Ancient Wisdom, Modern Bodies: Hybrid Authenticity in the Space of Modern Yoga

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates transcultural exchange expressed in architectural and conceptual spaces as well as visual and material culture through the case study of HappyTree Yoga, a popular downtown Montreal studio. Through images and objects within these spaces, I explore how the modern postural yoga studio is designed as an escape from, or antidote to, the stresses of modern Western lifestyle through the integration of spirituality from an imagined, ahistorical Orient with Western socio-cultural norms of health, gender and bodily regulation. The studio interior and the objects housed therein are considered from the perspective of material culture in order to understand how the practice of yoga is constructed and authenticated through 'exotic' objects such as images of gurus and small shrines and how practitioners encounter and experience the agency of these objects. I discuss the hybridity of modern yoga's performance as both openly progressive and Western but aware of a need for legitimacy and authorization through the presence of Hindu imagery, ultimately creating new meanings for both these artifacts and those who participate in the highly ritualistic and performative use of these interiors. The space of modern yoga is not situated as a wholly Western location of therapy, health or bodily regulation; nor is it a pure, unadulterated continuation of ancient Indian religiosity, but rather a highly malleable contact zone. A strong aesthetic and sensory experience is therefore created wherein embodiment is achieved precariously in the spaces between self and other, spiritual East and material West, modernity and ancient wisdom.

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If the sealing of one's practice ends with a bow of gratitude, mine must first and foremost be to my supervisor, John Potvin, whose intellectual rigour, steadfast support and guidance have made me a better student and a better scholar, and who has been in many ways as much an admired mentor as a valued teacher. My utmost appreciation belongs to the Department of Art History and the professors who greatly enriched my five years at Concordia. I am especially indebted to Nicola Pezolet for his timely observations and helpful insights; to Thomas Strickland, under whose tutelage I was first able to conceive of this research as a legitimate avenue of inquiry; and Alena Buis for her kindness and encouragement, and without whom grad school would have remained a far-away, imaginary land.

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Marli, this is for you.

Dedication

To my teachers.
"I would like you to know that I am in awe of your intelligence and your depth and I wonder sometimes at the many lives you've lived before this one and in this one."

"Have a room for this practice alone. Do not sleep in that room, it must be kept holy. You must not enter the room until you have bathed, and are perfectly clean in body and mind. Place flowers in that room always; they are the best surroundings for a Yogi; also pictures that are pleasing. Burn incense morning and evening. Have no quarrelling, nor anger, nor unholy thought in that room. Only allow those persons to enter it who are of the same thought as you. Then gradually there will be an atmosphere of holiness in the room, so that when you are miserable, sorrowful, doubtful, or your mind is disturbed, the very fact of entering that room will make you calm. This was the idea of the temple and the church, and in some temples and churches you will find it even now, but in the majority of them the very idea has been lost. The idea is that by keeping holy vibrations there the place becomes and remains illumined."

Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works,* Vol. 1, 145.

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Introduction

In an article entitled "The Most Beautiful Yoga Studios in New York City" from January 2012, online magazine Well&Good NYC outlines the parameters that define a "pretty" yoga studio – something, the authors claim, that is undeniably important to one's practice. Design details, they insist, are key in creating the necessary "vibe" of a yoga studio, whether that may be a "vibe for easily soothing the mind or energizing the spirit."[1] The environmentally friendly – or eco-chic, as the industry terms it – features of these studios, while not immediately visible, are fastidiously detailed in every paragraph of the article. The practice room of HappyTree Yoga (Fig. 1) looks not unlike these idealized studios: austere nearly to the point of industrial, with open, whitewashed walls and wood floors, abundant and atmospheric natural light, and earthy accents like plants or colourful fabrics often characterize spaces of modern yoga in North America (Fig. 1). Countless other images exist in this mold, many representative of the current design trends for spas and, to a lesser degree, gym spaces. Much like a spa, the space is serene and tranquil, and will receive on average fifty clients a day who, forgoing the gym, will use the yoga studio instead to bend, relax, stretch, and sweat for their physiological wellbeing. Health and bodily refinement, in this space, is a distinctly luxurious upper- and middle-class undertaking.

Like other studios, however, HappyTree's practice room features a collection of decorative objects one is unlikely to find in a gym or spa setting. On the wide platform of the windowsill a statue of Ganesha (the elephant-headed Hindu god) sits next to Shiva, the lord of yoga. From a sculpture of seated Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, strong Indian incense wafts through the room (Fig. 2). Flowers are ritualistically offered to the statues, and above them a strange New Age pictorial amalgamation featuring a multiplicity of religious symbols and icons

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[1] "New York City's Most Beautiful Yoga Studios." *Well and Good NYC,* January 2, 2012. Accessed November 23,

– including a Jewish star of David, a Hindu *chakra* motif,[2] and a Christian cross - overlooks the scene. This is the altar of the *shala,* or practice room, and though they are overwhelmingly present in the majority of Western studios, altars are rarely prayed to or acknowledged during a typical modern postural yoga session; moreover, their meaning or purpose is almost never made explicit.[3] The fact that images of Hindu deities, statues of the Buddha, and New Age icons litter the windowsills of popular Western yoga studios while crucifixes, for example, do not hang in the hallways of commercial gym or spas points to the hybrid, multi-layered nature of the spaces housing these objects. Despite many contemporary yoga studios primarily serving as spaces for secular group fitness, traditional fitness clubs and gymnasia nonetheless do not feature religious iconography or even decorative aspects within their interior spaces. What, then, allows the interior spaces of yoga studios to not only emphasize a highly Orientalized and exoticized design program, but simultaneously exist in a modern, secular context as spaces of fitness and health? How is the intimate privacy of internal, spiritualized experience expressed and displayed alongside the highly public spectacle of bodily regulation and refinement within this same space? With the intent to question the built environment of modern yoga and the physical and conceptual characteristics that constitute and define such a space, this work is concerned with the treatment of surfaces, spatial arrangements of rooms, borders, thresholds, and the way in which the studio's design facilitates the circulation of bodies, the nature of ornamentation and its placement within the overall design program. Through the case study of HappyTree Yoga, an urban Montreal-

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[2] "From at least the end of the of the first millennium CE, yogic and Tantric traditions in India began to evolve the idea of an alternative anatomy, which mapped the 'subtle body' (*sukshma sharira*) as a locus of spiritual energies and points of graduated awakening – chakras (wheels) or *padmas* (lotuses) – arranged along a vertical axis (*sushumna*) through a network of channels (*nadis*)". Sita Reddy, "Medical Yoga", in *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, exhibition catalogue (Smithsonian Institute: Washington, 2013), 275. Simplified *chakra* forms are common visual tropes in modern yoga studios and are used to illustrate yoga's connection to psychosomatic and spiritual understanding of the body.

[3] Sacha Mathews, *Indian Religion and Western Yoga Practices.* MA Thesis, Department of Religions, Concordia University: 2011.

based yoga studio, this thesis intends to examine the space of modern yoga as a hybrid location that negotiates – often ambiguously and paradoxically – modernity as the rational mind and productive body, juxtaposed against an ahistorical Orient as the repository of metaphysical wellbeing. Images and objects in these spaces, I argue, reinforce how the modern postural yoga studio is designed as an escape from, or antidote to, the stresses of modern Western lifestyle through the integration of spirituality and the wisdom of the Orient with Western socio-cultural norms of health and bodily regulation. Borrowing from Penny Sparke the precept that interiors can also be understood and analyzed by ensembles of objects within them,[4] I also examine the objects found within HappyTree, many of them characteristic of most modern studios - these include a wealth of statues of Hindu deities, called *murtis,* Tibetan prayer flags, images of the Buddha, paintings and prints of *mandalas* or *yantras,*[5] and the ubiquitous symbol of yoga in the West: the Sanskrit *Om* syllable (Fig. 3). At once starkly modern and highly Orientalized, HappyTree presents a space that both prominently displays objects of Indian religiosity and yet remains silent on the actual histories of narratives of these objects, using them instead as representations of the interior as outside of modernity: an imagined landscape. Situated on an above-ground floor, the studio both metaphorically and literally lifts the practitioner up and above the bustle of the urban landscape and into what HappyTree calls, " a sunny and candlelit oasis designed to help you leave the city behind."[6]

While scholars have begun to address how Orientalism, eugenics, nationalism, imperialism and globalization have and continue to have agency over yoga's multiple formulations,[7] little to

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[4] Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008) 11-12.
[5] *Mandalas* and *yantras* are geometric or circular symmetrical design patterns traditionally used in Eastern mysticism and part of both traditional Hindu and Buddhist iconography. They can refer to a specific deity or to a general concept or representation, such as symbolically representing the harmony of the universe.
[6] "Your Downtown Montreal Yoga Studio", HappyTree Yoga, accessed November 20 2013, happytreeyoga.com.
[7] On yoga, modernity and imperialism, see Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); on the history of yoga and global religious movements, see Elizabeth

nothing has been written on how visual material might impact and indeed has been agentic in the conceptualization and concretization of these ideas in the history of yoga. Yoga itself is a nascent field of study. At the forefront of it is Mark Singleton who, in collaboration with Jean Byrne, has written at length about the divide between scholars and practitioners in the study of yoga, and explicitly calls for the greater involvement of studies by scholar-practitioners who have both immersed themselves in the practices and spaces of modern yoga but also endeavor to understand the broader context and investigate how yoga has been shaped by modernity.[8] I myself fill this role of scholar-practitioner – I have worked, practiced, and taught at HappyTree since 2011. This total immersion into the space, discourse, and culture of yoga has offered ceaseless opportunities to question, discuss, and experience the very topics I address in this study. This experience has also reinforced Singleton and Byrne's supposition that scholar-practitioners may be unwelcome in their attempt to inhabit two worlds at once. This is due to a mutual prejudice, they suggests, between those who study yoga in an academic context and teachers and practitioners of yoga, who may regard critical enquiry as an attack on the integrity of their practice.[9] Although this thesis is not an account of my own experiences, I believe perpetuating such dichotomies is unproductive. Rather, I have made an attempt, as Singleton and Byrne advocate, to be aware of the "porosity of such categories", and to allow for the overlap of intellectual inquiry and experiential knowledge.[10] Translating personal lived experience into serious scholarship is not always a well-received avenue of exploration, though I believe it is

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De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2005); for an anthropological on the global flows of yoga see Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005). For the history of European Orientalist's involvement with the development of yoga and the correlation between yoga, Indian nationalism and eugenics, see Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[8] Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, "Introduction" in *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives,* eds. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (London: Routledge) 3-4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 3.

necessary to take into account the lived experiences of those individuals who frequent HappyTree and for that reason I include personal interviews in this study with both students and teachers of the studio. It is, after all, a space dedicated to living bodies. It is not, however, always open to such questions – my own personal experience has been that of gentle but firm censorship in the context of the workplace when my research has come up for discussion and taken a more critical tone. As Singleton and Byrne remind their reader, "parties from both 'sides' may have a personal or collective interest in maintaining such [scholar/practitioner] dichotomies."[11] The studio is indeed a space with a very established and preferably unquestioned narrative to maintain.

In order to address it, my research draws heavily from scholars who have laid the groundwork for such explorations, the earliest of which is Joseph Alter's examination of Indian modernity's influence on modern yoga through the perspective of physical culture and medicine, key in understanding that the origins of yoga's legitimization through science is not entirely predicated on its arrival in the West.[12] Following on from this, Elizabeth De Michelis' investigation of yoga in the West over the past century and analysis of the practice in its current form (focusing specifically on Iyengar-style yoga in Britain) represents the first thorough exploration of the actual processes and rituals of contemporary yoga.[13] Similarly, Sarah Strauss' anthropological analysis of the globalization of yoga and its interconnections with other movements that characterize the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, such as environmental activism, elucidates yoga's multiple nodes and networks, both geographically and as a modern phenomenon.[14] It is in large part due to their scholarship that yoga has come to be

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[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy*.
[13] De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* .
[14] Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures*.

taken seriously as a subject of academic inquiry.[15] Despite this growing wealth of research on modern yoga, scholars have yet to attend to the subject of the yoga studio as an archetypal space: while the performance of yoga itself is addressed, no attention is given to the built environment in which these activities occur, and no analysis or case studies exist that deal directly with the interior design and aesthetic of commercial yoga studios in the West. The fact that yoga studios come in an overwhelmingly standardized mold – from the features of the practice hall to the way in which they are decorated – reinforces the supposition that the yoga studio is a very carefully contrived space in its bid to provide authenticity to practitioners. Beatrix Hauser's superb anthology on the transnational aspects of yoga touches upon a multiplicity of contexts that help frame yoga's importance in the modern West: as a learning tool; as a diagnostic tool in psychotherapy; and as a technique for the improvement of employee productivity in the workforce, amongst other things.[16] Despite this wealth of new research, the anthology remains silent on the subject of the studio space itself, altogether ignoring the design programs of such spaces and discussing the body as an entity in and of itself, as though yoga were applied to the body rather than an *embodied* practiced and lived-in experience within a designated space.

To ground my theoretical investigation I draw from Charles Rice's work on the modern interior, specifically his evocation of the interior as both at once perceived and experienced.[17] In defining the modern interior Rice proposes a reading of space as a physical, lived reality based in the materials of the built environment itself, but also as an image, a "reverie or imaginal picture

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[15] Singleton and Byrne, "Introduction", 3.
[16] Suzanne Augenstein, "The Introduction of Yoga in German Schools: A Case Study" in *Yoga Traveling: Bodily Practice in Transcultural Perspective,* ed. Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013): 155-173; Liane Hofman, "The Impact of Kundalini Yoga on Concepts and Diagnostic Practice in Psychology and Psychotherapy" in *Yoga Traveling,* ed. by Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013): 81-107; Verena Schnäbele, "The Useful Body: The Yogic Answer to Appearance Management in the Post-Fordist Workplace" in *Yoga Traveling,* ed. by Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013): 135-154.
[17] Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

[…] which could transform an existing spatial interior into something other."[18] In the case of the studio, I examine this doubleness as it is expressed through the studio's physical layout and material culture while investigating the way it proposes to "leave the city behind"[19] and transport practitioners into an imaginary and ultimately immaterial, exoticized landscape.

Historically, yoga studios are not the first spaces to create escapist environments designed to counter the perceived ill effects of modern urban life. Spas, as I will explore below, and *hammams (*Turkish baths), are also built environments designed as pleasurable (and often luxurious) retreats for the sake of an individual's physical and sometimes emotional and mental wellbeing. In his work on the Jermyn Street *hammam* in Victorian London, John Potvin elaborates on the ritualized process and experience of bathers in the exoticized interior of the baths.[20] Like the ritualized[21] sequence of the yoga class, the interior of the *hammam "*offered its bathers a sense of refuge, a place of repose, a location to facilitate a sense of interiority […] a ritual withdrawal from the outside forced extraversion of the metropolis."[22] The yoga studio, I would argue, uses its Oriental and exotic design much in the same way as the *hammam,* as Potvin argues*:* the exoticized design not only allows for a greater submersion into an otherworldly experience, but provides for the consumption of the (commodified) spatial experience distinct and separate from everyday experience.[23] Such a space, he argues, was activated by the agents who appropriated it according to various ways of fulfilling their own needs, aesthetic or otherwise.[24] Much in the same way, I

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[18] Ibid., 2.
[19] "Your Downtown Montreal Yoga Studio", HappyTree Yoga, accessed November 20 2013, happytreeyoga.com.
[20] John Potvin. "Vapour and Steam: The Victorian Turkish Bath, Homosocial Health, and Male Bodies on Display." *Journal of Design History* 18.4 (2005): 319-33
[21] For an analysis of the ritual process of modern postural yoga classes, see De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga,* 252-59
[22] Potvin, "Vapour and Steam", 324.
[23] Ibid., 325.
[24] Ibid., 320.

propose a reading of HappyTree that accounts for the multiple ways in which bodies use the space to fulfill their own desires for health, bodily regulation, and spiritual experience.

To explore the yogic interior is to examine the duality of its presentation: its modern aesthetic and place in popular culture as a healthy and increasingly mainstream form of fitness, and its presentation of a sensorial experience that recalls its Eastern origins through both visual and haptic elements. This analysis considers several ways of conceptualizing the interior and divides the task into two overarching – yet by no means mutually exclusive – categories: the studio as a lived-in, embodied experience, and the studio interior as a representation of the Orient. In doing so I do not wish to reproduce the dichotomous divide that I believe the studio itself straddles: between East and West, Self and Other, modernity and tradition, science and mysticism, as the aim of this study is not to understand why these elements have come together in this way – an ongoing project for many of the aforementioned scholars – but rather how the built environment of the studio conveys and displays these binaries. Although I divide these two aspects I wish to clarify that this is not to insinuate that the space of the studio does not integrate these aspects into one another. Indeed, it is this very ambivalence that allows for the yoga studio to become a hybrid space, not simply predicated on its interior design or aesthetics but the multifaceted use of the space by the bodies that inhabit it and use it to perform their own acts of bodily refinement, healing, and ritualistic performance. As a ritual, the practice affords "various levels of access to the sacred, starting from a 'safe', mundane, tangible foundation of body-based practice. In such DYI [do-it-yourself] forms of spiritual practice, there is room for the practitioner to decide whether to experience her practice as 'spiritual' or altogether secular", suggesting a fluidity that permits practitioners to experience both facets (spiritual and secular) at varying levels of

commitment.[25] It is the very presence of the studio's exoticized aesthetic that differentiates it from commercial gyms, even while it reproduces the heteronormativity and disciplining practices of such spaces. As Lynda Johnston has shown in her work on commercial gym spaces, such places are exceptionally Foucauldian locations of discipline in which the heteronormativity of bodies are surveyed by the panoptic-like expanse of mirrors and open spaces through which a gaze may travel easily, assuring that the subject can both survey the bodies of others and their own.[26] Furthermore, she suggests that in the case of gym spaces, "bodies are often reworked to an explicit male/female binary."[27] While yoga studios do not have separate rooms for separate exercises, such as the sexed division of weight rooms for men and aerobic rooms for women common in traditional commercial gyms,[28] most studios, HappyTree among them, require students to mark their gender on a mandatory waiver form on their first visit. The studios bathrooms are gendered at all times except for during Queer and Trans*Only Yoga. These classes, as I will discuss further, are characterized not only by the intent to create a safe space but to eliminate gendered verbal instructions and posture modification that feature in regular classes.

