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Choreographers and Yogis: Untwisting the Politics of Appropriation and Representation in U.S. Concert Dance

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Choreographers working in the United States have been practicing yoga since the early 1900s. They mention their yoga practice in autobiographies and interviews, include physical poses (*asana*) in their choreography and classroom exercises, and rely on breathing techniques (*pranayama*) to support their movement technique and personal practice. Meanwhile, yoga practice in the United States has increasingly become associated with thin white women in elaborate poses and tight pants smiling on the beach at sunset. So how did this association come about? I contend in this dissertation that this is at least partly due to white choreographers' portrayal of yogis onstage and incorporation of yoga into their dance training. I focus on renowned (post)modern dance choreographers, such as Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Bill T. Jones, and recover the influence of yoga on their careers to help us better understand how

yoga has shaped modern dance throughout its history. As their use of yoga became a tool in their creative and innovative interventions in dance, these (mostly white) choreographers encouraged or facilitated the forgetting of the labor of the yogis and yoga teachers who instructed them. This dissertation therefore also attends to the innovations of their teachers, such as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Paramananda, Yogi Vithaldas, and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who strategically and selectively emphasized aspects of their yoga teaching to suit contemporaneous cultural trends and confront Orientalist fantasies. I apply the tools of movement analysis and the theoretical frameworks of critical race studies and critical yoga studies to autobiographies, published scholarship, archival records of dance technique training and choreography, yoga training manuals, and dance and yoga videos.

My dissertation interweaves the frequently disparate fields of yoga studies and dance studies, reorients scholars to the historical affinities between these two modes of physical practice, and complicates contemporary models of cultural appropriation. This work disrupts the economy of affirmation and forgetting that places yogis as non-agentive culture bearers and concert dance choreographers as individual geniuses via the logic of colonialism. It also encourages us to recognize the stakes of naming and valuing genealogies of practice under the system of racialized capitalism.

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Introduction:

Possessive Individualism, Cultural Circulation, and the Intertwining Histories of Yoga and Modern Dance

There is a man standing in the background with his hands over his head and one leg bent so the sole of his right foot rests on the inside of his left thigh. There's a woman supporting herself on her back and shoulders; her knees hover over her chest and come close to her face. Another man has his hands and head on the floor to support the weight of his body; his legs extend vertically and his elbows reach towards the ceiling. These individuals are all depicted in an image of The Performance Group warming up for a rehearsal of *Dionysus in '69* (1968-1970). The caption for the image is particularly interesting: in it, Performance Group director Richard Schechner describes the exercises as poses designed to help the group "give and get energy and motion from each other" (Novack 1990, 48: caption to image 22). He continues to say that the movements were learned from Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, initiator of Poor Theater, and that "We didn't know then it was yoga" (Novak 1990, 48).

They didn't know *then* that it was yoga. This statement has a series of implications: that the movements were inherently a part of yoga practice, regardless of whether the Performance Group artists knew what they were; that the artists would later learn that the movements were a part of yoga; and that the specificity of the categorizing the movements as yoga mattered. But mattered to whom? Why? How did it come to pass that they didn't know that the movements were part of yoga—were they similar to other exercises routinely done as dance or theater warmups? Under whose authority did they

eventually decide to call their exercises yoga? At what point were the poses they practiced separated from the cultures and peoples who originated them, and simplified into exercises to "give and get energy"? This dissertation does not directly answer those questions in relation to The Performance Group, but instead uses them as point of departure to broadly question how yoga changed through its translation to the United States and use by choreographers and performers, such that The Performance Group did not know *then* that it was yoga. In other words, I use the state of not knowing, but that not knowing mattering, to ask: when did yoga first start showing up in concert dance in the United States?[1] How has yoga changed through its interactions with concert dance? How has concert dance changed through its interactions with yoga? Who were some of the people responsible for those overlaps? How did their individual agendas impact the visibility (or lack thereof) of yoga in concert dance? What have been the raced, gendered, and political outcomes of the appearance and disappearance of yoga in modern dance?

