Adjusting the Quotidian: Ashtanga Yoga as Everyday Practice

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The challenge of Ashtanga is to maintain a regular practice.
For those who do I have seen their lives rewarded
(Paul Frechtling, YogaMoves website)

Sa tu dīrgha kāla nairantarya satkārā sevit drdha bhūmih
('You must practice continuously for a long time,
and you must do all this as God's service')
(Patanjali, Yoga Sutras 1:14)

The practice of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is increasingly popular in the West. A growing number of people have taken it up, whilst others have continued longer-running practices. For dedicated Ashtanga practitioners (or 'Ashtangis'), yoga means the daily practice of a sequence of *asana*[2] ('postures'). Many also try to apply a body of ethical principles drawn from the philosophical literature that underpins this practice. This paper outlines initial work undertaken towards a socio-cultural study of the practice of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga amongst Western practitioners, based on initial ethnographic research as a participant-observer in yoga classes in Australia and India. This research has included ongoing *asana* practice and participation in classes and workshops in Australia, India and other locations, and unstructured and semi-structured interviews with other practitioners. A substantial part of the project's methodology is reflection on the embodied experience of *asana* practice (including my own experience of practice, as well as that of respondents)[3]. This work also draws on the burgeoning field of English-language literature on yoga, which includes books and dedicated journals, websites, and practitioners' own web-logs.

The paper consists of some early 'soundings' of this project. It engages with varying forms of Ashtanga practice in Australia, which range from occasional classes in gyms to daily practice at yoga studios and practitioners' homes. My intention is to examine the ways in which yoga has become integrated into the wider lives of dedicated practitioners, and their assertions of yoga's ability to transform their lives, as well as their bodies. By relating the practice of yoga to other aspects of cosmopolitan late modernity, I hope to provide a partial explanation for its recent popularity and its relationship to other aspects of the contemporary quotidian[4].

Ashtanga Yoga as a system of practice

As most Western yoga teachers are at pains to point out, the practice of *asana* is 'not just stretching'. Rather, the Sanskrit term *yoga*, derived from the root *yuj* ('to bind together, hold fast, or yoke') places *asana* among a body of meditative and ascetic techniques leading to the achievement of spiritual liberation through the 'yoking' of self and the divine (Eliade, 1969/1958, pp. 4-5). For 'serious' practitioners, yoga is thus intended to be, or to lead towards, a form of spiritual development. Nonetheless, its recent popularity in the West has as much to do with a desire for fitness – and physical desirability itself – as it does with yoga's spiritual associations. This boom in popularity has seen yoga popularised through its associations with film stars and musicians. This is particularly true for Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, which has gained a reputation both for being an intensely physical practice (and thus one most likely to produce what is often described in the popular media as the 'yoga body') and one associated with a number of celebrities.

The term Ashtanga Yoga properly refers to any yoga practice drawn from or built upon the Yoga Sutras ('aphorisms') of Patanjali, an Indian sage, reputedly of semi-divine origin, who is said to have written the Sutras in the 2nd century CE. The content of these Sūtras, however, is likely to have been of earlier origin (Eliade, 1969/1958, p. 9)[5]. Ashtanga ('eight-limbed') refers to the eight 'limbs' or 'branches' of Patanjali's systematic treatment of yoga as a method for 'internal purification for revealing the Universal Self' (Eliade, 1969/1958, p. 9). These limbs are *yama* ('moral codes'), *niyama* ('self-purification and study'), *asana* ('postures', literally 'seat(s)'), *pranayama* ('breath techniques'), *pratyahara* ('sense control'), *dharana* ('concentration'), *dhyana* ('meditation') and *samadhi* ('contemplation') (Lai, 2004; see also Jois, 2002/1999, p. 6).