In this same vein, not all classes are designed specifically with the physical disciplining and regulating of bodies in mind. The Orientalizing narrative of yoga's psycho-spiritual history allows it to be framed as an alternative healing practice and place that subverts the western biomedical paradigm of curing as epitomized by the hospital.[29] The second section of this thesis proposes HappyTree as a healing space alternative to the hospital, specifically in the case of Gentle Yoga, a class dedicated for cancer patients. As Annemarie Adams and Thomas Schlich

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[25] De Michelis, *Modern Yoga,* 251
[26] Lynda Johnston, "Reading the Sexed Bodies and Spaces of Gyms", in *Places Through the Body,* ed. Heidi Nast & Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1988) 251-252.
[27] Ibid., 248.
[28] Johnston, "Reading the Sexed Bodies and Space of Gyms"
[29] Suzanne Newcombe, "Global Hybrids? 'Eastern Traditions' of Health and Wellness" in *The Gaze of the West: Framings of the East*, ed. Shanta Nair Venugopal (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2013): 202-17.

have shown in their case study of Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital, modern hospital architecture, especially the interiors of surgery rooms, are designed to exert the utmost control over a patient's body.[30] In tracing the evolution of surgical space from the large, naturally lit operating theatre of the late nineteenth century to the tightly regulated, windowless surgical unit of modern hospitals, Adams and Schlich reveal that "operating rooms became (and look) increasingly more like laboratories than like living rooms or theatres."[31] As I argue below, practitioners who use HappyTree as a healing space come to differentiate it from the hospital precisely because of the inviting aesthetics of its interior. Characterized by open space, natural light and ventilation, yogic interior is distinguished from the sorts of hospital spaces Adams and Schlich identify as "small […] opaque, inaccessible, mechanically lit and ventilated" and increasingly isolated and artificial.[32] As practitioner interviews reinforce, a sense of embodied wholeness and community experienced by Gentle Yoga practitioners comes to supplant and subvert the mechanistic isolation and loss of control characteristic of their experience as hospital patients.

The third section addresses the exoticized aesthetics of the studio space and its objects. In his work on contemporary conceptions of yoga's premodern past, Alter has argued that it is precisely "this 'other' history […] which both undermines and authorizes the idea of yoga as medicine […] and this tension between pragmatic rationalism and esoteric magic… makes it powerful" (Alter 2005:19). I would suggest that it is not only yoga itself, but the exoticized studio interior that produces the allure and authority of its Other history. Despite its contemporary grounding in modern medicine and the cult of the body beautiful, the studio is

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[30] Annmarie Adams and Thomas Schlich, "Design for Control: Surgery, Science, and Space at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, 1893–1956" *Medical History* 50 (2006): 303-324.
[31] Ibid., 323
[32] Ibid.

alluring precisely because it seems to offer this alternative mode of being in the world and the body, outside of Western hegemony. Richard King suggests that "the current wave of postmodern anxiety about the foundations of Western civilization is partly a consequence of historicist and reductionist analysis being applied reflexively to the West."[33] Colin Campbell echoes this in his treatise on Easternization, which he defines as the rise of the annexation and heroization of Eastern cultures as the answer to the ills of Western civilization.[34] The yoga studio subtly suggests through its Oriental material culture that the panacea of health may be found in invoking and performing the rituals, however interpreted, of yoga as a "healing ritual of secular [eastern] religion."[35] The objects in this space, then, are no longer assembled in a pastiche of *objets-d'art* in a cabinet of curiosities or museum setting – they are instead agentic in representing a solution to the postmodern anxiety King suggests, and which begin, albeit slowly, to move out of the historicist and reductionist discourse of "traditional" Orientalism as defined by Edward Said.[36] Singleton's contribution to the study of modern yoga has been particularly important in identifying the invention, construction and performance of yoga traditions since the height of Orientalism in India, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. His work on constructive Orientalism heavily informs this project and the way it explores the invention of authentic or "classical" aspects of yoga – including the objects and images associated with it.[37] This proposition of authoritative origin and the construction of a canonical idea of "classic" in the case of yogic discipline in North America is one I will evoke often in this analysis alongside the

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[33] Richard King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East' (London & New York: Routledge, 1999) 157-158.
[34] Colin Campbell, *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).
[35] De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga,* 248.
[36] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). In *Orientalism and Religion,* King discusses Said in the context of "traditional" Orientalism, that is to say a "negative" Orientalism that does not leave room for resistance, hybridity or "Orientalist discourses for anti-colonial purposes". King, *Orientalism and Religion,* 86.
[37] Mark Singleton, "The Classical Reveries of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Constructive Orientalism" in *Yoga in the Modern World,* see especially 87-90; see also Singleton, *Yoga Body,* 2010.

Orientalism of Said, and is predicated on the idea of the Orient as image, or representation of the studio space. This, alongside the idea of the actual architectural physicality of the studio and its ability to affect one's state of embodiment characterizes the "doubleness" of the studio space.[38] This is reflected in yoga's construction as traditional and its actual performance as modern: if one understands the physical movements of yoga as exterior insofar as they are embodied and tactile, the interior experience of yoga becomes linked to the mental, the mystic, and the transcendent. Such a modern and highly medicalized engagement with a subject constructed as premodern and thus irrational allows for the marked ambivalence that characterizes yoga studios. The interior, then, is neither only spatial nor only representational: it is, rather, a place between "reverie and reality."[39]

HappyTree: Your Oasis Above the City

As my investigation is an attempt to understand how the interior design and material culture of HappyTree produces a hybrid experience of aesthetic Eastern Otherness and modern, medicalized mind-body asceticism, it should be noted that yoga is widely performed outside of studios and has become ubiquitous in gyms, community centers, and even educational institutions. While studios dedicated specifically to yoga continue to open in urban centers, instructors whom I was able to interview indicated they have also begun to teach yoga in gyms due to its popularity.[40] Although the content of the class is often the same, I wish to suggest that it is the nature of the room itself and its aesthetics that impact practitioner's experience, especially

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[38] Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).
[39] Charles Rice, "Rethinking Histories of the Interior" in *From Organization to Decoration: An Interiors Reader,* ed. Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) 103.
[40] Interview with HappyTree teacher, February 4 2014, Montreal

their sense of the practice's authenticity. These multi-usage, unadorned rooms are the same in which aerobic and other group activities take place and, as the following example suggests, an entirely different spatial experience to that of a dedicated studio space. In a 2003 *Yoga Journal* article entitled "Pumping Iron, Practicing Yoga", managing editor Nora Isaacs questioned whether or not practitioners were getting their money's worth practicing in traditional gym spaces, immediately establishing that gym atmospheres are not conducive – in fact, they are contradictory - to yogic practice, however defined. It should be noted that *Yoga Journal* is the most lucrative and widely read English-language magazine publication devoted to yoga in North America,[41] and therefore carries a vested interest in its readership's understanding of what yoga is, with an editorial mandate that irreverently mixes yoga as health with yoga as esoteric knowledge. Isaac's article summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of yoga in studios versus yoga in gym spaces, noting that practitioners are invested in finding serene and tranquil atmosphere, which the gym, with its pumping music, loud machinery, and harsh ambiance does not provide.[42] One gym-goer offered: "There was a pervasive, frenetic, high-energy feeling in the room […] It was as if the room itself could never really calm down."[43] The décor, she notes, is less than inspiring. "The place they stick you in are often covered in mirrors and fluorescent lights; they are not the spaces that had yoga in mind when they were built."[44] This adds up to an environment, Isaacs suggests, which bypasses the "spiritual heart" of yoga and turns it instead into just another group exercise.[45] That the "spiritual" essence of yoga should be generated by the environment in which it is practiced rather than the content of the class itself would suggest that the more authenticating material incorporated into the practice space, the more a "spiritual-based philosophy" replaces a

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[41] "eCirc for Consumer Magazines". Alliance for Audited Media. December 31, 2012. Accessed March 19th, 2014.
[42] Nora Isaacs, "Pumping Iron, Practicing Yoga," *Yoga Journal*, August 2003, 88-93, 149-151.
[43] Ibid., 92.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

"fitness-based philosophy", insofar as religious iconography and exoticized aesthetics can be said to legitimize the space.[46] Though the movements done in a standard posture-based class are no different than a callisthenic training routine at the gym, yoga at the gym is framed as lacking not in spiritual content but in spatial markers that supplement one's physical practice with a degree of spirituality, only at which point it becomes monetarily "worthwhile" yoga.[47] .

HappyTree provides a model case study for several reasons. Perhaps the most significant of these is that it is owned and operated as an independent small business. It does not, therefore, require regulating of its class content and teachers, as Iyengar-style studios do, nor is the content of its promotional material or the design program of its studio standardized, as is the case with the very popular Moksha Yoga franchise.[48] Moreover, HappyTree is not a lineage-based studio, which means it is not obliged to have dedicated material to a founding teacher or guru from whom the lineage originates, as is the case with Iyengar and Ashtanga-style studios (Fig.5). Free of ties and obligations to a commercial franchisor and without the necessity to pay homage to any traditional lineage, HappyTree is an ideal environment to explore as it is a highly contained space, regulated internally and therefore able to construct a space of yoga both independent of outside forces and still recognizably mainstream and authoritative insofar as the modern postural practice it offers is not unlike that of the aforementioned lineage-based traditions, and thus locates HappyTree along the same spectrum of authenticity. In addition, many of the aforementioned studios offer a single type of yoga, or combine the space to offer traditional fitness classes and

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[46] Ibid.

[47] The subtitle of the *Yoga Journal* article is "Are Gym Yogis Getting Their Money's Worth?", implying that there are certain characteristics a yoga class must posses for it to be of a certain standard of acceptable expenditure.

[48] Iyengar and Ashtanga styles are both similar to the *hatha* yoga offered at HappyTree insofar as they are posture-based practices developed in the mid-twentieth century according to the lineages of a single guru: B.K.S Iyengar in the case of Iyengar Yoga, and Pattahbi Jois in the case of Ashtanga. Moksha Yoga is a popular North American hot yoga franchise established by Ted Grant and based off the 26-pose Bikram yoga system, the first variation of hot yoga established in the West by Bikram Choudhury in the 1970s. Montreal has three Moksha Yoga studios, one Iyengar, and multiple studios that claim Ashtanga-certification according to Jois' methods. See Mathews, *Indian Religion and Western Yoga Practice.*

martial arts alongside postural yoga. HappyTree is unique in that it offers strictly yoga, but a variety of yoga that points to the possibility of a more nuanced and multilayered understanding of the space. Its own mission statement offers the prospect of individuals catering their time in the space to suit their specific need, as the studio "unite[s] formerly competing styles of yoga under a single roof, allowing our practitioners the opportunity to explore the path to health, happiness and radiance that best suits them".[49] Alongside the callisthenic-inspired physical Hatha and Hot yoga, it offers courses dedicated to relaxation, meditation, and a special class dedicated to cancer patients, and in the past has also offered Queer and Trans*Only Yoga. It is perhaps this combination of spatial modalities, a wealth of possibilities of embodiment that make HappyTree unique in regards to its mainstream competitors. As this thesis investigates, the space in HappyTree is both highly malleable and actively molds the bodies within it, existing at one time as a Foucauldian space of bodily discipline and observation and at another a holistic space of healing, an alternative to the clinic. Both these functions, however, operate under the broader pretext of authenticity through its Orientalizing interior design and ornamentation.

Opened in 2007, HappyTree has remained in its central downtown location for the entirety of its operating years. Located on the intersection between the Montreal downtown core and the upper middle-class neighborhood of Westmount, HappyTree's location allows it to cater to several demographics. Its primary clients are the workforce from downtown office towers; it also has a large contingent of students from nearby colleges and universities, as well as the smaller demographic of wealthy Westmount families. Because of its connection with the Montreal-based organization CanSupport of the Cedars Cancer Institute, HappyTree also receives cancer patients from the Montreal General Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital for the Gentle Yoga class, free for patients. Its proximity to Westmount also locates it west of the city center and

[49] "Our Roots", HappyTree Yoga, accessed January 23, 2014, http://happytreeyoga.com/about-happy-tree-yoga.

consequently in the more Anglophone area of the city. Its promotional material is primarily written in English, however, and its prices are in the mid to upper echelons of cost compared to other local studios,[50] making its main market upwardly-mobile, middle-class Anglophones from the downtown and more suburban Westmount and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce areas.[51]

The exterior of HappyTree is entirely unremarkable (Fig.6). It is situated on the second floor of a commercial building, which on the first features a Japanese restaurant and a Kyokushin Karate school on the third. Four doors are required to access the space: the first on the street front, which also opens into the restaurant; the second leads up a narrow staircase and onto the second floor, where a third door must be opened into an unremarkable hallway. On the right side of the hall is the empty remainder of a now-defunct driving school; on the left is the final door to access HappyTree. The space, once a photo development laboratory, was extensively restructured in order to reorganize the space for the purpose of yoga (Fig. 7a, 7b). While the entirety of HappyTree's space was not constructed and designed originally with yoga in mind, the reappropriation of such an industrial space to notably *escape* the industrial, urban landscape creates a stark contrast between the featureless exterior and transitional hallways of the building with the warm and intimate layout of the interior.

Like most yoga studios, HappyTree requires practitioners to remove their shoes upon entering. The yoga class itself is done barefoot, and shoes and boots, objects belonging to the

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[50] According to Sarah Strauss and Laura Mandelbaum's research on popular studios in other major Canadian urban centers, including Toronto and Vancouver, the average price for a monthly membership ranges from 150 to 250 CAD, while a single class is between 16 and 20 CAD. Laura Mandelbaum and Sarah Strauss, "Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment: Transcultural Discourses on Sustainable Living" in *Yoga Traveling,* ed. Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer 2013) 182. HappyTree's monthly fee is 150, while a drop-in class is 18 CAD.

[51] Montreal, it should be noted, is highly saturated with modern postural yoga studios. In exploring elements of Indian religiosity and secular spirituality in some of these locations, Sacha Mathews suggests it is Québec and specifically Montreal's particularly secular social environment following the history and events of the Quiet Revolution that prevent it from becoming embroiled in the sort of debates and legal actions that emerge in the United States wherein yoga is directly positioned as antagonistic to Christian institutions and belief systems. See Mathews, *Indian Religiosity and Western Yoga Practice,* 75.

"polluted" outer-sphere must be left outside before entering the sanitized, ritualized interior.[52] Going without one's shoes implies the floor will be both sanitary and welcoming on tired feet. Indeed, the practitioner's feet are greeted with spotless hardwood floors. If a client is simply entering for information and not to participate in a class, they are often spared the task of removing their shoes. They are, however, warned that if they would like to come into the communal space or especially enter the practice room, it is imperative that they remove their shoes. The practice room is framed as the ultimate end in the divestment of outside garments and hindrances – little but one's mat and oneself may actually enter. If one is indeed intending on taking a class, they pass through the door and into the communal space – an area that comprises reception, the lounge, and the retail area (Fig. 8). A massive panel printed with the HappyTree logo dominates the space behind the reception – it is one of the few garishly colorful visual elements of the space, the bright green and deep purple jarring against the warm wood and muted grey tones of the furniture (Fig. 9). It is also one of the few yoga studio logos in Montreal that does not outright reference yoga in some way, either by a Sanskrit word or visual element. What at first glance looks like a calligraphic character is in fact an anthropomorphic shape meant to mimic *vrksasana,* the tree *asana.* Aside from the word yoga, there is nothing in the logo that would hint to the business' purpose as a studio, something that studio owner Melanie Richards counters in describing the rational for the color scheme: green for the *anahata* chakra and purple for the *sahasrara* chakra.[53] Such a link is entirely lost in the starkly commercial aesthetic of the logo, and worth noting insofar as HappyTree manages its image through the logo without outright

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[52] The removal of one's shoes or boots creates a "decisive spatial and temporal threshold between […] the outside world and what will transpire inside." Moreover, the removal of boots and shoes can be equated to a transition from the public, polluted exterior to the private, intimate interior. See Potvin, "Vapour and Steam", 321-322.
[53] The *anahata,* or heart chakra, is traditionally depicted as green, and the highest chakra, the *sahasrara* at the crown of the head, is purple..

reference to yoga's Oriental origins until one enters the studio itself, wherein the space describes an entirely different feeling.

Opposite to the reception and massive logo is the tea counter, where HappyTree makes and freely serves freshly made herbal chai tea every day, boasting a recipe brought to the west by Yogi Bhajan in the 1960s.[54] The space that constitutes the lounge and receptions is at once expansive in its brightness and high ceilings, and intimate in its size and the way in which the lounge area is organized separately from the reception, as a small alcove, though no door or wall separates the two areas. The space is lit by track lighting and abundant daylight that pours through the windows from the north side of the room (Fig. 10). The lounge is in this corner, and below the windows are two plush couches with colorful cushions and a large glass table. Both couches make a right angle to with each other and face the table; the smaller one importantly has its back to the reception space, creating the sense of a closed-off enclave (Fig. 11). Two shelves are next to the lounge: one is littered with plants, alongside plush satin pillows of rich green and purple, and bolsters (long, thick cushions) for sale of the same colours. The other shelf serves also as individual cubbyhole storage for patrons; above the storage is a retail display. HappyTree sells an assortment of its own branded goods, including tank tops and t-shirts, but there is also handcrafted jewelry, handmade soaps and cosmetics, organic and local skincare products, books, mats, and yoga DVDs, among other products. Next to the retail shelf is the door to the Nest, a small massotherapy center that is both independent of but run through HappyTree and directed by one of its teachers (Fig. 12). A fascinating space unto itself, this thesis will also consider the Nest and the role such services in yoga studios play in recreating a form of spa culture in which all practices of pleasurable self-care occur under one roof.