In this dissertation, I demonstrate the various ways that yogic practices and concert dance practices have overlapped since the early 1900s. I focus primarily on the work of four choreographers—Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Bill T. Jones—and the yogis, swamis, gurus, and teachers that taught them various versions of yoga, including Swami Vivekananda, Swami Paramananda, Yogi Vithaldas, and the early ISKCON movement. By focusing on the intersections between yoga and

[1] I mostly use the term "concert dance" in this Introduction, as I am discussing a wide range of Euro-American dance practices dating from 1907 to the present. Some of those dance practices predate the development of modern dance, while others are colloquially called postmodern dance even when another term would perhaps be more precise. I therefore use concert dance as an umbrella term to denote performances executed in "high art" or other concert settings, regardless of time period.

concert dance during four key time periods across the development of modern and postmodern dance in the United States, I am able to tease out a genealogy of the enduring impact of yogic practices on concert dance. These threads of investigation allow me to orbit and interrogate an important issue at the heart of much political and cultural debate over ownership, authority, and possessive individualism: appropriation. According to appropriation scholar and law professor Susan Scafidi, cultural appropriation is "Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission…. It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive" (cited in Baker 2012, see also Scafidi 2005).

As yoga becomes an increasingly profitable consumer product, the question of who owns yoga, and where yoga came from, has become more fraught than ever. For example, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid claim to the practice through his celebration of International Yoga Day, while popular perceptions of the practice in the United States tends to position yoga as an appropriated practice done by white women with enough disposable income to spend on overpriced leggings to wear on their yoga retreat to Bali or Tulum, Mexico. The idea that most modern yoga practiced in the U.S. was appropriated drives much current thought about yoga practice and circulation, yet that argument can also be simplistic. For example, the "Take Back Yoga" campaign, created in 2010 by the Hindu American Foundation, argues that popular magazines such as *Yoga Journal* go out of their way to avoid using the word "Hindu" in referring to the

origins of yogic practices, and that that avoidance reifies anti-Hindu sentiments.[2] Their position is strong, yet their arguments also deny the long history of yoga as a Jain, Buddhist, or Muslim practice, and instead position yoga as always entirely Hindu. This is just one example of how the appropriation argument is often used as a hammer with which to define a singular, "true" definition of yoga, and to police who is—and is not—allowed to practice something that might be better viewed as a conglomeration of disciplines that have circulated internationally in various forms throughout their histories. (More on what yoga has been and how it has changed over time will come later in this Introduction.)

In this dissertation, I argue that the perception of yoga, whether as desirable and beneficial spiritual practice, threateningly exotic or foreign influence, or otherwise, was at least partially shaped by representations of yoga on concert dance stages. For over 100 years, choreographers—including St. Denis, Graham, Cunningham, and Jones—have been representing yogis onstage, practicing various versions of yoga, and using yoga breathing techniques and poses in their pedagogy and choreography. These representations of yogis and uses of yoga have helped to shape popular perception of what yoga in the United States is, who can practice yoga, and what yoga practice can do for the individual. Yet, when asked when yoga first started to appear in modern and post-modern dance technique and choreography, most dancers date that intertwining to around 1970. However, as I demonstrate, yoga techniques have been used by choreographers

[2] See http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/nyregion/28yoga.html?src=me&ref=homepage, and http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/YogaJournalLetter.pdf. Accessed Feburary 2, 2017.

since the turn of the twentieth century. This misconception, or inaccurate historicization, or intentionally forgotten or misconstrued history, leads to a series of questions that are at the heart of this dissertation: Why, how, and when did concert dance (consciously) forget its intimate connections to yoga, and who does this forgetting benefit? How do brief mentions of yoga or affirmations of its existence in modern dance benefit choreographers?[3] What impact did yoga have on concert dance conceptions of the body, the self, and what it means to dance? How can we see (or not see) those influences in dance training and choreography? How did that use or appropriation of yoga by modern dance relate to contemporaneous racial formations, gender politics, modernity, coloniality, and modernisms? In order to tackle these questions, some further exposition and historicizing is needed.

