Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment: Transcultural Discourses on Sustainable Living

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Abstract The practice of yoga in transnational contexts, from North America to Europe to India, has been linked with what has come to be known as the Green movement for environmentally sustainable living. Both this Green movement and the yoga practices that are being mobilized on its behalf are closely connected to the construction of a transnational cosmopolitan middle class that defines itself through particular understandings of health, well-being, and environmentalism. In this paper, we discuss the utility of yoga for both promoting an ecological worldview as well as for linking personal health and well-being with a broader understanding of planetary health; our analysis also highlights the current commercialization of both yoga and the more general health and ecology arenas. In order to do this, we provide both a discursive analysis of web and print media representations of these topics, and also explore the meanings of yoga through ethnographic data collected in a variety of locations between 1992 and 2010. These data were collected among yoga practitioners associated with the training initiated by three major figures in the history of twentieth century yoga, Swami Sivananda, T. Krishnamacharya, and Sri. K. Patabhi Jois. By combining ethnographic research with an examination of text and images, we explore how personal practice and planetary health are linked through the minds, bodies, discourses, and transcultural flows of the yoga world's diverse members.

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Introduction

This paper is the result of an exciting collaboration between an older and younger scholar of the transcultural world of postural yoga. Spanning about two decades of research, it examines the ways that yoga practice and its associated products have moved beyond the context of Hindu India to the global marketplace; much of this transformation occurred in association with the development of the wider "green" turn toward ecological awareness. When Sarah began researching modern yoga in 1992, she had neither the intention nor the expectation that she would include anything specifically related to the environment in her work. She had set out to conduct an ethnographic study of yoga practice in Sivananda's Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, India, but quickly found that staying within the walls of the Sivananda ashram would produce an ethnography that represented only a limited view of the very rich and transcultural Rishikesh yoga scene. Instead, she conducted a multi-sited ethnography of the transnational cultural flows of yoga practice, ultimately published in 2004 as *Positioning Yoga*.[1] While practitioner views of personal health and well-being were integral to the understanding of how yoga had been transformed over the previous century, many of the members of the yoga community described in that book also linked their own health maintenance to wider ecological values, though this was treated only briefly in print.[2] At the time of Sarah's primary data collection (1992–1995), few people in the mainstream of yoga practice, whether in India, Europe, or North America, were making explicit statements about ecology and yoga, though there were definitely some more engaged individuals who were already writing on this theme.[3] Yoga students in the 1990s, from both India and elsewhere, told Sarah that their yoga practice was both for the sake of their own health and that of the planet, exemplifying E. F. Schumacher's exhortation to put one's own house in order, and the rest would follow.[4]

Additionally, yoga was presented by tour operators as well as yoga practitioners, along with trekking, rafting, and other "back-to-nature" activities in Rishikesh in 1992, as clear and obvious shared interests for a certain sector of the global market that would be defined nearly a decade later as "LOHAS," or "Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability."[5] LOHAS is thus 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 of the sort highlighted in Paul Hawken's and the Lovins' work on natural capitalism.[6] Since that time, with the regeneration of the global environmental movement after a period of malaise during the 1990s, the yoga world has developed

[1] Strauss (2004).

[2] Ibid, 130–40.

[3] Skolimowski (1994) and Strauss (2004, 122).

[4] Strauss (2004, 118); Schumacher (1990 [1973]).

[5] Ray and Anderson (2000).

[6] Hawken et al. (1999).

Fig. 1 Green Yoga Association logo (Courtesy: GYA)

a distinctively "green" tinge for at least some portions of the practitioner base; the creation of such organizations as the Green Yoga Association (GYA), discussed in detail below, exemplify this trend.[7] The GYA's logo, below (Fig. 1), makes explicit the connection between human action through postural yoga in the form of the tree pose (*vṛkṣāsana*), with an actual tree as part of the natural world.

Fast forward 15 years to Laura's thesis research in Toronto on Ashtanga Yoga; she has found that the voices of her participants echo many of the themes that Sarah had originally found in her ethnographic work. Moreover, the rapid and intense proliferation of yoga studios within cosmopolitan urban milieus, such as Toronto, suggests that the production and consumption of yoga in a transnational market continues to be a phenomenon that is ripe for academic inquiry. This chapter therefore draws on research that spans two decades, three continents, and a broad range of cosmopolitans in order to explore the complex and fascinating connections that relate discourses of health, wellness, and ecology with one another within a transnational context.[8] Our goal is to show how a significant sector of the modern postural yoga community of practice has become commodified in very specific ways through its association with health and environmental values.

We make use of both textual and web-based analysis, as well as ethnographic research conducted in India, Europe, and North America. Sarah spent most of 1992 in Rishikesh, India, based in three sites including the headquarters of Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society and two other associated yoga ashrams; she conducted extensive archival as well as ethnographic research with 36 discussants

[7] See Feuerstein and Feuerstein (2007) and Fuerch (2009); http://www.greenyoga.org/home (accessed 4 January 2011).

[8] On the category of cosmopolitans see Hannerz (1993, 252).

between the ages of 25 and 50, observing and participating in yoga classes with many more individuals.[9] This research continued in Europe in 1993 and 1994. Laura conducted 4 months of fieldwork at Yoga Blitz, a pseudonym for an Ashtanga yoga studio in the greater Toronto Area, which follows the teachings of T. Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) in Mysore, India. Peter and Rachel (pseudonyms), a married couple who own the studio, alternate their teaching of the traditional "Mysore" form, in which a student is taught one on one by a teacher, one pose at a time, in a room full of practicing students. Between the months of May and August 2010, Laura observed and participated in yoga classes and philosophy of yoga discussions among the students and instructors of this Ashtanga Yoga studio, conducting 20 formal interviews with yoga students and teachers from this studio. Ranging in age from 21 to 60 years of age, they are not a homogenous group by any means. They are all either engaged in, or have graduated from, post-secondary studies, and come from a background that can be considered broadly middle class. All of Laura's discussants were aware of most of the themes of this research study, and were already involved in the personal process of actively engaging in self reflection regarding the role of yoga in their lives.

Consuming Yoga: The Commodification of Bodily Practice

Around the mid 1990s, yoga started to really hit the mass market, showing up at the front of the airport magazine racks and on television. As yoga's visibility in the international public eye grew, it became an integral part of the marketing opportunity associated with the LOHAS consumer sector, worth some US $290 billion in 2008 and on the rise globally as well, for whom ecotourism, spirituality, alternative health practices, alternative energy and building practices, and "natural lifestyles" are key issues.[10] Yoga products proliferated—clothing, mats, Iyengar-style props—and yoga experiences like retreats also became available all over the world. Though India retained its place in the hierarchy of "authentic" yoga vacations, the degree of commodification surrounding all of these activities increased dramatically.