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[54] Yogi tea, as it is called, refers to a decaffeinated chai tea served regularly during Richards' Kundalini training and has been a feature of HappyTree since it opened.

Once they have paid for their class, patrons are directed past the lounge and the doors leading the practice room down a narrow hall to changing rooms. This narrow wall features several works of art. On one side minimalist ink drawings of anthropomorphic figures in various yoga poses, donated to the studio by artist Meier Kaur, line the wall above a cushioned alcove (Fig. 13). Opposite, a large scale commissioned work by S. Jowett, one of HappyTree's own clients, is prominently featured: called *Tree Mandala,* it is a large silver tree from which the traditional iconography of the subtle body *chakras* emerge (Fig. 14). In keeping with the Orientalizing aesthetic, the end of the hall features a sculpture of a multi-faced golden Buddha head next to purple and white drapery decorated in *mandala* motifs (Fig. 15).

A practitioner may continue down the hall which leads to the women's washrooms and changing space, then to the men's. Both spaces are minimalist and streamlined in their interior design – long mirrors, cabinets in dark wood, elevated glass sinks, accented by stark slate floors and rich purple walls create a highly aestheticized and glossy space of tiles, glass, and steel (Fig. 16a, 16b). The men's changing room is designed much the same way, though there is both one less shower stall and one less latrine than the women's room, reflecting the disparity in the female to male ratio of attendance, where women constitute the majority of clients. The washroom walls are also covered in inspirational quotes, posters, and advertisements for upcoming studio events. Beyond the washrooms at the very end of the hall is a space more or less restricted, though readily visually accessible - the small laundry room and at the very end point of the hall, the studio director's office (Fig. 17). This space is arguably the only one off limits to the regular practitioner, making the studio an otherwise extremely accessible space, small and intimate. When returning down this hall one may enter the "destination" space - that is to say, the practice hall, or *shala,* itself. In this way the other spaces serve as transitional to a certain degree, in which the self is moving between space of pre-practice condition and post-practice condition, either shedding

aspects of the outside world in order to prepare to transition into this intimate space or absorb the aftereffects of the practice while preparing to return to the outside. Drawing from Arnold van Gennep's work on ritual rites of passage, De Michelis outlines three phases of the practice experience within the room: first, separation or preliminal, the closing the room and beginning the centering and meditation; second, transitional or liminal, the experience of embodying the postures themselves and moving into a heightened state of self-awareness; and third, the incorporation, or postliminal phase, the final relaxation and closing chant in which the benefits of the practice are absorbed before the ritual "re-emergence…to the 'normal' world".[55] The interior of the studio, especially the practice hall, is framed in opposition to the outside world, with the rest of the studio acting as a transitional or liminal space to prepare the body for the practice and then release again into the world. Once a class begins, the closing of the *shala* door represents a cordoning-off of space and time, a sealing of the practice room wherein the radical difference between interior and exterior is heightened to its maximum during the course of the class. As Beatriz Colomina reflects on in her work on the interior and exterior aspects of public space, the split between the "intimate and the social life of the metropolitan being" is epitomized as practitioners leave the "'outside', the realm of exchange, money, and masks" and enter the "'inside', the realm of the inalienable, the nonexchangeable, and the unspeakable."[56] Practitioners may face the full-length mirror that runs along the entire east side of the wall, or they may face the bright windows of the north side of the room, where the altar is located. Here practitioners give themselves over to the authority of the instructors – much in the same way one experiences a fitness class, they assume their positions on their mat and follow the instructions of a teacher through a standardized series of postures, named in both English and Sanskrit. Some classes are

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[55] De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga,* 252-59.
[56] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994) 274.

designed to relax practitioners into deep and sustained states of meditation, in which most postures are held for long, restful periods. Other classes, such as Hot Yoga during which the temperature of the room is raised to 40 degrees Celsius, bodies are pushed to their physical limits in an effort to "detoxify" and rid the body of impurities through intense perspiration.[57] Like all other sessions, this is followed by a short period of relaxation and chanting. Not unlike the *hammam,* such an experience sealed in the innermost sanctum of the studio is meant to immerse practitioners in "exoticism, heat, health, and otherworldliness."[58] The interior takes on a double meaning: physically it is the innermost space of the studio while simultaneously signifying spiritual experience or mental faculties, and the processes that refer to both the organic interiority of the body and the metaphysical interior that connotes the inalienability of a soul or psychic state.

Theorizing the Yogic Interior: Reality and Reverie

In his work on the history of interior, Rice argues that the subject's negotiation of an interior is "psychologically charged […] through the medium of objects and furniture".[59] The full effect of the space relies on its "doubleness" – on one hand, the physical and material reality of the space; and on the other, the interior as "an image, one that can be imagined and dreamed, and inhabited as such".[60] Significantly, he suggests this doubleness involves the "interdependence between image and space, with neither sense being primary".[61] The yoga studio's physical space is, as I wish to show, extremely modern and highly regulated insofar as it receives, conditions, and is agentic in its practitioners formulations of their own bodies during practice. It is, however, also the image of the Orient itself. Spatially immediate and conceptually distant, as much as the yoga studio folds bodies it also folds time, overlapping modern medicine onto the image of an ancient,

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[57] "Our Yoga Styles", HappyTree Yoga, www.happytreeyoga.com/our-yoga-styles.
[58] Potvin, *Vapour and Steam,* 321.
[59] Rice, "Rethinking the History of the Interior", 3.
[60] Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior,* 2.
[61] Ibid.

pure, and mythologized tradition, explicitly linking the space as one through which the true benefits of yoga's esoteric past may emerge and manifest. In this sense the practitioner is "caught between material and immaterial registers […] a material space that produces de-realized experiences".[62] A promotional image from HappyTree's 2010 advertising campaign exemplifies this conceptualization of the interior as both material and non: in the foreground, the image features one of HappyTree's teachers physically aiding and adjusting a client on her mat, and positioned (intentionally) between the two of them in the background is the same heart chakra print seen in Figure 2, moved from the wall and now the centerpiece of the studio's altar (Fig. 18). Doubling at once as spatial reality and two-dimensional representation of the space, the single image contains multiple meanings and suggestions, evoking at once the sort of space that, according to Rice, is both corporeally inhabitable but also dematerialized through the possibilities created by its own image.[63] The space of the interior, "never wholly separate from its imagistic considerations," is neither entirely physical or imaginary – such representations allow it to be framed as both, with the potential for corporeal habitation while capturing the immateriality of the interior through, in this case, photographic means: its representation, clearly marked through the presence of the art object, as one that encloses an Other history. Bodies silhouetted by the print echo the ambivalence of reverie and reality, wherein the space rests somewhere between physical architecture and the imagined links it conjures of other worlds and states of being through its Oriental decorations. For this reason I suggest two theoretical tenets that may aid in conceptualizing the double ambiguity of this space: doubling both as heterotopic and as an ambiguously hybrid.

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[62] Rice, "Rethinking the History of the Interior", 13.
[63] Ibid.

Compared and contrasted against the unreal and ineffable utopia, Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia is characterized by a sense of *otherness*, or being outside hegemony. This is exemplified primarily by its role as an in-between spaces: in the case of the yoga studio, a repository between science and mysticism for the application of ancient wisdom to modern bodies. In the studio's explicit link to (ancient) Eastern visual and material culture through its ornamentation and its modern, interior design and urban location, it juxtaposes "in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible […] a whole series of places that are foreign to one another".[64] In the heterotopic folding of time and bodies, the space also act as a heterochrony, "indefinitely accumulating time"[65] through the representation of yoga as connected to an ancient past and place by visually referencing the Orient, while simultaneously acting as a transitory space through which bodies flow: passing, entering, performing the practice, and exiting to return to the linear time of modernity. The ancient East is repackaged and rebuilt in the heart of the urban West, providing a separate sphere of sacredness,[66] a site of bodily purification, and spiritual release from the oppressive isolation of the city landscape. It is not, however, indefinitely open to receiving this flow of bodies; rather it is both isolated but penetrable: "the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures"[67] – the removal of one's shoes comes to mind, and as Foucault suggests, the yoga studio is one of those heterotopias, like the *hammam* or spa, entirely

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[64] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" in *The Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 233. Originally published as "Des Espaces Autres," in *Architecture /Mouvement/Continuité*, October, 1984, based on a lecture given in March 1967 and translated from French by Jay Miskowiec.
[65] Ibid., 234.
[66] In this work I use the terms 'sacred' and 'numinous' interchangeably to denote the presence of something *other* without necessarily referring to something divine. Mircea Eliade writes "the numinous presents itself as something 'wholly other' […] something basically and totally different from the profane […] The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from 'natural' realities […] all that goes beyond man's natural experience." Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) 10-11. For a discussion of both the transformation of "profane" or everyday objects into sacred objects and the creation and conceptualization of sacred space see especially chapters 1 & 2.
[67] Ibid., 235.

devoted to purification rites, both ritualistic and hygienic. Although physically it appears accessible as a public space, a service in which all may take part accord to economic exchange, it is also a space "that generally hide[s] curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into the heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion—we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded",[68] something made obvious by the inaccessible pricing of many of the yoga studio's services, to say nothing of its heteronormative and healthist framework, or even the physical reality of its location's inaccessibility to those with reduced mobility. While yoga itself and HappyTree's marketing of yoga specifically caters to an upper middle-class demographic – indeed, one can argue yoga *is* principally a gendered, white upper middle class activity in the West[69] – I wish to reinforce the point that spaces, despite the perceived buttressing of dominant ideologies, are also open to resistance and subversion from the margins, as well as counter-hegemonic representations.[70] While the practice space is a highly policed heteronormative place of bodily regulation in the case of some classes, both HappyTree's Queer and Trans*Only Yoga and Gentle Yoga for cancer patients offer an alternative use of the space: the first by subverting the gendernormativity implied in yoga as healthism[71] and the second by offering an alternative and altogether more holistic and humane treatment of the body in contrast to the Western biomedical paradigm of treating bodies as isolated, diseased entities.[72] This engagement with HappyTree as a heterotopia is predicated on an analysis of its shifting ability to embody "oppositions that we

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[68] Ibid.
[69] On race, class, and the gendering on various forms of physical fitness in mass media, see Shari L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs, *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), especially 94-96 in reference to gender. Dworkin and Wachs identify what they term "fears of masculism" and "fears of physical feminization" characterized by an identification with aerobic, stretching, and relaxation techniques (as yoga is often characterized) with femininity, as women would not build excessive (masculine) muscle as a result.
[70] Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 20.
[71] Healthism describes the neoliberal tendency to privatize illness insofar as disease becomes an individual's burden, and locates wellbeing as accessible depending on individual efforts to attain it, regardless of socio-economic and cultural context. Robert Crawford, "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life", *International Journal of Health Services* 10.3 (1980) 365-388.
[72] Suzanne Newcombe, "Global Hybrids?", 202-17.

regard as simple givens: between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. All these are still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred."[73] This will be particularly relevant to my discussion of the negotiation of interior/exterior in the third section of this work.

The second theoretical tenet is that put forth by Homi Bhabha in his discussion of cultural hybridity. While aligning my own discussion of Orientalism with that of Said's definition, I believe Bhabha's argument for ambivalence as characteristic of sites of hybridity is particularly salient in the case of the yoga studio, and propose Bhabha's notion of the conflicting desires of ambivalence within colonial discourse as a lens through which to explore the ambiguity of this space. This analysis is greatly aided by Felipe Hernández, whose work explicitly focuses on Bhabha's theories within the context of architecture and space. With ambivalence as the centerpiece of Bhabha's discourse on hybridity, I wish to suggest that the hybridity of the yoga studio lies in both its identification with yoga's esoteric and religious history and disavowal of that Other history. As already argued, the intent is not to reproduce in this thesis the sort of reductionist binaries and dichotomies that Bhabha himself attempts to disprove. Instead, hybridity designates the "constant transformations that result from sustained processes of cultural interaction."[74] Yoga itself, as I further elaborate below, is the product of this sustained transcultural interaction rather than the result of a singular, linear journey from East to West. For that reason, as these spaces attempt to encapsulate such a transcultural journey they inevitably embody the characteristics of the Third Space: "outside, or in-between traditional binary structures of cultural analysis… an attempt to assign spatial characteristics to the margins, those

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[73] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 230.
[74] Felipe Hernández, *Bhabha for Architects* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 11.

areas of irresolution between cultures, or inside them, where hybridization occurs."[75] As a space that both mimics and reinvents tradition, the studio authorizes yogic discourse on a holistic worldview as superior to that of the Western Enlightenment viewpoint and yet simultaneously must authenticate it through Western biomedicine and science. The exoticized visual and material culture of the yoga studio is therefore legitimized through its very difference and Otherness. At the same time, the subversive power of hybridity is epitomized by the reactionary need to return to an "original", or "pure" tradition of yoga. At one end, hybridization helps "to dismantle binary systems […] and unsettles the idea that cultures are, or were, once pure and homogeneous, it disrupts the recognition of authority because it illustrates an endless proliferation of cultural difference; it helps to authorize cultural practices which do not correspond exactly to the parameters of hegemonic systems of cultural classification."[76] Its adverse implications, on the other hand, are the ones yoga often finds itself embroiled it: railing against the commercialization and secularization of modern postural yoga. The Hindu organization Take Back Yoga[77] has used hybridity's underlying connotation that if something is hybridized, it is the result of elements that were once "pure" and "original." Their demand to return yoga to its original state reinforces a cultural binary in which yoga is on a teleological path and, in passing through the West, has deviated or become corrupt. That yoga studios, in their offering of powerful alternative healing for individuals, should be regarded as a deviation ignores the sort of productive results hybridization can have. As Hernández suggests, the process and the result of hybridization should be considered a "complex intersection of multiple subject positions and historical temporalities,

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 58
[77] For more on the "Take Back Yoga" movement, see http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback. The Hindu American Foundation's objectives are both an acknowledgement of yoga's Hindu origins - "HAF noted its disappointment at finding countless descriptions of the Upanishads or Gita as "ancient Indian" or "yogic", but rarely "Hindu" - and an occasionally problematic effort to de-commodify Western practice, or remove non-Hindu attributes from it, ignoring how postural yoga arrived in the West in the first place.

not simply as a straightforward relationship between two assumed homogenous constructs: colonized and colonizer."[78] If East does indeed meet West in the yoga studio, they do so in a highly malleable, fluid state that, despite the valid problems of cultural appropriation and colonialism which still underlie the practice, does not resolve such tensions but instead is both the cause and the result of the tension between such dichotomies. The Third Space is, according to Bhabha, neither one nor the other, but a spatialization of hybridity, a location that describes a threshold that continuously transforms according to cultural interaction.[79] In other words: a temple of health, a gymnasium of spirituality.

The 5000-Year Trope: Positioning Yoga's Authenticity

Originally the religious and ascetic practices of sages and holy men, only by a conscious legitimization process through the gatekeepers of science and rationality did yoga penetrate and incorporate into a Western worldview. It did so primarily in the late nineteenth century as an anti-colonial, eugenically-inclined physical practice of Indian nation building, maintain a link to asceticism that was factually tenuous at best but vigorously reinforced by Orientalists at the time. Initially arriving in North America at the 1893 Chicago World Fair, Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda introduced the Western world to what he termed *Raja Yoga* – a non-physical form of yoga, based on the newly revived and classicized *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali - as secularized spirituality quantifiable through scientific methods. Lecturing at the Parliament of the World's Religions on what the rich spiritual East had to offer the overstimulated material West, Vivekananda's inexhaustible use of the terms *science* and *scientific* in his subsequent publications point to this insistence on validating knowledge as scientific despite his bald reference to spiritual

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[78] Hernández, *Bhabha for Architects,* 61.
[79] Homi Bhabha, "Third Space" in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference,* ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 207–21.

experience as "extraordinary mental phenomena".[80] He even challenges his readers to take on the role of scientists themselves, and that yoga may be practiced in the same way the experimental method may be undertaken to prove a hypothesis. Singleton goes as far as to suggest that Vivekananda's introduction of yoga to the Western world is in itself a carefully contrived performance of constructive Orientalism, insofar as the lineage of wisdom he claims to offer the world – what "the Hindu has been cherishing in his bosom for ages"[81] - is in fact a product of the fabricated canon of yoga. Influenced by and repackaged for the modern Westerner's appeal and more commonly termed "Neo-Hinduism,"[82] this movement is characterized by a back-and-forth dialogue between British Orientalists of the nineteenth century, Hindu Pandits and European philosophers and occultists. "The link with which the Neo-Hindus find their tradition is, one may say, an afterthought; for they first adopt Western values and means of orientation and then attempt to find the foreign in the indigenous",[83] a practice that I suggest was crucial in the marriage of Western esotericism, modernity with the framing of Indian cultural and religious history as a mysterious spiritual panacea that characterized the development of modern yoga. It should, however, be acknowledged that a part of this act is the kind of anti-colonial resistance implicit in Bhabha's discussion of hybridity, in which appropriation and mimicry of the colonizer's discourse can be used to the advantage of the colonized.[84] The very spirituality that Orientalists presupposed of India was claimed, most famously in the case of yoga by

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[80] Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1899), v.
[81] "Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science". Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* quoted in C. Mackenzie Brown, "Vivekananda and the Scientific Legitimation of Advaita Vedanta", in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science,* ed. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 209.
[82] De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga,* 38.
[83] Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988) 219-20.
[84] Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under A Tree in Delhi, May 1817" *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985) 144-165.