In many ways, the history of yoga in/and modern dance has been a history of choreographers—often white women—learning yoga practices, claiming the techniques as their own, and using a variety of rhetorical devices to frame themselves and their yoga-related work as spiritual, artistic, and innovative. This positioning of yoga is related to the consumption of other orientalized cultures as "spiritual style," or objects that are ahistorical, people-less, and collectible (Wong 2001, 13). For example, dance scholar Yutian Wong describes Ruth St. Denis's relationship to the Asian dance forms that "inspired" her choreography as follows:

> [W]hite women could inhabit various "Oriental" dance forms without public acknowledgement or historical reminders of the actual Asian bodies that informed

[3] I am working here with Lisa Lowe's concept of "affirmation and forgetting," and will discuss its implications more in the next pages (2015, 3). My thanks to Jacqueline Shea Murphy for pointing me in the direction of her recent work.

> their works. St. Denis's oft-told contribution to American modern dance lay in her ability to interpret and transform Asian-ness into American-ness. In other words, Orientalism disappears Asian American bodies from the present by associating them within an imagined past that is both temporal and spatial. (2001, 13)

She goes on to characterize the appeal of "Oriental" dance forms and movement practices through her term, "superspirituality." According to Wong, "Doing yoga suggests that one is or aspires to be enlightened, sophisticated, educated, and progressive…. To engage in such alternative practices allows the body to transcend the provincial and adopt a worldly and cosmopolitan knowingness outside of mainstream American culture" (2001, 13). This framing of yoga as a "superspiritua[l]" object that is concomitant with worldly and cosmopolitan knowingness and outside of the mainstream is, I believe, at the heart of the appeal of yoga to many choreographers.

Whatever the appeal, choreographers' (and, indeed, many white practitioners) use of yoga is frequently identified as appropriation by bloggers, Hindutva proponents, and cultural essentialists who are interested in protecting their culturally specific practice. This position is justifiable, given the economics of present-day yoga practices and the frequent exclusion of people of color from yoga spaces, especially when yoga practices originated among communities of color. And yet, this sort of rhetoric of appropriation is often not sufficiently complex when one looks at the history of yoga on a longer scale. The rhetoric of appropriation functions mostly in the present: someone took a culturally precious practice and is out of line in their use of it. Yet, what happens to the appropriation argument when that practice was intentionally exported several decades ago and is still being practiced by the communities it was exported to? Or what happens when there are multiple different strands of yoga that have been appropriated at different

times, and those strands are then homogenized into a singular imagined version of mainstream yoga as white women in tight pants and flexible poses?

Dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild provides another way to theorize appropriation through her discussion of the appropriation of Africanist dance forms by mainstream modern dance. According to Gottschild, "APPROPRIATION leads to APPROXIMATION leads to ASSIMILATION" (Gottschild 2003, 21, capitalization in the original). This model means that, in the process of incorporating a cultural practice into a dominant culture, the cultural practice is first taken, then modified and made familiar, which then makes the cultural product able to be assimilated into the dominant culture. The process is problematic in that it erases or otherwise invisibilizes the influence of the culture of origin on the eventual assimilated cultural product (Gottschild 1996). Although her framework is quite functional in many circumstances, it does not fully explain the relationship between yoga and modern dance. While yoga in Euro-American concert dance has certainly gone through stages of appropriation, approximation, and assimilation, there also have been constant influxes of new forms of yoga. Therefore, the story of yoga and concert dance is not the story of a singular yoga, but of many different versions of yoga that each have been appropriated, approximated, and/or assimilated. I therefore extend Gottschild's arguments around invisibilization and the processes of appropriation, approximation, and assimilation to develop a nuanced representation of how yoga exists simultaneously as both an integral part of modern dance and as its persistently separated other.

Whereas the presence of Africanist forms in modern dance and other art was often invisibilized, choreographers who use yoga often explicitly call attention to their yoga practice—perhaps due to its superspiritual connotations—however, they also turn attention away from previous choreographers who also studied yoga. In doing so, they position themselves as uniquely innovative artistic geniuses, and erase the influence of previous generations of yoga teachers and choreographers who popularized yoga in the United States, represented yogis onstage, or used yoga in their dance teaching or choreography. As I will demonstrate, choreographers and dance historians frequently name yogic practices in their discussions of the choreographers' artistic interventions, however, they generally do not go beyond naming to explore the yogis' impacts. Thus, the politics of yoga in modern dance is not just a politics of invisibilization, but also a politics of decreased attention to the recognition of teachers and lineages, resulting in the forgetting of their influence. This framework, which positions the appearance of yoga in modern dance only through the desires and intentions of appropriative (often white and female) choreographers, continues to erase the plethora of yogis, swamis, gurus, and teachers who taught them yoga, and who made their own contributions to the development of yoga practices. The current narrative of the appropriation and use of yoga by white women therefore functions in several ways: it erases the innovations of the swamis, gurus, and teachers who introduced the women to a specific yoga practice and instead renders yoga—and yogi's contributions—homogenous and available for appropriation; it supports the choreographers' claims to individual genius despite their knowledge existing within and coming from specific communities of yogis, dancers,