In the West, however, the term Ashtanga usually refers to the system of yoga taught by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois of the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore, India. This yoga school (and its now world-famous principal) is the source of the style of 'Ashtanga Yoga' or 'Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga' now popularised globally. For most practitioners, Ashtanga Yoga means several series of sequences of *asana* – Patanjali's third limb – which are tied together in a *mala* ('garland') by a series of movements (*vinyasa*). For more committed practitioners, these postures and movements are linked to the breath through a form of controlled breathing (*ujjayi*) and the focus on or contraction of specific muscle groups (*bandha*s or 'locks'[6]) intended to increase the internal flow of the body's energy. These are usually accompanied by the control of the gaze (*drishti*), believed to assist with the 'stilling of the mind' to which practitioners aspire. Most commonly, Ashtanga Yoga refers to the practice of the primary series of *āsana*, preceded by two variations of a dynamic *āsana* sequence referred to as *surya namaskara* ('salute to the sun') and a sequence of standing *asana* ('the standing sequence'). The practice concludes with a number of back-bends, and a set series of 'closing poses' which end in a supine meditation (*savasana*, 'corpse pose').

Figure One: 'Mysore-style' Practice, Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (April 2004)

In Australia, Ashtanga Yoga is taught across a number of different settings. These range from local classes (typically in hired community venues or in gyms), to classes in dedicated yoga studios. Local classes tend to focus principally or absolutely on the practice of *asana*, with little or no emphasis on the ethical codes of *yama* and *niyama*, the meditative breath-work of *pranayama* or the contemplative and meditative aspects of Patanjali's yoga system. Those practicing and teaching at studios usually demonstrate greater dedication and a more purist attitude towards yoga practice, often tied to a closer relationship with Jois's Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute and Patanjali's schema. Gym and community-style classes are typically 'led' classes, in which the teacher leads the class by ongoing instruction throughout the session – typically somewhere between one and one-and-a-half hours – calling out each movement to be made by the students. In some cases the teacher will assist a student's practice by verbal and/or physical intervention, the latter usually referred to as 'adjustment'. Such interventions are usually limited to those students uncertain of a pose, or whom the teacher sees either as not

correctly performing the *asana*, or attempting to perform it in a way which is beyond their current flexibility or strength or in a manner likely to cause injury to themselves.

Studio classes, by contrast, are more likely to be ‘Mysore-style’ (Figure One), although nearly all studios offer at least some ‘led’ classes for beginners. The Mysore-style practice, so named because it mirrors the style in which the *asana* series are taught at the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (albeit with some differences in the style of teaching), involves the students rehearsing one of the series at their own pace, having previously learnt the sequence by rote. The teachers’ role (these classes often have two or more teachers in attendance) is to move around the room adjusting practitioners’ *asana*. These adjustments are typically more ‘hands-on’ than in led classes, although they will usually (but not always) be accompanied by verbal instruction. Adjustments are also less likely to be aimed at reducing likelihood of injury (although this remains a concern of most Australian teachers) and typically involve ‘deepening’ a pose. This deepening is effected either by moving towards a fuller version of an *asana* (practitioners often start by performing a ‘modified’, less physically challenging form), by assisting the student to move into a pose, or by adjusting the pose to produce greater effect on the practitioner’s body.

Figure Two: Home Practice (Utthitha Parsvasahita)

Teachers and more dedicated students of the Ashtanga Yoga system refer to it as '(the) practice'. The discourse of practice is fairly well developed, and refers to the ideal of a daily rehearsal of one of the Ashtanga Yoga series by practitioners, either in a class or at home. It also emphasises that yoga is an ongoing process of development and refinement of the embodied self. As one teacher puts it,

> There's a reason we refer to our yoga as "practice": It's an opportunity to practice whatever qualities we want to see more of in our lives. Sometimes we do yoga to cultivate patience, clarity, or bravery. Other times, our list is more tangible: We want a strong upper body, increased energy, or open hips. The reasons we practice inevitably change as we go through career moves, love affairs, pregnancies, and other life transitions.
>
> They also change from day to day … We get on the [yoga] mat whenever we can, for whatever length of time, in whatever amount of space is available to us. This practical approach is a first step toward integrating yoga into everyday life (Lee, 2004, p. 85; see also Farhi, 2003, pp. 38-49).

Yoga and the adjustment of the quotidian

Ashtanga Yoga, like other forms of Hatha Yoga (yoga which takes *asana* and related bodily techniques as a principal aspect of its practice), has a strong focus on physical embodiment. Dedicated practitioners and teachers, however, see Ashtanga's physical aspects as a vehicle for refinement of other parts of the self. There appear to be strong ties between yoga's emphasis on the embodied self as being inexorably tied to other aspects of personhood – patterns of thought and action, emotions and deeper structures of the self – and perspectives on human embodiment that have developed in the work of philosophers, social scientists and other critical thinkers over the past two decades.