Vivekananda, as a tool for anti-colonial Hindu nationalism through the espousing of everything from the emergence of the European physical culture movement to scientific empiricism.[85]

Because of this explicit reframing of indigenous Indian religions as both homogeneous[86] and secularized through science, a clarification is necessary on the use of the term spiritual in contrast to religious, the latter almost never appearing in the broader dialogue of yoga and the former overwhelmingly abundant in mass media, from studio advertising campaigns to contemporary how-to yoga manuals.[87] As Robert C. Fuller asserts, *religious* and *spiritual* were widely used as interchangeable terms before the twentieth century. In the last century, however,

> a number of modern intellectual and cultural forces have accentuated differences between the "private" and "public" spheres of life. […Americans] began to associate genuine faith with the "private" realm of personal experience rather than the "public" realm of institutions, creeds, and rituals. The word *spiritual* gradually came to be associated with the private realm of thought and experience while the word *religious* came to be connected with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines.[88]

In his text on the changing formulation of religion, Thomas Luckmann similarly argues that the concept of secularization runs parallel to the privatization of religion, in which old religious traditions are transferred from collective, communal – and one can even posit, classical - expressions of religion to re-emerge in a different form at the level of the individual.[89] Expanded upon in Stephen Hunt's analysis on the individualized nature of religion and the postmodern condition, this new manifestation without any strict ties to dogma or institutional regulations

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[85] King, *Orientalism and Religion,* 86.
[86] Ibid., 106-110.
[87] See De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga.*
[88] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4. Though Fuller's study focuses on the United States, his argument is relevant insofar as it characterizes much of the global north, including Canada and Western Europe, as this shift from religious to spiritual is predominantly characterized by a shift away from Judeo-Christian institutionalized religion to beliefs attributed to the West's "Others", including Eastern and First Nations belief systems.
[89] Luckmann suggests that this is directly attributed to a relocation of religion in society – out of the public sphere and into the private through modern themes of self-realization and autonomy. Thomas Luckmann, "Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?" *Sociology of Religion* 51.2 (1990) 127-38.

allowed for the believer to "follow a personal quest for "ultimate meaning" which endured as part of the human condition."[90] A key notion in this argument is Hunt's emphasis on the difference in use of the terms "spiritual" and "religious" in mass culture. He states that spirituality is a "self-referential designation", and distinguishes itself from religiosity in the way that it connotes an experiential "awareness", or contemplation that depends on the individual's own belief systems and experiences therein.[91] Conversely, religion retains connotations of institutionalized dogma, particularly in the West, as well as the heightened contradictory nature of scientific rationality espoused by secularism and faith-based doctrine espoused in the context of organized religion. It is unsurprising, then, to witness the co-opting of Eastern religiosity - often regarded more as philosophy than religion[92] - into a society valorizing it as a moral, spiritual, and above all an individual panacea unbound by the constraints of organized Judeo-Christian institutional boundaries. Oriental religions, free from any sort of ingrained societal framework in the Western world, "become an aspect of private life and engendered individual choice from a variety of alternatives which could be constructed into a personally satisfying system of beliefs."[93] The oft-seen crossing of visual and material symbols of Hinduism and Buddhism in yoga studios[94] point to a spiritual marketplace in which one is free to choose from the multitude of forms of now-accessible Far-East spirituality. This serves to both reinforce an idea of the constant rediscovering of a universal meaning through the mysteries of Eastern religions and the immediacy with which multiculturalism is accessible, pre-packaged and commodified. This, like Campbell's Easternization theory, brings together Eastern influences at a cultural and superficially spiritual

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[90] Stephen Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 32.
[91] Ibid., 24
[92] This transformation of "esoteric traditions into a philosophy geared to everyday spiritual concerns" can be linked to the work of the Theosophist Society in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India. See Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious,* especially 80-81.
[93] Ibid., 32.
[94] Mathews, *Indian Religion in Western Yoga Practices,* 10.

level, while being interpreted through a lens of human potential, thus fitting perfectly into the Western mold of neoliberal individual human progress and notions of society's forward, linear trajectory. For this phenomenon in the West, "changes in consciousness include beliefs in the unity of man and nature, holistic views of the mind, the unity of body and spirit, the limits of science and rationality, and the alleged virtues of meditation and other psychotherapeutic techniques."[95] This cultural absorption and appropriation involves the West's enthusiasm for all things East through an irreverent mixture of everything from Ayurveda to tai chi to nature worship, imbued with an *a priori* assumption that these elements always have and always should belong together.[96] Simultaneously inventing and then performing tradition, this blurring of a sense of time becomes an element of the transition from modernity to postmodernity, wherein the rationalization of space and visual linearity is supplanted by a multi-perspectival "crisscrossing".[97] Despite my characterization of the yoga studio as modern in a multiplicity of ways, Hunt's definition of the postmodern religious experience rings true of yoga's "scrapbook attitude" toward its own history, borrowing, repositioning, reviving, and assembling old pieces into new patterns.[98]

Modernity on the Mat

In considering yoga's transcultural history, Beatrice Hauser has suggested that the formulation of yoga today cannot simply be attributed to modernity or globalization, or as absolutely contingent

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[95] Hunt's interpretation of Campbell's earlier (1999) version of the Easternization theory. Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life,* 37.

[96] According to Newcombe, there is a "demographic overlap between those participating in 'Eastern' spiritual or fitness activities and those using the healing systems associated with the East". See Newcombe, "Global Hybrids?", 204-205.

[97] Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance,* (New York: PAJ, 1988) 79-80, quoted in David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion" in *Religion and Material Culture: the Matter of Belief,* ed. David Morgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 66.

[98] Tobin Siebers, "Introduction: What Does Postmodernism Want? Utopia" in *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic,* ed. Tobin Siebers (Anne Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6

on India's history of British colonialism. More than nonlinear, Hauser proposes a fragmented, almost nebulous course of development. As she states:

> Imagining the development of yoga as a family tree with Indian roots, a substantial trunk of 'tradition', and several more or less globalized branches is a modern trope for a complex formation that more appropriately resembles a huge banyan tree with several intermingled aerial roots that make it difficult to recognize where the tree begins and where it ends, how it is absorbed by other plants, and that it may, in fact, be the product of multiple distant origins.[99]

While Hauser's point is salient inasmuch as it removes the sort of teleological narration of yoga - which has somehow been thrown off its destined trajectory by Western appropriation - I would caution against the outright dismissal of the influence of both modernism and globalization as key factors in the way yoga manifests itself today, and especially in the way its spaces are constructed and designed.

Exploring the evolution of the interior over the course of the twentieth century, Penny Sparke identifies the emergence of the modern interior with industrialization and the resulting phenomena of mass production and mass consumption. Despite the pervasiveness of the reinforced separation of spatial spheres – public and private, exterior and interior – the modern interior in the twenty-first century has begun to blur those boundaries so explicitly delineated in the nineteenth century, made evident by the presence of domestic, plush living spaces of coffee shops and bookstores, the mock-parlor setting of homey recliners and rugs found amidst the bustling crowd and soaring glass and steel spaces of modern shopping malls.[100] Modernity itself has been theorized in multiplicities of ways – one may even suggest the yoga studio is better theorized and understood from the perspective of postmodernity, in its denial of everything from

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[99] Beatrix Hauser, "Introduction: Transcultural Yoga(s). Analyzing a Traveling Subject" in *Yoga Traveling,* ed. Beatrix Hauser ((Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 11.
[100] Sparke, *The Modern Interior,* 9.

consumer desire to a technologically-based progression.[101] Other scholars have suggested that domesticity and the private interior remain deeply antagonistic to modernity's public ethos, and suggest modernity's outright disavowel of the private interior.[102] Perhaps most relevant for this project is German cultural critic Walter Benjamin's association of the materialization of modernity with that of the private individual.[103] Here I wish to extend the idea of the private individual's body with the capacity for autonomy and as representative of human capital. Autonomy is defined in this case in the form of post-materialist individual agency, insofar as social, economic, and even corporeal mobility is concerned. Yoga, both private in its offering of secluded introspection yet public in its setting, serves as a tool for the modern individual's impetus for autonomy through the experience of self-care, which translates to their eventual social and economic mobility and personal development and empowerment.[104] Conversely, Verena Schnäbele has identified yoga as a management tool for one's betterment in a post-Fordist marketplace in which stress-management and social flexibility are required for individuals to navigate their public relations, especially in the context of the workforce.[105] The private individual is therefore both an autonomous subject in charge of their own social, economic, and corporeal wellbeing, while simultaneously instilled with the incentive to maintain accountability for their productivity within society. Through their advertising campaigns, yoga retailer Lululemon has effectively represented the buying and clothing of oneself with Lululemon garments as the

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101 Ibid., 12.
102 Christopher Reed, "Introduction" in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London, Thames and Hudson, 1996) 7-17. See also Sparke, *The Modern Interior,* 23; 214, note 6.
103 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 9-10.
104 Anne Koch, "Yoga as a Production Site of Social and Human Capital: Transcultural Flows from a Cultural Economic Perspective" in *Yoga Traveling,* ed. Beatrix Hauser (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 240.
105 Identifying with both De Michelis' (2005) supposition of increased stress levels due to urban living and Strauss' (2007) study correlating increased interest in postural yoga with mounting physical and mental demands in the workforce, Schnäbele suggests such a connection relies on the neoliberal notion that "bodies have to appear capable, strong, flexible, and aesthetic, a reflection of the productivity the employees offer" (Schnäbele, "The Useful Body", 143).

consumer choice of individuals invested in their refinement and maintenance of an acceptably moral and productive body.[106] The capacity for productive human capital is recognized at once as a requirement for the smooth functioning of society and a laudable activity insofar as one has the drive (and the capital) to maintain their wellbeing, broadly understood. This implies that the individual has the time to do such things, as well as the disposable income to afford extracurricular activities. While the working class tends to view the body as instrumental in day-to-day functions that may be more concerned with feeding one's family than matching socially-determined bodily norms, the middle class is likelier to see the body as a project in and of itself, used to designate not only one's unwitting conformity to healthist norms, but also one's economic status, implied by their ability to have enough leisure time and disposable income to devote to physical activity.[107] Deborah Lupton outlines that health promotion, while seemingly shaped through healthist and neoliberal ideology as applicable equally to every citizen, is in fact heavily invested in separating the "haves" from the "have-nots":

> Public health and health promotion act as apparatuses of moral regulation, serving to draw distinctions between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' behavior, to privilege a version of subjectivity that incorporates rationality, to promote notions of the human body as separate form the mind/will, needful of careful management and control and to represent certain social groups as uncontrolled, and therefore, the threatening Other.[108]

An apt example of both Schnäbele and Lupton's arguments are the images used in HappyTree's advertising campaign for their corporate yoga services. Present both online and in the form of posters advertising corporate services in the studio proper, these images feature a man and woman, smartly dressed in business attire, performing a variety of *asana* in the studio setting while simultaneously engaged in what one assumes is work-related technology. In one image, the

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[106] See Carlie Charlene Stokes, *Healthist Ideologies: The Case of Lululemon,* MA Thesis, School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University: 2008.
[107] Ibid., 27.
[108] Deborah Lupton, *The Imperative of Health: Public Health and the Regulated Body*, (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 158.

featured woman stands in the well-known posture of *vrksasana,* or the tree pose, ironically out of place on the yoga mat with her high heels and professional attire. As she balances on one foot, she holds a computer (Fig. 19). In a similar vein another image features a young man in a dress shirt and tie lying along the length of a mat, propped up on his hands in a small backbend, while gazing at his laptop (Fig. 20). The text that accompanies these images addresses corporations by encouraging them to bring yoga into their space or their employees into the space of yoga in order to "enjoy […] the awesome work place benefits that come from stress-relieving yoga."[109] The parallels between social, economic, and corporeal flexibility and health blur as HappyTree promises to "shape a winning workplace culture by encouraging work-life balance" and assures their corporate clients their employees will "return to work energized and focused"[110] with an even greater ability to handle those strains.[111] In assuaging the stresses and pressures of modern life, yoga is effectively framed as a coping tool for work-induced stress and anxiety, and a remedy for unproductivity. By combining aspects of technological process and implying bodies that are or will be engaged (on the mat, in this case) in dynamic, physical exercises, such images "respond to the forces of postmodernity that shape our images of 'perfect' people and corporate structures".[112] At once a sanctuary from the rush of the postindustrial white-collar economy, the

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[109] "Corporate Yoga and a Healthy Workplace", HappyTree Yoga, accessed February 15 2014, http://happytreeyoga.com/corporate-yoga.
[110] Ibid.
[111] According to Slavoj Žižek, "'Western Buddhism' presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace […] 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity." While Zizek focuses mainly on Western Buddhism, he qualifies this by noting that much of his argument also applies to what he terms "New Age 'Asiatic' though", of which Western Buddhism and I would propose yoga, are two manifestations of a multitude. See Žižek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism" *Cabinet* 2 (2001): 33-35.
[112] John Hoberman, "The Sportive-Dynamic Body as a Symbol of Productivity" in *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic,* ed. Tobin Siebers (Anne Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994): 205.

studio repairs and revitalizes workers in order to return to the world as productive and thus, as Lupton has argued, civilized, manageable, and moral citizens.[113]

The yoga studio becomes one space that fulfills this management and control, though as Lupton elaborates it is a distinctly privileged one, reserved for upwardly mobile social groups. In entering the yoga studio one is essentially putting their health on display. Although they have come to engage in a seemingly 'private' activity that demands silence and an imperative to look inwards, they are doing so in a public place. Sparke's characterization of the modern interior's blurring spheres is apt in this case both in the materiality of the yoga studio and its built environment but also in the way individuals are engaged and their bodies displayed. The yoga studio not only serves as a ritualistic retreat from the stress, sensory overload, and sociability of the metropolis – albeit a highly regulated and purposeful retreat – but also denotes a certain luxury of time and disposable income. The time taken to enter the studio, partake in a class and leave indicates an upper-class impetus to publicly display socioeconomic status and participate in socio-cultural norms of health and leisure.[114]

Eco-Chic: Nestled in Nature

Because of the link between the luxury of health and leisure, I wish to suggest a parallel between the phenomenon of yoga studio culture and spa culture. Barbara Benedict has shown that spa culture's association with nature and its framing as a healing and leisure space for the middle class to cleanse the body afflicted by the distresses of city dwelling dates back to the eighteenth century. The rhetoric is much the same: spa culture, like the treatment offered in yoga studios, is positioned "in opposition to corrupt city culture […it] presents spas as a social environment that

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[113] Lupton, *The Imperative of Health:*. See also Dworkin and Wachs, especially 10-16.
[114] Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic,* 14.

will cure their visitors' urban ills."[115] Like the spa, the yoga studio is also an alternative to urbanity: the explicit permission to relax in contrast to the emphatic speed and stress of urban life, alongside the impetus to "detoxify" oneself or flush out the ills of their mental, spiritual, and physical dis-ease to enable a return to a natural state reinforce the sanctified and almost bucolic space the yoga studio occupies in popular imagination. Spa miscellanies from the eighteenth century, as Benedict shows, could easily be part of a contemporary studio's advertising ephemera: "Spa verse portrays pleasure as the same phenomenon as health: the restoration of 'natural' - not excessive - appetites, enfeebled by city living, which involved not only working but over-eating, over-drinking, staying up all nights, and imaging oneself distressed."[116]

Attempting to provide such a complete regime of self-care not unlike the spa, in 2012 HappyTree constructed a small single-bed massage and wellness room, encompassing space once devoted to retail display. Due to management issues and lack of client interest, it was given over to one of HappyTree's teachers to run as an independent partner business and renamed The Nest. Now relatively financially successful, the Nest offers primarily massage, as well as a variety of other Eastern-inspired wellness treatments, including Thai Yoga Massage and the non-physical energetic practice of Reiki. The Nest's environment is described on its website as "a warm, supportive and inviting environment, where clients can be themselves and explore various paths to well being,"[117] which according to manager Christine Guenette is reflected in the way she redesigned the interior decoration. The low, atmospheric lighting and warm colours of The Nest "recall home", as do the white walls with their green accents, richness of organic material including raw wood, fur, and abundance of plants (Fig. 21). Otherwise a small and cubic white

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[115] Barbara Benedict, "Consumptive Communities: Commodifying Nature in Spa Society" *The Eighteenth Century* 36.3 (1995): 209.
[116] Ibid.
[117] "About Us", The Nest, accessed February 20 2014, http://lenid-thenest.com/en/about-us.

area not unlike a hospital room, Guenette emphasizes that even the green of the wall acts to negate the sterility of the room: "if the walls had been solid white, that would have been too sterile - that's why you have accent walls in green. It's not the sickly hospital green."[118] In choosing the materials for The Nest, Guenette's focus on organic materials recalls Benedict's assertion of the back-to-nature purpose imbued in spa experience.

