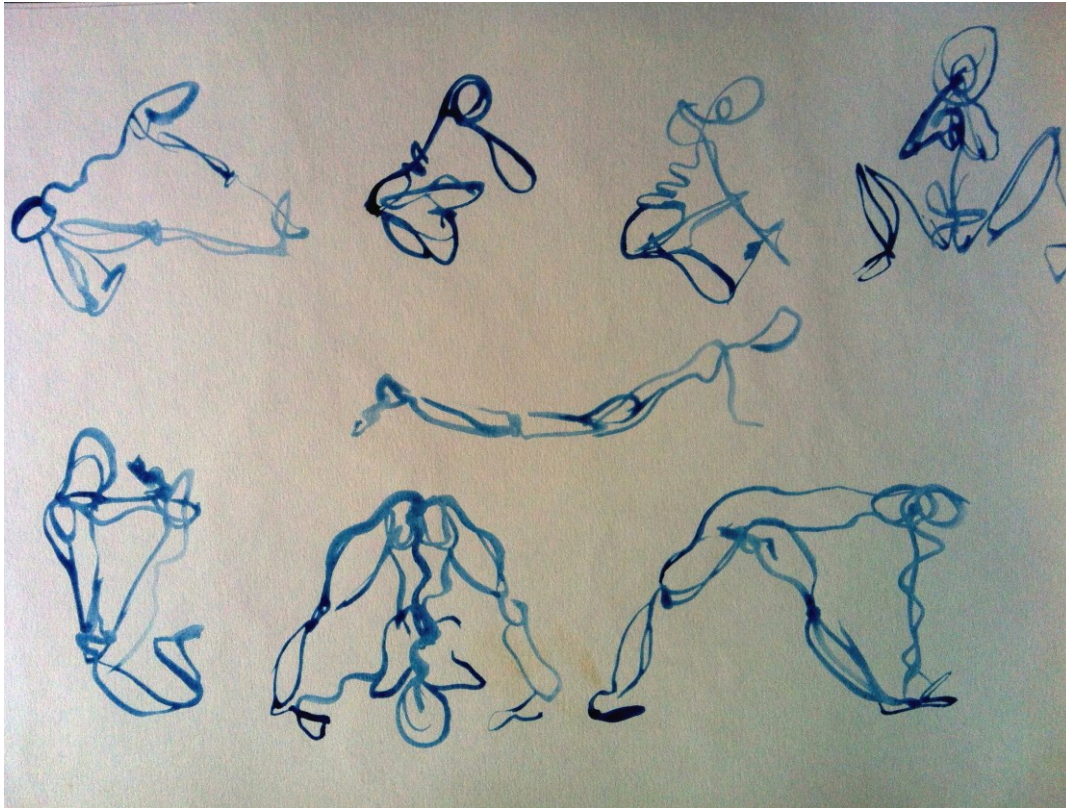
means of power offered and practiced to develop the self. April, the studio owner, describes the life-changing yogic ability practitioners are harnessing:

I think at the root of it yoga is calming and relaxing and whatever that does to us neurologically, it helps us to see things in a bit more of a wider perspective and in a relaxed state of mind, and its not to say that we don't become overly emotional or that we don't have hardships. That's still human nature, but I think yoga helps us to be with those things as we go through them. Truly, yoga teaches us a lot about slowing down time and developing patience to be with your life as it is unfolding.

Conclusion-Positioning Contemporary Yoga

Positioning contemporary yoga in these four frameworks uncovers the social and cultural processes that impact and shape yoga in Montreal. This process demonstrates the overlays yoga practitioners experience and live as it also exemplifies the social norms they negotiate and critically assess. With the increase of global cultural flows, yoga is both transnational and a multi-billion dollar industry. In spite of the high-level of yoga consumerism and marketing practitioners are discovering creative and novel means to relate with others and identify with yoga. Furthermore, even within such frameworks spirituality is sought and meaning is derived in practice and with others.

In the next chapter I will discuss the relationship between spirituality and mobility and in Chapter 5 I will illustrate what designates yoga as a meaning making activity.



Chapter 4: The Mobility of Yoga

(Artist: Ondine Guralnick)

“Travel that has been initiated to meet particular resources and aims can be transformed in the course of journey into other pursuits, in the process sometimes radically shifting the terms of social engagement” (Amit 2007: 12). In her consideration of transnational mobility Vered Amit describes various types of spatial mobility (ie; immigration, tourism, work-travel) that exist today and points to the differing categories of people involved. In doing so, Amit demonstrates the varying intentions as well as experiences individuals encounter through travel. Like Amit, I realized that there are a number of mobilities in yoga and that practitioners’ objectives may differ. Additionally practitioners also come across new and unexpected experiences in their yoga

journey. In conducting research on mobility in yoga I discovered four principal forms of mobility: spatial, bodily, cognitive and conceptual mobility.

Two types of spatial mobility were investigated, practitioners' daily and local commuting routes as well as their yoga travels abroad. I will briefly describe the types of local spatial mobility in Montreal and look at transnational yoga trips as contemporary forms of pilgrimage. In addition, I propose that in yoga there are external (traveling & bodily) and internal quests (spiritual & cognitive) on which practitioners embark. Therefore, I will examine the sensorial experiences and acquired knowledge that stem from the physical movements practiced in yoga (āsanas), which I have titled "bodily mobility". In exploring bodily mobility I became aware of the equally influential relationship between the body and the mind and noted the other forms of mobility involved, which are cognitive and conceptual mobility. There is a common thread that spreads across and unites these different versions and strands of movement. Within the mobilities of yoga, practitioners are uncovering new notions of belonging and spirituality. What makes the yoga voyage spiritual is the unforeseen experiences of personal transformation undergone by these travelers.

Spatial Mobility

Montreal yoga students frequently travel across the city to attend a yoga class, as do yoga teachers who in giving lessons on a daily basis in different locations such as studios, gyms, schools and corporate offices regularly move from place to place through a variety of modes of public transit. The routes teachers and students travel vary. Some practitioners attend classes primarily at one studio or exclusively with one teacher while others prefer studio hopping and training with multiple teachers. The level of spatial mobility is determined by a number of

factors; residential location, means of transport, style and level of practice, studio and teacher. For example, Jasmine²¹ who is a yoga teacher and artist, teaches yoga in differing locations near her primary residence. She trains habitually with two principal teachers, and from time to time she tries new classes with different yoga instructors. Moreover, the studio she attends repeatedly is conveniently located near her house.

As there are many local yoga teachers constantly moving from one location to the next in the city there are also visiting teachers and practitioners regularly making journeys to Montreal. Local yoga studios frequently invite renowned teachers from foreign countries to teach workshops. This often generates more travel within and beyond the Montreal area. Thus students living outside of Montreal, for example Granby, take trips to the city to participate in yoga training workshops given by exceptional teachers. A few yoga programs and specialized seminars also stimulate movement across provinces. For instance, a few students I met during my fieldwork drove to Quebec from Nova Scotia to take part in a three-day workshop with an expert teacher (Summer 2012). All and all Montreal is a hub for yoga travelers. Practitioners are seeking yoga within the city and also abroad.

Many yoga students and teachers voyage to other countries (i.e. India, United States, New Zealand) for yoga training and retreats. The length of time for these types of voyages differs; it may be months, weeks or just a weekend. I will suggest that these yoga trips abroad are contemporary pilgrimages, and I will also attempt to show how they allow for the expression of spiritual meanings.

Pilgrimage:

²¹ In order to protect research participants and companies' identities and in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of research participants and companies.

Simon Coleman work has focused on the spatial mobility, spiritual experience and symbolism within religious pilgrimages. His research has a particular focus on the pilgrimage site of Walsingham (UK), which is a sacred site visited regularly and annually by pilgrims. Coleman (2000) maps out the cultural and social rituals of the pilgrimage and identifies the feeling of belonging and personal meaning it produces in visitors. A site is considered sacred when it holds special significance for each of the hundreds of pilgrims embarking on what Coleman calls a spiritual voyage (2000: 153). In fact, Coleman applies James Clifford's notion of 'dwelling-in-travel'. He explains that the voyage (spatial mobility) and repeated rituals (a routine set of practices) give pilgrims a sense of being "home" (2000: 154). I propose that the mobility, routine and set of practices in yoga trips are ritualistic and also represent a 'dwelling-in-travel' for many practitioners.

Additionally, Victor Turner argued that the importance of pilgrimages is the opportunity it grants to travel away from daily practices and locales. Moreover, he points to the significance of the liminoid space, which is when "the state of the ritual subject (the passenger or liminar) becomes ambiguous, he passes through a realm or dimension that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state, he is betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification" (Turner 1978: 2). As I was conducting my fieldwork the yoga trips described to me resonated with Turner's theory of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon. There seems to be a transformative feature in the pilgrim's experience of traveling for yoga and practicing in a space, which may be considered sacred and is away from one's primary residence.

In Turner's theory of liminality (Turner and Turner 1978) he discusses the stages of ritual and describes the middle phase of the ritual as liminal. This is a point in time where the practitioner no longer holds the same status held before beginning the ritual process. Nor does

the practitioner yet possess the new position of someone who has been through and transformed by the ritual. If we apply this to yoga this stage is where the person is in a threshold between a previous identity and a new one established by the rituals experienced within the mobilities of yoga. It seems that the participants within my research who declared being changed by their yoga journey are those that moved from the spatial mobility phase all the way through to the conceptual mobility phase. In these instances yoga became less and less about health and fitness and more and more about an opening into the heart and meaning of their yoga practice. Spiritual expression and transformation is experienced in the act of embarking on a journey for yoga.

Strauss supports the idea of voyages made within yoga as special forms of travel (as pilgrimages). She witnessed and experienced it while she conducted research on yoga in Rishikesh, an area well-known for being a major Hindu pilgrimage site and a site of great spiritual power (Strauss 2000 & 1992). This city in northern India has for the last few decades attracted hundreds of Western yoga practitioners and continues to do so today. Following on Strauss' account of the ways in which ideas and practices of yoga are transformed when they cross cultural boundaries, I provide examples of how people are changed by their experiences of yoga abroad.

Yogic Pilgrimages:

Jasmine goes on an annual trip every summer to a yoga studio in New York State. She usually attends two yoga classes a day and a few workshops during her one-week stay. When interviewed, she expressed excitement about her once-a-year yoga voyage where she learns new ways of moving and positioning her body in āsana (physical postures) and acquires knowledge in verbal instruction and teaching methods. Jasmine's yoga retreat is of importance because it not only nourishes her with information, and permits her to take more time to fully explore her

personal practice and understanding of yoga, but because it, as Jasmine said “really connects me with my heart. So when I leave I am not only renewed but feel I have reached deeper into my truth. Who I really am, more confident and passionate about my path”.

When Sandra, the yoga student who tries hard to find a work-life balance, visited a friend for a weekend in the United States, she decided to go to a candle lit Sunday evening yoga class at a well-known studio. Most of the practitioners in her class were visiting students from other countries. Sandra described feeling more open and receptive to the energy in the room and to the teacher’s instructions. In fact, she said that she had never felt or had such an experience before:

These people are in transit, tourists, young people away for a weekend. All of these strangers come here, to this studio, to this class to spend a moment together. We are a large group, at least 65 people. It’s hot and the only light available are those from the candles. I secretly cry through out the lesson. I feel the energy of all these different people in the room and my eyes well up.