This is particularly true of work which has set out to develop a critique of the mind/body dualism that has remained at the centre of Western understandings of the self since Descartes. Recent work which draws on the earlier writings of Merleau-Ponty to argue that the body is not simply an object in the world, 'but that very medium whereby our world comes into being' (Leder, 1990, p. 5) demonstrates strong resonances with the philosophy underlying Ashtanga Yoga and the experiences of dedicated practitioners. Unlike practitioners of critical thought, however, who remain for the most part content to conceptualise embodiment as the ground of the human quotidian, and in doing so maintain the hegemony of the mental over the other aspects of embodied human existence, serious practitioners of yoga set out to understand the self through the body. Moreover, this understanding is embedded within practices intended to transform quotidian selfhood at the same time as bringing it into clearer view[7].

For many teachers and practitioners, the process of revelation and transformation of the self centres on the way in which the body is encountered during the challenges of *asana*

practice. These moments of challenge almost always involve a confrontation not only with the limits of one's own physical embodiment, but with the emotional and mental reactions to such moments[8]. During these moments, the quotidian lack of awareness of embodiment that Leder (1990, p. 4) calls 'the body's usual absence from our consciousness' is replaced by an overwhelming experience of our physical embodiment[9]. The body confronts the self with a lack of cooperation that threatens the state of calm, controlled breathing and concentration which practitioners endeavour to maintain, whilst simultaneously striving to achieve a controlled performance of each *asana*. Over time, practitioners develop a greater facility to maintain their breathing and remain aware and focused on the body. It is this 'deeper' aspect of the practice which the American teacher David Williams refers to when he writes that

> I am occasionally asked if someone is "good at yoga." I quickly respond that the best Yogi is not the one who is most flexible, but the one who is most focused on what he or she is doing, the one most intensely doing the mulabandha and deep breathing … My goal is to convey the idea that the greatest Yogi is the one who enjoys his or her Yoga practice the most, not the one who can achieve the ultimate pretzel position. It is my belief…that in your practice of this moving meditation, what is really important, is what is invisible to the observer, what is within each of you (Williams, 2004)[10].

Among the most influential theoretical tools brought to bear in cultural and social studies of embodiment are Bourdieu's theorisation of habitus, and the linked concepts of doxa and bodily hexis. For Bourdieu, and those who have utilised his theorisation, habitus provides an account of 'practical knowledge…the whole complex of habituated practices of ordinary living that people acquire through socialization' (Farnell, 2000, p. 401). Habitus is 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history…the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product', but which can nonetheless be transformed through further learning (Hastrup, 1995, p. 89). Hexis is that aspect of embodiment that 'speaks directly to motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values' (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 87-88). As Bourdieu is at pains to stress, such aspects of human subjectivity 'are able to pass from practice to practice without going through discourse or consciousness', but they are not simply acquired through mechanical learning through trial and error, instead involving the inculcation of specific systemic modes of embodiment (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 87-88, 93-94)[11].

Farnell (2000: 402) notes Bourdieu's claim that bodily hexis, is a 'permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and thinking'. It is this accreted embodiment, encountered during the practice of Ashtanga Yoga, that challenges the student's ability to maintain the practice, and which is gradually transformed through this practice. Bourdieu claims that hexis is 'placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary deliberate transformation' (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 93-94). However, as Farnell notes, Bourdieu's suggestion that hexis is unreachable is already problematised by the fact that such unavailability seems not to apply to his

theoretical engagement with hexis (Farnell, 2000, p. 402). Ashtanga Yoga makes parallel claims on the availability of hexis for voluntary deliberate transformation through the ongoing practice of *asana*. It is during the moments where concerted awareness is brought to *asana* practice, calm and equanimity are maintained through challenge, and the patterns of the embodied self become visible, that the 'spiritual' aspect of yoga practice emphasised by practitioners also becomes evident[12], and as such it seems likely that practitioners' experience of spirit is closely related to the bringing of awareness to the limitations of hexis. As Baranay (2004, p. 246) notes, difficult though the idea of the 'spiritual' may be, it is hard to find another word to identify these moments of sublime immersion in practice which come when one gains 'a sense of your own [potential] ultimate control and awareness of what the body is doing and what that's doing to you'.