> The raw wood, fur blanket were intentional elements, and plants are a healing energy, which you don't find in hospital rooms. It brings it back to a more organic type of environment, something relatable and warm like your home might be. Wood is a big factor, as opposed to laminate, because it's organic. You touch wood and you feel something. I knew what I wanted it to feel like. There's a reason why it's stained and not varnished. It's a raw wood […] For example at Spa Vert […] you walk barefoot on the raw wood and it's amazing. You feel like you're walking in the forest.[119]

Campbell identifies this rehabilitation of nature as part of the Easternization theory. It implies "both expressing (rather than suppressing) natural responses and a preference for natural (as opposed to unnatural or artificial treatments) […]A change in which nature's previous status as both profane and inferior to mankind is replaced by one in which nature is effectively sacrosanct."[120] Unnatural modes of treatment or starkly artificial environments, including pharmaceuticals and clinical settings, are then regarded with suspicion and unease, while therapeutic experiences based on interaction with organic or natural medicine, non-invasive relaxation treatments, and experiences in natural settings – like spas - are privileged as counteractive to such ills. Despite The Nest's small, enclosed architecture, the presence of plants and other organic material, immediately in evidence in such a small place, attempts to recreate the nature retreat or nature spa effect.

Besides the organic textures of the fur, wood, and plants, there are several images on the wall. All of them are by Wisconsin-based artist and yoga teacher Eliza Lynn Tobin**,** and are

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[118] Christine Guenette, interview with the author, 21 February 2014, Montreal.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Campbell, *Easternization of the West*, 75.

notably hybrid themselves. While the formal qualities of the work are recognizably contemporary, two of the four pieces directly or indirectly reference the traditional depictions of yogic elements in Indian art. On the west wall of the room, a polyptich assemblage of six individual canvases depicting colourful and abstracted circles are arranged together as a single piece (Fig. 22). Entitled *Mandalas,* they draw a subtle connection to the visualization of traditional tantric yoga's depiction of the subtle body *chakra* wheels and sacred *mandala* shapes. Guenette revealed that despite clients not knowing the name of the pieces without asking, the congruence of the name of the pieces and purpose of The Nest is important on an "energetic" level.[121] The most striking piece in the Nest hangs on its door: a multimedia print in orange and gold with a large and patterned *Om* syllable, the lettering on the work reads *om namah shivaya* (Fig. 23). The piece straddles the threshold between the contemporary design of The Nest (and HappyTree) while blatantly referencing the aesthetic traditions and visual cues that recall Indian religiosity. *Om namah shivaya* is a commonly recited mantra in the devotional sect of Shaivism and specifically adopted by the Anusara tradition,[122] essentially praising the name of the deity Shiva. As the door of The Nest is always left open when treatments are not in session, the piece serves as a visual threshold between the yoga studio and the massage room, as it was intended to create a "flow" between the two spaces.

> It was very important to me to not have this space resemble HappyTree, as a question of branding and marketing, but it had to flow. I didn't want people to move from one space to another and go into another world, but it needed to be clear it wasn't the same thing. It's part of the reason I have artwork on the walls the way I do - you don't have any real artwork like this out there. There's a few drawings, like the cloth Ganesh, but really the artwork out there….there's no real artwork in HappyTree.[123]

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[121] Guenette, personal interview.
[122] Founded in California in 1997, Anusara is a contemporary yoga style based on the appropriation and reinterpretation of Nath *hatha* and tantric traditions merged with alignment-based postural yoga and New Age philosophy. Anusara School of Hatha Yoga, http://www.anusarayoga.com.
[123] Ibid.

The supposition that the artwork in HappyTree is not "real" artwork may be attributed to several things, including the fact that the sculptures and prints around the altar and walls were either gifts to the studio or bought for the purpose of adorning the altar, rather than through a gallery or directly by the artist, as Guenette acquired her work. Similarly, Guenette's explicit referencing of the cloth Ganesh print (Fig. 24) implies that these mass produced images of Hindu deities – whether in print or sculptural form – are not artworks insofar as they have devotional references and a practical history connected to worship, rather than contemporary art production. In this way she is able to situate the aesthetic of The Nest as modern and purely decorative in nature (despite the overt reference to mantras and mandalas in Tobin's work) while also situating the decorative program of HappyTree in another realm because of the overt Orientalism of its material culture, and accordingly attempts to branch the two landscapes with the hybridity of the *Om* print that hangs in the threshold of spaces.

This mélange of nature worship and a "low-threshold spiritual practice"[124] is a trademark of Campbell's Easternization theory, and characteristic of clients of both The Nest and HappyTree, who share an overarching concern with the management of their social body and self-care, an interest in non-Western modalities of healing and leisure, and the consumption of organic, natural and environmentally conscious experiences and products. Part of yoga culture's demographic, this market segment is defined as subscribing to a "Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability", LOHAS.[125] Unlike traditional spa culture in which a back-to-nature retreat was primarily regarded as beneficial to the body's regeneration, LOHAS implies an overlap in both

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[124] Verena Schnäbele, *Yogapraxis und Gesellschaft. Eine Analyse der Transformations- und Subjektivierungsprozesse durch die Körperpraxis des modernen Yoga*, (Hamburg 2009) 240, quoted in Karl Baier, "Modern Yoga Research: Insights and Questions" (Vienna, University of Vienna, 2012) 16.

[125] "LOHAS is a description of a market segment defining a category of consumer, an organization with international scope dedicated to further defining and serving this market, and a product and institutional identity which businesses have adopted as part of a movement toward sustainable business practices". Mandelbaum and Strauss, "Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment," 176. See also LOHAS Online, http://lohas.com.

the regard for nature as a curative environment and the urgent need to preserve it in the face of increasing industrialization and environmental destruction. In their work on the conflation and commodification of healthist ideology and environmental sustainability, Sarah Strauss and Laura Mandelbaum suggest yoga not only as a Maussian *technique du corps* but a "*technique du monde"* that allows studios to fashion an association between practicing yoga and engaging in environmental activism.[126] This concept of yoga as a "back-to-nature" activity is apparent in the majority of yoga studios, both aesthetically in their interiors and an actively advertised part of their facilities. The investment of yoga studios in promoting "green" living and ecologically-friendly practices reflects a New Age-inspired custom of associating ancient religions or non-Western spiritual practices with nature worship, and a greater concern with yoga practice not only for the sake of one's own health, but for the earth on both a physical and metaphysical level. Behind the reception desk at HappyTree, the 2012 McGill Green Business Award is displayed, reinforcing the association with the space as one of conscientious values and sustainability. On their website, HappyTree is specifically referred to as an "Eco-conscious" studio, and their justification is highly detailed:

> Committed to green values from day one, our bamboo floors are not only gorgeous, but were chosen because of their sustainable farming and durability. We are proud recyclers, and offer blue boxes at the studio so that students can make the same choice. From our window spritz to our mat spray, to our energy efficient appliances, we aim to make the greener choice whenever possible. We've even installed a Trusource water system so that we can offer all students clean, purified water without the waste of plastic bottles.[127]

There is more at stake than simply reducing the use of plastic bottles: LOHAS-designated businesses, yoga studios explicitly among them, all bear the features of "other alternative health practices, sustainability or ecological sensitivity, spirituality, alternative energy and 'authenticity' […] key elements which are explicitly listed as the core components of the LOHAS

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[126] Ibid., 177.
[127] "Our Roots", HappyTree Yoga.

designation".[128] In this vein, HappyTree is careful to make clear in its retailing that its branded clothes are by eco-friendly company Alternative Apparel. Moreover, the soaps and cosmetic products it sells are from two Montreal-based local retailers that boast organic, all-natural ingredients, though the price point of many of these products makes HappyTree's target demographic glaringly evident. Buying into saving the planet, as Mandelbaum and Strauss's research reinforces, is a luxury only certain classes are privileged to participate in. Like the spa, HappyTree provides a space for bodily refinement, the purchasing of one's self-care goods and services through retail and additional massage services that encompass a total "yogic lifestyle" that is part of a "bourgeois, cosmopolitan class identity entailing membership in a yogic community of practice, which is available for purchase on the global market of health and wellness".[129] Despite this, as I argue in greater detail below, as a result of the studio's offering of multiple formulations of the same space for varying individuals and identities – as an exclusively queer safe space, or a location of healing alternative to the hospital - it may also be characterized as subversive to such increasingly neoliberal demands of self-regulating behaviors by moving beyond yoga as merely concerned with personal "appearance and functionality".[130] The following two sections will address both the privileging of such hegemonic discourse in the yogic interior as well as the ways in which HappyTree offers its space to less privileged demographics. Through an analysis of both the bodily experience of interior space and the exoticized design and ornamentation of the studio, it will investigate the multiple ways in which HappyTree attempts to fulfill its mission statement

[128] Mandelbaum and Strauss, "Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment", 176.
[129] Ibid., 181.
[130] Baier, "Modern Yoga Research", 16.

by "providing a space in which people can grow, the spirit can flourish, and the Self is warmly embraced".[131]

Inside/Outside: Corporeal(ity) in the Mirror

The most ritualized action of yoga takes place in the practice hall, or *shala* room, the innermost space of the studio when it is closed off from the lounge and reception. All classes are performed in this room – whether Hot yoga, Restorative, or Trans*Only. Once the class begins, the room is sealed, signifying a cocooning or closing off from the outside. A sign on the practice the door reads "Please respect the space: Silence Within"(Fig. 25), echoing some teacher's explicit request to kept the space quiet and calm before and after class. Once the opening meditation or centering has begun, latecomers are forbidden from entering until the period of stillness is over, and the class begins its exercises or stretches. Although the door is explicitly kept closed during the practice and opened immediately afterwards, practitioners are often encouraged to stay and linger in the space after class before the next course begins, though it is not unheard of for staff to usher them out to prepare the room for the following class, intermingling the sense of hush with a sense of anticipation and rush to clean before the next course. Practitioners are not permitted to leave anything in the space: all traces of classes are removed after each session, not unlike a stage being cleared to prepare for a following act. Above the door hangs a sculpted golden *Om* syllable and a garland of Tibetan prayer flags (Fig. 26), echoing a dual transition through the threshold of the doorway: from exterior to interior and from modern to an atemporal, Other landscape.

Reflections on Refinement

At this juncture I propose the reading of the interior/exterior and public/private dynamics of the yoga studio and the performance of bodies therein through the work of Colomina, particularly on

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[131] "Our Roots", HappyTree Yoga.

the modern interior. Although Colomina's work deals more explicitly with the interiors of modern private homes (specifically those designed by the great denouncer of ornamentation, Adolf Loos) her discussion is relevant insofar as it highlights the paradoxes and fluid modalities of such spaces to exist as "a frame for action rather than as an object in a frame."[132] The frame of the space – the practice studio and the objects within it – wait for an agent to activate the space. Much like her suggestion of the home as an empty theatre, a bare stage full of possibilities, the yoga studio is a space in which the body performs various acts of refinement and healing according to the type of class given. Where once a curtain hung to hide the wall-length mirrors of HappyTree's practice room, practitioner's reflections are now negotiated according to the body's position in relation to the mirror. In less physical yogic practices like Yin, Restorative, and Gentle Yoga,[133] which are consciously spiritualized and refer to interior mental and emotional experiences such as relaxation and meditation, practitioners face away from the classroom mirror, while physically demanding classes which emphasize embodiment through yoga as a way to fine-tune one's physique, like Hatha and Hot Yoga,[134] tend to feature sessions facing the mirror. The practice hall therefore adapts the significance of the practice by subtle alterations of the placements of bodies within space. Of particular importance to this section is the imperative of practitioners in physically vigorous classes to face the mirror, which, not unlike the mirrors of commercial gyms, allow the dual possibility of observing one's own body and the bodies of others. Practitioners both witness the spectacle of the class while simultaneously participate in it, blurring the lines between a gaze of control (the spectator) and the controlled gaze (the

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[132] Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity,* 270.
[133] Yin, Restorative, and Gentle Yoga classes at HappyTree are characterized by extended periods of guided relaxation, visualization, meditation, gentle movements, and stretching. They are considered healing and introspective practices used to "release bodily/mental tension". "Our Yoga Styles", HappyTree Yoga, www.happytreeyoga.com/our-yoga-styles.
[134] Hatha and Hot Yoga classes at HappyTree are characterized by vigorous movement and challenging sequences of postures designed to provide clients with a physically exerting workout. "Our Yoga Styles", HappyTree Yoga, www.happytreeyoga.com/our-yoga-styles.

spectacle).[135] The mat, in the form of the practitioner's island, is immovable and restrictive - to venture off one's mat during a class and into another's space is taboo. Even as the body is told to open, to stretch, and most interestingly to take up space, how much space one can take up is already established by the contours of the mat. The gaze is therefore the only way to move in and across the room, onto the mats and bodies of others, even as the class is directed to find their own gaze in the mirror, to close their eyes or to "return" to their breath. In simultaneously experiencing an internal state of awareness, while being confronted not only by one's image reflected before them but by the availability of the gaze to survey the bodies of others in the room, and the localization of inside and outside - both in reference to one's location in the room and to one's own body – the gaze becomes convoluted. The practitioner becomes at once subject that views and object that is viewed. Despite the *shala* room as the innermost sanctum of the studio, the gaze is in constant play as the practitioner not only views themselves and others in the mirror, but can be regarded from the threshold space of the studio itself. Windows from the practice hall open, albeit in a partially hidden way, onto the lounge and hallway area. The middle parts and the general area around eye-level of these windows are frosted, while the bottom and top part are clear and allow one to glimpse into the practice hall. This sort of gaze is never made explicit, however, because of the frosted portions of the windows one cannot casually glance into the practice room. One would have to intentionally lean down to glance through the clear part of the window, or elevate themselves onto the couches of the lounge to glance through the top. In this way the presence of the windows open to the *possibility* of an outside gaze without explicitly putting bodies on display to the outside world during the practice session itself. Clients who ask to "view" classes in order to garner an idea of what the practice consists of, without participating in the class itself, are often discouraged from watching the class through the unfrosted openings

[135] Ibid., 269.

of the classrooms windows, presumably because of the voyeuristic implications and the studio's wish to construct the practice room as a private, contained space.

Some scholars, De Michelis among them, have addressed the language used in *asana*-based classes and its implicit and explicit ways of directing the body.[136] Though it is of less import to this project, I do wish to emphasize the curious exchange between sensuality in yogic movement, that is, the emphasis on "feeling", "going inwards", and so forth, and the more overt referencing of how certain postures can affect health. This can range from giving explicit anatomical instructions to explaining how *sirsasana* (headstand) for example is beneficial in purely physical terms by allowing the flow of blood to reverse during the body's inversion. The preforming body as such is the subject of both an eroticized and medicalized gaze - the conflation of the exotic and erotic are particularly salient in the case of the body's spectacular performance of more acrobatic or grotesque postures.[137] Colomina's verbal evocation of the image of a body in water as "liquid, elusive, unable to be controlled, pinned down"[138] reflects the dual use of *asana* in attempting to both free the body, or create a deeper sensation, while simultaneously attempting to control it on multiple levels. Offering a medical apologia by turning devotional austerities into self-regulating abstinence, this rationalization of yoga for fitness purposes recalls Foucault's notion of *askesis,* not as punishment of the body but as a practice of discipline, and indeed a pleasurable and laudable one in the case of yoga and its alleged psychosomatic benefits. Drawing

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[136] See De Michelis, *Modern Yoga,* especially on B.K.S. Iyengar's yoga manuals and the formulation of contemporary Iyengar yoga sessions; and Asha Persson. "Intimate Immensity: Phenomenology of Space and Place in an Australian Yoga Community." *American Ethnologist* 34.1 (2007): 45-56, for the use of both directional language in yoga classes and practitioner's verbal interpretations of embodied and spatial experience.

[137] Johnston has argued for the multiple readings of female bodybuilders, two of which are particularly relevant in the case of (mainly female) yoga practitioners: the first is bodily participation in exercise for the building of ideal, docile, and self-regulating bodies; and the second "driven by the desire for corporeal erotic sensations, such as the pleasure/pain feeling". Johnston, "Reading the Sexed Bodies and Spaces of Gyms", 245. Unlike Johnston's case in which the erotic gaze produces female bodybuilders as abject, the yogic body is personified and gazed upon as ideally feminine. See also Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic,* 36-40.

[138] Ibid.

from its ancient Greek origin, he describes *askesis* as the sort of self-mastery, not unlike that of healthism, as "one was expected to govern oneself in the same manner as one governed one's household and played one's role in the city."[139] Practicing this asceticism not only controls the body itself – especially the physical contours of the "excessive" body[140] – but as Foucault posits, is a method to "control representation"[141] of one's undeniably public body: the liquid and elusive body, if disruptive, must be reigned in and pinned down. Controlling the representation of the body by enduring *askesis*-like practices produces moral, trained, and self-regulating bodies. Indeed, sweating, flowing, and twisting in yoga classes are part of a greater rhetoric of detoxification, or removing impurities from the body, physical and non. The result is the ubiquitous "yoga body" of mass media: slim and white, a pure and closed vessel. Barely a vessel at all, it is airy, light, supple, utterly defiant of gravity, and almost always the ideal feminine.