> Yoga is certainly becoming very commercialized. Going to a yoga class has very much become another type of consumptive activity that you can do for your health and well-being. You can shop at Whole Foods and buy organic food and you can go to a yoga class at the Yoga Sanctuary. It's all part of the things you can purchase for yourself that help your mental and physical well-being.[11]

The above comment was recounted by Terry, a lawyer who has been practicing yoga for over 9 years, almost entirely at Yoga Blitz. Her observation is not atypical

[9] See Strauss (2004) for further information about the original fieldwork. These discussants were of various national origins, including American, German, Indian, and Swiss.

[10] On the LOHAS consumer sector see Ray and Anderson (2000). On LOHAS related marketing data see following web-sources; http://www.lohas.com/research-resources (accessed 24 October 2011).

[11] Interview with Terry (pseudonym), 10 July 2010, Toronto.

from the experiences and comments shared by most of the yoga practitioners Laura observed and interviewed over the summer. Terry's comment astutely points to both the increasing commodification of yoga into a consumptive activity, as well as the emerging popularity of a plethora of health and wellness practices within which yoga is situated: Yoga philosophies are being rendered into a highly marketable commodity in the global market place of alternative health.

The first step in the commodification of something is to turn it into an object, and then to ascribe value to that object.[12] Essentially, whatever it is that is being commodified must become an object in our minds, something that is no longer an invaluable part of a whole, but rather exists in and of itself.[13] The next step in the commodification of a practice entails ascribing monetary value to it, as it becomes a good that can be bought or sold in a capitalist market. In order to analyze yoga as a commodity, it must be transformed by society, both conceptually and practically, into an object—meaning that it is ascribed with monetary value within a capitalist economic system. Yoga has value as a consumable good because of the meanings people derive from it and attach to its consumption, as well as the effects it has for its practitioners.

Commodification, Class, and Self-Identity: Bikram Yoga and Beyond

One example of the commodification of yoga practices and philosophies can be found in the franchised and patented international business of Bikram Hot Yoga, which was created and copyrighted by Bikram Choudhury in Los Angeles. The fact that this system of yoga is copyrighted (and the debates surrounding this) speaks directly to the social transformation of yoga into an objectified practice that can be legally owned, and is therefore entrenched in the legal and political apparatus of property rights. Because the Bikram Yoga series is patented, official Bikram Yoga studios must belong to the Bikram's Yoga College of India (BYCI) network, which, at the time that Allison Fish wrote about this, consisted of over 800 studios in 33 different countries.[14] More updated figures, for example from an article posted on an online business journal written in 2008, estimates that there are "over 1,700 [Bikram] schools, 5,000 certified [Bikram] teachers worldwide, and 500 yoga centers with affiliation agreements."[15]

[12] Taussig (1980).

[13] Ibid.

[14] Fish (2006).

[15] "Yoga's Populous Rise has Bikram's Eyeing Franchising" in http://www.indusbusinessjournal.com/ME2/dirmod.asp?sid=&nm=&type=Publishing&mod=Publications::Article&mid=8F3-A7027421841978F18BE895F87F791&tier=4&id=89C02FFEDA5E47F5B5ADC91FADAB7647 (accessed 3 January 2011).

Bikram has copyrighted and trademarked the particular sequence of postures that comprises the Bikram primary series, as well as the corresponding pedagogical dialogue. Between 2002 and 2005, BYCI has been involved in two federal court lawsuits, both of which were settled out of court via non-disclosure agreements.[16] What is most significant for the sake of our analysis is that the franchising, copyrighting, and trademarking of a brand name of yoga speaks to the extent to which contemporary transnational yoga is becoming a commercial commodity. Certainly, as discussed earlier on, contemporary transnational yoga is by no means a monolithic or homogenous entity, and as such the case of BYCI cannot be extrapolated to all of contemporary transnational yoga; however, it does illustrate one clear example of the commodification of this style of modern postural yoga.

In *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai defines commodities as "objects of economic value," and argues that their value exists in the object's cultural biography, that is, its classification, circulation, and, most importantly, the "way in which people's senses of themselves are reflected in and derived from their objects."[17] Subsequently, there have been more than a few conferences revisiting Appadurai's work on this topic; for example, van Binsbergen and his colleagues, including Appadurai himself, have extended the discussion of commodification and consumption in the face of increasing globalization in the decades since *The Social Life of Things* was published, showing "another strategic dimension for highlighting the relation between things-in-motion and human agency."[18] Much conceptual work has been done in economic anthropology and, while there are a variety of perspectives about what commodities are and how they are validated as commodities, there is agreement that the process of commodification is deeply social, cultural, and political (as opposed to simply economic).[19] The social construction of the self through bodily practices is an important aspect of the meaning and value ascribed to yoga. Essentially, when one purchases a yoga pass at a studio, along with a yoga magazine and new exercise gear, one is crafting a specific aspect of one's self identity. For Laura, it became clear as she conducted her observations and interviewed the members of Yoga Blitz that most people who practiced yoga on a regular basis did, in fact, have a specific sense of themselves that was reflected in and derived from their daily commitment to a specific yoga practice.

Diego, for example, has been practicing Ashtanga Yoga for several years, and has completed a yoga teacher's training course in Toronto. His wife is also a yoga teacher and practitioner, yet within a different lineage. For him, although it is difficult to articulate with clarity, there is certainly a sense of self identity to be found in being an Ashtanga Yoga practitioner:

> I don't self identify as a yogi in the spiritual sense, but I do feel that by practicing the way I do and hanging out with the group of people I do I am . . . but when forced to put a definition on it I'm having trouble. To many different people it can be a different thing. For some,

[16] Fish (2006, 195–200).

[17] Appadurai (1986, 135).

[18] Van Binsbergen (2005, 25).

[19] For more on commodities, specifically in a globalizing world, see Hauguerud et al. (2000).

> being a yogi is becoming a commercial thing, for some it's ... I don't know, do you consume it? I mean we identify as Ashtanga [Yoga practitioners], cause we wake up every morning and work ourselves damn hard and there's an identity to that.[20]

Diego also felt that, although yoga might form one aspect of his identity, it is also part of a capitalist economic system, and he identified the consumptive element within yoga:

> You wander in a yoga studio and in order to sell it they set up certain images, certain stages. A yoga studio certainly does look different than a boxing studio—you are having a stage prepared for you.

The consumption of these yoga practices specifically, as well as alternative health more generally, is central to the construction of a newly emerging international bourgeoisie class identity situated within cosmopolitan milieus.[21]

The meanings that practicing yoga can have for a person's self-identity can also be considered part of the repertoire of symbolic capital, since they are linked to social class as per Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of taste and practices as class distinction. In Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste* he conceptualizes taste and preferences in consumption as cultural practices that create a "social hierarchy of tastes," which are parallel to, and reinforce, class hierarchies.[22] As such, class membership is delineated in large part by taste, or manifested cultural preferences. These cultural tastes then become naturalized, embodied daily practices, or *habitus*, at which point class distinctions can be conveyed through the body's physical attributes, manners, and practices.[23] Each social group has its own *habitus*, which can be decoded according to the judgment of taste and practices, rendering individual practices as a site for class distinction. Yoga, and the making of a "yogic body" through lifestyle choices associated with practicing yoga, are therefore valued not only as a fitness fad, but also as 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.