The quotidian adjustments of the Ashtanga Yoga practice are intended not only to bring such awareness to the embodied self, but also to transform the physicality of the body. Pattabhi Jois calls Ashtanga Yoga's primary series *yoga chikista* ('yoga therapy') (see Swenson, 1999, p. 14), and a number of senior Ashtanga teachers stress the role of Ashtanga Yoga in healing the body. Jois writes that

> Body and mind are inseparably related, one to the other … Hence, the body and sense organs are linked to, and depend upon, the strength of the mind. It is for this reason that the method for concentrating the mind should be known. To learn how to achieve such concentration, the body must first be purified, and then mental strength developed. The method for purifying and strengthening the body is called asana. When the body is purified, the breath also becomes purified, and the diseases of the body are eliminated (Jois, 2002/1999, p. 22).

The therapeutic process engendered by *asana* practice is thus understood to prepare the body for the development of the deeper aspects of yoga practice, including *pranayama* and the meditative practices detailed in the last four limbs of Patanjali's eight-limbed schema. The therapeutic emphasis is related to a wider stress in Indian religious philosophy on the 'basically flawed' natural state of human embodiment (Alter, 1992, p. 95). Understood as one aspect of this wider Hindu religious/philosophical tradition, yoga can be seen as a system of practices

> designed to compensate for the natural irregularities of the mind/body through the application of physical and mental control. Although one may practice yogic control and achieve a high degree of harmony, one is not completely healthy…until one has achieved self-realization (Alter, 1992, p. 95, following Atreya, 1973).

There remains, nonetheless, an emphasis on physical embodiment and physical healing in the styles of yoga which developed under the guidance of Krishnamacharya, the *guru* of both Pattabhi Jois and B. K. S. Iyengar, who remains the most famous proponent of Hatha Yoga in the West (see Kadetsky, 2004). This involves a focus on health and healing through correction of the physical imperfections of the body, the release of trapped emotions, and the raising and overcoming of emotional and other habitual

patterns held to be unhealthy. It simultaneously emphasises the embodied nature of the self as a tool for spiritual development, rather than simply as something to be overcome in this pursuit. Both of these involve what Bourdieu terms 'voluntary deliberate transformation' of habitus and hexis through the practice of *asana*.

Teachers variously identify the healing effects of the Ashtanga Vinyasa practice. For example, Eve Grzybowski (2004, p. 49), a Sydney-based teacher, writes that '[t]he purpose of doing the basic level of postures (i.e., the 'primary series' and 'intermediate series') is to strengthen, align and detoxify the body and to purify the nervous system'[13]. This transformative effect of the Ashtanga Vinyasa practice is part of the reason for the strong emphasis senior teachers place on the need to maintain a daily practice. By making the practice a part of one's everyday life, it is held, the quotidian nature of the body and self will be transformed. The purpose of Ashtanga Yoga is thus the transformation of the quotidian. Nonetheless, although many teachers suggest that the quotidian transformations often emerge from the practice, 'sneaking up' on those who began it 'just as keep fit' or to 'get a better body', others emphasise the need for a deeper engagement with the practice in order to realise its true purpose. As Eileen Hall, one of a handful of Australian teachers certified to teach by Pattabhi Jois puts it,

> It is my belief that what is happening on the physical plane is a reflection of what is happening on an emotional and psychological plane. From day to day, I see in my students a totally different body. How can the body be so different form one day to the next? It is our thoughts that create that difference. Therefore, thoughts have to change, otherwise the body won't shift. If your thinking doesn't change, then you keep repeating old patterns…No matter how much you twist, sweat and grunt, and turn yourself inside out, if your heart is not in the practice, if your spirit is not there, then changing your body won't make any difference to your psyche. For real change to take place, the heart must be willing (Hall, 2004, p. 35).

Hall, like many senior teachers, stresses that such transformation is best realised through ongoing work with a teacher or *guru* (Hall, 2004, p. 35), an emphasis tied to the relationship of *guru parampara* (direct transmission from teacher to pupil; cf. Jois, 2003, p. 12). The importance of this relationship for senior Ashtanga practitioners is also apparent in the stress that most studio teachers of Ashtanga Yoga place on regularly returning to Mysore to develop their own practice under the instruction of Pattabhi Jois evident in the teacher profiles which appear on larger studios' websites (see YogaMoves 2004 for several examples).