Reflections on Gender

As a fitness practice, yoga is distinctly framed as feminine – contrary to the heavy weightlifting and intense interval training recommended for men in contemporary health discourse, yoga is generally viewed as stretching and light aerobics, a distinctly feminine pursuit guaranteed to keep women's bodies free of excessive or disruptively non-normative muscle mass.[142] The explosion in popularity of Broga, a trademarked fitness method that purposefully masculinizes yoga and offers to help men get "real" fit by targeting muscularity rather than flexibility, frames regular yoga classes as problematic because "all men are tight".[143] By suggesting that a real workout allows men

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[139] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 74.
[140] The body is seen as an ongoing project that, once the proper exercises and asceticism (in the form of diets or rigorous exercise programs) are followed, will reach its ideal shape. In a contemporary setting this is often depicted as a hard, muscular body, bulky and large in the case of men and lean and free of soft flesh in the case of women. See Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic,* especially 36-40.
[141] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 75.
[142] See Dworkin and Wachs, *Body Panic,* and Johnston, "The Sexed Spaces of Gyms".
[143] Broga, "Intro to Broga Yoga" Online video. Broga LLC, accessed February 14 2014. http://vimeo.com/21616497

to "fit in, feel welcome, and feel like you're in the right place", the typical yoga studio is framed as a markedly feminine environment, unwelcoming to men.[144] Reacting to similar instances of discomfort at the discernable heteronormativity of the space, one graduate student of HappyTree's teaching program offered Queer and Trans*Only yoga for several weeks during the summer of 2013, attempting to create a safe space by offering gender neutral bathrooms and gender neutral cues during instructional classes. One teacher remarked in an interview that the yoga studio should always "absolutely be a safe space", and while having two openly queer teachers on the roster was an improvement, it has nonetheless been an occasionally problematic experience:

> Studios need to ask, who is feeling alienated in the room? The space does carry gender norms. The bathrooms signs aren't just male and female – the blue one is male, the pink one is female. This isn't biology […] In the past I was discriminated against by another teacher for being too feminine. I work in very macho [gym] environments, but I got that discrimination nowhere else […] and those [gym] spaces were more safe for me at that time than the yoga studio.[145]

In an explicit effort to keep the space safe during Queer and Trans*Only Yoga, those class timeslots were not included on the printed schedule or official online schedule, effectively cloistering the studio for a set amount of time each week. Moreover, because the class was by donation it became financially accessible in ways many of the regularly scheduled classes are not. As the previous interviewee remarked, there was little difference in Queer and Trans*Only Yoga from typical postural classes aside from the avoidance of gendered instructions and cues, as well as providing gender-neutral bathrooms, emphasizing how little effort studios needed to invest in order to begin to create safe spaces. Although these classes are no longer offered, Queer and Trans*Only Yoga represent an instance in which the studio space and purpose was appropriated

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Interview with HappyTree teacher, February 4 2014, Montreal.

and redistributed to safely cater to a multitude of identities and orientations not otherwise visible nor explicitly welcome in such places under normal circumstances.

Reflections on Health

Unlike the short-lived Queer and Trans*Only classes, HappyTree has been offering Gentle Yoga for cancer patients since it opened in 2007. The classes are geared specifically to be conducive with a comfortable usage and movement of the body while simultaneously attaining deep, relaxing states and promoting a sense of healing within the body. Both the owner of HappyTree, Melanie Richards - who has taught theses classes since their inception - and patients who attend view the class in this context as a healing space both complementary and interchangeably to the hospital. Practitioners who undergo cancer treatment while simultaneously attending Gentle Yoga classes remark a startling difference between the two places, even as they seek to use both to heal:

> There is a huge difference between the hospital and here [HappyTree]. When the aesthetic is involved, there is healing that comes from a cultural place. It is also intimate, not bureaucratic - it is very accessible, both the people and the space. The hospital is so impersonal, so cold. It's frightening…the power over you is very strong. You are just one more body among many… the message [at HappyTree] is that it's a healing institute. Not just because you say it is, but during the practice you see that, and in the processes of organizing the space you see that. This place empowers people.[146]

Richards, who has made a concerted effort to bring yoga to both the staff and patients of clinics and hospitals and who has taught both groups in hospital spaces is definitive about how HappyTree's aesthetic is an important facet alongside its impetus to facilitate a pleasurable and healing experience.

> In the yoga studio we really want to bring a sense of warmth, and pleasing to the eye, pleasing to the senses. Hospitals are designed to just have turnover. They're generally quite dismal. When we first built the massage therapy room, before all the warmth was added with the different paintings and the furniture and the plants, someone had reflected that it looked like a hospital room. And it was not a compliment. It was like, I wouldn't want to get a massage here - it's too sterile.[147]

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[146] Interview with a cancer patient and Gentle Yoga practitioner. February 5 2014, Montreal.
[147] Melanie Richards, interview with the author. February 17 2014, Montreal.

She makes a distinction between hospital ambiance and studio ambiance by exemplifying the intention and effect of color in the space. This rings true as the familiar, white-washed antiseptic floors or walls of a hospital greatly differ than the more natural, distinctly warmer color palette experienced in the studio. Richards attributes this more natural atmosphere to more favorable healing. She expressly credits the ambiance and atmosphere - the natural light, abundance of plants, the layout of the lounge as promoting the informal group discussions that occur between the patient/practitioners after the class – as a direct correlation to their healing and the management of disease. In the same case as HappyTree's logo, in choosing the colors of the studio, yogic philosophy was significant. Richards decided that green and purple would dominate: in Indian artistic traditions of portraying the subtle body *chakras,* or energetic centers, green is associated with the heart, and purple, with the crown of the head. "Green is the heart chakra, so opening the heart; that's a place where we are in society if you want to talk about healing. Think about heart disease, breast cancer, think about all these modern-day diseases that stem from the heart [….] And then purple is the thousand-petal lotus at the crown of the head, that's your connection with the divine."[148] In this scenario the yoga studio becomes not only a spatial alternative to the hospital, but also a psychological alternative, a separate state of being in mind and body. The notable differences are those of preventative methodologies of yogic practice and curative methodologies of allopathy, wherein "biomedicine generally understands body, person, and illness as objects", whereas alternative therapies, yoga among them, is predicated on mind-body interdependence and treats the whole patient.[149] These differing ways of regarding patient/practitioners and their ills calls for, as Jean Langford suggests, different environments: the

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[148] Ibid.

[149] Allopathy refers in this case to treatments based in Western pharmacologically-active modern biomedicine. See Jean Langford. "Ayurvedic Interiors: Person, Space, and Episteme in Three Medical Practices." *Cultural Anthropology* 10.3 (1995) 330.

hospital is characterized as a space to treat a patient's disease, while the yoga studio concerns itself with building a space for a client's overall wellness.[150] Richards goes on to succinctly describe the difference between the two types of spaces, as well as the patient/practitioner reaction to both.

> [The difference] is night and day. HappyTree is a place of healing. Hospitals are a place of curing, but not necessarily of healing. There is a big difference there. Healing, you could still have the disease but feel whole. So a yogic definition of healing is your mind, your body, your emotions, your social life - your interaction in the community - are all in alignment.[151]

Western medicine, as Richards emphasizes, treats the human body as a dissolvable structure of parts, which can be easily spread over the distance of a hospital space, with different locations dealing with different bodily aspects, but rarely, if ever, the body as a interconnected unit. As Adams and Schlich's work has shown, the control invested in the organization of bodies in hospital spaces is highly regulated by the surgeon and often treats the patient as a moveable set of parts. "In that special architecture [hospital operating rooms] the patient's body is rearranged, controlled, and made visible in ways that make it possible to master and manipulate it. Achieving control, however, not only means controlling the patient's body […] it also means controlling the surgical environment."[152] Instead, as the above interviews suggests, the studio space can empower patients inasmuch as they are no longer "just one body among many", but individual and whole: patient/practitioners may reassemble their body as a whole, reflecting upon the ideas of healing as wholeness as opposed to curative practices ignoring the root causes of dis-ease. Moreover, they are able to reassert control over their bodies, free of what Adams and Schlich terms the hospital's "technology of control" and power over the patient to "control life phenomena at will."[153] Instead, as Asha Persson suggests, a re-embodiment takes place on two levels: the first internally

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[150] While Langford's research is mainly concerned with the interiors of Ayurvedic treatment centers, Ayurveda (a South Asian healing practice based on curing through socio-psychosomatic understanding of illness) is now offered in multiple yoga studios and is generally considered to fall under the same rubric of alternative, non-invasive therapy as various forms of yoga and meditation. See Newcombe, "Global Hybrids?", 2012.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Adams and Schlich, "Design for Control", 309.
[153] Ibid., 308.

as the patient regains control of their self and body, and their sense of wholeness is restored; the second externally as they are relocated outside of the hospital and into the studio to facilitate this reintegration, a "coming back into oneself."[154] In this therapeutic paradigm, "psychic and somatic components of health, which are isolated from one another in the biomedical paradigm, are integrated."[155] In emphasizing the holistic approach of yoga in which the body is *re*-membered, literally put back together after the clinical practice has taken it apart in order to address the singular entity of illness within the body, Richards echoes differences in Western and Eastern perspectives of suffering. As Suzanne Newcombe's work has shown, traditional Eastern medicine and alternative therapy has come to supplant Western biomedicine as the most humane way to treat individuals, to remedy both physical and non-physical ailments through an explicit re-membering and re-embodying of the subject in its entirely, holistically treating and supplying what modernity has taken apart.[156] As one practitioner notes, the studio acts as a "sanctuary" of sorts in which shared experience, both between fellow practitioners undergoing or having undergone treatment, as well as with their own bodies, is explored outside of the medical framework. The practitioner suggests that "intimacy here is needed for healing", and credits the lounge and the tea counter as being spaces integral to the establishment of a feeling of community before and after class. "To me, the tea symbolizes a sort of communion with the community […] it's a clear message there for us to sit, communicate and exchange our experience."[157] Because the majority of other studios do not feature lounge areas, the studio no longer simply funnels bodies in and out for practice in a rapid turnover from class to class, but invites individuals to stay and linger in the space: "You feel like a person here, not just a consumer. I visited some other studios before,

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[154] Asha Persson. "Intimate Immensity," 48-49.
[155] Langford. "Ayurvedic Interiors.", 330.
[156] Newcombe, "Global Hybrids? 'Eastern Traditions' of Health and Wellness", 202-17.
[157] Interview with a Gentle Yoga practitioner, February 6 2014, Montreal.

but here you feel like you have value, this message is very clear. When you can take your time [in the lounge] you give people space to relax, and the intimacy that you create…you create a community. This is not common."[158]

In working expressly with the concept of hybridity, Newcombe devised a spectrum for practitioner belief in the subversive power of non-Western therapies (2012). She divides practitioners into "pragmatics", "true believers", and "holistics", defined as three overarching (but by no means mutually exclusive or exhaustive) ways of approaching complementary and alternative medicine, including yoga (*asana*) therapy, meditation, Reiki, Ayurvedic therapy and other activities defined as primarily "Eastern traditions" (and notably often undertaken in yoga studios). While Newcombe's aim is to understand the practitioner's response to the paradigm of Eastern religions as "healing" and "natural", versus Western biomedicine as patriarchal and often disempowering, her three categories are an effective way in which to gauge the uses of such spaces and practitioner's views of them on the proposed spectrum of secular, religious, and hybrid.

Newcombe describes pragmatics as those seeking the spaces and practice of yoga for practical reasons.[159] These can range from relief of chronic pain to an athlete's advantage of cross-training. As Sacha Mathews demonstrates through his participant-observation study of several other Montreal yoga studios, many of the practitioners – and a greater percentage of male than females – described their yoga practice as purely physical, either to increase their level of fitness or as a form of physical therapy.[160] In this case, the overtly exoticized décor of a yoga studio is an added, often unwelcomed facet of the practice that the practitioner may forcibly choose to ignore as it does not conform to their pragmatic use of the discipline. As Newcombe suggests, "although

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[158] Ibid.
[159] Newcombe, "Global Hybrids?", 206.
[160] Mathews, *Indian Religiosity,* 55.

this group may also be interested in spirituality, their motivation […] is to find a technique that helps their complaint. The primary concern is whether or not the therapy 'works'; any spiritual interests are only secondary".[161] For them, the yoga studio is a site not unlike the gym. Conversely, "true believers" reject all tenets of biomedicine or any alternative medicine that offers therapeutic or medical intervention in favor of a theological worldview, wherein only the power of "faith or prayer" can heal.[162] As my argument that yoga is an activity of secular spirituality hinges on the notion of modern spirituality as a rejection of religious doctrine, it is unnecessary to address this category in light of this particular case study, and I would suggest that "true believers" are the category most likely to frequent spaces exceptionally devoted to religious experience, such as churches or temples.

Newcombe's third category of "holistic" practitioners is perhaps the most reflective of the diversity of practitioners and uses of the space at HappyTree. Newcombe rightly points out that these views often embrace a romantic Orientalist view of these disciplines, framing them as pure in their provenance and thus putting them in diametrical opposition to Western modernity. This reductionist view implies that yoga studios, in using highly exoticized ornamentation and objects from various Eastern traditions – such as *both* Hindu statues and Buddhist *yantras* – erases the art object's point of origin from a specific culture. While the object in question may be agentic in imbuing the space with a spiritual characteristic, making "pragmatics" distinctly uncomfortable, and "holistics" more connected on an undefined, metaphysical level, this "reduces into a single tradition diverse and evolving practices that span huge expanses of time and geography"[163] effectively turning the realities of multiple Eastern cultures to a unified, mythical, and ancient landscape of esoteric knowledge. If the holistic category represents hybridity insofar as it accounts

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[161] Newcombe, "Global Hybrids?", 206.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., 207.

for practitioners who both use the space of HappyTree for immediate health benefits and to perhaps experience a more metaphysical state of being rooted in ideas of "classical" yogic practices,[164] then one must negotiate the fine line between an ambivalence in which both aspects of the practice are equally privileged in the space – and one in which such a display of objects becomes an outright exercise in cultural appropriation and Orientalism.

Oriental Reveries: Affirming the Other

There is perhaps no greater symbol of Indian religiosity than the *Nataraja,* Shiva as the Lord of Dance (Fig. 27). Dating back to the Cola period (8th century CE), the image of Shiva dancing silhouetted by a flaming ring, with one leg raised and matted locks flying is perhaps even more ubiquitous representation of yoga than the Sanskrit *Om* syllable. While HappyTree does not own a *Nataraja* statue, it was not uncommon for a former teacher to bring her own to class and recite myths about it to begin the session. That HappyTree does not have one is perhaps an exception to the rule: as evident in the fieldwork of Mathews, most Montreal studios feature one quite prominently.[165] In my own training program, though not organized by HappyTree, there would often be a *Nataraja* at the front of the practice room during training sessions, presented with offerings by both the teacher and the students. Often fruit, flowers, and personal possessions like jewels would be placed at the foot of the sculpture for the duration of a training session, and students were actively encouraged to bow and offer private prayers to the statue. Despite its absence at HappyTree, I wish to begin the discussion of the Oriental ornamentation of HappyTree by relating it to the research of Matthew Harp Allen on the "revival" of classical art in twentieth-century India through the example of Rukmini Devi, Indian dance, and the *Nataraja.*

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[164] De Michelis defines these non-physical, non-religious yoga practices "early modern psychosomatic yoga", a typology which recalls Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and other various esoteric branches of Neo-Hinduism, such as the revival of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras.* De Michelis, 2005: 17-35: 21-22.
[165] See Sacha Mathews, *Indian Religiosity and Western Yoga Practice.*

The queen of modern Indian dance, Rukmini Devi (1904- 1986) is credited with reviving (or reinventing, depending on how one approaches it) *bharatnayam,* or classical Indian dance. Previously an art form reserved largely for temple life, Devi is credited with bringing "classical" dance to spaces of secular performance.[166] She also brought with her onstage the icon of the *Nataraja.* In her own words, the "intention was that dance, now abolished in the temple, should create the temple atmosphere on the stage".[167] In doing so, Devi created the same spiritual resonance present in the temples she herself rejected, moving Indian dance out of a realm of religiosity and into one of secularity without relinquishing the visual culture of temple interiors.[168] This act shaped a connection to Indian religiosity that fit snugly within the parameters of the Orientalist project in colonial India – a "second-order religiosity", which involved a dislocation and subsequent relocation of religious objects and a translation of their meaning.[169] This, as Allen's research demonstrates, was a conscious process of both legitimizing the art's historical tradition while simultaneously reinventing it. Though the *Nataraja* was historically never associated with dance or Indian nationality, it is due to Devi's popularization of the icon that it is now widely regarded as the quintessential symbol of Indian culture. Much like Shiva, the *murtis* that grace the altar space of HappyTree serve as a connection to the "classical" in yoga, and thus the authentic, as well as "a focus of devotion and inspiration for practitioners".[170] Singleton has termed this preoccupation with a conscious and careful establishing of "classical" as authoritative as constructive Orientalism. As Singleton suggests, this network is a result of the Orientalist project – in India and beyond - of the nineteenth century which goes beyond a conceptual

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166 Matthew Harp Allen. "Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance". *TDR,* 41.3 (1997): 63-100.
167 Ramnaryan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: Dancer and Reformer, A Profile," Part 2. *Sruti* Vol. 9 (1984), quoted in Allen, "Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance", 79.
168 Allen, "Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance", 79.
169 Singleton, "The Classical Reveries of Modern Yoga", 90.
170 Ibid.

framing and encompasses a literary and visual discerning for the purpose of a canonical selection and validation of how India's classical heritage should be defined and what it would comprise. To understand constructive Orientalism is to understand that in the nineteenth-century yoga existed mainly in the minds of Orientalists and Hindu intelligentsia as a religious practice, grounded in an interest in the theoretical and philosophical content of Sanskrit texts. In *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy,* renown Orientalist Max Müller declares modern yoga emerging at the time – inspired by European physical culture as it was – to be "purely practical and most degenerate", and that the supplanting of the practice's "intellectual" devotion to esoteric aspects of the subtle body into "practical" physical aspect of the gross body were "rational beginnings into irrational exaggerations."[171] This discourse on the philosophical facets of yoga as the most authentic and original paradoxically translates into contemporary yoga in the West. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras,* for example, a short text from around the third century CE is widely cited and even sometimes discussed in yoga classes today as the be-all end-all of yogic authority. The irony of the *Sutras* is that they do not engage whatsoever with yoga as physical discipline: in this context, Patanjali provides instructions on how to attain a deeply altered state so as to reach *samadhi,* or enlightenment. Considered to be one of the foremost authorities on yoga (and a text that is often a prerequisite for students of modern yoga training to be teachers), Patanjali's work is often used to justify an authentic connection and legitimation of modern yoga to its unbroken past. What is often left unsaid is that Patanjali's writing remained largely irrelevant to the multiple forms of yoga in India for nearly two thousand years, until British Orientalists and Sanskrit scholars decided to revive it and represent the text as "a fit participant in an exclusively European