The above argument linking yoga and class is certainly contestable; however, by simply scanning the list of yoga studios, resorts, and retreats available, and glancing at their prices, the class distinction becomes glaringly evident, since the price of practicing yoga is itself a barrier that only certain, privileged classes can overcome. On average, a pass to a yoga studio in both British Columbia and Toronto ranges from CA$ 150 to CA$ 250 per month, with individual drop-in yoga classes ranging

[20] Interview with Diego (pseudonym), 22 June 2010, Toronto.

[21] Hannerz (1990) and Molz (2006).

[22] Bourdieu (1984, 25, 101–110).

[23] Ibid, 105.

from 16 to 20 dollars each—this drop-in rate is more than double the minimum hourly wage in Toronto.[24] To highlight this issue in our interview, Diego pointed to the premium prices that are charged by the owners of Yoga Blitz:

> The *śālā* [hall] is CA$ 180 per month, but there are only ten people who are authorized in all of Canada! It's a hot commodity—they could charge more and we would probably pay it. But it is a barrier, and time can be a barrier, as well. It can be hard to do yoga and work.[25]

Jay, another respondent who had recently returned from volunteering in Africa and had only been practicing yoga at Yoga Blitz for 2 months, also commented on the commercialization of yoga as an elitist practice with clear connections to class:

> It makes me uncomfortable, the faddish nature of yoga. The image of the California beach bum, surfer, yogi all rolled into one person, and throw in Whole Foods in there. It makes me uncomfortable. It's elitist. It's this concept of health that is snobbish and superior and available only if you have money. Ashtanga Yoga feels very different, it feels authentic.[26]

Ironically, Jay felt that Ashtanga Yoga was "different," that it was not as exclusionary as other forms of commercialized yoga. The irony is that, as Diego pointed out, Ashtanga instructors with the "official" blessing, from Mysore, to teach Ashtanga Yoga are a "hot commodity," and, precisely because there are such few of them, Ashtanga Yoga studios can charge a premium price. Further, because Ashtanga Yoga is based on practicing 6 days a week, many Ashtanga Yoga studios will only accept students who commit to attending 6 days a week, or else will simply not offer punch passes, having only monthly passes instead. Hence, although Jay feels that Ashtanga Yoga is exempt from the "snobbishness" of commercialization, it is, in fact, one of the most exclusive lineages of yoga because of both the price and time commitment involved in practicing this form of yoga.

For practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga, which is an *āsana* (posture) based practice that is quickly growing in popularity within Europe and North America, the authoritative place is the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (AYRI) situated in Mysore, India. At the time of writing (2009), this studio charged US$ 600 per month simply to practice at the studio for 1–2 h a day, not including meals, flight, or accommodation.[27] Furthermore, an internet survey of the plethora of yoga retreats, vacations, and trainings being offered to consumers reveals that they are all sold at prices that create a very real economic barrier and transform the practice of yoga into a luxury, a privilege, and a class distinction.

[24] This estimation of costs was gathered in 2010 by surveying the websites of 25 yoga studios in British Columbia (in Vancouver and the Okanagan), as well as 25 yoga studios in the Greater Toronto Area. Please note that what is presented is a range, not an average.

[25] Interview with Diego (pseudonym), 22 June 2010, Toronto.

[26] Interview with Jay (pseudonym), 25 June 2010, Toronto.

[27] See also Nichter (this volume). Further information on the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute is given on their website: http://www.kpjayi.org/ (accessed 10 December 2009). Price was listed in Indian rupees and calculated in US dollars.

Modernity and the Middle Classes

Under the terms of late, or reflexive, modernity, Scott Lash saw a shift in influence led by the "new" new middle class, i.e. those members of the middle class who have been termed "professionals" (by Ehrenreich) or "symbolic analysts" (by Reich), who are salaried or self-employed, who generally have a high level of formal education, and who have been taught the value of flexibility.[28] The sociological literature on what has been variously labeled the "new" new middle class is vast, and derives from the perceived gap in Marx's polarized vision of the relationship between the proletariat and the capitalists, which failed to account for the increasing number of salaried, white-collar workers in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. During the years following World War II, sociologists like Charles Wright Mills and Hans Gerth compiled landmark studies on the class structure of the United States, in which discussions differentiating various levels of the middle class and their relationship to status in that society predominated.[29] Debates between members of the political right and left about the definition and value of these white-collar employees became heated in the late 1960s and early 1970s with such scholars as Daniel Bell, Alvin Gouldner, Anthony Giddens, Joseph Bensman, and Arthur Vidich, among others, weighing in.[30]

The significance of the debates concerning the "new" new middle class for Sarah's research lies in the fact that the majority of the people who in the period 1992 till 1995 seem to be involved with yoga in Sivananda's tradition can be recognized as having similarities in educational background, occupational preference, and fundamental values, even though they were born into very different cultural traditions and national contexts. Similarly, this observation resonates with the broadly middle-class participant base that Laura interviewed in Toronto over the summer of 2010: Every single one of the 20 participants interviewed had finished post-secondary education, and all of them were either working in a profession (such as lawyer, engineer, or professor), or else currently undergoing postgraduate studies. Although there were some remaining members of the studio who Laura did not have a chance to interview, she was still able to gather through informal conversations and social events that most of them were also either middle-class professionals or students.

[28] See Ehrenreich (1989), Lash (1994, 128–129), Martin (1994, 234–244), and Reich (1992).

[29] See Vidich (1995).

[30] See Bell (1973), Bensman and Vidich (1995), Giddens (1975), Gouldner (1979), and Burris (1986).

Constructing Healthy Selves: Individualizing Discourses of Health and Environmentalism

We do not in any way argue that the individuals discussed above constitute a distinct "new middle" class in Marxist terms, but we do think it is important to explore the significance of these similarities in order to understand who these people are, why they are attracted to yoga, and how they have come to participate in this transnational community of practice. In this section, we therefore draw on the theoretical tools provided by both Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose as we try to interpret and understand the connection between the crafting of the subjectivities of yoga practitioners, and the larger social systems within which these subjectivities exist, including the global economy. In a lecture presented at the University of Vermont in 1982 (first published in 1988) Foucault stated that "my present work deals with the question: How did we directly constitute our identity through certain ethical techniques of the self that developed through Antiquity down till now?"[31] In order to embark on his primary research objective of "sketching out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves," Foucault focused primarily on discourse analysis and genealogical studies.[32] For him, the techniques through which individuals constitute their own self-understanding exist within specific, historically grounded rationalities. In his works on governmentality, Foucault argues that the technologies of the self are inextricably linked with the rationality of government, since government can be seen as a point of convergence where "techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion."[33] We situate the techniques of the self, or strategies through which individuals can effect, by their own means, "a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" within the context of both government and capital.