teachers, and yoga practitioners; and it turns attention away from the previous generations of concert dancers and choreographers who made similar moves, rendering each choreographer's use of yoga new and innovative. Furthermore, unlike many yogis and yoga students during the twentieth century, choreographers did not engage with claims to yogic lineage, and thereby were able to assert their mastery of the yoga they practiced, erasing the particularities of the lineages they studied. Therefore, a major project of this dissertation is to tease out the rhetorical moves, erasures of lineage, and claims to authority that allowed yoga's influence on choreographers, choreography, and concert dance techniques to be consciously forgotten.

This idea of conscious forgetting draws on Lisa Lowe's work in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), where she argues that "forgetting reveals the politics of memory itself, and is a reminder that the constitution of knowledge often obscures the conditions of its own making" (39). I explore the politics of "affirmation and forgetting" throughout this dissertation (Lowe 2015, 3). Lowe defines the phrase as follows:

> I observe the ways in which the archive that mediates the imperatives of the state subsumes colonial violence within narratives of modern reason and progress…. I devise other ways of reading so that we might understand the processes through which the forgetting of violent encounter is naturalized, both by the archive, and in subsequent narrative histories. In a sense, one aim of my project is to be more specific about what I would term the economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding. (Lowe 2015, 2-3)

I understand this to mean that archives and other written work often turn attention away from the memory of violent encounter, and in so doing naturalize the forgetting of challenging histories and maintain liberal subjecthood. Even as attention is turned away from the specifics of a violent encounter, the occurrence of the encounter is affirmed just

enough to be naturalized by the archive and by history. While the violence of yoga's forgetting within archival history is less immediate than the violence of slavery and indentured servitude that Lowe discusses, the stakes of its forgetting are still high. In turning attention away from the contributions of yogis, the myth of white yoga as an ahistorical "superspiritual" endeavor is maintained. Yet, by constantly mentioning yoga within modern dance histories and archives, its existence is affirmed and naturalized. As I will argue in Chapter 2, Martha Graham's claims to modernism in her dance technique relied on her conscious forgetting of St. Denis's and Ted Shawn's influences on her conception of the breathing, moving body. The impact of this conscious forgetting can then be seen in Merce Cunningham's interactions with Yogi Vithaldas and use of yoga *asana* in his choreography (explored in Chapter 3), and the multidirectional yoga influences on Bill T. Jones (explored in Chapter 4). Even as St. Denis, Shawn, Graham, Cunningham, and Jones referred to their yoga-related techniques and practices, their claims to innovation, archival practices, and written work often turned attention away from the dance and yoga teachers who informed their uses of yoga techniques. Their constitution of modern dance techniques as forms of knowledge relied on the forgetting of specific influences of yogis and yoga practices, as well as the affirmation of the superspiritual connotations of yoga itself. That is to say, I use a genealogical approach to concert dance history, but look at the connections and influences that the already recognized branches of the genealogy would have historians forget.

If we move forward from this concept that modern dance has intentionally forgotten its relationship to yoga, what do we discover when we return again to those

"forgotten in plain sight" relationships? One benefit of this process is a refreshed analysis of the racial politics of movement practices as they travel not just between African-Americans and Euro-Americans working in the United States, but also between South Asian American practitioners and Euro-and African-Americans. Another benefit is a deeper understanding of who gets to be seen doing what—who is allowed to be seen as an innovator? As an artistic genius? In other words, who is allowed to be seen as an agent in the development of modern dance or yoga? Are choreographers, with their astute rhetorical moves and cultural cachet, the only agents in the relationship, or is it possible for yogis to be agents as well?