The importance of learning directly from Pattabhi Jois and his grandson Sharath for many Ashtanga teachers is clearly closely tied to a common Indian emphasis on the direct transmission of knowledge about yoga. This emphasis helps explain a widespread discomfort about other forms of yoga teaching amongst senior Ashtanga Yoga teachers. But this discomfort is not without other forms of justification. A key concern voiced by senior teachers about yoga classes taught in gyms is that their teachers have little or no experience or training, and do not maintain their own daily practice (widely held as an essential part of a teacher's qualifications). Given the physical challenges of Ashtanga

yoga, poor teaching is particularly likely to lead to injury. Senior teachers also appear wary of the inevitable focus on the physical aspects of the practice to the detriment of yoga's spiritual and philosophical basis, and the emphasis on physical attractiveness and competitive atmosphere which pervades gyms and the yoga classes that they offer, although others regard health clubs and gyms as providing opportunities to take yoga classes to an increased number and range of students (cf. Isaacs, 2003). In Australia, the tension between studio and gym teaching has also seen attempts by senior yoga teachers to standardise teacher training, whilst simultaneously resisting attempts by the fitness industry to bring all yoga classes under its certification scheme[14].

The problems senior yoga teachers attribute to yoga classes in health centres mark a disjuncture between 'serious' practitioners and students, and many of those who have taken up yoga during its current boom in popularity. But they also highlight aspects of teaching and practice which are common in dedicated studios as well as in health club classes. One the one hand, despite an emphasis on daily practice, even fairly committed students – many of whom are young professionals – cannot find or make the time to undertake a daily practice. On the other, it is clear that even fairly committed practitioners find themselves drawn to compete or 'push' their own practice in order to 'achieve' poses and improve their performance. Conversations with many 'serious' students indicate that they often watch others' practices during classes, and measure their own practice through comparison. And studios themselves often inadvertently add to or draw on such aspirations, the advertising for one Australian studio, for example, states '"The secret to success in yoga is regular practice. There's no doubt about it!" See you in class…'

Aspiration, injury and resolution: The 'Type-A' Ashtangi

In an interview for the yoga magazine *Yoga Journal* (Gova, 2003, p. 31), Natasha Rizopoulos, a well-known American Ashtanga teacher, is identified as 'a self-described "type A Ashtangi"'. The depiction is telling, as a significant proportion of those practicing Ashtanga Yoga appear to fit this description. Many serious practitioners have professional jobs, and tend to be focused, often career-driven achievers. Many of those who travel to Pattabhi Jois's Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore also match this description, although their time at AYRI is often figured as a break or interruption of their career and life-path. As Rizopoulos suggests, this achievement-focused attitude often manifests itself within students' yoga practice, an orientation to the practice that – given the combination of the tightness of many Western bodies, the corporeal unfamiliarity of the movements and the intensity of many of the *asana* - can easily lead to injury[15]. David Williams similarly notes his common observation of students 'competing with their yoga practice' (Williams, 2004), often marking their progress through the achievement of fuller realizations of *asana* mapped against their own 'progress' and against the practice of other students in a class or practice session. Pushing one's limitations in this way can easily result in injury, and such injuries appear to be far more common amongst Ashtangis than among practitioners of other styles of yoga (David Williams, personal communication, 11th March 2004)[16].

The experience of injury amongst Ashtanga practitioners is said to lead to slow and uneven progress, and discouragement in the practice (Williams, 2004). But for some practitioners (myself included), it also seems to bring a renewed focus on the body and a more 'balanced' practice. Teachers often relate such balance to the philosophical principles of *ahimsa* ('non-violence', in this case violence against the body produced by ambition manifested through the practice), *vairagya* ('non-attachment'), and *pratyahara* ('withdrawal from the mundane world', here as attachment to an idea of achievement within the practice – cf. Lasater, 2004). Rizopoulos refers to a common trajectory in the practice of many Ashtangis, in which 'an injury gave her new insight into her yoga practice… [which] "…forced me to rediscover the quieter parts of my practice"' (Gova, 2003, p. 31). She relates this shift to the inducement of the embodied and spiritually immanent aspects of yoga through attention to her body during practice,

> My body tells me when it's time to bring back a pose … When I first got hurt, I felt such an urgency to get my practice back. Now, I'm not in such a hurry. …As long as we practice asana with integrity and intelligence…it has value regardless of the 'difficulty' we associate with the pose. It's all yoga (Gova, 2003, p. 31).