Yoga can be understood as one of the mechanisms of the self that Foucault discusses, since the body as the key site for the transformation of the self is a central aspect of yoga; as stated on the website of Yoga Blitz: Yoga can be a "fantastic path towards *personal transformation* and *self realization*."[34] The potential of yoga as a tool for self-transformation was clear for Robin, a music teacher who began practicing Ashtanga Yoga 6 years ago:

> Yoga for me is a huge mirror. And when I started to do yoga, and I saw that mirror, that mirror was fuzzy. With time, when you clean that mirror, you can start to see yourself better. It gets clearer—that's what yoga is, a mirror. Where you can see everything: the

[31] Foucault (2000, 405).

[32] See Foucault (1988, 17–18).

[33] Foucault (1988, 23).

[34] Ashtanga Yoga Shala website 2010; emphasis added. Website not listed and quote slightly changed to preserve anonymity.

> good things, the bad things. And then you can start adjusting what you don't like because then you are aware of it.[35]

For Robin, then, yoga is a tool for self-transformation, which allows her to understand herself with more clarity and honesty, and that understanding helps her to "adjust" the things she does not like about herself. Yoga, then, can be understood as one of those *techniques du corps* (Mauss) that can be used to develop the self, which is transformed through the body.[36] For example, out of the 20 yoga practitioners Laura interviewed, nearly two thirds of the respondents answered that yoga was not only a transformative practice for them, but that one of the things they valued most was the discipline and work ethic that yoga instilled in them.

Valerie, for instance, who has been practicing yoga for over 6 years, explained the numerous ways in which yoga had helped to transform her:

> I stopped smoking, I lost about fifteen kilos, I stopped doing drugs, I stopped drinking for three years (now I am drinking very little), *I have developed self discipline* (something that I never had before). I can accomplish every day being the human being that I want to be, through practice. I am more calm, *more disciplined*, more focused, eat better, feel healthier, more energized.[37]

Valerie was not alone in her response, since Vivian also seemed to value the discipline and structure that yoga brought to her life:

> What I liked about Ashtanga [Yoga] was the routine, which *disciplined myself and my mind. It disciplined me as a person* because it made me go to bed at a certain time, eat the right type of food, get the right hours of sleep, and all of those things, in balance, were ideal for my mind and my body.[38]

Both of these answers are representative of more than half of the responses Laura received in the interviews she conducted.

This emphasis on discipline is at the heart of the importance of situating yoga within a specific political and economic context. To return to Foucault, the techniques through which individuals seek to transform themselves and craft their own self-understanding exist within specific, historically situated rationalities. What is, then, the current situation in Canadian and American society that makes discipline such a positive attribute? What particular rationalities give rise to these constructions of selfhood and understandings of health? What is the discursive context within which the bodily and mental practices of contemporary transnational yoga, as techniques of the self, have become increasingly popular, and how do these converge with neoliberal capitalism and corresponding shifts in state policy? Nikolas Rose's concepts of "ethopolitics" and "somatic selfhood" provide an interesting starting point for answering these questions.[39]

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[35] Interview with Robin (pseudonym), 5 June 2010, Toronto.

[36] Mauss (1973 [1936]).

[37] Interview with Valerie (pseudonym), 22 June 2010, Toronto.

[38] Interview with Vivian (pseudonym), 22 June 2010, Toronto.

[39] Rose (2001).

In "The Politics of Life Itself," Rose traces a shift from "biopolitics" to what he defines as "ethopolitics," where "life itself, as it is lived in its everyday manifestations, is the object of adjudication … ethopolitics concerns itself with the self techniques by which humans should judge themselves and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are."[40] In the past few decades, popular discourses on health have shifted from a focus on preventing illness to an emphasis on optimizing one's overall quality of life by improving the health and wellness of one's body, mind, and spirit. Rose astutely points to this when he notes that

> In the second half of the 20th century … the very idea of health was re-figured—the will to health would not merely seek the avoidance of sickness or premature death, but would encode an optimization of one's own corporality to embrace a kind of overall wellbeing—beauty, success, happiness, sexuality, and much more.[41]

It is precisely this promotion of overall well-being that is one of the central selling features of contemporary transnational yoga. This discourse regarding holistic health has become increasingly hegemonic in tandem with a growing industry of alternative health and wellness products, as well the LOHAS movement, and, as Rose argues, "by the start of the twenty-first century, hopes, fears, decisions, and life routines shaped in terms of the risks and possibilities in corporeal and biological existence had come to supplant almost all others as organizing principles of a life of prudence, responsibility, and choice."[42] These discourses take as their subject, and simultaneously create said subject, a "self" that is centered around an individual's body, psyche, and behavior—what Rose identifies as an "intrinsically somatic selfhood … in which the body has become the key site for transformation."[43]

How this "self" is understood is tied to a specific socio-cultural context. In the case of contemporary transnational yoga, the role of neoliberal capitalism cannot be ignored. Indeed, it is difficult to separate yoga's impetus for continual self-improvement and self-transformation from the capitalistic and neoliberal ideology of self-reliance, hard work, and individualism; yet, if ideologies exist they exist only so far as they are legitimizing particular material conditions, in which case the question arises of what conditions are legitimized by this neoliberal ideology of selfhood. We argue that this ideology legitimizes the pulling back of the welfare state from its responsibility for ensuring the health of its citizens, since it posits that the responsibility of one's health, and the health of one's family, rests firmly on the shoulders of each individual's choices in regards to consumption and lifestyle practices. Essentially, one's health is one's own responsibility, and the achievement of overall well-being is increasingly seen as an individual success or failure.

[40] Ibid, 18.

[41] Rose (2001, 17).

[42] Rose (2001, 18).

[43] Ibid.

Within this context, implementing some form of alternative health practice into daily life is perceived as a moral duty and responsibility to one's health, to be achieved through transcultural practices that promise self-transformation and individual life enhancement.[44] At the same time, however, "the state is no longer expected to resolve society's needs for health" since it has, in fact, freed itself from many of the health-promoting responsibilities that it had acquired during the twentieth century.[45] We believe that this is particularly true since the turn to neoliberalism in the late 1980s. Thus, there is a distancing of the neoliberal state, at least in Canada and the United States, from its social responsibility in facilitating health-promoting practices, while, simultaneously, there is an increasing pressure placed on individuals to engage in health-enhancing activities.[46] The former cannot occur without the latter, since without a social welfare system that provides for the health needs of a society the very practices that individuals are encouraged to embark on are often inaccessible due to material limitations. Even though there are many structural barriers that prevent people from engaging in alternative health practices, the manner in which health has been naturalized as a personal choice and responsibility results in placing the culpability for disease squarely on the shoulders of the diseased.