Sandra believes that being away from her hometown, from her usual surroundings, daily stresses and her regular yoga routine enables her to enter into her practice at a much more profound level. When she practices at her main studio in Montreal, it is mostly about being in a space that allows her to quiet down, decompress and connect with her body. Her local yoga experience and practice objectives differ from what she experiences on her yoga encounters abroad.

Christopher Key Chapple notes that most regular practitioners practice yoga to reduce their levels of stress and get back into their bodies: “Yoga provides a way for the modern person, unwilling to commit to a fixed ideology, yet in need of solace and meaning in a turbulent world, to engage body and mind in a practice that brings about relief from the onslaught of everyday busyness and stress“ (2008: 76). Similarly, in Sandra’s yoga experience away, she was more responsive to the entire experience of yoga (no particular goal or focus in mind) and more aware

of her surroundings (studio environment, students, teacher and inner experience). Having no schedule and anxiety to offset, her yoga practice transformed into what she described as being an experience of personal freedom and interconnection:

The freedom I felt was because I was in another country, with a teacher I had never met before, might not ever see again. Sharing a moment with complete strangers, knowing I would never even know their names, their story, the country they came from, the languages they spoke. To share a yoga routine (a candlelit class...almost intimate) with people I had no attachment to was to me very special and moving. The yoga routine was the only familiar ground. The Interconnectiveness I felt came from a deeper place, the understanding or simply just some awareness of that very moment, being unique, being connected to these people I felt connected to something bigger than yoga.

During a group meeting I held with several yoga teachers, the “tradition” of spatial mobility within yoga and Indian culture was discussed. Jackson, the yoga teacher who is a member of an international meditation association, said that whenever he went to India he was “always amazed [that] people walk an hour to go for a morning [meditation] class at 5h or 6h am”. Joanna, the transnational yogini, responded saying: “Well I mean also as children they would go to their guru, I mean they would go to their guru to learn, they might even live with their guru for a good length of time [...] you go seek it out”. Both Jackson and Joanna spoke about their experiences seeking yoga abroad and are convinced the voyages enriched their practice. As a result, both plan a yearly trip to India to either train in postural yoga or attend a meditation retreat. They recount their yoga encounters out of the country as enlightening and regenerating. Yoga is filled with stories of travel, experiences of uncovering movement and meaning in distinct areas. Practitioners seem to feel a sense of belonging and may be discovering new spaces they consider a kind of home.

Here is an example of how the definition of home can take on different meanings for practitioners. The workshops Tara travels to are mostly those offered by her principal teacher and many of them comprise of yoga training workshops outside of Quebec. She is willing to

cross geographical borders and explore new spaces in following her teacher. His extensive yoga experience and her relationship to her teacher are what motivate her to take these trips. She is continuously amazed whenever witnessing his practice and teachings perpetually evolve, which she claims “opens [her] heart”. For Tara, home is where the heart is. She describes experiencing a shift in her understanding of her practice while in Eka Pada Rajakapōtāsana (pigeon pose) during a yoga and sound workshop abroad:

There is a process where what happens in the pelvic floor around the hip area, around the diaphragm and around the throat are all intimately related so if there is a tightness in any of those areas then the sound is going to be different so its about a release that happens at a very deep level in the body that allows sound to happen. [The teacher] would often say “let yourself be sung” and I started to understand the phrase more and more through the training that we were doing because to let yourself be sung has so much to do with surrender.

While pilgrimages continue to be undertaken today, their parameters have adapted to a world that is fundamentally in motion. The significance of a pilgrimage may not always be religious, nevertheless these kinds of journeys are still embedded with meaning and are considered spiritual by some. As Coleman (2002) states “The kinds of behaviors that make anthropologists regard people as pilgrims will inevitably change over time as systems of transport, articulations of spirituality, secular ideologies, forms of syncretism and so on are transformed” (362). Yoga voyages are an example of the changes that are taking place in contemporary pilgrimages.

Belonging and Home:

A common theme throughout my research is the idea of home and what it consists of, and the feelings of belonging practitioners discover through yoga practice. Practitioners are finding new

meanings and locations that define belonging and home. For instance, several research participants mentioned that they either follow a particular teacher, practice a specific style of yoga or are members of a one main yoga studio. Often these participants referred to either the relationship with the teacher, yoga space, or distinct practice as home. For example Laura, who worked as a vendor for a yoga retailer, said:

I'm not interested in exploring other studios [...] find what works for you and stay with it [...] this kind of relates to finding a home and living there for awhile. If you revisit the same postures everyday you are in constant] relationship. [It's like] doing the laundry, the cleaning, you are doing the mundane, [but] that's how it becomes more intimate and close [...] I feel like ashtanga vinyasa is really home.

The descriptions of home provided by students and teachers connotes much more than a designated space of practice (i.e. studio or ashram). A yoga dwelling is fluid in that it takes on many forms and is not fixed. Home can be a feeling or state of mind that circulates within the body during and after training. It is explained as an experience of interconnection where the practitioner senses a deeper awareness of 'being in the body' and perceives a shift of clarity in the mind. This phenomenon occurs in both individual and group practice.

As a yoga practitioner myself, even before my fieldwork, I came across the idea of home being constituted by the experience of interconnection and this was true in various yoga contexts. It transpired during the three years (2008-2011) I attended a yoga studio in Montreal regularly. Whenever entering the studio to practice I underwent an experience similar to when I happily arrived home after a busy day. I felt comfortable in a familiar and safe space. Furthermore, exploring and sharing a philosophical and physical training with a like-minded group of individuals encouraged a feeling of belonging.

In her research on aikido dojos, Kohn describes a comparable practice environment, which is similar to the communities formed in modern yoga studios:

Dojos are small-activity-generated communities (with shared identities based on shared activity and practice rather than idealized shared markers of blood, land, ethnicity, nationality, etc.), and they tend to have a solid core of long term members as well as some newcomers who may or may not continue training in the dojo for long” (Kohn 2007: 177).

In addition, she demonstrates that locality can be transcended by an embodied practice that is no longer based on territorial boundaries or ethnic and religious affiliations (Kohn 2007). Kohn’s description of the dojos reflects my yoga experience. Feelings of home emerged when I trained both in a group and independently. In both settings, a sensation of release spontaneously appeared during practice. The deliverance is either emotional, physical or mental. In these moments, a profound sense of belonging to the world around me increased and permeated through sentiments and thoughts of separateness. The experience that derived in and from my yoga practice is what I define as home and what I believe makes the yoga practice spiritual.

Yoga as Spiritual:

Elizabeth De Michelis, a yoga historian writing about yoga in America, is convinced yoga is popular because of its success in reducing stress. In her research, she demonstrates how effective yoga is in aiding individuals with anxiety. According to De Michelis, yoga is the antidote for the fast paced, secular and global societies we live in (Michelis 2004). More importantly, she argues that yoga provides people with a contemporary and malleable model of spirituality, one she believes fuses elements of religion with modernity. In fact, she suggests yoga is a healing ritual of secular religion, and demonstrates this by outlining the three phases of a yoga session (Michelis 2004). In doing so, Michelis (2004) attempts to show the ritual passage existent in yoga classes; a ritual that is intended to unite the practitioner with the sacred and the universe.

Pina’s (yoga teacher from Mexico) account sheds light on the healing power described by De Michelis that some practitioners experience in yoga practice. Pina had a weekly yoga

routine that consisted of walking three times a week to her teacher's residence. Here is the revelation she experienced:

I would feel my quads burning [...] and what I would [feel] the most was the fear of being there and I was trying to hold everything and I would say "I'm just too afraid". [The teacher would say] "you would be such an amazing teacher" and I never understood what she said and why she said that, but the reality was that she could see that I was relating everything that was happening in my body with the practice and the emotions that were coming out through moving in a particular way.

As this example demonstrates, yoga gives practitioners the opportunity to undergo shifts in being. As awareness develops, students become more and more in tune with their bodies and receptive to these type of experiences. Pina strongly believes yoga helped her transform her personal suffering as it also taught her to manage the daily stresses and difficulties of modern life. These types of occurrences are perceived as meaningful and transformative for practitioners and as such seem to be viewed as spiritual in nature. When yoga practices are performed regularly and are associated with altered states of being they are contemporary rituals of spirituality. As Chapple (2008) says: "The possibility of transcendence is dependent on life itself, as life is experienced through the body by a person who practices yoga" (239). It seems that the body is an important tool in yoga and is a means in which practitioners connect with the spiritual.

When I asked participants if their yoga practice is spiritual, the majority answered yes. Even so, most practitioners have a difficult time defining spirituality and are not entirely sure why their yoga practice is sacred. The disclosure and discovery of the self, and the development of awareness and feelings of interconnection derived from practice appears to make yoga spiritual.

Bodily Mobility

Tim Ingold examines the movement and experience of walking as part of a broader paradigm of mobility over the life course: "In his movement as in life, his concern is to seek a way through: not to reach a specific destination or terminus but to keep on going. Though he may pause to rest, even returning repeatedly and circuitously to the same place to do so, every period of rest punctuates an ongoing movement. For wherever he is, and so long as life goes on, there is somewhere further he can go. Along the way, events take place, observations are made, and life unfolds" (Ingold 2010a: 126). This quote demonstrates the multi-layered response and sensation that occurs in a simple movement such as walking. Furthermore, it shares a similar thread with the experience of movement yoga practitioners encounter in practice. In my attempt to explore bodily mobility in yoga I observed the ways in which students engaged in movement while in group settings. Additionally, I listened and watched teachers demonstrate postures and give instructions in class. Lastly, I gathered detailed information about practitioners' bodily experiences.

Here is an example of bodily mobility. Laura recounts her experience exploring her hips in an āsana (postural) class:

Right now I'm sort of exploring my hips and I'm not really loving the journey and I think it's one of those "I thought we were over that. I thought we can sit and become comfortable here" [when] actually I'm torqued, out of alignment, [and] I'm blocked. I just need to sit up, straighten my back to draw in my femur, to let my tailbone drop, to let my hips even out and square off, and suddenly I should be standing up. "God this resembles nothing to what I'm usually in" and then [I ask myself] "Are you attached to the sensation of the posture and what it gives you rather than being willing to experience where your body needs to be in that posture?" And [that's] fascinating, it's fascinating but it's also frustrating because I totally want to be there [and] because that's where I was before, well I thought I was (giggles). And so, [it requires] re-evaluating space and re-evaluating mobility. What does my mind think of mobility as spacious and what does my body experience as mobility and spacious?

Laura's experience illustrates the attention she devotes to the movements of the body when carrying out an āsana (physical posture), and the relationship she has with her body while practicing and exploring yoga poses. The practice of yoga āsanās puts practitioners in direct and intimate connection with their physical selves. Over time yoga students formulate a new relationship with their bodies.

While participating in a range of postural yoga classes throughout my fieldwork, the teacher's instructions brought my attention to specific areas of my body (similar to Laura's experience). The instructors encouraged me to investigate and examine the sensations arising in my bodily movements. Hence, the physical aspects are essential in the experience of bodily mobility in yoga. Moreover, I took note of the instructions given by yoga teachers in class and remarked how each directive focused on specific body parts such as, my feet, legs, pelvis etc.