This concept of the simultaneous affirmation and forgetting of yoga's impact on modern dance is therefore related to questions of who is considered to be a possessive individual. As has been explored by many scholars of race, racism, whiteness, and postcolonialism, a fundamental tenet of whiteness is the ability to possess and decide, that is, to have interiority and the ability to select their preferred version of spirituality or artistry. This is related to legal scholar Cheryl Harris's argument that whiteness is based upon the ability to own and acquire, and to exclude others from doing the same. According to Harris, "The origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights" (1993, 1714). Harris argues that the right to use and enjoy is a key characteristic of whiteness as "race plus privilege" (1993, 1734-8). While Harris does not discuss the relationship between South Asian (American) peoples and practices and whiteness, I contend that, in the context of dance and yoga, a

central privilege of whiteness is the ability to acquire any object that a person with the legal and cultural status of 'white' enjoys and desires, such as yoga. Modern dance choreographers' ability to "use and enjoy" yoga is directly related to rhetoric that positions the choreographer as an individual genius, and to the logic of colonialism that positions their yogi interlocutors as non-agentive, effeminate culture bearers who do not necessarily fully understand the import of their own spiritual tradition.

This argument is somewhat complicated by the early proliferation of yoga to the United States, which was based on South Asian instructors teaching yogic practices to white students, who then went on to teach other white students, who in turn had their own students (Bender 2010, 109).[4] This meant that, beginning in the early 1900s, several generations of yoga students learned the practice from other white teachers, even as other South Asian instructors arrived in the United States and taught yoga practices to new generations of students. This resulted in a multi-directional proliferation of yoga across the United States, as students could learn from either Indian teachers or white ones. While the Euro-American yoga teachers presumably benefitted from the "superspiritual" connotations of their chosen practice, Indian yoga teachers' knowledge was more often positioned as natural or inherent. What's more, due to the explosion of translations of

[4] For example, Pierre Bernard (The Great Oom) was a famous early yoga instructor working in with New York elites in the 1910s; he learned yogic techniques from Syrian-Indian instructor Sylvais Hamati and went on to instruct other white yoga teachers such as Blanche De Vries, who continued to teach in New York City for several decades (Love 2010). Similarly, Indra Devi (born in Russia as Eugenie Peterson) taught yoga to Hollywood stars in the 1940s and 1950s; she learned yoga from T. Krishnamacharya, famed yoga innovator and instructor of renowned yoga popularizers such as B.K.S. Iyengar, T.K.V. Desikachar, and Pattabhi Jois, and taught yoga to Gloria Swanson, Elizabeth Arden, Marilyn Monroe, and Ruth St. Denis before moving to Argentina and forming a very popular yoga school (Goldberg, M. 2015).

ancient and medieval yoga texts and publication of yoga manuals and autobiographies of yogis, would-be yoga practitioners did not necessarily have an in-person teacher. Yoga practices began to circulate separately from yoga teachers and practitioners.

The separation of yoga practices from South Asian yoga teachers is related to what dance scholar Anthea Kraut discusses as the gendered and racialized separation between the individual as an inalienable owner of their representation and choreography—and their circulation in a capitalist economy—and the individual as a cultural producer who is separate from their products. (This individually-based ownership is also central to the construction of whiteness as property.) According to Kraut, "in the case of choreography, because the body is implicated in both the person of the author and the substance of the work, property rights in the body prove an insecure site of privilege" (2016, 39). As in dance, the cultural production of yogis—their movements, philosophies, and practices—is intimately and inextricably tied to their bodies, as well as their lineage, and genealogy. The breakdown of the guru-student relationship in yoga across the twentieth century, as well as the increased proliferation of yoga texts, made it much more complicated for yogis to control the proliferation of their teaching and other products, especially because the innovations of many yogis were rendered less visible by their need to lay claim to ancient or ahistorical yogic lineages, which rendered their innovations less easily seen.[5]

This intricate proliferation of yoga in the U.S. complicates questions around the ownership of yoga in modern dance, as the embodied cultural production of the yogi