It is here, within this discourse of health centered around techniques for improving the "somatic" self, that contemporary transnational yoga has become increasingly popular as a bodily practice that promises to transform the self into a well-balanced individual. In a sense, the conceptualizations of selfhood that are produced within yoga converge with neoliberal constructions of selfhood, and these discourses are therefore mutually reinforcing and constantly reproduced. Ultimately, this highly individualized construction of the self, which posits the responsibility of overall well-being on one's own choices, legitimates the increasing deterioration of state responsibility for the health of the members of its society, and also reproduces class distinction in its most embodied form—the health-enhancing practices that can lead to well-being are available only to those who can afford both the fee and the time that they require. In Canada, achieving an idealized healthy body and balanced mind through the consumption of transnational bodily practices such as yoga is a luxury only a few can afford—it is nothing less than health reconstituted as class distinction.[47]

[44] Lau (1998, 167).

[45] Rose (2001, 6).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Bourdieu (1984).

Commodification and Environmentalism

The carbon footprint associated with yoga practice grew in the same exponential way that its practitioner base increased. Yet, when asked about health, yoga, and spirituality, many of the answers conveyed by respondents were intertwined with particular philosophies of nature, ecology, and environmentalism. When we think about the practice of what has come to be known as modern postural yoga[48] in relation to the environment, a few distinct poses come to mind—perhaps the tree pose (*vṛkṣāsana*) or the mountain pose (*tāḍāsana*), postures that metaphorically stand for familiar aspects of the natural world, as in the GYA's logo, above. Or perhaps the sun salutation (*sūryanamaskār*), which is only recently seen as being linked to Vedic hymns to the sun god Sūrya (Goldberg). Certainly, it is easy enough to derive a strong imperative for environmentally conscious living from the Hindu philosophical context within which yoga was developed. In Nelson's edited volume on Hinduism and ecology, a number of scholars and activists have made the association between these two domains.[49] Most notable here would be Chapple's call for an "indigenous Indian environmentalism" which is specifically supported by a yogic perspective; the "ultimate goal of Yoga . . . involves the cultivation of a higher awareness, which, from an environmental perspective, might be seen as an ability to rise above the sorts of consumptive material concerns that can be harmful to the ecosystem."[50] More recently, we have seen calls for an explicit "eco" or "green" yoga, as well as the founding of organizations to promote environmentally-friendly yoga practice (e.g., the GYA) or explicit environmentally related statements in existing organizations to reflect a greener orientation. In this India-based website, we learn that "yoga offers us the tools and the guidance to craft health on every level, and gives us the ability to live happily and in harmony with our natural environment and all of our fellow beings. . . . In short, yoga offers us a holistic, nurturing and evolutionary 'way of living'."[51]

The sheer amount of goods now associated with yoga is partly related to the "props" used in Iyengar Yoga practice—blocks, straps, pillows, and blankets—but specific yoga "fashions" have evolved as well, as noted in a 2010 National Public Radio story by an American journalist of Indian origin: "I am just amazed at all the . . . stuff. Yoga tops, bottoms, blankets, mats. My vision of a yogi was a guy in the forest, sitting on a piece of tree bark—or in the deluxe version, a deerskin. He didn't have a yoga mat carrier!"[52] Initially, none of the special yoga clothing or products advertised in *Yoga Journal* or other popular magazines were made of organic or otherwise sustainable materials, and the travel associated with yoga retreats in ever

[48] De Michelis (2004).

[49] See Nelson (1998).

[50] Chapple (1998, 30, 29–31).

[51] http://www.discover-yoga-online.com/what-is-yoga.html (accessed 6 January 2011).

[52] http://www.npr.org/2010/12/29/132207910/yoga-a-positively-un-indian-experience?sc=emaf (accessed 6 January 2011).

more exotic locales added carbon to the atmosphere at a rapid pace. While yoga was certainly associated with the LOHAS population as it emerged in the 1990s, it was not because of the way that yoga was practiced at that time; environmental values may have been seen as inherent in the philosophical basis for yoga, as discussed above with respect to Chapple, as well as in Sherma's work on Tantric ecofeminism, but were not so evident in its global expression.[53] However, by the time the annual American LOHAS meeting, held in Boulder (Colorado), came around in 2008, yoga was not merely one of the health fads that comprised the LOHAS market, but an integral part of both the products and the entrepreneurial practices of the organization itself. Each day of sessions started out with a yoga class, and one of the conference sessions was devoted to teaching business people how to incorporate yogic values in their workplaces.

LOHAS itself is an interesting concept. First derived from social science research defining an emergent market sector, LOHAS has come to be defined in different ways. It is an umbrella under which many different previously separated markets come together (health, environment, social responsibility), and has been incarnated in the United States as an organization with members comprised of companies with LOHAS products to sell, marketing firms interested in promoting such products, and practitioners.[54] As a non-membership organization, LOHAS produces a journal and an annual conference, and provides a website for business listings and discussion. However, the concept has grown far beyond the definition in academic terms and the subsequent institutional structure created to support the newly defined market sector. It has taken on its own life and identity, with an emergent transcultural community that sees value in this new framework and definition.

And this trend is evident not only in the United States, but elsewhere around the world.[55] A description of the LOHAS logo gives a sense of the Japanese interpretation of the LOHAS goals: "Colorful flower images inspired by smiling faces represent happy LOHAS life. Five smiling petal flowers stands for five LOHAS categories, as well as the oriental Ying-Yang and five elements, Wood, Fire, Soil, Gold, and Water. The triple ring expresses the 'Triple Bottomline' of economy, environment, and society."[56] Similarly, in Taiwan, the national tourist bureau has used the concept of LOHAS to promote both traditional and modern Taiwanese activities, including yoga and health practices, as well as ecotourism.[57]

One piece of Sarah's 1990s research that was not explored fully in *Positioning Yoga* was a broader discussion of the similarities across the populations of German-speaking, American, and Indian yoga practitioners involved in Sivananda's orbit.

[53] See Chapple (1998) and Sherma (1998).

[54] http://www.lohas.com/mission.htm (accessed 5 January 2011).

[55] Cf. http://lohas-ba.org/english/; http://www.japanfs.org/en_/newsletter/200606-1.html (accessed 5 January 2011).

[56] http://lohas-ba.org/english/ (accessed 6 January 2011).

[57] http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/m1.aspx?sNo=0002036 (accessed 6 Jan 2011).