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[171] Max Müller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (London, New York, and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899): xx, 458, quoted in Singleton and Byrne, "Introduction", 3.

hermeneutic and philosophical colloquy."[172] According to Tapati Guha-Thakurta this was the case for much of India's indigenous art forms:

> The new nationalist ideology of Indian art, its aesthetic self-definitions and its search for a "tradition" had strong roots in Orientalist writing and debates. British Orientalism produced and structured much of its notion of an Indian art tradition. While it had provided the core of historical knowledge and archeological expertise on the subject, it would also stand at the helm of the aesthetic reinterpretation of Indian art during the turn of the century.[173]

Despite this, I would suggest most practitioners of yoga and studio owners who decide what objects are displayed and how the studio is decorated would not identify themselves as Orientalists. My use of the term Orientalism in this context refers primarily to Said's classical definition as the dichotomous socio-geographic and cultural landscape of the East as gazed upon, imagined, and identified as a nebulous whole by the West and rooted in longstanding imbalances of colonial power and dominance. Using David Kopf's critique of Said to illustrate his point, King demonstrates the deeply problematic supposition that, despite Hindu reformers and Western "apologists" having only the intention of bettering indigenous people's lives according to their own values, Orientalism as modernization and Orientalism as westernization cannot and should not be regarded as separate undertakings.[174] By erasing the vein of colonial resistance that gave birth to modern yoga, the yoga studio reinstates both Said's critical narrative of the passive native while also adopting the affirmative Orientalism of Richard Fox, inasmuch as it romanticizes yoga's origins and history without allowing for indigenous agency in developing and revolutionizing modern yoga.[175] As this thesis has already discussed, this strain between the desire to present yoga as modern in the contemporary studio setting but reject any outright

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[172] Singleton, "The Classical Reveries of Modern Yoga", 82.
[173] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art: Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 146.
[174] King, *Orientalism and Religion,* 153.
[175] Affirmative Orientalism allows for non-reductivist Oriental discourse without reproducing the one-sided passive reception of the negative Orientalism defined by Said. This includes Western apologists (Theosophists among them, as particularly relevant to the development of Hindu nationalism alongside yoga) and indigenous agency, participation, and resistance to such narratives. See King, *Orientalism and Religion,* 86-87.

westernization is visible in the tension between the studio as a space of health and hygiene and its highly exoticized decorative program. It is moreover found between the margins of yoga's textual discourse that justifies the use of religious yogic concepts with immediate health benefits. Affirmative Orientalism, in this case, positions the practitioner as a passive receiver of indigenous knowledge through the physical and conceptual framing of the modern yoga studio.

Authentically Sacred and Sacredly Authentic

One of the only works that concerns itself (albeit briefly) with practitioner's reactions to studio aesthetics, Mathews' research describes the range of reactions to studios decorated in a highly exoticized way. At Sattva Yoga Shala in Montreal, for example, the walls are covered with paintings of Hindu deities, the window sills of the practice room are lined with small statues of more deities, and the wall is covered with a *yantra*, or sacred geometric diagram. There are, in fact, two *Nataraja* in this space: one in the main hall and one in the practice hall. While one of his interviewees from Sattva expressed an appreciation of the overtly Hindu décor because it was the "cultural part not found in gyms",[176] another student expressly disagreed. He claimed not to be a "spiritual guy", and thus the ornamentation made him uncomfortable.[177] Moreover, Mathews stresses that while the majority of the practitioners he interacted with knew virtually nothing about what the various art objects represented, they did feel it was an important aspect that gave respect to yoga's origins.[178] Many of them did not, however, view yoga as a religion,[179] an important point that recalls the argument of multiple scholars that spirituality and Eastern philosophy are not regarded by the West as institutionalized, structured and historically specific

[176] Mathews, *Indian Religiosity,* 55
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid., 71.
[179] Ibid., 53.

religions. Because of the explicitly *non*-Hindu engagement with yoga in his fieldwork, Mathews suggests that it renders not only the practice itself but the abundance of Hindu iconography nonthreatening because they essentially knew nothing about the images themselves, aside from their association with "the East" in all its imagined homogeneity.

While HappyTree offers a workshop on Hindu mythology in its teacher training program, it otherwise remains silent on the presence of these objects; though studio owner Richards describes at length that the ensembles of objects, particularly at the altar, are assembled in reaction to the pervasive secularization of yogic spaces. In deciding to devote a space to an altar in the practice room, Richards emphasizes the desire to give practitioners a "focal point" during practice, and that it is a matter of being "less afraid of bringing spirituality into the studio".[180] When students are not facing the mirrors for practice, they face the altar, and in doing so the altar becomes both a locus of sacrality within the room as well as a point of control, from which the teacher's authority issues, symbolically both receiver and transmitter of yoga's authenticity. This authenticity is relayed verbally and physically as the teachers positions themselves at the point of authority through instruction and through their physical positioning the room, standing in front of and silhouetted by the alter space itself. The initiation, or "opening" ceremonies of the training program (Fig. 26) at HappyTree revolve around the altar as a sacred focal point, wherein newly initiated students place an object of personal value at the altar "so they're each giving a part of themselves to the studio"[181]. This entire ceremony is a highly performative ritual in which trainees are initiated through various actions not unlike Catholic sacraments: clothed in white "for purity" and scattered with rose petals "recalling India", they are cleansed in "a cleansing ritual and cleared all around their body with incense. Then they go to the altar, they light a tealight, put their

[180] Richards, Personal interview, Feb 19 2014, Montreal.
[181] Ibid.

intention [in a box], put their object on the altar, and say a prayer, then they came to me and I put the mala [prayer beads] around their neck".[182] While some of these performances were implemented by a teacher no longer employed at the studio and assumed by Richards to have their origins in his own practice, she associates other elements, such as the ritual cleansing at the wearing of white with her own yogic lineage.[183]

While the altar is meant to evoke the sacrality of the practice space, as the *Om* and prayer flag garland above the door signal, the other decorative elements are consciously chosen insofar as they maintain the exoticism of the decorative program but are not the focus of quasi-religious attention, as the altar is. *Tree Mandala,* the aforementioned painting that hangs in the hallways between the lounge and the locker rooms, as well as the golden Buddha head and mandala-printed drapery are part of an effort to "give the hallway a little magic". Richards explains how the chakras of *Tree Mandalas* are a sacred visual element that she hopes impact students as they pass through the hallways space, awakening a "certain feeling".[184] Decoration in the hall is part of a greater effort to unite the space of the lounge and practice hall with the rest of the studio, both on a visual level and on a more "energetic" level. "That was my spiritual mentor who noticed it [the space] was cut off - how everything was so beautiful out in front and then as soon as you went down the hall […] it just turned into a regular space, there was nothing beautiful or inspiring about it. So that people are going in or out of the change room and there's that feeling of sacred in the space."[185] Much like the *Nataraja* dislocated from the religion of the temple and relocated on the secular stage of dance or the modern yoga studio, these decorative elements surpass their

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[182] Ibid.
[183] Richards comes out of the Kundalini tradition as taught by Harbajan Singh Yogi, a hybrid practice in and of itself: tantric in origin and taught under the authority of Yogi Bhajan or "Supreme Religious and Administrative Authority of the Sikh Religion in the Western Hemisphere", it is a syncretic practice that blends elements of kundalini practice and Sikhism. The wearing of white and covering of one's head, in this case, has its origins in Sikh tradition.
[184] Richards, interview
[185] Ibid

purpose as visually pleasurable and become an attempt to evoke a more numinous experience. One student remarked that "the paintings in the studio are yoga inspired, which add to this feeling of authenticity for its clients."[186] As the interviews below suggest, such numinous feelings are associated almost entirely with the yoga studio's degree of authenticity.

Like Mathews, I was able to interview HappyTree students who volunteered to anonymously share their experiences in a confidential interview. Most of them are regular practitioners and familiar with the studio and the aims of this project and, as Strauss and Mandelbaum's fieldwork reflects, middle-class and of postsecondary education.[187] Of the ten students whom I was able to interview, seven affirmed a spiritual connection with the objects in question, while three did not think it mattered where the objects were located. One in particular, vocalized her belief that while it would be great if the objects had meaning, they were, in the setting of Western yoga studios, too commercialized to have spiritual significance. She suggested that the set-up of yoga studios was "inauthentic", and that the transference of these objects from their original context stripped them of real meaning. Another agreed, but suggested that devotional objects kept in one's home could still be spiritually potent, but only on a more personal and intimate level. This domestication of religious objects outside communal spaces recalls Luckmann and Hunt's assertion of secular spirituality as a private and highly selective, personal engagement free of organized, institutional dogma.

The other students were considerably more engaged with the idea of spiritual potency contained within these objects. One emphasized that gym spaces are distinctly different from yoga spaces, as the former lacks sacredness, something imbued in yoga studios because of the presence of objects such as deity statues. She gave the example of personally experiencing a

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[186] Interview with HappyTree student, Feb 23 2014, Montreal.
[187] Mandelbaum and Strauss, "Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment", 178.

teacher bringing a small figurine to a space otherwise devoid of visual representations and its presence changing the nature of the class, imbuing it with a degree of spirituality, and that offerings to a statue are "invigorating", and helps to "use the energy of the deity". She began to understand the "energy" evoked from the different deities when a teacher explained why offerings were given. She also lamented seeing wilting flowers near a *murti* because in India, "flowers at temples are changed three times a day. We don't do that here".[188] Another suggested the objects carry even more potency if one is introduced to their meaning, therefore allowing the practitioner to "better embody them". One in particular, a teacher in training who identified as being "deeply spiritual", suggested that without a deity, "the place is not infused or initiated with the presence of the divine", and that a *murti* acts as "a divine guide that opens and helps everybody practice yoga more deeply".[189] Overwhelmingly it appears the very presence of these objects and their agency on a more *embodied* level – that students may experience something "deeper", part of the "felt life-belief"[190] of the studio rather than merely decorative accents – allows practitioners to engage in more than physical exercises or modern, secular *techniques du corps*. In considering this I wish to propose overlapping the interior as image of the Other with Benjamin's work on the domestic interior as "long experience" (*Erfahrung*), founded, as Rice relays, on "an appeal and a connection to tradition, and the accumulation of wisdom over time".[191] From physical objects that embodied such immaterial notions of history and tradition, a feeling of long experience could perhaps be grasped and, like the nineteenth-century domestic

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[188] For a discussion on the use of the term "energy" in a spiritual context, see Fuller, *Spiritual but Not Religious,* 76-100. This use of the word "energy" is characterized in his work as a belief that "our world is susceptible to an 'influx' of spiritual energies. It is this metaphysical conviction that underlies their harmonial faith that spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being flow automatically from a person's rapport with the cosmos." Ibid., 76-77.

[189] Interviews with HappyTree students, Feb 5-23 2014, Montreal.

[190] Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion", PAGE

[191] Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" in *Selected Writings* vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996-2003) 731, quoted in Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 11.

interior, the yoga studio's refuge of long experience exists to counteract the "short experience" (*Erlebnisse*) of the city, modernity, and all its immediately jarring and alienating experiences.[192] HappyTree creates these moments of interior refuge not through its own traditional objects but through objects of Other traditions, extending the long experience to one not only of time, but of place. In doing so they open "a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration"[193]. Without suggesting that HappyTree's display of such objects is *not* Orientalist in overt ways, it does not seek to completely subdue their agency to affect practitioners, and in constructing its own "visions of community and its own version of historic memory",[194] the studio may complicate the outright reading of the space as West subsuming the East. To return to Rice's discussion of the interior's image, there is a certain "mortification" of the past that takes place in the representation of the interior not only as image, but as *past* image, indeed in this case as the "illumination of a forgotten past", one that is at times remembered as authentic, hybrid, or even modern.[195]

Conclusion: Yoga – Premodern, Modern, Postmodern?

More recent research, particularly work in the fields of sociology and anthropology, have come to show that most casual practitioners who use these spaces know little to nothing about yoga's esoteric history, or how it arrived in the West, but find the exoticized aesthetics of yoga studios to either be disturbing in the way they recall another culture or useful insomuch as they substantiate and pay homage to the roots of yoga. It is these sensory cues – the presence of religious objects, the smell of burning incense, the sound of traditional Indian music - that recall and identify the imaginary Orient from which many of these practitioners draw their ideas of yoga's history in the

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[192] Ibid.
[193] Bhabha, 1993, 167-214
[194] Hernandez, *Bhabha for Architects,* 70
[195] Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior*, 35.

first place. Claims such as those of the Take Back Yoga initiative that insist modern Western yoga is inauthentic, or that the religious objects in yoga studios have lost their power due to the commercial or secular nature of the space deny and ignore the studio's ability to function as commercial and secular, yet as a sacred space *apart* from the consumer culture that characterizes the postindustrial landscape.

Whatever modality of embodiment one chooses – or perhaps conforms to – in the setting of the yoga studio is, in some way or another, embroiled in a discourse of authenticity. How many *murtis* are there in a practice room? How faithfully to the original is this posture or breathing technique taught and performed? As postmodernism has tried and tried again to show, authenticity within a grand and singular narrative is highly exclusionary and ripe for deconstruction. In a similar way if one is to judge the modern spaces of yoga for a perceived authenticity, they should be judged, as Geoffrey Samuel suggests, "on its own terms, not in terms of its closeness to some presumably more authentic Indian practice".[196] Practitioners are then as concerned with their own authenticity as they are with the practice they engage in, and it is "clear that for many, yoga is seen as the privileged site of an authenticity otherwise unavailable or deficient in their daily experience and is felt to provide […] a more 'authentic' way of being."[197] As stated in the introduction, this thesis did not set out to define how *authentic,* however problematically defined, the space of yoga and HappyTree in particular is. It set out instead to understand how authenticity may be constructed, displayed, embodied, and experienced in such a setting. Whether the presence of a statue beside the mat of a teacher imbues the space with an aura of numinous authenticity, or the image of a guru authenticates the idea of lineage, or an emphasis on healing one's body brings them into a state of authentic wellbeing and integration is

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[196] Geoffrey Samuel, Endpiece, *Asian Medicine, Tradition and Modernity (Special Yoga Issue)* 3 (2007): 178 quoted in Singleton and Byrne, "Introduction", 6.
[197] Singleton and Byrne, "Introduction", 6.

negotiated differently by each body and each individual. Certain facets of the yoga studio remain problematic: while Orientalism, colonial discourse and cultural appropriation are all features of these studios that require thorough self-reflection by both the consumers and producers of such narratives, the studio nonetheless remains a site ripe with possibilities because of its ambivalence and hybridity. It is not simply within scholarship that these issues must be addressed. Naada Yoga, a commercial modern postural yoga studio in Montreal, invites Mark Singleton to lecture to their teacher trainees on the history of yoga, giving them the tools to be critically discerning in what they claim is yoga's authentic history. Many teacher trainings, including HappyTree's, feature mandatory workshops on ethics and accessibility that examine issues of class, race, gender, and ableism in yoga in an aim to make it (and its spaces) available and safe for all bodies and identities. Last year the grassroots activism-based site Decolonizing Yoga came online and has proved an accessible and mainstream way for practitioners and non-practitioners alike to explore many of the issues raised in this thesis.[198]

Modern yoga is modern inasmuch as it has, until this point, excluded any narrative that allows it to deviate from its teleological path, maintaining an all-encompassing, universalizing narrative of yoga as a monolithic entity on a singular evolving path that rarely leaves room for the narratives and histories which stray too far from it. Ambiguity in the *space* of yoga, however, may lend to it a shift towards a postmodern aesthetic that "wants its audience to hear the story behind the object and works hard to tell it".[199] As I have shown, the yoga studio is a space heavily invested in erasing much of its historical narrative and supplanting it with a fictional one – it must exist, spatially and temporally, as a place of possibilities, of a gaze both fixated on the future and the nostalgic state of a romanticized past – but in doing so it creates the room, quite literally, that

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[198] "Decolonizing Yoga: Where Spirituality Meets Social Justice", accessed February 17, 2014, http://www.decolonizingyoga.com.
[199] Siebers, "Introduction", 11.

allows practitioners to produce their own story as they move through the space. Some stories are premodern: they begin in ancient, mystical India, with sages from whom they have come to directly receive wisdom, embodied in *murtis* and the ever-present *Om* syllable. For others, the warm communal space of the studio lounge and the quiet introversion of the class creates a markedly different time and space to the slick, antiseptic white of the hospital halls, offering an alternative to the biomedical system that, once lauded for its miraculous science, has in their eyes failed to heal them completely. Still for others the studio mirrors the gaze back at them as just another site of bodily refinement, just another location to perfect a dynamically social and productive body, and, before catching up with the pace of modernity, a reminder to pause and take a deep breath.

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Figures

Figure 1. HappyTree practice hall. HappyTree Yoga's Online Gallery, http://www.flickr.com/photos/24045425@N03.

Figure 2. HappyTree practice room shrine. Author's photograph, March 2013.

Figure 3. Ganesh murti on altar with flower offering. Author's photograph, May 2013.

Figure 4. The "temple-like design vibe" of studio Yogamaya, New York City. Well & Good NYC, January 2012. http://www.wellandgoodnyc.com/2012/01/02/new-york-citys-most-beautiful-yoga-studios-2/#new-york-citys-most-beautiful-yoga-studios-1.