[5] Thank you, Amanda Lucia, for encouraging me to think about the breakdown of the guru-student relationship in connection to ideas of ownership and authority.

became leverage in the embodied cultural production of the artist, who was often positioned as an individual genius (see Kraut 2016, 65). So, as yoga practices circulated throughout the United States in many directions, the question of who is seen as a possessive individual becomes more important than ever. According to Lowe,

> race as a marker of colonial difference is an enduring reminder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten. The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of modern race; racial differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality. (Lowe 2015, 7)

By constantly positioning yoga as something separate from modern dance, but on which modern dance can draw, choreographers and scholars maintain the boundaries between the two practices, and the implied races, individual authority, and intentionality of their practitioners. It is therefore important to continue to highlight the innovations and movements of Indian yoga instructors, in order to foreground their agency and intentionality.

The model of appropriation is not the only model used by dance scholars to address the transmission and use of dance practices outside of their culture of origin, or complex issues of representation onstage and access to stage space. As demonstrated by dance scholar Susan Manning in *Modern Dance/Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (2004), concert dance in the United States during the mid-twentieth century was racially stratified, with separate scenes for African American and white dancers. Through the use of "mythic abstraction," white choreographers granted themselves the privilege of performing as "universal subjects without the mediation of bodies marked as culturally

other" (2004, 118). This is to say that, through the use of the mythic mode and modernist principles of abstraction, white choreographers frequently took on the dances, cultural practices, and universalized aspects of the appearance of peoples and dances from "other" cultures.[6] By positioning themselves as universal subjects, mid-twentieth century choreographers were able to use their possessive individualism to draw on whatever cultural practices and products they desired. As I will explore in this dissertation, the framework of mythic abstraction also applies to parts of the relationship between modern dance and Indian cultural production, despite the fact that the racial relationship between Euro-Americans and South Asians differed from the racial relationship between Euro-Americans and African-Americans. Because the Immigration Act of 1924 prohibited immigration by people of Indian origin, among others, it became much more difficult for swamis and gurus to enter the United States to teach yoga practices. While Indian practices were fascinating, Indian people were considered an always-foreign part of the imagined community of the U.S. nation.[7] Even as yoga came to be depicted as a universalized superspiritual practice, and was used in the 1930s and 1940s by modern

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[6] Meanwhile, choreography by African Americans working during the mid-twentieth century often used modernist principles and movement techniques, but was marked (or coded) as "Negro," whether through subject matter, predominant audience composition, or the identity of the choreographer (see 2004, xv).

[7] Vivek Bald discusses the racial formation of the United States: "At the same time, they [peddlers and seamen from India] point to one of the United States' most enduring contradictions: In the very years that the United States became what its leaders would call a 'nation of immigrants' it also became a nation of immigrant exclusion" (9). Despite the rise in 'melting pot' rhetoric during the early 1900, and the existence of Indian immigrants in the U.S. for several decades, certain groups of immigrants were not welcome to enter the United States, much less assimilate into dominant American culture.

dancers who were invested in positioning their art as universally expressive, most yogis were not able to immigrate to the United States. [8]

This separation between yogis and yoga practice is directly related to the logic of British colonialism that justified its domination of the Indian subcontinent by positioning Indian people as inherently incapable of self-rule, Indian learning and knowledge production as inherently inferior, and Indian culture as inherently spiritual.[9] Such rhetoric also contended that the main cultural offering of the "West" was modern science, rationalism, and governance. For example, in his influential speeches at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, Swami Vivekananda emphasized the unity of all deities, and argued that the East was spiritually wealthy (due to its religious history) while the West was materially wealthy (due to the development of capitalism and imperialism) (Strauss 2005, 35). This concept that the inherent gift of the "East" is its spirituality results in that spirituality being homogenized into a singular, transferrable object. It is therefore necessary to look at how the goals of yoga shifted over time, which will begin the project of increasing the specificity of yoga's historicizaiton within modern

[8] Because India was still a part of the British Empire during the early part of the 20th century, and because British colonialism was premised upon a perceived inability of Indians to rule themselves, yoga, with its long and complex history in relation to various kingdoms and sects in India, could not be seen as a truly modern discipline, since modernist ideals were inherited from post-Enlightenment rationalist discourse (Chatterjee 1986). Therefore, the use of South Asian ideas by middle- and upper-class Americans was not a sign of yoga being modern, so much as it was a sign of the practitioners being interested in the exotic and the Other. When linked to whiteness and upper class-ness, the choice to participate in South Asian practices signified cosmopolitanism, even as the practices themselves remained "ancient."