Like many of Laura's Canadian discussants in Toronto, most of the people who had chosen to come to Rishikesh to practice yoga, whether from Europe, America, elsewhere in India, or Rishikesh itself, shared certain characteristics that fit into the LOHAS market base. In addition, they tended to be well-educated professionals, not necessarily having a high income, but having had the education that would have made them eligible for such a status had they chosen to pursue it. They worked overwhelmingly in the service sector, either in health, social services, education, or tourism. If they were not from India, they were likely to be women. Indeed, though they did not constitute a class in the usual sense of the word, they fit many of the characteristics of a "new" middle class not only in Europe and the United States, but also in India—a sector that has been described in a variety of ways during the 1970, 1980, and 1990s just prior to the LOHAS values-based analysis. [58]

Class and Being Modern

In her book, *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial*, Margaret Rose cites Toynbee extensively to demonstrate that

> . . . the word "modern" in the term "Modern Western Civilization," can, without inaccuracy, be given a more precise and concrete connotation by being translated "middle class," "Western communities became 'modern' in the accepted Modern Western meaning of the word, just as soon as they succeeded in producing a bourgeoisie that was both numerous enough and competent enough to become the predominant element in Society".[59]

So, a linkage between "middle-class" lifestyles and "modernity" is not without precedent. But how does a society acquire a middle class? Krishan Kumar answers this by pointing out the inseparability of modernity and industrialism, which he sees as ideological and material forms of the same revolution.[60] The ideological belief in progress and "the continuous creation of new things," coupled with the technological advances that make such creation possible, together create the will and the opportunity for people to raise their standard of living.[61] Yet these same people who achieve a certain level of material wealth often become dissatisfied with certain other features of modern, industrial life. They are the ones who have the leisure to evaluate and comment upon the state of their world, and sufficient means—which could come in the form of educational, symbolic, or other cultural forms capital as well as financial power—to translate their musings into a real impact on their world.[62] It is clear that this group shares a great deal in common with those who

[58] On the "new" middle class in India see, for example, Singh (1985) and Vidich (1995).

[59] Rose (1991, 9).

[60] Kumar (1995, 82–83).

[61] Ibid., 81.

[62] On cultural capital see Bourdieu (1984).

have in the twenty-first century come to be defined as the LOHAS market and, increasingly, a transnational and transcultural community of yoga practitioners.

This market sector has been long in the making. Edward Bellamy captures the same sense of dissatisfaction in his novel *Looking Backward*, a utopian vision of Boston in the year 2000 from the vantage point of a young doctor born in 1857.[63] Bellamy's vision of the direction America should take resonated with the general public's concerns of the day; the novel was wildly popular, not only in the United States, but around the world. This account, although fictional, serves well to describe the conditions under which Swami Vivekananda arrived in the United States five short years following the initial publication of Bellamy's book. While his primary purpose was to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions at the Chicago World's Fair, Vivekananda also visited with private, generally well-to-do, citizens in Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The people into whose homes he came seem, from their descriptions, remarkably similar to members of the 1887 Boston society described in *Looking Backward*.[64] Such similarities may point to the reason why Vivekananda's American hosts sought alternative visions of the way the world should work, whether from reading Bellamy, listening to Vivekananda and taking up his practices, or following one of the New Thought, Spiritualist, or other emergent movement leaders who offered forms of practice often radically different from the context within which these members of established society grew up.

Now we can leap ahead 100 years to the mid-1990s. Following the spate of sociological literature on the "new" new middle class, a sociologist and a psychologist, Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, conducted a values assessment study in the mid 1990s, which placed Americans in categories of "traditional," "modern," and "creative."[65] This was reported in a book called *The Cultural Creatives*; this group transcended traditional socioeconomic categories, sharing features of the political right and left. Overall, the "cultural creative" turned out to be the drivers of the LOHAS market, for which yoga and other alternative health practices, sustainability or ecological sensitivity, spirituality, alternative energy and "authenticity" are key elements which are explicitly listed as the core components of the LOHAS designation.[66] Many manufacturers and practitioners jumped on the bandwagon, anticipating the extraordinarily strong market that awaited their goods and services. The LOHAS market is also more than 60 % female, with a strong interest in books and the arts, as well as good food.[67] More recently, Ray and Anderson

[63] Bellamy (1995).

[64] Atulananda (1988) and Chattopadhyaya (1993).

[65] Ray and Anderson (2000).

[66] http://www.lohas.com/about.html (accessed 5 January 2011).

[67] On statistics related to the Cultural Creatives in 2008 see http://www.integralpartnerships.com/content/view/45/1/ (accessed 4 January 2011).

have continued their research and added a consulting element, shifting their focus to what they see as an emergent "integral culture."[68]

LOHAS and the Yoga Community of Practice

As we have seen, the practice of yoga in recent decades is, to a great extent, a middle-class phenomenon. Yoga practitioners in both India and the West, especially those associated with Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and similar teachers, like Pattabhi Jois and other followers of Krishnamacharya, tend to be educated people with at least some discretionary income for travel and leisure. By the standards applicable to their countries of origin, they are neither at the very bottom nor the very top of the economic hierarchy. Even those individuals who learn yoga techniques from a book, video, TV show, or website, and never make the face-to-face acquaintance of other yoga practitioners, recognize the existence in the world of other people who share knowledge of the same bodily techniques they have learned. Once a certain mastery of the techniques presented through these various media has been achieved, many of these individuals seek out other yoga practitioners, both to advance their skills and to discuss the implications of these practices for their health or lives in general. Many people who are exposed to yoga learn to practice it in the company of others, through one of the many yoga classes that are now widely available around the world. There is, then, a connective thread of "transculturality" that links all of these practitioners, since, as Welsch (referring to Wittgenstein) asserts, "culture is at hand whenever practices in life are shared."[69]

While the practices of the individuals with whom we are here concerned do not vary tremendously from place to place, the significances attached to them shift according to local culture and historical context. In this way, we suggest that the transnational community of yoga practitioners resonates with Welsch's notion of transculturality, as being composed of "transcultural networks, which have some things in common while differing in others, showing overlaps and distinctions at the same time."[70] Members of the community of practice, then, share a lexicon of postures and practices, with variably overlapping interpretations of these acts. Not all yoga practitioners are "seekers" in the Western New Age sense of the term, relentlessly pursuing a spiritual path, self-consciously questing for enlightenment which will free them from the bounds of that very self; neither are they all Hindu fundamentalists, nor yet all physical fitness fanatics questing for immortality.[71] Most of the practitioners we have spoken with have no intention of renouncing this world, and indeed, as they see it, the practice of yoga is quite specifically a way of

[68] See http://www.goethe.de/ins/ca/tor/prj/eds/the/leb/en2424837.htm (accessed 7 January 2011).
[69] Welsch (1999, 8).
[70] Ibid., 9.
[71] Howell (1995).

living "in" this world. For example, Robert, one of the respondents Laura interviewed, explained the connections that, for him, united yoga, nature, and living "in" this world:

> My main problem with spirituality is that it is separate from nature. I like the idea that nature is seen as divine, and that the divine is seen as nature, and it's a very different worldview when you appreciate that nothing but perception is going to change ... I don't believe in re-incarnation for sure, ... *I'm not seeking to liberate myself from life, I'm seeking to be in deeper relationship with life*. Which is not a new idea. There are a lot of schools in yoga that subscribe to this. Tantra is about liberating oneself in life. Tantra was about liberation from illusions, the other schools are about liberation from illusion so you can escape this *māyā* [illusion], this materiality, because materiality is suffering. I disagree with this idea and find it offensive. This idea that we should escape nature has led us to disregard nature to the point that we end up in the environmental situation we find ourselves in.[72]

As the above quote illustrates, the goal of achieving "self-realization" while still participating in worldly social life, *jīvanmukhti*, is one which is defined in the ancient texts, but which has taken on new meanings in the contemporary world. Robert's discussion also makes explicit the connection between yoga, self-realization, and the environment that is increasingly being made by contemporary yoga practitioners. Despite the emphasis on self, these practitioners are not alone; rather, they belong to a broadly defined community of practice, for which yoga has become a signature *techniques du corps*.