It is common for yoga teachers and committed practitioners to relate this relationship between 'mindful' asana practice and insight into self through the notion of 'balance'. This idea of balance directly relates the embodied physical experience of balancing (and, by extension, other challenging physical moments within the practice) to the experience and development of emotional and 'spiritual' balance in the practice, and from the practice into everyday life. This relationship is particularly emphasised with regard to one-legged standing balances like Utthitha Parsvasahita (see Figure Two, above), which 'can instill [sic] a deep sense of calm even though they require intense, unwavering alertness' (Cole, 2004, p. 98), as well as inverted handstands and headstands such as Pincha Mayurasana ('Peacock Feather Pose'). Cyndi Lee (2004), a senior American teacher, describes this as the potential of a full experience of each *asana* as 'an opportunity to practice recognizing our habits and returning to the breath [the focus on breath acting as an anchor for steady and mindful practice]. We move toward balance when we can relax the grip of our habitual thought patterns and connect to our immediate experience exactly as it is' (Lee, 2004, p. 86).

This aspect of Western Ashtanga practice might be understood as the conflict between two forms of 'spirit' manifested in the embodied selves of practitioners. The first of these is the 'spiritual' experience of balance that the practice is explicitly intended to foster. The second is a 'spirit of capitalism', first identified by Max Weber (1958), which drives us towards individual achievement, success and self-regarding status. For many practitioners, it seems that the moment of confrontation during Ashtanga practice, and the process of adjustment of quotidian selfhood, involves the tensions between, and ongoing resolution of these two forces.

Ashtangis as consumer subjects?

Many of those who practice yoga – in particular those who teach, or who maintain a 'serious' practice – see themselves as engaging in an activity at odds with the consumerist bent of contemporary Western society. However, the links between the recent explosion of yoga's popularity and its promotion by various celebrities (and, for that matter, the popularity of yoga with these celebrities themselves), as well as the saturation of yoga with a plethora of magazines, videos and DVDs, designer clothing for practice, and accessories (all of these advertised in yoga magazines and on yoga websites) gives pause with regard to such claims. It seems that rather than providing a space detached from our increasingly hectic lives as professionals and consumers, yoga in the West has become absorbed into the field of what Nikolas Rose calls 'ethopolitics'. Rose identifies ethopolitics as a body of techniques of self-conduct linked to a field of the government of behaviour through ethics. In particular, ethopolitics relates to ways of 'acting on the ethical formation and self-management' of individuals and communities of identity (Rose, 2000, p. 1402). This field represents a shift in contemporary subjectification and government, in which the techniques of discipline and biopolitics identified by Foucault are increasing replaced by a shift towards 'autonomization' and 'responsibilization' of individuals and identity groups with regard to their own existence and relationship to the wider communities in which they find themselves situated. The increasing popularity of yoga in the West may well mark (and form part of) a broader ethopolitical adjustment of the quotidian.

As part of this ethopolitical turn, Rose identifies a 'new habitat of subjectification' in which individuals find themselves impelled to 'shape an autonomous identity for themselves through choices in taste, music, goods, styles, and habitus…[inducing the] detailed shaping by individuals of their daily lives in the name of their own pleasures, contentments or fulfilments' (2000, p. 1402). Advertising, 'the multiple stylizations of the act of purchasing' and lifestyle magazines form key aspects of this new habitat (Rose 2000, p. 1399). It is precisely these aspects of the ethopolitical habitat which have become saturated within the field of yoga in the West, materializing in the 'promulgation of images of lifestyle and narratives of identity choice' (2000, p. 1402) that have drawn so many to yoga classes and studios.

These 'new commercial technologies of life-style-based identity formation' (Rose, 2000, p. 1402) are particularly apparent in the presentation of yoga in lifestyle magazines. Enthusiasm for yoga in the West supports a number of yoga magazines, including the Australian magazine *Australian Yoga Life*, as well as a number of widely-available international publications, and yoga also features heavily in magazines aimed at aspirational younger women, including *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie-Claire*, and in a growing number of magazines (whose readership is again predominantly female) concerned with health and wellbeing. One of these – the Australian magazine *Wellbeing* recently produced a special publication devoted to yoga, and its by-line 'Balance Strength Harmony' illustrates some of the qualities which yoga is taken to instil or increase in those who practice yoga, and , perhaps by association, in those who purchase and read magazines of this kind.