The anatomical vocabulary employed when giving instruction for example, 'place the block underneath the sacrum', educates practitioners about their physiology. Most beginners do not know what and where the sacrum is, and upon their first encounter they are puzzled and often ask 'Where is my sacrum?' Yoga practitioners are learning about their physical anatomy and are being trained to sense their bodies in unfamiliar ways, exploring untraveled territories. As a result, they are experiencing more subtle forms of bodily mobility such as the ability to be in tune with and feel the functions of the inner body. A simple example is feeling the lungs expand when breathing.

One of the many skills yoga practitioners acquire is the ability to sense the exterior and interior body more expansively. In fact, there are legends in yoga of Master yogis who developed the capacity to sense as well as control their internal organs and bodily functions. This type of internal sensing was not often mentioned by research participants, however teachers made a

point in saying “experience the inner body” in the group classes I attended. Furthermore, many research participants described their internal experience when asked about bodily mobility.

Inner Milieu:

In his book The Absent Body, philosopher Drew Leder writes about Western and Eastern spirituality. He explores the role of the body and looks at how it shapes individuals’ experiences of the world. Leder (1990) also examines the inner body and remarks that “the body not only projects outward in experience but falls back into unexperienceable depths” (53). In this quote he suggests that there is an array of sensorial experience within the internal body (ie; intestines), which consists of a range of unknown bodily sensations. In addition, he demonstrates the difficulties of being fully aware and in contact with the inner body because of its unseen, concealed and buried properties as well as its hidden functions: “my body surface envelops a hidden mass of internal organs and processes. The visceral functions that unfold in these bodily depths are crucial in sustaining my life. Yet such processes constitute a hidden depth vis-a-vis myself as experiencer” (Leder 1990: 36). In sum, it seems that the experience of the internal body is accessible to a lesser degree and is in many ways unfathomable.

Sundar Sarrukai, a philosopher interested in both Western and Indian philosophies of science, math and art, has investigated the phenomenology of the inner body. In doing so, he suggests that the capacity to experience and feel the inner body, the sensations of the visceral body and its organs, is often a sense that is overlooked and unheard of in the West. It seems that the understanding and perception of the inner body is, for the most part, scientific and dualist (Sarrukai: 2002). The human inner milieu appears to be mostly recognized through the dominant sense of vision (x-rays) and is frequently experienced in relation to pain (e.g. intestinal cramps).

Surraikai's observations suggests that there are possibly more and different sensorial experiences available to humans.

David Howes, well known for his work on the senses, reveals the ways in which varying cultures place importance on different senses and shows how Western culture is constructed around the socialization of the five dominant senses (sight, smell, sound, taste and touch): "The anthropology of the senses is primarily concerned with how the patterning of sense experience varies from one culture to the next [...it] grows out of the interest in bodily modes of knowing and the place of the body in the mind [...] as different cultures emphasize the development of different modalities, their ways of thinking will also differ" (1991: 3, 173). Howes gives the example of the printing press and demonstrates the significance it had in augmenting the visual sense in Western Culture. Furthermore, he outlines the type of thinking and relational behavior that sight reinforces, which is unidirectional, analytic and distancing. The experience and connection with the inner body is present in North America but usually in a less developed form than in some other cultures. Yoga is an example of a culture that cultivates inner body awareness and experience.

Both Leder and Sarrukai draw upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher well known for his work on the phenomenology of perception and corporeality of consciousness. They extend the work of Merleau-Ponty by investigating the experiences of the lived body, its sensorial powers and by discussing the abilities and skills of highly trained yogis who have cultivated the ability to tap into the sensorial experience of the inner body and acquired the capacity to control their visceral and organic processes: "Certain dim sensations that I had never noticed-the feeling of my pulsing blood, the depths of respiration, the subtler reactions of my stomach to different foods, can be brought into experience by conscious effort [...] The

awareness of and control over the inner body exhibited by trained yogis has far surpassed what used to be thought possible in the West” (Leder 1990: 43). Evidently, the techniques and practices of yoga develop and harness senses that make the inner body accessible and familiar.

As stated previously, while this incredible ability to sense the internal body may not be the type of internal or mobility experience most yoga practitioners today are encountering, it seems that a deeper level of bodily exploration is often encouraged and taught within yoga; enhancing the five senses and possibly developing the sixth sense. Howes (2009) for example suggests that there are a diversity of senses to discover and experience and that it is possible for 7th, 8th, or more senses to exist. He believes that the overexposure of the five senses in Western culture has compartmentalized and minimized individuals’ ability to experience the multitude of senses available.

That being said, for Joanna (research participant), yoga is her modality to explore and uncover new senses. She loves and continues to be committed to her practice because it is a never-ending journey: “there is always this kind of feeling that there is always growth and more to experience and the more you explore the body the more you feel the body [...] you know over the years practicing yoga you say “oh I discover more” [...] and there is this ongoing process within just the bodily kind of aspect of the āsana”. The magic in yoga may be that it grants individuals a practice where practitioners learn how to experience and connect with their inner bodies, and to discover unfamiliar senses and previously unfamiliar bodily experiences. In addition, the bodily mobility of yoga stimulates the mobility of the mind and also brings forth new experiences of consciousness.

Cognitive Mobility

“Conscious awareness does not retreat with practice, or subside into the murky depths of unconscious automatism, but rather increases in concentration and intensity with the fluency of action, along the ever-extending pathways of the body’s sensory entanglement in the life world” (Ingold 2010b: 136). According to Ingold (2010b), mundane activities stimulate walking paths within the mind. For example, leisure activities such as reading and painting activate the senses and give humans the possibility of travelling within the mind. Ingold’s research focuses heavily on the body-mind connection and displays the mobility that exists and flows between the two. I will demonstrate the ways in which yoga, a leisure activity, echoes Ingold’s research findings.

In a meeting of yoga teachers that I had organized as an opportunity to reflect on movement, April (yoga studio owner) spoke about the ways in which the body affects the mind and gave the example of raising her arm: “ whether you raise your arm and you think about raising your arm, you are affecting your mind. [If] you raise your arm and you don’t think about your mind, you are affecting your mind. There’s no separation [and] so [when] you work your body in an intentional way, there’s a shift in the mind”. In this example, April demonstrates the direct effect that moving the body has on the mind. The bodily mobility gained and learned in yoga thus also has an important cognitive dimension.

Practicing yoga not only strengthens the relationship between the mind and body it also seems to enhance practitioner’s ability to process information. Both Joanna and Jackson claim that their yoga practice increased their level of awareness, their ability to concentrate and improved their memory. For example, Jackson claims that he is able to understand and retain details from his readings (ie; books and articles) more easily. Joanna and Jackson are advanced yoga teachers and have very active lifestyles. Besides practicing and teaching yoga regularly they are involved in other physical activities such as, dancing, swimming, running and bicycling.

In their book Migrants of Identity Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson examine individuals' search for an identity and their perceptions of home. In doing so they uncover "the physical and cognitive movement within and between homes [...as well as] within and between the conceptions of home" (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 4). As migration continues to increase, the modern cultural identity shifts and is affected by this movement (physical and mental). As such, the cognitive home takes precedence over traditional classifications of home such as locality, ethnicity, religiosity, and nationality: "One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one's identity best mediated [,] and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed" (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 10). Here the two authors put forward a conception of home as found within movement and the mind (cognitive dimension). Regarding this and as described earlier, yoga practitioners are redefining and experiencing home and belonging through the mobilities developed and introduced by yoga, which resonates with Rapport and Dawson's research. Furthermore, yoga students are also revisiting and reformulating their identities through yoga. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In sum, I have pointed to the reality of yoga being a practice of the body and mind and have illustrated how intertwined they are. Additionally, I've shown that the new classification of the 'cognitive home' is present and very much alive within the culture of yoga and the lives of its practitioners. In the next subsections I will illustrate some of the cognitive aspects of yoga practice and examine cognitive movement by also exploring the idea of migration through reflection, imagination and cultural concepts.

Passages of the Mind:

There is a time in every practitioner's yoga journey when they will begin to notice the impact their mind has on their yoga practice. The conceptions and thoughts held, employed or given will in turn shape their experience of yoga and level of mobility (physical and other).

At times Laura's postural yoga practice encourages reflection and awareness. Her mind affects her āsana practice:

Its like when you decide to use a block [in a forward bend] and [once] you put your head to the block your mind stops and shuts up because you reached your goal [...] the body [...] can soften and open further because its feeling supported and safe. So I feel like that's just it; my mind has this different idea, this different perception of where my body can be and where it can go [...] I feel like its' an attachment game that my mind is playing and I have to just put my head on the block so that my [mind stops and my] body has more room to explore.

In this example, Laura's mind is being influenced by having the idea (goal) that it can only relax and let go once her forehead reaches a surface, be it her legs or a block placed underneath her forehead. When the idea (goal) is realized, her mind is able to accept or expand in a way that allows the body to soften and become mobile. In addition, ideas or perceptions can restrict and limit bodily mobility. In this case, if she did not have a block available or did not place her forehead onto her legs her mental objective would not be fulfilled. As a result, both her body and mind would experience difficulty in softening, opening and expanding. And so, the mobility in both areas is restricted.

From October 2011 to June 2012 I kept a yoga journal of my independent practice, which consisted of either going to the studio or practicing at home on my own. Before beginning my own āsana practice I'd write my general thoughts about how I was feeling physically and emotionally. In every āsana (physical posture), I took the time to observe the sensations in my body, for example, in the posture of parsva upavistha konāsana (Seated Wide Angle Pose) I felt a

tightness in my lower back and pelvis. Different reactions surfaced in varying poses such as feeling anxious, witnessing my mind racing, or experiencing relief etc. In recording the postures, sensations, reactions and emotions I noted the times my bodily mobility was kept within the bounds of my mind. The level I achieved of both bodily and cognitive mobility depended on my state of mind and how I mentally approached and received the āsana. The sensations and reactions that came with it determined the range of mobility. In other instances, the movement entailed in practicing the āsanās (postures) influenced and enabled my mind to relax, to let go of perceptions or ideas, and to become more clear. In completing these journal entries, the deep connection between my body and mind became apparent. Furthermore, this connection influenced my mobility.

As demonstrated with the example of Laura and my yoga journal entries, the internal workings of the mind affect an individual's yoga practice, as do the words, instructions, and ideas given and presented by yoga teachers. For instance, some styles of yoga utilize visualization and metaphors in their instructions. Yoga classes like these open the door to mind mobility. The title of one of the workshops I attended at the Yoga Conference was "Imagery and Yoga". The session opened with a guided imagery meditation, which focused on the breath. A female yoga teacher, considered an expert in her field, uses images when teaching yoga. In her workshop, she explained the affects mental pictures have on the body, and described the power of the mind in either hindering or helping a person heal.

The guided meditation she gave reminded me of practices I read about in meditation books and of exercises I tried independently as well as in other yoga classes. For instance, the body scan is a popular meditation practice, with which I am most familiar. It consists of visualizing each part of the body as the practitioner slowly scans the body from head to toe while

practicing diaphragmatic breathing. In this particular exercise, envisioning each body part and holding that image in mind while breathing will do one or all of the following: relax the body and mind, bring the person in connection with their body and breath, and experience the subtle sensations existent in each bodily area being scanned. This simple example illustrates the influence and leverage visualization and imagery can have in a yoga session. By the same token some yoga teachers recognize and are very aware of how their words guide and help their students in their yoga practice.