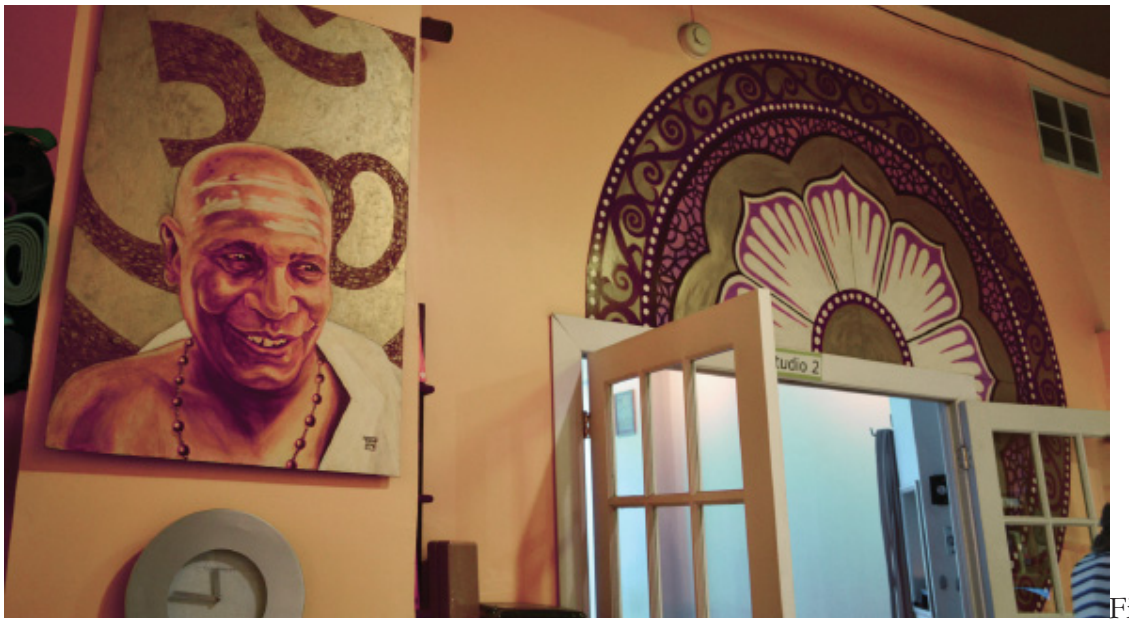

Figure 5. Decorative mandala and portrait of Pattahbi Jois, founder of Ashtanga Yoga. Such devotional images to specific gurus and originators of a yoga style's lineage are common in Ashtanga and Iyengar Studios. Author's photograph. Ashtanga Yoga Montreal, Montreal, Quebec. March 2013.

Figure 6. Façade of HappyTree and neighbouring businesses on St Catherine Street, Montreal. Author's photograph, February 2014.

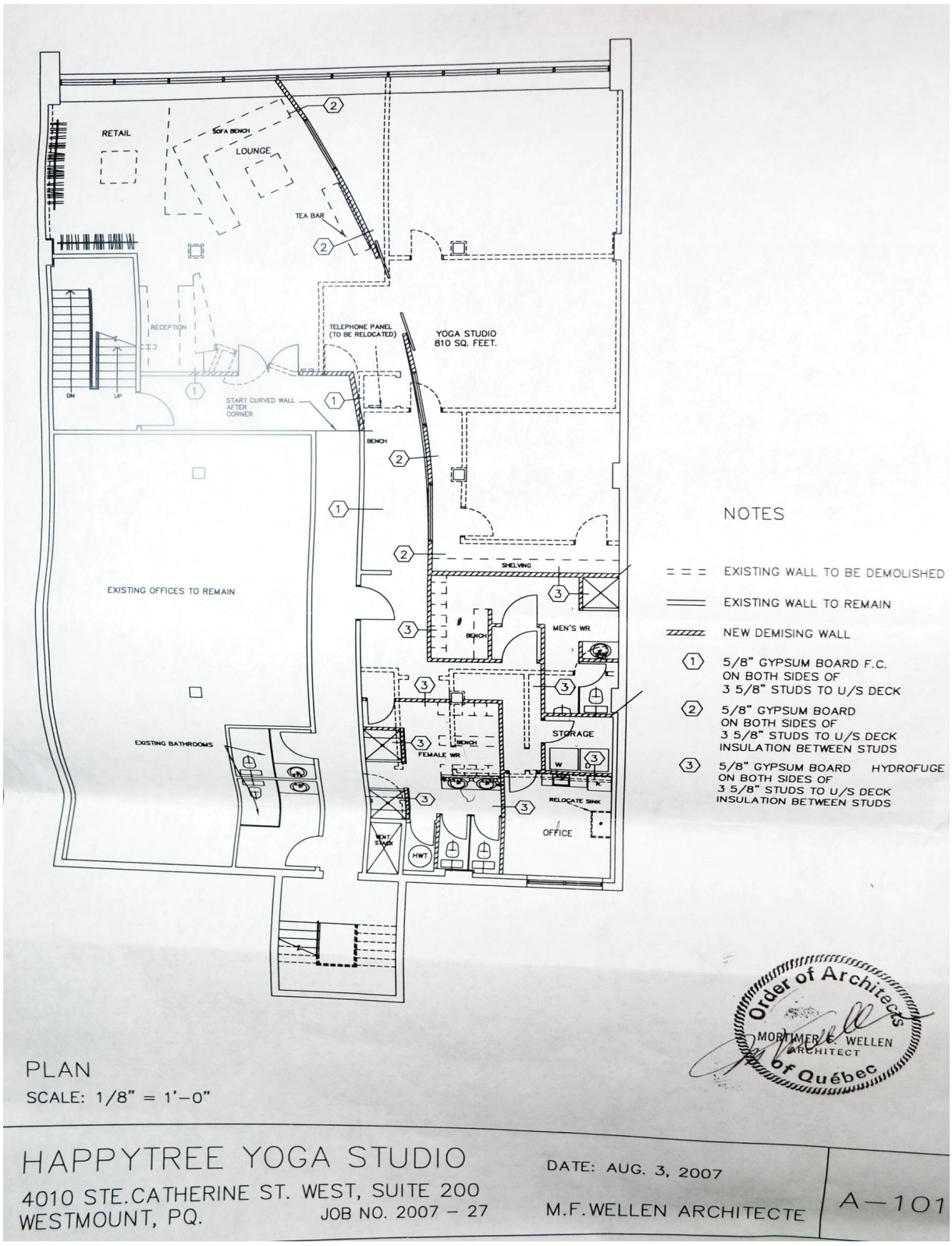

Figure 7a. Architectural plans for the restructuring of HappyTree's interior. M.F. Wellen Architecte, August 3rd, 2007.

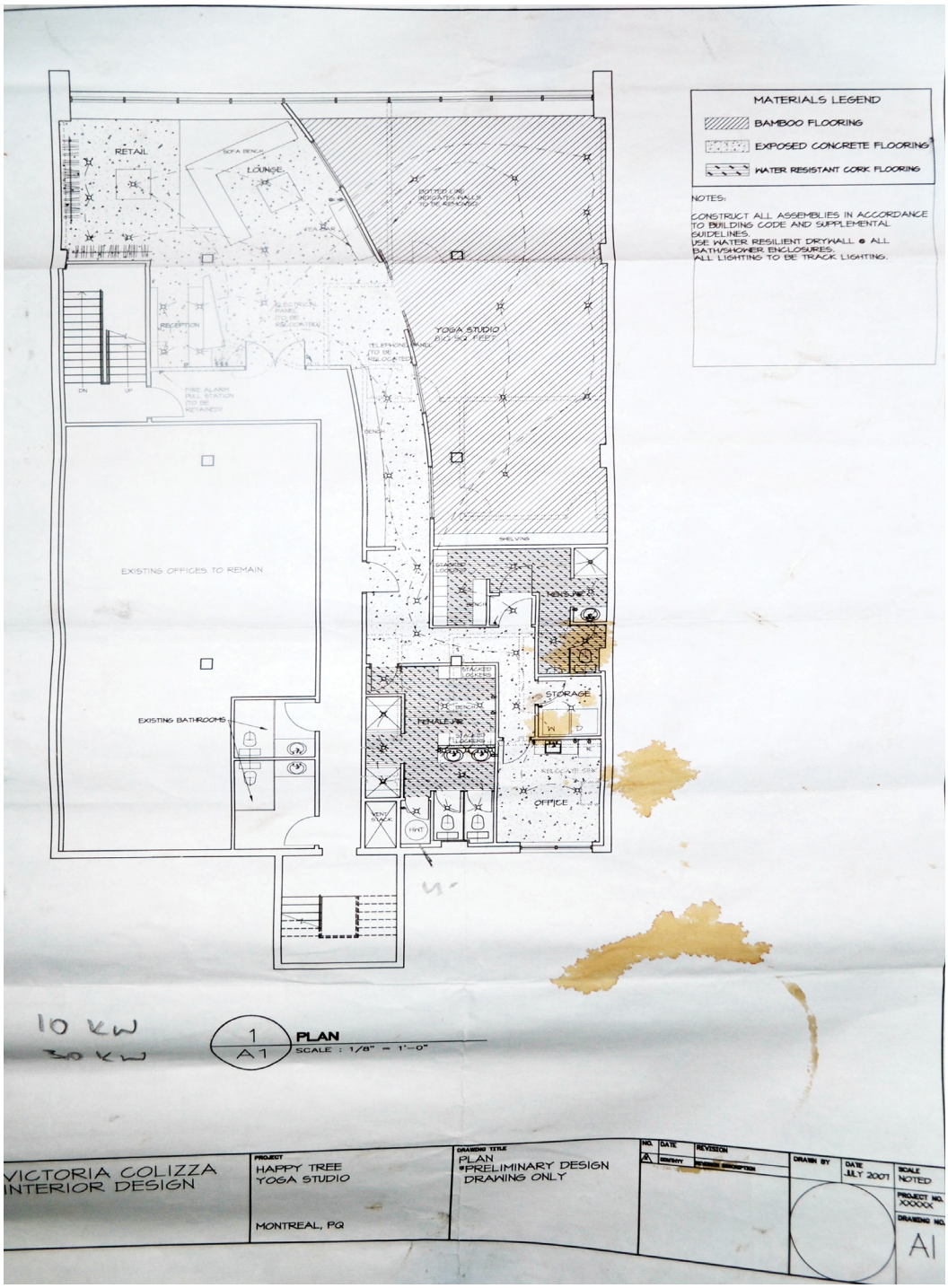

Figure 7b. Architectural plans for interior design of HappyTree. Victoria Colizza Interior Design, September 2007.

Figure 8. HappyTree reception and lounge area. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 9. HappyTree reception desk and logo. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 10. View of the tea counter.

Figure 11. Lounge, retail space, and window to the practice room. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 12. Entrance to The Nest, therapeutic massage and wellness room. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 13. Alcove along hall. Untitled ink drawings by Meier Kaur, donated to HappyTree in 2007. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 14. Hallway to washrooms. Left: S. Jowett, Tree Mandala. Acrylic on canvas, 2012.

Figure 15. HappyTree hallway. Drapery with mandala patterns and golden multi-faced Buddha head. Author's photograph, January 2014.

Figure 16a. Women's washroom. HappyTree Yoga's Online Gallery, http://www.flickr.com/photos/24045425@N03.

Figure 16b. Women's washroom, locker area. HappyTree Yoga's Online Gallery, http://www.flickr.com/photos/24045425@N03.

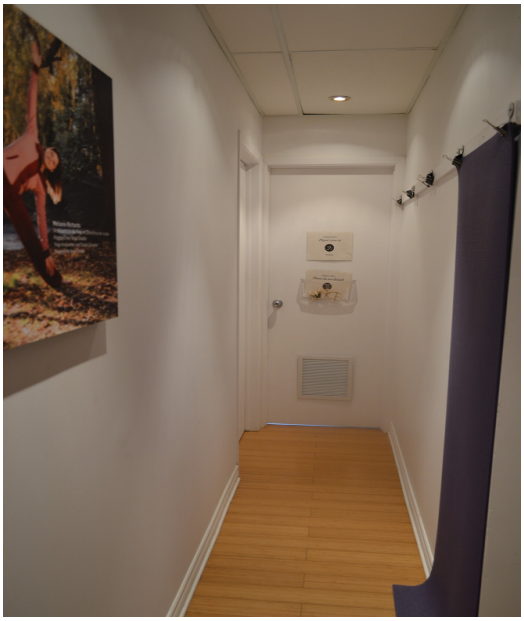

Figure 17. End of the hall, leading to laundry room and staff office, view from doorway of men's washroom. Author's photograph, February 2014.

Figure 18. Promotional image (2010) from HappyTree website, featuring a contemporary print with an anahata chakra design, now placed on altar. HappyTree Yoga's Online Gallery, http://www.flickr.com/photos/24045425@N03.

Figure 19. Promotional image for HappyTree's corporate yoga services. HappyTree Yoga's Online Gallery, http://www.flickr.com/photos/24045425@N03.

Figure 20. Promotional image for HappyTree's corporate yoga services. "Corporate Yoga and a Healthy Workplace", http://happytreeyoga.com/corporate-yoga.

Figure 21. The Nest. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 22. Eliza Lynn Tobin. Mandalas series. Acrylic on wood, as displayed in The Nest. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 23. Eliza Lynn Tobin. *Om*. Multimedia print. Author's photograph, February 2014.

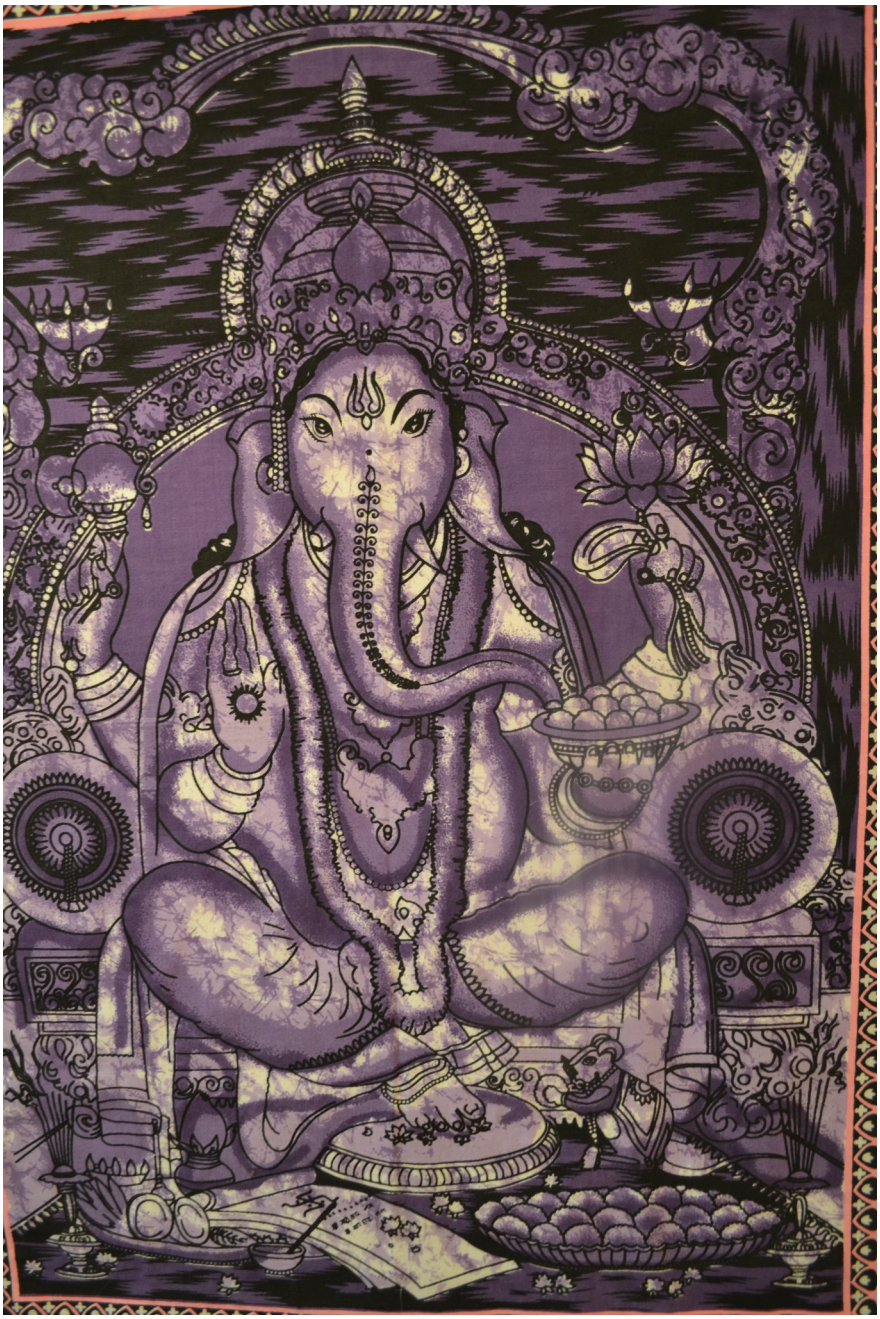

Figure 24. Artist unknown. Untitled. Cloth print of the Hindu deity Ganesha. Author's photograph, January 2013

Figure 25. Practice hall door. Author's photograph, February 2014.

Figure 26. Tibetan prayer flags and Om syllable above the practice room entrance. Lumisculpt Productions, December 2013.

Figure 27. Shiva as Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, among a group of teacher trainees during a session. Author's photograph. June 2012.

Figure 28. Opening ceremony of HappyTree's 2014 Hatha Teacher Training Program. "In the Community" February at the Tree Newsletter. February 1st, 2014.