The ethopoliticization of yoga may well extend into the practice itself. Within this ethopolitical turn, the sense of personhood has become increasingly somatic, with the body becoming a key site for work on the self. The growing interest in finding ways to return to the body, including the practice of yoga, might not be best understood as 'a reaction to the generally "decorporealized" modern Western existence' (Leder, 1990, p. 3). Rather, this turn to corporealization might in fact be part of the deepening embedding of Western subjects within the ethical field of late capitalism.

> From official discourses of health promotion through narratives of the experience of disease and suffering in the mass media, to popular discourses on dieting and exercise, we see an increasing stress on personal reconstruction through acting on the body in the name of a fitness that is simultaneously corporeal and psychological … [for many] the corporeal existence and vitality of the self have become the privileged site of experiments with subjectivity (Rose 2001, p. 18).

The experience of yoga for Western practitioners again appears as deeply ambiguous here. It is clear that many Western practitioners have developed a self-identity through their involvement with yoga as a social assemblage of practice, community, media and consumption that produces Ashtangis as subjects through a 'collective assemblage of enunciation … linking bodies as order-words' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 129-130). Moreover, the deep presence of aspects of the Western quotidian saturates the experience of practice, manifesting itself in moments of competition and striving for success, as well as a more general 'ethopolitical' desire to improve the nature of one's embodiment, as health and appearance, through *asana* practice. At the same time, yoga practice seems to produce changes in embodiment deeply at odds with these aspects of cosmopolitan subjectivity, a stilling or detachment from the aspirational drive, and an attention to embodiment which seems to prove itself as a profound corrective to the late-modern quotidian.

NOTES:

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[2] Here, and elsewhere in the paper, Sanskrit terms (unless proper names) are italicized and followed by an English gloss. I have not followed a standard orthography for these Sanskrit words, which have been cited from a number of disparate sources.

[3] As Strauss (2000, pp.172-73, 180) rightly notes, yoga practitioners commonly feel confident of another's ability to properly discuss the practice of yoga only where that person also practices yoga. Strauss appears to have taken up the practice of *asana* for this reason during her fieldwork in Rishikesh and Europe. However, her account of yoga remains that of a detached observer, and she appears to have resisted drawing on the subjective experience of yoga practice in her research except as a method for engaging her respondents.

[4] I use the term 'quotidian' here in its Standard English sense of everyday things or acts, and its less common use to describe persons performing or sustaining some act or character in their everyday lives. In the context of this paper, these meanings take on additional import given that not only do Ashtanga yoga practitioners attempt to make their practice of yoga part of their everyday lives, but they also do this in an attempt to engage with and transform their quotidian selves. This is apparent in the assertion by many dedicated practitioners that, for them, their practice of yoga extends beyond their daily *asana* practice through their attempts to inculcate yogic philosophy and practice into other aspects of their everyday lives. At the heart of such attempts lies the insistence, within yoga's philosophical tradition, that the quotidian self masks an underlying 'true self' (*atman*) that the practice of yoga (eventually) reveals or realizes.

[5] This dating of the sutras stems from the identification of the Patanjali of the sutras with Patanjali the grammarian. This identification is not without controversy (see Eliade, 1969/1958, pp. 8-9). Indian yoga teachers tend to assert Patanjali's divine origin, and treat the Sutras as a sacred text (see Jois, 2003, p. 10; see also Kadetsky, 2004).

[6] In the Ashtanga Yoga system, there are three *bandha* which practitioners commonly utilize: *mulabandha* ('root lock'), located in the perineal muscle (men) or near the top of the cervix (women), *uddiyana bandha* ('flying lock'), engaged through the drawing up of the lower belly and diaphragm, and *jalandhara bandha* ('chin lock'), in which the chin is extended and drawn back into the notch between the two clavicle bones (Swenson, 1999, pp. 9-10).