Both Jasmine, a yoga teacher who travels to New York State annually for a yoga retreat, and Flora, an urban yogini who loves to cycle, include metaphors in their yoga instructions, and they also enjoy attending yoga classes where teachers use images and visualization. For instance, whenever Jasmine wants to help her students feel light in a posture she will say “float like a flower petal in water”. From her observations it seems to help both her and her students grasp and integrate a feeling of lightness in their bodies while in āsana; a metaphorical instruction produces an image in the mind, which creates a feeling in the body. On the other hand, Flora remarked how “our mindset is influenced by how we feel physically and sensation wise [...] when you [...] are feeling supple [in the body] that creates a platform of contentment for the mind [...] it’s like this lotus flower that the mind can sit in and when we are in a good state of mind [...] I think the body also reaps the benefits”. In sum, the movements of the body will have an impact on cognitive movement (increase, decrease or stagnant); the mind will affect the mobility of the body. Furthermore, practitioners may utilize their imagination in practice to assist them in discovering and reaching new terrains of experience; be it bodily, perceptually or spiritually.

Conceptual Mobility

What I argue here is that, more important than the traversing of geography in these stories is, rather, the movement of the mind or imagination, enabling a shifting of cultural and perceptual frameworks. Indeed, those who argue in favour of ‘insider anthropology’ or ‘anthropology at home’ emphasize this latter migrancy over the former, locating the value of the discipline in the capacity of the anthropological imagination to transcend and encompass alternative frameworks for perceiving, understanding and acting in the world [...] At the heart of anthropology is a notion of the migrancy of not just members of the discipline, but especially of ideas, perceptions, frameworks and worldviews, enabling the familiar to be rendered unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar, familiar (Wilding 2007: 332).

In drawing on Rapport and Dawson’s work in Migrants of Identity, Raelene Wilding encourages readers, especially anthropologists, to consider the mobility of ideas. She directs attention to the ways in which ideas circulate, and shows how they can significantly impact individuals’ lives. For example, global images and ideas in consumer cultures influence the ways in which people construct their identities (Wilding 2007). Her research makes me wonder and ask “What are the concepts (ideas) that are disseminated and passed around in yoga classes in Montreal? How are these perspectives influencing our bodily and mind mobility?”

As mentioned in Chapter 3, health and self-help seem to be two of the primary notions in yoga. There are many practitioners practicing yoga as a means to attain “good health”. In fact, quite a number of my research participants have “well-being regimes”, which include eating well, getting enough sleep, cleansing rituals and seeing body-workers on a regular basis (massage therapists or osteopaths). Furthermore, in their quest for health and well-being some practitioners believe they are harnessing a body and mind that is both strong and open. In addition, the idea of “knowing thyself” is also common in yoga and stimulates self-inquiry, personal awareness, and reflection:

I remember attending a yoga class on a beautiful sunny friday in July. The class began at noon and took place in a studio I knew well. I had practised previously with most of the teachers who worked there. Having said that, on this particular day my regular teacher was absent and we

had a substitute teacher, whom I did not know. I noticed throughout the practice and noted down afterwards some of the unsettling thoughts and feelings I experienced in class. I recognized I had an extremely critical mindset during class; I evaluated the instructor's teaching skills and knowledge while following her instructions. I also felt angry and scared, which seemed to affect my bodily mobility, I felt restricted and rigid in several poses. Rather than ignoring or letting those thoughts and feelings go after class, I decided to ask myself a few questions and contemplated my experience: " Why am I examining this teacher? Why did I feel frightened?" Upon reflection, I realized that because I did not have a relationship of trust with this teacher, I became skeptical and judgmental towards her. A few factors played into my reaction: we did not know each other, a new teacher with a different teaching style, and she was not aware of my earlier injuries.²²

This is a simple example of how yoga stimulates self-inquiry. Moreover, it is common for teachers to encourage and for yoga environments (studios, ashrams and retreat) to support the idea of exploring and being acquainted with one's self as well as encouraging practitioners to muster the courage to fully experience the sensations, emotions, and thoughts that come up during or after practice.

Another popular idea circulating in yoga is the idea of opening the heart. Tara defines it as, "opening the heart means you don't leave anything out. It's not like I open my heart to what [only] feels good. You open the heart to what [you] feel. You know [what] really sucks and what makes you feel bad. You open your heart to all the judgement you have [...] that's what it looks like, it's pretty raw and demanding". Tara (experienced yoga teacher) spoke of surrender and trust. She experienced the meaning of surrender while away at a yoga weekend retreat:

²² Due to a surgery in 2002 I experience pain in various areas of my back such as, shoulders, mid-area of the spine and sacrum.

There were people injured in the group, there was one man who genetically was missing most of his foot, another woman who had an open wound [...] actually she had a charred bone that came out of her foot that was not visible on x-rays or MRI's because it had been right behind one of her foot bones [...] she couldn't walk either, so we had two people that could barely walk. [In the group] we were all kinds of ages, sizes, and shapes, so you realized that yoga was happening all the time and the questions were coming directly from their experience. It wasn't "what can I do to somehow be a better person with a shard of bone in my foot, or how can I get this pose". It was really "how can I work with exactly where I am". I learned a lot. I was trying to do inversions [while making] sounds and chant, and I realized I couldn't do that. There was so much tension in my body [...] First pose was an hour. That gives you an idea [...] of the level [of our practice [...] What happens is that you cannot hold a pose for one hour, you have to release into it and then you start to notice all the ways that you are tense in a pose [...] Right away you are meeting your experience where it is [...] the pose is going to tell you a lot about yourself (giggles) all your demons will come out. The longest pose I ever held prior to that was 35 minutes in a forward bend and after that amount of time I went through everything to "it was easy", cursing [my teacher], to wanting to walk out of the room and then I started weeping. It caught me by surprise. The essence of forward bends is surrender, and I thought I'd surrender to everything and it went in under the radar because I wasn't censoring anything anymore at that point. And there was such deep weeping that happened.

Danaka (long time yoga practitioner) shared Tara's experience of yoga as a practice of surrender. When she described the studio in which she practiced she expressed the sense of trust she felt in this milieu: "[the studio is] a space of support, a space of [...] security [where I have this] feeling [of being] at ease, and it's also a space that you can maybe let go [...] that you may feel secure to let go in". Surrender in both these examples seems to refer to a letting go of external barriers (physical, mental, emotional), which once experienced enables the practitioner to explore and travel uncharted spaces of the inner self: "It appeals not to outward appearances, whether real or imaginary, but to an inner life – to emotion, feeling and the pulsations of the soul" (Ingold 2010a: 21). Additionally, it appears that these experiences of letting go are possibly gateways to healing and are what make the yoga journey a transformative one.

Conclusion: The Mobility of Yoga

In this chapter, I have outlined the numerous variables that influence local and transnational spatial mobility among yoga practices in Montreal. My focus on transnational yoga trips exhibited the liminal space and ritual components that make these present-day pilgrimages spiritual and sacred. Furthermore, I show that in both spaces (local and transnational) a feeling of belonging emerges for practitioners, and a sense of home in yoga is experienced and lived in various ways (ie; yoga space, group, bodily practice and cognitive environment). Moreover, the research conducted on bodily mobility pointed to the importance of anatomy in yoga today, and showed how yoga practice teaches individuals to sense the exterior and interior body differently. In exploring bodily mobility, I uncovered the cognitive and conceptual mobilities within yoga. In doing so, I demonstrated the influential relationship between the body and mind.

In examining the four forms of mobility within yoga (spatial, bodily, cognitive and conceptual) I realized that these differing versions of movement are intrinsically interconnected. One level of mobility leads to another and opens up more avenues for practitioners to travel (externally and internally). Yoga practices (ie; pilgrimage, āsana, meditation, breathing exercises) stimulate a series of different kinds of movement that slowly open the body, mind, and eventually the heart. As there is a sense of ritual within a yoga class and yoga pilgrimages there is a ritual element that also ties the different phases and strands of mobility together (De Michelis 2004). It is important to recognize that even though these mobilities may be looked at separately they could not exist without each other. A spiritual transformation (awakening) through yoga manifests when the relationship between these varying mobilities is strengthened.

The next chapter will examine identity formation in yoga and what makes the yoga practice a meaningful pursuit.



Chapter 5: The Embodiment of Yoga

(Artist: Ondine Guralnick)

As I walk into the studio I say hi to the receptionist, a friendly woman in her twenties. Upon entering I remove my footwear and place them on the shoe mat underneath the bench. I immediately recognize some of the practitioners in the lounge. I slowly stroll towards the changing room and smile to the individuals with whom I am familiar. Students are sitting on the floor carpet in the resting area talking. Others are looking at yoga books located on the small shelving unit next to the practice room. I quickly change into my yoga clothes and with my mat in hand I go to the practice space. I choose my usual spot and place my mat near the centre of

the room in front of the wall and close to the doors. Two students are setting up their props and warming up, slowly moving in and out of yoga poses. I gather my materials, two blocks, a strap, a bolster and a blanket. I place them around my mat as I take a deep breath, inhale and upon the exhale I quietly release the sound “aahhhhhhh”. I am ready to begin my practice.

I’m feeling tired, my eyes are heavy. I lie on my back, place the strap around my right heel and lengthen my right leg up towards the ceiling as I extend the left leg keeping it on the ground, at all times, making sure I keep the curve in my lumbar spine. As I hold the pose I hear music playing in the background. I also hear cars and trucks zooming along the street. More students are entering and setting up their practice space. After a few poses I sit on a block, cross my legs and place my hands on my knees. I notice the plants in the large studio window, a big wooden buddha sitting at the front of the room and a painting of an Indian God hanging on the pillar in the centre of the wall. I close my eyes and focus on my breath as I wait for the teacher’s arrival.

As the female teacher walks into the practice space she asks us all to stand up at the front of our mats. We begin with an opening chant, “Ommm” three times. She carefully instructs us through the sun salutations (surya namaskars) saying “Flow and exhale with the movement”, “create length”. After completing the ten surya namaskars she includes preparatory exercises within the lesson plan before continuing with the primary sequence. I am in a table top position bending my two arms and learning how to lift up without crunching my shoulders forward and down. Aha!!! She is teaching us to keep our shoulders lifted so we can transfer this shoulder movement into our four-limbed staff pose (chaturanga dandāsana). She breaks down another pose to give us a sense of how to transfer the weight in our bodies. Returning to the sequence,

she observes the group carefully. Spotting tension in students' bodies, her instruction becomes more detailed: "reset the shoulderblades" and "no compression in the lower back".

Observing the practitioners around me I'm aware of the bodies that are more familiar with the poses. They move into the postures with ease and mindfulness. As I slowly proceed into an extended side angle pose (Utthita Parsvakonāsana) on a chair I notice the student next to me placing a one inch foam block underneath his upper thigh. The person across from me is doing the exact same pose, but neither rests her thigh on a chair or prop. A few students are modifying the pose by carefully choosing and utilizing the props while other practitioners are stumbling into the āsana. Awkwardly holding it, quickly jumping out of it and eagerly waiting for the next instruction. The techniques of the body in yoga vary considerably in terms of practitioner's mobility, attunement, understanding, and choice of materials.