We can use Tönnies' 1887 definition of *Gemeinschaft* to establish that there are many different types of community: Of blood, of place, and of mind. It is this last that provides the basis for a community of practice, for Tönnies tells us that

> ... a community of mind comes most easily into existence when crafts or callings are the same or of similar nature. Such a tie, however, must be made and maintained through easy and frequent meetings, which are most likely to take place in a town ... Such good spirit, therefore, is not bound to any place but lives in the conscience of its worshippers and accompanies them on their travels to foreign countries. Thus those who are brethren of such a common faith feel, like members of the same craft or rank, everywhere united by a spiritual bond and the co-operation in a common task ... spiritual friendship forms a kind of invisible scene or meeting which has to be kept alive by artistic intuition and creative will.[73]

Extending the definition from "crafts and callings"—professions, religion, or rank—to other kinds of shared practice requires no artifice. Likewise, it takes little effort to imagine that while towns were the most obvious place for the "easy and frequent meetings" required to maintain these relationships a century ago, new forms of communication and speeds of travel have permitted new ways of keeping such associations alive. While Tönnies may have been concerned with the differentiation between "traditional" and "modern" societies, giving the weight of *Gemeinschaft* to the former and of *Gesellschaft* to the latter, it seems fair at this point to suggest that a shift in orientation has occurred, and that new, composite

[72] Interview with Robert (pseudonym), 22 June 2010, Toronto.

[73] Tönnies (1957 [1887], 43).

forms of community are being formed, with virtual interactions on the web and the sporadic interaction of individuals engaged in what I have elsewhere called "oasis regimes" in places like Rishikesh becoming equally as important as local connections.[74] The LOHAS market share, and within that, the community of yoga practitioners, is certainly one of these. And, though we started out by speaking primarily of the American and Canadian LOHAS market, this group is recognized in every country with a middle class, from China and India to Western Europe and South America. LOHAS marketing websites are found everywhere, in all of the major languages, as various references throughout this chapter demonstrate.

To think about this community of practice more precisely, we call to mind the model of a speech community. Individuals may belong to multiple speech communities, engaging in similar speech patterns or dialects with particular groups of people who may be connected by geographical locale, occupation, cultural background, age, gender, class, or any of a number of such cross-cutting categories.[75] In early sociolinguistic work, as in earlier examples of anthropological research, the notion of studying a community through the ethnographic method of participant observation required firm anchoring in a specific locale. In the last decade or two, operational definitions of "community" have begun to loosen so that recent editions of the *Oxford Desk Dictionary of American English*, while maintaining the link between community and locale in its primary definition, focuses on shared beliefs, practices, and interests in the second and third definitions of community.[76]

Becoming Ecological: Green Yoga

So, we can see that there was a community of yoga practitioners that developed over the past century, and this community was part of a larger group of mostly middle-class people who were dissatisfied with some of the impacts of modernity, whether directly on the environment or on people's interface with the environment, through technology. By the end of the twentieth century, this dissatisfaction had converged with a general scientific consensus on topics such as anthropogenic climate change, and other problems of pollution and resources. One Indian company that is promoting yoga as well as other health and environmental products to the LOHAS market is T. Spiritual World (TSW), in business since 1986.[77] While TSW, a publicly traded company, primarily emphasizes the health and wellness market, it also invests in sustainability activities.[78] Yoga practitioners began to

[74] See Etzioni (1993).

[75] Hymes (1974).

[76] Abate (1997).

[77] http://www.tspiritualworld.com/investor/spiritmkt.htm (accessed 7 January 2011).

[78] http://www.tspiritualworld.com/investor/indianmkt.htm (accessed 7 January 2011).

realize that they needed to "walk the walk" and make their practice match their lofty ideas of a monistic unity with the world around, the *Umwelt*.[79] Chris Chapple, in a recent post on the GYA's website, commented that "A group of yogis from Los Angeles has joined a group from Chennai, Hyderabad, and Delhi for a 10 day training and retreat with Srivatsa Ramaswami in Delhi and Rishikesh. As we move through the various *vinyasas* and *pranayamas*, and as we chant various *mantras* to move forward in our practice, one [sic] cannot help but feel deep within the connection between the body and Mother Earth."[80] This connection between yoga and the natural word is also echoed in the responses of many of Laura's respondents, for example when in Robert's discussion with Laura (above), when he states that "I like the idea that nature is seen as divine, and that the divine is seen as nature."

The Green Yoga Association was formed in 2003 to promote environmentally friendly yoga practice and now has 340 teachers listed in their directory. It is open to all and supports the integration of environmental values and practices with yoga practice by individuals and studios. According to their website, membership dues are used to support the elimination of plastic water bottles from yoga events and studios; the removal of PVC and harmful chemicals out of yoga props; the education and support of yoga professionals regarding sustainable practices; and the planting of fruit trees to offset carbon "and demonstrate Yoga/Permaculture."[81]

The GYA philosophy, as presented on their website, is as follows:

> The health of our bodies depends on clean air, clean water, and clean food. Yoga is grounded in an understanding of this interconnection. Historically, Yoga developed in the context of a close relationship with the earth and cosmos and a profound reverence for animals, plants, soil, water, and air. This reverence towards life is the basis of the Yogic teaching of ahimsa, or non-violence, non-injury, and non-harming.
>
> Today, the viability of earth's life systems is in danger. If humanity is to survive and thrive, we must learn to live in balance with nature. Now is the time to cleanse and heal the earth and to establish a sustainable relationship with the environment for generations to come.
>
> Therefore, as practitioners of Yoga we will:
>
> - Educate ourselves about the needs of the biosphere as a whole and our local ecosystems in particular.
> - Cultivate an appreciation for and conscious connection with the natural environments in which we live, including animals, plants, soil, water, and air.
> - Include care for the environment in our discussion of Yogic ethical practices.
> - Commit ourselves to policies, products, and actions that minimize environmental harm and maximize environmental benefit.
> - And if we are Yoga teachers or centers, we will incorporate these commitments into our work with students.[82]

[79] The fact that the yoga of Patañjali was a dualistic project, and not of the *advaita* tradition that Vivekananda promoted is a story for another day; here, we will go with the version of yoga that has been gaining popularity since the early twenty-first century.

[80] http://www.greenyoga.org/about-greenyoga/136-dispatch-from-india (accessed 6 January 2011).