[7] Sjoman's (1999/1996, p. 59) scholarly account of the styles of yoga associated with the Mysore Palace stresses the need for any analysis of yoga to focus on yogic practice, rather than on the texts pertaining to various yoga traditions (cf. Strauss, 2000, p.188).

[8] Some teachers assert that different postures challenge or transform the body in different ways, with different *asana* brining to the fore different emotions, for instance, as well as working the physical body in different ways. For instance, twisting *asana* are commonly

considered to 'cleanse' the body, encouraging the circulation of blood into the digestive system and vital organs. These *asanas* are also commonly spoken of as effecting the release of tension and 'sometimes bringing up old stored emotions – whether general feelings or specific memories' (see Yee 2004, p. 15). For many practitioners the greatest emotional disturbances seem to come from 'hip openers', poses which stretch and open the hip muscles. Some teachers seem to believe that emotional responses to poses simply arise out of a frustration at the body's inability to 'achieve' poses, but others imply that emotions are themselves 'stored' or 'trapped' within particular parts of the body, and brought to the surface when these areas are stretched or 'opened'.

[9] It seems to me that the body seizes our attention most strongly where we experience the body as disjunct from the state in which we desire it to be operating. It is precisely this state which faces practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga. My experiences conducting ethnographic research in Aboriginal North Queensland also lead me to wonder that, whilst the degree of bodily awareness might be culturally inflected, the awareness-through-discomfort of embodiment might be more widespread. It seems that whilst attention to physiological aspects of embodied selfhood is far more pronounced amongst the Indigenous people I work with, their moments of body awareness are also tied to 'events' within the body, typically linked to ill-health (a body being too hot or too cold, in a manner similar to that paid attention to in Chinese traditional medicine), or bodily sensations tied to beliefs about the body's registering (in specific body parts) of mishaps relating to one's close kin.

[10] Williams has made a similar point in his yoga workshops by describing a film of Pattabhi Jois and B. K. S. Iyengar (both of who were his students) performing *āsana*. After their demonstration, the film features their *guru* Krishnamacharya. Unlike his young students, Williams says that the older man simply sits in *padmasana* (the cross-legged 'lotus position'), and begins to demonstrate *pranayama*, engaging the *bandhas*. Williams says that the strength and power emanating from the older man is palpable, outshining the more showy demonstrations of his pupils earlier on the reel.

[11] Despite its opening of a place in social theory for understanding the embodied aspects of enculturation and their role in the reproduction of social structures, and for attempting to overcome the 'subjectivist-objectivist dualism in classical social theory' (Farnell, 2000, p. 401), Bourdieu's theorisation has been subject to critique by Farnell and others for failing to properly account for human agency and (like Foucault's theorisation of subjection), to totalise the systemic nexus within which it locates the human subject.

[12] Whilst the experiences of Ashtanga Yoga practice appear to affirm the Cartesian theme of body as the oppositional moment within the self (cf. Leder, 1990, pp. 4, 126-148), the development of embodied attention within Hatha Yoga practice simultaneously collapses Cartesian distinction of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* by bringing together the intentional and the physical sphere (see Leder, 1990, p. 6). Although I do not have the space to develop this argument further here, it seems that Farnell's questions about the place of

agency relate directly to the relation of will and embodiment realized during *asana* practice.

[13] The 'second' or 'intermediate' Ashtanga series is called *nadi shodana* ('nerve cleansing', Swenson, 1999, p.129). '*Nadi*', often glossed as 'nerve(s)', is the name given in classical Indian philosophy to a series of energetic channels held to transfer energy through the human body. It is the *nadi* channels that Grzybowski refers to here as 'the nervous system'.

[14] In addition, some yoga teachers remain resistant to any attempts to regulate yoga instruction.

[15] The *Sydney Morning Herald* (2004, p. 3) reports that the Australian *Sports Injuries Report 2004* 'found more than 25 percent of people surveyed who practiced yoga had been injured'.

[16] Williams is a key figure in the introduction and popularization of Ashtanga Yoga in the West, having brought the yoga to California and Hawai'i in the early 1970s, and bringing Pattabhi Jois to America for the first time in 1975. His concern over this tendency in Western Ashtanga practice has been a key motivation in his return to teaching workshops. That these workshops are entitled 'If it hurts, you're doing it wrong' indicates the centrality of this concern to his teaching.

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