Half way through the class I feel more awake, my mind is alert and my body is more mobile (less stiff) despite the fact that I'm sweating and performing a number of muscle strengthening exercises normally seen at gyms. Feeling more relaxed, a sense of relief comes over me. I lay in the final pose (shavāsana / corpse pose) on the floor. I never felt so comfortable. Finally I fully rest into my breath. My eyes lightly close and my whole body is tingling. The yoga teacher quietly instructs us to sit up and chant "Om Shanti Shanti Shanti". I place my hands together in prayer position as I chant. Keeping my hands together, I move them over my lips, towards my forehead and above my head. I bring my hands back down, still seated, I bow forward. I feel a sense of renewal and my heart is open; my sternum and chest are relaxed. I am less tense. I walk out of the practice room feeling more whole and centered. "Thank you" I whisper to myself.

Introduction

The body plays a central role and is the principal medium for discovering, manifesting and living the practice of yoga. Yoga is embodied within a kinesthetic culture where learning occurs through feeling the body's position, muscles, bones and weight. As such, the teachings of yoga focus on training the body. The term embodiment in this chapter refers to Noel Dyck's (2003) definition of discipline as "a domain of instruction, learning or knowledge" (2). According to Dyck, a leisure activity may be an embodied discipline that is self-actualizing. For example, dedicated yoga practitioners generally experience a spiritual transformation. Consequently, teaching and learning yoga shapes practitioners' bodies and minds as well as their social environments, relationships and identity.

In order to understand this subject more clearly I look at an assortment of variables that will aid in comprehending the ways in which individuals and collectives embody yoga. Therefore, to investigate the kinesthetic culture of yoga I will briefly describe the techniques of the body and their transmission by comparing yoga to other bodily leisure activities such as aikido, capoeira and silat. In doing so, I will uncover the ways in which yoga practitioners learn and teach yoga in groups and individually. For instance, students commonly acquire knowledge of yoga in group settings and trainings, although it is possible to study yoga with the aid of reading books, watching videos and practicing at home. In addition, I will examine and write about the yoga sociality that surrounds the physical practice and discuss some of the skills developed by means of being a member of a yoga collective. For example, yoga practitioners spend time together outside of the classroom environment. These more casual social exchanges (ie; talking in the lounge) are as important as the interactions that take place in training (ie; teachers and students learning āsana). Lastly, I will explore the formation and transformation of identity (group & individual) within yoga by demonstrating the similarities yoga shares with a

group of salseros in germany and a study case of an individual's bodybuilding project. In delving into and assessing the social and identity features of yoga, I will discover the ways in which practitioners put together their self-image, yoga family, and spiritual pursuits.

Learning & Teaching Techniques of the Body

Yoga training consists of primarily learning and teaching specific bodily movements and breathing methods, which I consider to be “techniques of the body” (Mauss 1973). I make reference to Marcel Mauss's work as he has been and continues to be influential in the field of anthropology, particularly in leisure studies. According to Mauss, individuals' bodily movements are shaped by their upbringing (children imitate parents), training (sports or other bodily activities such as dance) and culture (education and socialization). He points to the different bodily expressions and attitudes that exist within various cultures while also noting that techniques of the body in physical activities change over time. For example in training swimmers, swimmers were once taught to dive with their eyes closed while today they keep their eyes open at all times (Mauss 1973). One of Mauss's major themes is the transmission of bodily techniques. He places importance on education and believes the techniques of the body are embodied by means of teaching, learning and practice (Mauss 1973: 78)

Mauss's notion of techniques of the body is considered in Greg Downey's research on the practice of capoeira. Downey (2005) writes about young capoeiristas learning to walk for the first time and about the new exercises students are exploring as they learn new ways of moving their bodies. Hence Downey (2005) shares with Mauss the view that different cultures and practices involve teaching varying bodily movements, which are not biologically determined or universally shared. In sum, every leisure activity has its own specific bodily movements and

practices that are transmitted over time and across cultures. The dissemination of a discipline and its bodily techniques are inclined to be modified and altered.

The learning and teaching identified in Kohn's research on aikido shares many similarities with the yoga collectives I have studied. Kohn describes the principles of movement in aikido and explains how they are transferred into practitioners' work and personal lives:

Nearly all of these people who train for any length of time, however, will eventually come to understand their practice in terms of a number of key principles of movement that are very commonly related to analogous reactions and events in their everyday social world. It's this capacity to intertwine growing awareness of movement in the physical activity with strategies and understandings in social interactions with others that gives it centrality in the minds of those who practice (Kohn 2003: 144).

Many of my research participants spoke of the main principles of yoga movement and like Kohn mentioned that they used these yogic precepts in other spaces besides the practice room. For example Mary, a yoga teacher and occupational therapist living and working in Montreal said she employed her yoga skills and concepts outside of her yoga practice:

I feel that I do practice yoga everyday even if I'm not on the mat; if only in the way of having those moments of refocusing and getting rid of a kind of mental noise or emotional noise. So, for me it was because of the breath because yoga teaches you to move with your breath and I feel that whenever I get overwhelmed or anxious about something or whatever it's always with my breath that I find that sense of being grounded or being centered even when things are not very grounded or centered around me.

Additionally, Mary makes use of the yogic breath method when she is riding the metro or chopping vegetables. Thus, the techniques of the body Mary learned in yoga are transferable and useful to her in other kinds of situations as well.

Another example is Laura, a yoga teacher who worked for a yoga retailer. She feels that the teachings in her yoga classes influence and support her in other areas of her life:

One thing is said in one class one week and then somehow it stays with me and then it ties in with something that is said in another class by another teacher the next week and it's enough that I'm sort of piecing it together. [My yoga teacher] had said [in class] "why go forward come back." Why go forward come back and that for me was [my] momentum. [I am always] pushing forward [...] like almost jumping forward [...] instead of slowing down. And then I feel like it carries into my day where [I ask myself] "where else am I pushing forward and not moving back" so it can be something small in my day like, am I trying to put too much in my schedule. It can be a theme in my life you know, am I striving for this relationship, am I pushing to finish something faster, training or homework when really I should stop and just let myself be a student in it?

The bodily movements learned and practiced in a lesson carry forward into practitioners' daily activities as do the yoga teachings. For instance, Laura's tendency is to push her upper body forward in āsana. When she is riding her bike, carrying groceries, standing in line and cleaning her apartment she also sticks her chest out. She consciously says to herself when she notices it "bring the ribs in and lengthen the sternum," which is what her teachers advise her to do in class. Evidently, the yogic techniques of the body practitioners learn and apply become important in other social contexts.

If we relate these theories (Mauss, Downey, and Kohn) to yoga, we find that yoga holds its own unique techniques of the body and principles of movement, which have been transmitted and reshaped over time. In fact, the history of yoga clearly demonstrates a series of alterations and modifications of the practice (Singleton 2010). Well-known teachers are continuously altering poses and teaching methods. A classic example is B.K.S. Iyengar who introduced a new approach to teaching a shoulder stand that involves placing blankets underneath the shoulders to protect the neck. Montreal has its own distinct versions of yoga and offers yoga practitioners a numbers of spaces that motivate and support training and transmission of the practice.

Furthermore, expert teachers living in Montreal are also disseminating their modified yoga

techniques and in recent years, there has been an emergence of different and newer styles and forms of yoga.

According to Jean Lave, ‘communities of practice’ are groups of individuals whose interaction arise through their shared interest in a particular kind of practice (e.g. yoga). As a result, they share information and experiences and learn through their common pursuit (Lave 1991). Learning continues to materialize as ‘communities of practice’ (CoP) establish themselves. The yoga collectives I observed and participated in, fit into Lave’s theory of ‘situated learning’, as I will demonstrate in the next sections to follow.

Yoga Sociality

The yoga weekend training led by a expert teacher (30+ years of practice and teaching experience) was filled with students and teachers of all different levels (beginners, intermediate, advanced). As I was warming up on my mat on the first day of training I immediately noticed the tall older man (Expert teacher) enter the practice room. I watched him walk to the front of the crowd. He was completely silent yet his presence communicated a strong message. The noisy room of 50+ people instantaneously quieted down and intently waited for his instruction. “To know who you are is the real purpose of yoga. The rest is gymnastics”, he said. Upon hearing his words my body immediately eased up and without conscious thought I smiled.

He signaled the group to come closer and all sit. All the practitioners, including myself, listened attentively, eyes wide open and bodies leaning towards him as he spoke. The expert teacher shared a story of his experience teaching and learning yoga. The students in the room broke out into laughter several times. He then explained and demonstrated a posture and said “Try or do?” and we responded “DO!”. We all stood up and found a partner. I asked Jackson

(an advanced yoga teacher) if he'd like to work with me. Jackson verbally instructed me into the pose and made adjustments. I did the same for him. We gave each other suggestions and explored the different possibilities to experience the āsana (pose). I was excited and nervous at the same time. Thrilled to be in the workshop learning yet feeling apprehensive. I hoped I was doing this new pose right. Jackson is such a good teacher. I didn't want to make a mistake and embarrass myself. The rest of the day consisted of short lectures, demonstrations and learning with either a partner or in small groups (3-4people). The assembly of practitioners comprised of 'oldtimers', 'newcomers', 'experts' and 'novices' all developing their 'knowledgeable skill' of yoga.

Yoga training workshops usually consist of two or three full days (8 hrs) of learning, teaching and practice. Students frequently get together for lunch (normally groups of 2 to 6 people) to share a meal and discuss their current training and other related yoga topics. It is an opportunity for practitioners to get to know each other: "Off the mat [...] the first questions that tend to be asked is: Where and with whom do you train? People become placed in histories and genealogies [...] One hardly ever overhears discussions [...] about what people do for a living. One tends to learn about people's various occupations through the gossip of others" (Kohn 2007: 179). Furthermore, friendships do eventually develop among workshop participants.

Practicing yoga in class, training with each other over time and spending moments together just before and after yoga classes or workshops generates invitations to more personal social activities, such as trying new physical pursuits (e.g. rock climbing) and hobbies (e.g. knitting). The various types of social gatherings amongst yogis and yoginis include hanging out in the studio lounge, going to pubs, picnics in the park, meet ups at coffee shops and pot-lucks. The social exchanges that occur before or after classes at the studio are similar to the social

exchanges I witnessed during the weekend yoga training workshop I attended. Most conversations between practitioners transpire before and after class. In fact, it is common for students to go to the studio early and instead of warming up in the practice room they hang out in the lounge and talk.

One morning, while I was sitting on a bench in the studio reception area sipping freshly brewed tea, Willow (student) walked in and sat beside me. Willow then asked “How is your practice going?”. I told her about the bodily sensations I experienced whenever I was in a supported back bend pose in class. She spoke of the physical challenges she encountered in specific āsanās and suggested I try the supported back bend differently: “place the block behind your back horizontally instead of vertically” she said. “Really, I’ll try that. Thanks!” I replied. Dialogue and sharing of information among practitioners is usually about practice, training history, and teaching experience, which is similar to the discourse of aikido (Japanese martial art) students that Kohn describes:

Practice [...] draws people from many parts of the world on the mat, and the space of the mat becomes a global village of bodies that silently share a language of movement a quality of body contact. Off the mat, this ‘community’ of practitioners will discuss the quality of training and teaching, they will be able to watch others practicing and identify and discuss the ways in which various people’s bodies are changing or not. The ability to use an indigenous vocabulary to describe elements of training that are seen to be essential for good practice reinforces a sense of community belonging” (Kohn 2003: 151).

The social gatherings that transpire in yoga and other kinesthetic cultures such as aikido, showcases the non-formal interactions that surround the formal teaching and transmission (ie; yoga lesson) of techniques of the body. Additionally, the social life derived from sharing a common pursuit such as yoga contributes to and enhances practitioners’ learning of the yoga practice.