[81] http://www.greenyoga.org/donate/ (accessed 7 January 2011).

[82] http://www.greenyoga.org/about-greenyoga/51-green-yoga-values-statement (accessed 6 January 2011).

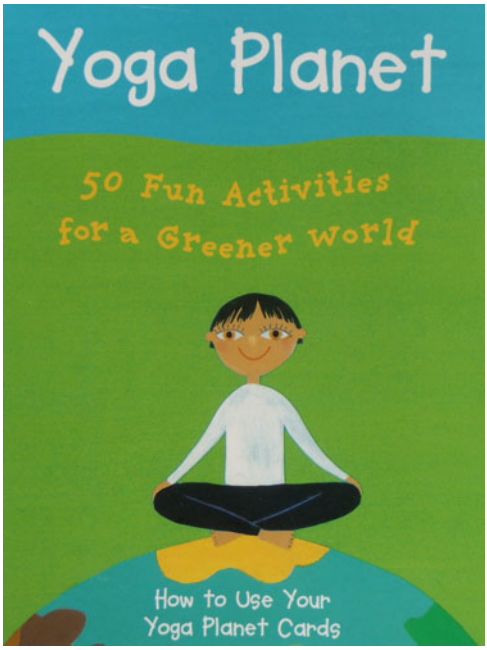

Fig. 2 Yoga Planet cards for children (Courtesy: Barefoot Books)

The Green Yoga Association now certifies products and yoga schools as being "green"; some products that have been developed are the "Eco Yoga mat," and many different lines of organic clothing.[83]

Another line of product meant to support both environmental and yoga practice targets children: a package of yoga activity cards called "Yoga Planet" (Fig. 2). The instructions on these cards espouse not only environmentally friendly practices, but also the interconnection between people and their environment, as discussed in the GYA mission statement, above. They instruct the practitioner that "Yoga is about awareness, balance, relationship, and connection: with ourselves, with society, and with the planet."[84] As one breathes in and out—the yogic practice of *prāṇāyāma*—the relationship between the air outside and the breath inside is felt directly, just as when one stands barefoot on the ground at a yoga retreat on the beach to do the mountain pose (*tāḍāsana)* or the tree pose (*vṛkṣāsana*), the connection with the earth is intensified. In the cases of both the GYA and the Yoga Planet cards, we can see a co-mingling of the values of health and environmentalism with the commodification of yoga and its associated products. Both are earnest in their efforts to effect change at the level of the individual behavior and identity—fostering a "conscious

[83] These mats are marketed from Great Britain; see http://www.ecoyoga.co.uk/ (accessed 6 January 2011).

[84] *Yoga Planet Activity Cards*, Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2008.

connection with the natural environments in which we live" in the case of GYA, as cited above. Likewise, the Yoga Planet cards packaging informs us that "Yoga enhances our physical, mental, and emotional vitality and cultivates inner peace and awareness. All of us can embody these qualities and skills that both enrich our lives, and prepare us to help restore the health of our planet and create a sustainable future." Both of these are also geared toward cementing a change in yoga culture through education, whether of individual children or of all yoga students, through the exemplary practices and studio management of their instructors.

In 2009, a book came out in Germany that claims a universal fix through Green Yoga, which is defined as showing the way to "a complete integrated life-practice that brings together not only yoga and ecology, but also inside and outside, individual and collective development."[85] The author, Hardy Fürch, introduces a cartoon character named eco-yogi Gaiananda to promote an integral yoga practice derived from that of Sri Aurobindo, which had also been an inspiration for Mahatma Gandhi. On the last page of the book, he proposes that yoga practitioners lead the grassroots charge for a "green new deal"—and then, saying that this may seem an overoptimistic response to the world's problems, quotes Barack Obama "Yes we can!."[86] In much more modest terms, philosopher Henryk Skolinowski had made the same suggestion with his book *EcoYoga* in 1994, but that volume was more along the lines of Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, suggesting that we all need to get our own houses/bodies in order before the world can change.

We can find many examples of the ways that people in different places are practicing the same kind of yoga-based planetary therapy that Gaiananda professes in *Wie Green Yoga die Welt verändert*. One noteworthy example is an American group that has been driving around the country in a biodiesel bus, selling "I love Yoga" t-shirts and giving classes to promote alternative energy and world peace. They are now trying to raise funds for another effort, ongoing in Kenya, to provide health and education services to youth, including teaching yoga.[87] Another effort, the Eco Yoga Village endeavor, is taking place in a variety of locations around the world, in India and Europe as well as a wide range of locales in Latin America.[88] This organization combines yoga practice, vegetarianism, recycling, and other sustainable living practices as a way of creating transcultural yoga communities in rural and urban contexts where Western volunteers can support and learn from local residents to the benefit of all. Each of these organizations demonstrates a simultaneous commitment to environmental and health values, using the practice of yoga as a vehicle to achieve both personal health and wider planetary goals of peace, energy efficiency, and environmental preservation/conservation.

[85] Fürch (2009, 10); author translation from the original: "... Green Yoga [wird] eine ganzheitliche, *integrale Lebenspraxis* aufgezeigt, die nicht nur Yoga und Ökologie, sondern gleichfalls Innen und Außen, individuelle und kollektive Entwicklung zusammengeführt." (emphasis in original).

[86] Fürch (2009, 91).

[87] See http://satnamexpress.com/?page_id=2 (accessed 6 January 2011).

[88] http://ecological-farms.blogspot.com/2009/02/who-we-are.html (accessed 6 January 2011).

Conclusion

Yoga is, then, an emblematic example of Welsch's model of "transculturality," in which "cultural connections" extend far beyond state borders, and play a decisive role in our identity formation.[89] In each of the cases described in the previous sections, from Ashtanga and Bikram Yoga, to Yoga Planet cards to eco-yogi Gaiananda and the eco-yoga bus, a wider transcultural community of yoga practitioners is being developed and supported in service of a linked set of goals designed to maximize both personal and planetary health. These examples highlight a trend that has been under way for at least 20 years, using the power of the global market to simultaneously generate revenue and shift cultural practices and identities toward a unified framework for action, using modern postural yoga as the foundation.

At the same time, the very concepts of health, both personal and planetary, that are being mobilized, hinge on particular constructions of selfhood and behavior that personalize responsibility for our bodies and our earth. The social context within which these discourses of health and environmentalism are becoming hegemonic—in this case, neoliberal capitalism and the explosive growth of a global market place of health and environmentally conscious products —is central to understanding the changes in the meaning of yoga that have occurred in the last two decades. In so saying, we do not intend to claim that the yoga practitioners we describe are not deeply and ideationally committed to their practice, but rather question why and how that commitment came to be. From these varied examples, we can see that yoga has become much more than a Maussian *technique du corps* in the twenty-first century, and has now been transformed into what we might identify as a *technique du monde*, mobilizing individuals into communities of practice with a goal of transforming global cultures.

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[89] Welsch (1999).

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