Teaching and Practicing Yoga

Yoga is commonly taught and practiced in group settings: morning, lunch and evening classes, workshops and trainings. The size of the group can vary from 5 to 30 people and in some cases yoga trainings and special events may attract as many as 100 or more participants. Teaching techniques and approaches generally vary with the style of yoga and studio but verbal instructions and demonstrations are the most prevailing methods.

As an instructor, I use both of these strategies to teach yoga. I normally walk around the room and observe students' movements, postures and alignments. Whenever I notice students struggling in a pose or with their breath I call out more detailed instructions such as "remember to breath" or "press the four mounds of your feet into the floor and lengthen your legs". In some instances, more personal and tailored coaching is needed. In those cases, I will make or demonstrate subtle adjustments to student poses. For example, I will move into 'downward dog' right beside a student who is having trouble understanding how to hold the pose safely and comfortably. I'll place my hand beside hers and exaggerate the spread of my fingers to encourage her to activate and use her hands on the mat.

Yoga is primarily practiced in group settings as well, but individual practice also exists. Some practitioners train at home either by following a yoga manual (book), yoga video or by rehearsing what they learned in class, workshops or trainings. But individual practice can also be promoted in a group setting. In yoga 'communities of practice' this is referred to as mysore practice, which consists of individuals going to the yoga studio, usually early morning between 6h00AM-10h00AM, to practice either a sequence (i.e. primary series), new poses learned from a teacher training program or simply to have a space to perform one's personal yoga routine. There are usually one or two teachers present and their role is to make sure students are practicing

safely and to make adjustments. Several of my interviewees also mentioned that they experience class sessions as an individual practice:

My experience has been pretty individual in terms of the way that I learned [...] it really has nothing to do with the rest of the [group]. [When] you are in a workshop and you are with 40 people. [When the teacher is talking], he is talking to my body and I will have to interpret that in terms of what my challenges in my body are. It doesn't help me to know what the other challenges of the other bodies are, and what they are thinking about [them]. It only matters what I am thinking about my challenges and what I do with them.

Therefore, learning in groups even for individual practice is popular and of significance in yoga training.

Here is an example of how I experienced a yoga class on an individual level:

I am usually attentive to my bodily sensations and movements during class. I remember taking an evening yoga session, and distinctly recall my experience in Ustrāsana (Camel Pose). Following the teacher's instructions, I simultaneously applied the bodily techniques I knew for the posture. I took two blocks and put one next to each ankle as I talked myself through the pose: "knees hip width apart". I placed my knees against the wall and made sure the tops of my feet were pressing against the mat. Ankles were properly aligned as I have the tendency to let my ankles splay out. I Inhaled, kept my hipbones forward as I slowly began to lift sternum up. "It's an internal lift. Don't move into it so quickly. You don't want to feel that awful pinch in your sacrum again, do you? Oh right the safety belt technique, apply it" I said to myself. I then brought my attention to the back of my sacrum and visualized the two sacral-plates slightly moving towards each other. I felt a shift in sensation in that area and I held that feeling as I imagined my two hipbones moving towards each other as well. Both actions were in place. I exhaled and began to roll my collarbones up and back. As I slide my shoulderblades down I kept my neck lifted. Eventually I placed both hands onto the blocks, which I previously had set. "woooohhhhhh" I tried to relax

my nerves by finding a even breathing pattern and by slowing it down. I encouraged myself to release into the pose.

Yoga students acquire knowledge and become skilled in both training settings and practice genres (group and individual). Clearly these two approaches of learning are intertwined in that they seem to contribute to the overall apprenticeship of yoga. What is learned in a group setting is transferred into individual practice and vice versa. Additionally, practitioners can focus on their independent practice even in a class environment.

Skills Developed

Within each leisure activity there are numerous skills that must be acquired in order to advance in the discipline. As such, all leisure pursuits have their own systems and traditions of teaching and learning. What seems to be common amongst most kinesthetic cultures is that the learning is carried out mostly in groups and is active, requires practice, and challenges students at every level. Furthermore, practitioner's thinking, movements and bodies are conditioned and changed by the training:

Understanding skill acquisition as physiological, neurological, perceptual, and behavioral modification suggests that physical education activities are not interchangeable. Each skill set shapes peculiar clusters of physical traits in its practitioners' bodies. Cultural distinctiveness inheres not only in behavioral patterns and cognitive 'contents'—symbols, signs, representations—, but also in the way that physical practices shape the unfolding development of a skilled body [...] Culturally distinct forms of physical education shape distinctive bodies in a literal sense, forging muscles, crafting tendons, assembling sensory systems, and generating physical capabilities (Downey 2005: 3).

Downey's accounts of capoeira practice illustrate how his and other capoeira students' bodies adapted during training. They developed movement skills and enhanced the techniques of the body with continual practice. They executed movements more efficiently by moving faster and more intuitively. Students also became more aware of their surrounding space, and were able

to self-monitor and continuously readjust their movements in class and in the roda (Downey 2005). In capoeira and other leisure activities such as sports and dance, practitioners' progress and learning is dependent on their ability to get through more physically challenging exercises (ie; pirouette) or to meet more additional demands (ie; rock-climbing steep rock formations) (Downey 2005). When we compare yoga to capoeira and other bodily disciplines we see that there are similarities in terms of which and how skills are learned.

Some of the skills developed in capoeira correspond to the aptitudes learned in yoga. A notable development in yoga is the refinement of awareness and proficiency in sensorial experience and bodily movement. Students return time and time again to the mat to endlessly train and mature their practice by augmenting their newfound skills. The skills yoga practitioners develop in training are numerous and transformative. Yoga provides the physical benefits it promotes such as strength and flexibility. For example, the arm balancing poses, planks, and inversions such as a yoga handstand, strengthen the body. Moreover, yoga teaches practitioners to find their balance and be grounded (physically, mentally and emotionally). For instance, the standing poses help students find stability in their legs and teach them to use the muscles in their feet so that they are rooted and steady. Finally, yoga training encourages students to be active learners, learning mostly through participation and taking action (doing!), and attentive listeners (ie; carefully follow verbal instruction).

Here is another example, which demonstrates the skills I learned while attempting to master a challenging posture in my yoga training:

I held a headstand for 10 minutes for the first time during a ten day training. I placed my mat in front of the large pillar and took a few deep breaths before placing my arms on the mat. The wall behind me gave me a sense of security. It would stop me from falling completely over and

onto my back if I lost my balance. I carefully placed my fore arms, hands and head onto the mat. Once I was physically and mentally ready I slowly lifted my legs up towards the ceiling. My belly shook and my legs wobbled. I moved back and forth from being unsteady and jittery to being straight and stable. I continuously tried to find my centre as I endlessly attempted to find comfort in being upside down. I felt anxious and scared as my body twitched: “Am I not taking enough weight off my head and neck?” I thought. So I strongly braced my arms and kept lifting my shoulders and legs up. After a few minutes passed I sensed my body was in a twist so I raised my attention to even out my hips. A release and lengthening in my body unfolded. I felt content with my efforts and a feeling of joy appeared. With only three minutes left, I persisted in holding the pose till the end even if it was unpleasant and gruelling. “Time’s Up. Come down.” I drew my legs down and quickly moved into the child’s pose, breathing heavily.

All in all leisure activities seem to be more than recreational pastimes in that they engage practitioners on many levels (bodily, socially, mentally etc.) and give them valuable skills that shape their bodies and social lives.

Collective Identity

Participating and being committed to a bodily discipline such as yoga can become part of a person’s identity. This generally depends on the person and the phase of one’s yoga practice. Furthermore, practitioners tend to feel a strong association with yoga (ie; principles and ethics) and fellow group members. Many of my research participants are loyal and have affinity with their yoga family and home. Consequently, the rapport they have with yoga may partly define who they are and with whom they feel an affinity.

Heike Wieschiolek's (2003) research on salsa illustrates the ways in which being a member of a salsa collective can constitute a means to construct a self-image and reflect a person's sense of identity. In fact, the salsa community of Germans and Latin Americans living in Hamburg, Germany share the collective identity of being "salseros". Together they practice their moves on the dance floors of salsa discotheques (Wieschiolek 2003: 129). In her discussion of salsa Wieschiolek draws on Simmel's view of sociality and explains the "'forms of sociation', or 'forms of being [...] in which individuals grow together into a unity and within which their interests are realized [...]' The 'being of and for one another' that ensues ideally leads to understandings and practices of group solidarity and belonging" (Wieschiolek 2003: 27-28). Similar to the group of German "salseros", Montreal yogis/yoginis feel a strong sense of unity with the collective with which they practice.

In yoga, being a member of a studio, participating in trainings regularly and practicing in a group locally and abroad unites fellow yoga practitioners. They share, what Joanna, an experienced yoga teacher, calls, "common ground". Joanna describes her trips to Mysore as validating her efforts to practice, teach and live yoga. She practices yoga in India in large groups. Her 'community of practice' reminds her of a promise she made early on. It re-inspires her to continue: "The other notion is that knowledge and skill develop in the process- and as an integral part of the process-of becoming like advanced practitioners within a community of practice. This more inclusive process of generating identities is both as a result of and motivation of participation" (Lave, 1991: 71). Joanna and other yoga teachers describe their group trainings as "being in a vortex. It's as if we are plugged in[to]"; the energy emitted by the group.

Joanna and Jackson perceive the communities of practice in which they participate as family. Their connection to these fellow adherents may feel stronger since it is a supportive kin.

With their yoga families they share a different lifestyle that is encouraged and magnified by participating in the group. Additionally, Joanna spoke of the death of her primary teacher and its effect on the community to which she belongs. His passing resulted in a phase of community reconstruction, which involved re-negotiating the functions and roles of primary participants. This example demonstrates the manner in which ‘newcomers’ and ‘oldtimers’ both contribute to the collective identity of communities of practice:

Newcomers and oldtimers are dependent on each other: newcomers in order to learn, and oldtimers in order to carry on the community of practice. At the same time the success of both new and old members depends on the eventual replacement of oldtimers by newcomers - become-oldtimers themselves [...] The construction of identity is also a way of speaking of the community’s constitution of itself through the activity of its practitioners. It further involves a recognition and validation by other participants of the changing practice of newcomers become oldtimers. Most of all, without participation with others, there may be no basis for lived identity (Lave 1991: 74).

The sharing of bodily movements and practice within kinesthetic cultures, be it in a discotheque or yoga studio, creates solidarity amidst practitioners who may have varying personal and cultural histories.

As in the salsa community in Hamburg, Germany, yoga brings individuals from contrasting backgrounds together in Montreal:

The sense of *communitas* (Turner 1969) that is frequently triggered by performance and absorption in sport and dance can suddenly and viscerally connect individuals who would otherwise be unlikely to associate with one another in any manner, let alone in these ways. It is hardly surprising that sport and dance are frequently likened to forms of social, if not religious, ritual. Like ritual, sport and dance serve to connect people in ways that are not otherwise readily available to them in contemporary social worlds (Dyck 2000: 17).

Some students and teachers share similar lifestyles and beliefs yet other practitioners lead very different lives. Despite individual differences, yoga communities are cooperative and are remarkably open and inclusive. The common ground of yoga seems to overcome the dissimilarities. In sum, leisure activities such as yoga may provide adherents with an alternative

culture with which they connect and identify. Additionally, the yoga practice and the collective may act as a support and provide tools that aid students to surmount personal matters and life challenges (ie; depression).

Yoga Training as Support and Change

Bodily disciplines commonly provide individuals with a support network, be it the group of people sharing the same leisure activity or the practice itself. They also tend to give practitioners values and codes of behavior (i.e. being mindful) that seem to enhance students' personal lives and sense of self. I will demonstrate this by briefly introducing the research conducted on bodybuilding and badminton and show the role yoga played in periods of transition for my research participants.

With time and practice, practitioners reach different levels of self-realization through disciplining their body. For example, Rapport's ethnographic account of Bob, a hospital porter and bodybuilder, demonstrates the personal investment put into physical training, the type of support it provides and the personal changes it creates. For Bob, bodybuilding is "a life-project of ethical fulfillment and personal development" (Rapport 2007: 27). Rapport argues that Bob's sense of self and confidence is due to his dedicated commitment to bodybuilding. He believes it has helped Bob negotiate his role and relationships at work with administrators and other porters (Rapport 2007). Therefore, as the case of Bob illustrates, it is possible to utilize a leisure activity such as bodybuilding as a self-making activity. Furthermore, bodily disciplines may teach interpersonal skills and give practitioners values to abide by.

Sally Anderson has conducted research on inclusive recreational badminton in Copenhagen (Denmark) and writes about the moral training involved in body-culture. She

explains the ways in which in this setting, children learn to share space, interact with others, and develop relationships in leisure activity. The “two moral maxims” children are taught is “we all have to be able to be here” and “there has to be room for everybody” (Anderson 2003: 23).

Anderson (2003) points out that these moral maxims are a reflection of the values of inclusive egalitarianism in Denmark.

In yoga, ethics are intertwined with the training of the body. In fact, despite the heavy focus on physical practice (*āsana*) morality seems to be central to the system of yoga and appears to influence many practitioners’ self-development and way of living. For example Jackson, a yoga teacher and dancer, utilized yoga to transform his body. When his dance teacher commented on his posture during rehearsal he took up yoga to gain flexibility and open his body. With yoga training he reached his physical goals. In fact, Jackson’s yoga practice also became an outlet for him to manage and let go of difficult feelings such as anger and sadness. He sometimes utilized *āsana* (physical postures) as a form of meditation.

For other practitioners, however, attempts to reconfigure the body like Jackson may lead to injury. Transformation of the body through yoga practice depends on many variables such as body frame, mental health, past injuries, trauma and phases of one’s practice. Thus, for some these self-directed goals of bodily transformation may not be plausible. As April, the yoga studio owner, explained:

I discovered [yoga] through curiosity to move my body [and] probably in quite a sort of physical and demanding way. I have a background in dance so I’ve always sort of been inspired to explore the potential and possibility of the body. I would say the original or early stages of my yoga practice was about developing strength and flexibility and then probably half way through my practice I got injured and so the practice of yoga dramatically changed and ever since then it’s been less about sort of challenging the body to develop strength and flexibility and more sort of a curiosity to explore the depth of the body, which has obviously opened up [to] the different facets of the practice which go beyond just its physical form.

In this case, April's injury altered her ideas about yoga and her identity as a yogini and yoga teacher.

In a focus group discussion Joanna (transnational yoga practitioner) speaks of the dangers of identifying oneself as either a yogi or yoga teacher. She discloses the stereotypes and myths that individuals may hold about yoga teachers. Joanna believes that a "part of the yoga is lost" with such identifications: "Yoga and meditation is about stepping away from your constructed identities, which is often projected from consumerist trends. The point is to be present and exist with what you are doing without grasping or labeling it". Thus, the changes that take place on a bodily and personal level are a result of staying true (dedicated and honest) to the practice and not getting caught up in false ideas about yoga and the self.

For example, before becoming yoga teachers, Joanna as well as Jackson were part of the counter-culture movement of techno and raves. When they compare their current lifestyle to their club kid days it seems like a paradox. Instead of staying out till two in the morning dancing and dj'ing they are now in bed by ten to wake up for early morning practice. As their yoga practice became more and more regular and prominent, their lives began to shift. Their daily routine is structured around their yoga and meditation practice and by the values they imbibed such as taking care of their bodies and living in the present moment.

Another example is Paula, the yoga teacher who believes in educating her students about yoga history:

Ahhh for me, it's fantastic, I feel connected, I feel more connected to people now than I ever had in my whole entire life. Not just to people in the yoga community but really people outside of it as well because it's given me ways of understanding, and perceiving and analyzing the world that I did not have [before], and so it's been proven to be useful on so many levels. I feel like I've always been looking for a community, an intellectual and spiritual community and I never really found that, not even in school and it's the first time in my life where I feel engaged in a ongoing living dialogue [...] It could be from what I eat to how I view politics [...] and so yeah [...] it's definitely opened

up my world in many ways and created possibilities where before I didn't feel like there were possibilities [...] I mean it started with yoga but it definitely branched out to pretty much all aspects of my life.

Several yoga practitioners in my research believe yoga helped them overcome major difficulties in their lives. Tania (yoga teacher and blogger), for instance, shared with me the role yoga played in her recovery from depression:

I had a pretty serious bout of depression and I was hospitalized for it and when I got out of the hospital I was like 'I need to do something, I need to figure some things out in my life and heal and rest and learn about myself'. So I went to an ashram [...] and I was drawn there mainly not to engage in a study of yoga but to engage in a study of myself and work on myself. It's a pretty small little community, [which functions as] a retreat centre. They have courses [and] they also have a youth program where young people can go there, live and work in the community [...] so I was able to do that.

Like Tania, many of the research participants in my study discovered yoga in times of transition and are convinced it led them to live a healthier, ethical, and more meaningful life. Sandra, the yoga student who tries her best to find a work-life balance, began her yoga practice during a trying period:

We first met at a yoga studio in Montreal where we both practised and where I was teaching. Our first research meeting took place on a Tuesday evening at a Sushi restaurant located in downtown Montreal. I arrived a little early. The hostess sat me at a table near the window. A few minutes later I received two menus and was served a cup of green tea. As I waited I looked over my questions. Upon her arrival we greeted each other; smiled and gave each other two kisses on the cheek. We quickly glanced over the menu, talked about our day and placed our order. Sandra seemed shy. She was quiet and broke eye contact from time to time by looking around the room. The tension slowly dissipated half way through the meal. We began to talk about her yoga history. She informed me that a yoga teacher she met in a previous workplace inspired her to try yoga. She described the woman as radiant, energizing, and enlivening. At that moment in time, Sandra was in the midst of a break-up, working and going to school (graduate studies) and also

dealing with some difficult family matters. Her yoga practice began with Kripalu (2x week) and she moved onto practicing ashtanaga (5x week). Yoga served her well. In gaining confidence with her yoga practice she dealt with her stress and mustered up the courage to make important decisions that changed her life circumstances.

Self-making disciplines such as yoga not only reshape bodies, they also develop people's characters. Mauss (1973) and Downey (2005) both write about "education in composure" and explain how character traits are developed through bodily practices. Yoga definitely helped shape my character. With practice I learned to be focused and to stay calm and connected to my sense of stability when I was faced with stressful situations. Prior to developing these skills I faced difficulty in a very anxious and reactive manner. Moreover, skilled teachers become competent in knowing their students' personalities by merely observing them in class. In fact, Mary's "do nothing challenge" provides an apt illustration of how yoga may influence the thought processes and behaviors of practitioners. She decided to challenge herself and her students to have "do nothing" moments over the course of one month:

I would be on the metro and I would be thinking about the things I wasn't doing because I was sitting on the metro or [I would think about] just how tired I was [...] and so I started focusing [...] on doing nothing on the metro and not think about the things I wasn't doing because I wasn't doing them (giggles), but you know really kind of making that a practice: 'o.k. I'm on the metro, I am just going to enjoy the fact that I don't have anything to do right now, all I have to do is sit here and go for the ride'.

Yoga's teachings begin to take effect with simple exercises such as Mary's.

As you can see the yoga practice and its collective presents practitioners with experiences, lessons and strategies exercised in the practice room that are also applicable and drawn upon in other social contexts (ie; riding the metro). Furthermore, the ways in which the

body is disciplined in yoga has as much a physiological as a psychological and spiritual effect. Subsequently research participants find it hard to describe in words their embodiment of yoga.

Words

Jaida Kim Samudra's research on silat training (art of self-defense) highlights the challenges students encounter when describing their experience in practice: "practitioners [...] run up against the limits of language for expressing embodied knowledge [...They] met my questions about their bodily experiences with silence and puzzled requests to rephrase my queries. They provided testimonials to the mental, social, and health benefits of silat training but danced around descriptions of their own kinesthetic practices" (Samudra 2008: 665). In addition, in silat training students are discouraged to ask questions and rarely receive more explanation besides the instructions given and movements taught (Samudra 2008). It seems that verbal expression and intellectual understanding of the practice is not encouraged or of significance.

Similarly, many of my interviewees struggled to find the right words to verbalize their embodiment of yoga. For example Pina, yoga teacher from Mexico, tried to describe her embodiment of the yoga practice as the following:

I'm still trying to understand what embodiment means and I think that it's deeply related with developing the capacity to listen to what is going on in your body in a way in which you can communicate better both with what's going on inside in terms of emotions and thoughts and outside in terms of what you are perceiving from what you are getting through your senses, and embodiment is through that process in which you, your body actually becomes that tool that I was talking about earlier, in which it is actually a means of communication from the inside and from the outside. Whatever that means, so embodiment would be more that process in which your body develops the capacity to be that tool in which it is meant to be. I don't know if that is clear?

As in silat training, yoga practitioners are persuaded to practice regularly, to explore the postures kinesthetically and to gain bodily understanding through repetition rather than asked to reflect

and discuss the experience of their yoga practice. When I asked Joanna to define her yoga practice, she responded by saying “I think [its about] just getting on your mat and doing your practice [...] Trying to define the practice is where we start to lose it a bit [We don’t even have to talk] about it. The practice being what it is. Getting on your mat, [knowing] it is part of what you do in your day and just not making a big deal [of it]”. In yoga as in other kinesthetic cultures (ie; silat) there are underlying beliefs; the practice is learned and transferred through body to body transmission, it is embodied and understood solely in practice, and the intellectual understanding of it is of little importance:

A student’s responsibility is not to talk but to do new movements until you’re sick, so that they get into your body directly [...] A core principle of silat [...] is having an experience which is frustrating or confusing, then [it] generates some idea or question, and then the structure or answer helps you go forward. But if [an answer is] given too soon, it prevents you from having the experience, because you think you already know (Samudra 2008: 668).

I remember approaching my teachers after class to inform them about my challenges in practice. In doing so, I hoped to gather more information on how to practice a posture or breathing technique more efficiently. The recurrent response I received was “show me how you do it”. As I demonstrated, the teacher made a few adjustments, gave one or two more instructions and suggested I practice it and see if anything shifts. Teachers give minimal verbal explanation, which seems to be the status quo. This finding led me to ask my research participants questions about the role of words in yoga.

Several practitioners have made declarations to me about the use and meaning of words in yoga. Three common arguments include the following:

- 1) When words are formulated to label or understand yoga the meaning of it is lost.
- 2) Words commonly used to describe and teach yoga are incorrectly applied or misunderstood.
- 3) Words are spiritual.

Tara spoke a great deal about the effect words have on individuals' practice and also on their understanding of yoga. She gave an example of the ways in which students and teachers interpret and comprehend the yoga sutras:

The sutras [...] are not prescriptive they are descriptive of experience. We tend to read a lot of the text [...] to receive or give instruction in a methodical way so we say 'do this, put your big toe here' instead of just saying 'move into the pose or let the breath move into the pose'. It's funny, the balance, because you need some instruction and you need somebody to follow [...however] the sutras are not telling you how to get into it they are describing the experience that has already occurred.

Moreover, Tara and I discussed certain words that frequently heard in yoga, such as commitment, strong and surrender, and realized there are often culturally pre-conceived ideas attached to these words.

Vanessa: Is it challenging for Western yoga practitioners to be committed or devoted to their practice?

Tara: The word devotion, semantically it's difficult because there is so much history behind it and overlays, and yet we would certainly say we are devoted to our children, to our partner. [...] if we see devotion as a sense of the heart connecting and opening to love, it's not that difficult a term to take in. Do you love your practice and yourself so much that you would do this? [...] that's where the commitment comes from. The commitment comes from this deep love.

Vanessa: What does the word commitment mean to you?

Tara: A capacity to continue to open the heart [...] we can open the heart to joy but can we open it to pain? Can we open to everything around us? So it's this continual capacity to open the heart.

Vanessa: I have noticed that many practitioners think of commitment as doing their formal practice 5-6x a week. Additionally, I have also observed that those who do not have a regular formal practice tend to feel ashamed.

Tara: [Yes] we have this attitude in our society that has a very harsh quality to it. Commitment and dedication are work-oriented words.

The words used by yoga teachers when giving instructions are also often misapprehended. For example, a yoga practitioner may hear the suggestion to open the heart, and

mistakenly think it is a physical directive to lift the sternum. There are numerous reasons why a student may mistake opening the heart as lifting the sternum. The student may have noticed the teacher raising her chest when giving the instruction, or possibly assumed that was what she meant. Do words strip yoga from its meaning and power? : “students, instead, remark that they learn movements most effortlessly from highly experienced teachers who do not talk too much” (Samudra 2008: 670). As words may lead some students in the wrong direction (ie; misunderstanding an instruction) for others, words are powerful and transformative.

Thus for students like Laura, words hold meaning and enhance practice:

When words are beautiful I really connect with them even if they are really simple [...] When I run in the morning I memorize poetry, and particularly Walt Whitman, and now I’m memorizing “Song of The Open Road”. I feel like those words in poetry and in philosophy [are] really expressing something really deep [...] I feel shifts and I feel openness and I feel mobility when I’m reading certain scripts [like] The Bhagavad Gita, Leaves of Grass, Les Miserables. For me words are spiritual.

Resembling Laura, I once experienced words as spiritual in a yoga class. Lying in corpse pose and feeling completely relaxed while the teacher quietly read out loud a poem, I listened attentively. The piece of writing touched my heart and held deep meaning for me. In hearing the words I felt my state of being change. Having a more loving and gentle relationship with yourself was the subject of the poem and coincidentally matched the personal goal I was learning to exercise in my practice. As I listened to the words my body reached a deeper level of relaxation. Incidentally, unlike Samudra, Downey found words to be useful in capoeira training.

Downey describes his capoeira coaching as a form of poetry and shares his story of how he learned to hold “Bananeira” (capoeira hand stand) correctly:

The story stuck with me because of the power of simple words: ‘Just stand up!’ When I finally succeeded, the words were waiting for me, capturing evocatively my new sensation. [...] His deceptively simple words were a kind of poetry disclosing how to take up the bananeira with my own body (Downey 2005: 48).

He writes about the power of poetry and how it draws upon metaphors, which he believes generates imagery that invokes life-changing experiences. Words shift individuals' perceptions and ways of experiencing the world (Downey 2005). In this account, Downey points out that his coach's words stayed with him for months before he was able to embody its meaning and accurately perform a capoeira hand stand (bananeira). Besides words are a way of "sharing, poetically, how [his teacher] lived the movement" (Downey 2005: 48). In my own study of yoga, Tara's (experienced but timid yoga teacher) observations echo Downey's analysis of words:

I think that's why the old text uses metaphor and a lot of iconography like Buddhist texts and even Hindu text. Because images, sound and metaphor are the closest things to language [they] capture these qualities [...] so if we use metaphor we are coming close to maybe feeling the experience [...] In that moment you are getting a sense of it but you still can't put words on it [even though] you know metaphor speaks the language of the soul. I think there is so much spirituality in symbols [...] they are the shorthand of the unconscious. [Through poetry] we are just trying to capture these archetypal energies and that's what we are opening to, connecting to spiritual practices in that realm.

All in all, the use and affects of words in kinesthetic cultures need to be considered and carefully employed as they can have both positive and negative outcomes. Moreover, they seem to be central in learning and transmitting the bodily practice.

Conclusion - The Embodiment of Yoga

As demonstrated, yoga is embodied in a number of ways (physically, socially, and verbally). All of these modes of yoga embodiment make-up a specific culture that incorporates distinctive techniques of the body, social etiquette and personal conditioning. Furthermore, it is evident that a leisure activity such as yoga is more than a fitness or relaxation undertaking. The investments practitioners place in learning and teaching yoga leads to creating and belonging to a group of individuals with whom they can identify and share meaningful experiences. Additionally, these

bodily and social yoga encounters provide individuals with a framework and methods to develop skills, adopt ethics and reflect upon and change one's identity.

Chapter 6: Thesis Conclusion

The image of Indra [is like a] matrix [which] is a web and by definition a matrix [is like] a crystalline structure. [It] functions as a conductor, and is a semi conductor [similar to our bodies and] our connective tissues, the fascia. [The matrix like the fascia] holds [...] information and transmit[s] and transform [s]. This interconnection, this matrix that can form and transform and transmit. It takes [information] in, lets it out and it changes its nature [...] Matrixes are by definition multi-dimensional but the degree of dimensionality is infinite as are the potential boundaries of the matrix.

Tara's explanation of Indra's net nicely describes the complexity and movements within a matrix. As she compares a matrix to the human body she points to several features; the interconnections, influences, effects, developments and changes. Most importantly, she states that "the degree of dimensionality is infinite as are the potential boundaries of the matrix". I'd like to take this concept a step further and suggest that what Tara is portraying is the intricacy and limitless possibilities in movement that transpires in a global world and that is ultimately reflected in yoga.

The primary aim of this thesis has been to provide an anthropological perspective on yoga in an attempt to position yoga in its contemporary and global context. What I have presented in the proceeding chapters illustrate some of the ways in which yoga is influenced and shaped by a variety of variables such as, cultural setting, marketing etc. I therefore demonstrate through my study of yoga the ways in which global proceedings stimulate and affect local developments. For example, transnational communities of yoga practice are forming in major cities across the globe and thereby changing the demographics and central activities. Hence, yoga practice is, as shown in the thesis, always moving in several directions and being reorganized towards meeting the different social conditions into which it is being brought as it is also influencing and changing the cultural and politico-economic centres it is being injected into.

Furthermore, the interconnections created in yoga are not always compatible and as discussed in the literature review and in Chapter 1 disjunctures arise. The classic example in this case is the consumerism and business of yoga, which as previously mentioned often leaves practitioners in a conflictual or confusing position and as a result they are left to come to grips with the subtle divergences produced by these disjunctures. As I have shown in Chapters 4 and 5 within these disjunctures there are practitioners who are discovering a spiritual practice and establishing a deeper awareness and connection to themselves while others are developing skills and utilizing yoga as a leisure and meaning-making activity. In addition, the movements in yoga can create a sense of stillness within the bodies, minds and hearts of practitioners, which has been depicted and described by my interlocutors as 'home'. Home, as previously discussed, is found in the varying types of mobility that exist in yoga (spatial, bodily, cognitive, conceptual mobility) and it is precisely where practitioners may seek to gather the stability and strength to face the challenges, stresses, and uncertainties of living in a world that is always in motion and changing. In yoga, the feeling of belonging is harnessed and being re-located. Home is literally where the heart is and belonging is felt within oneself. As such, this stillness, home, is precisely where practitioners transform. Yoga is the common ground shared with other practitioners as it is also a dwelling one can continuously return to time and time again. In yoga practice the body is the primary site where practitioners not only find a sense of home but it is where they encounter the same interconnections and disjunctures that exist in the world. In experiencing interconnection and working with the disjunctures their bodies are also continuously moving and changing.

Contributions:

My research on yoga serves to further extend the anthropological study of leisure and yoga. I utilize notions of embodiment to analyze and comprehend practitioners' experience of yoga in

order to not only provide a different understanding and perspective on yoga, but in the hopes of shedding some light on the big picture surrounding the yoga practice. Furthermore, in exploring the shared bodily practices of yoga I quickly became aware of the numerous forms of mobility existent within the yoga practice such as, the movement of bodies in āsana (physical postures) and the pathways created and travelled in the mind. Therefore, I identified and adapted a number of different theories of mobility, such as bodily, cognitive and conceptual mobility, to the context of yoga. In doing so, I have used the concept of 'bodyscape' to extend further Appadurai's notions of 5 scales²³. As illustrated my research project served to illustrate that the interactions and exchanges between cultures through global flows in yoga were largely based on the movement of individuals and groups of people who travel and practice yoga.

Further Research:

There are a range of subjects to study when researching yoga academically. If time permitted I would have also looked into examining yoga teacher training programs in more detail and learning more about the spread and growth of yoga schools in North America. Future consideration for research projects on yoga may also be conducted on the following themes:

- 1) Online yoga communities
- 2) Gender roles in yoga collectives
- 3) Individuals who feel excluded from yoga collectives

Online yoga communities

While conducting my research project on yoga I came across many practitioners who were implicated and involved in yoga through virtual means. For instance, I met practitioners who either wrote or followed yoga blogs to either spread or read yoga news and to raise awareness.

²³ The suggestion of 'bodyscape' as a term derives from Professor Vered Amit.

Others met online either through Skype or Facebook to connect with fellow practitioners living in different countries or to take part in a virtual and international meditation session.

Furthermore, yoga businesses advertise and use the internet to promote their products and services. All in all there is an ample amount of online yoga activity that can be studied.

Gender roles in yoga collectives

As mentioned in the methodology section of this thesis, the majority of yoga practitioners that took part in my research were female. Moreover, while conducting my field work I noticed that even though the majority of students and teachers in yoga were female the principal and most successful yoga teachers were in fact males. In addition, there tends to be a difference in teaching style between men and women, and men and women also seem to be attracted to dissimilar forms of yoga. It would be interesting to investigate this topic in order understand the role gender plays in yoga.

Individuals who feel excluded from yoga collectives

A few months after completing my fieldwork I was invited to partake in a roundtable at the Montreal yoga festival (June 2013). In meeting with fellow presenters and talking to participants I discovered that there are yoga practitioners who are actively addressing systemic inequality in yoga environments. For example, I met two teachers who were identifying and confronting prejudices existent in yoga. One teacher looked at women of color and their experience and relationship to yoga. The other instructor examined the feelings and reality of individuals who identify themselves as queer and practice yoga. The yoga talk was fascinating in that it stimulated discussion on the structures of power and race that play into yoga. It also looked at the possible ways yoga practitioners can bring more equity and diversity in yoga settings. As my

study of yoga did not focus on power relations and inequality I did not touch upon subjects such as accessibility, oppression and exclusion in yoga.

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