[9] A classic example of this perspective is found in Thomas B. Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835). From there, British colonialism endured through repetitions of similar philosophies.

dance, and create increased visibility for the yogis who impacted modern dance's development.

(It is worth noting that my drive to name and recognize the yogis who contributed to the practice's international popularization and use by modern dancers can also be seen as related to the drive to maintain the distinctions of appropriation and commodification that enable the rhetoric of individual genius. I recognize that my attempt to rupture global historical power relationships through naming the influences of yogis on dance choreographers and the innovations of those yogis, in some ways simply replicates the rhetoric of individual genius that I supposedly dismantle. Despite this complexity, I find the project of increasing the visibility and foregrounding the agency of yogis valuable, as it works to rupture simplistic versions of yoga history.)

I begin my historicization with the *Yoga Sutra*, which is commonly considered the foundational text of modern practice.[10] Among many practitioners in Euro-America, hearkening back to the *Yoga Sutra* is used to create the illusion of a direct inherited continuity of yoga practice across the almost two thousand years since the text's inscription. Yet, common interpretations of the *Yoga Sutra* today do not always account for the philosophical complexity of the text; this sort of simplistic interpretation is combatted by David Gordon White in *The Yoga Sutra of Patañjali: A Biography* (2013), which analyzes the various ways the text has been analyzed and interpreted over the past 2000 years. The *Yoga Sutra* frames the goals of early yoga around issues of the relationship between consciousness and materiality, as framed through a version of

[10] I am not a Sanskritist, and therefore, with the exception of direct quotations, generally employ anglicized transliterations of the Sanskrit terms used in this dissertation.

Samkhya philosophy. These philosophical underpinnings construct the world as based on two distinct elements: *purusha* (consciousness) and *prakriti* (materiality). The manifest world comes into being from *prakriti* through a series of transformations, which ultimately shift *purusha* from the state of pure consciousness into involvement with worldly things. A major goal of Patañjala Yoga is the isolation (*kaivalya*) of *purusha* from *prakriti* through the disciplines of yoga in order to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth. It is important to note that Patañjala Yoga differs from *Samkhya* philosophy in that it is theistic and contains an understanding of god in the form of *ishvara*, whereas *Samkhya* philosophy is not theistic in any significant way.[11] This combination of the dualistic *purusha*/*prakriti* understanding of the world with a theistic understanding of the divine as impersonal and merely a 'specific' one among a plurality of *purusha*s undergirds the conception of the world set out in the *Yoga Sutra* (Larson 2008, 49-50).

There is also an important distinction between the type of dualism seen in the *Yoga Sutra* and other dualisms in Euro-American philosophical and exercise traditions. As explained by yoga scholar Edwin F. Bryant,

> While the distinction between the material body and a conscious soul has a well-known history in Western Greco-Abrahamic religion and thought, Yoga differs from most comparable Western schools of dualism by regarding not just the physical body but also the mind, ego, and all cognitive functions as belonging to the realm of inert matter… In the Yoga tradition, the dualism is not between the material body and physical reality on one hand, and mental reality characterized by thought on the other, but between pure awareness and all objects of

[11] According to Larson, "Hence, God in Yoga becomes an impersonal, acosmic, detached presence whose inherent contentlessness can only show itself as what it is not…. Moreover, since *īśvara* is not personal in any meaningful sense of that term, *īśvarapraṇidhāna* (*Yoga Sutra* I.23, II.1, II.32 and I.45) can only be a deep longing for transcendence" (Larson 2008, 49-50).

> awareness—whether these objects are physical and extended, or internal and nonextended. (2009, xlv-xlvi)

This distinction between pure awareness and the objects of awareness as the main means of encountering the world is quite different from philosophies or exercise systems with the goal of understanding the relationship between self and world, or mind and body. This difference of goals between ancient Yoga and contemporary yoga and modern dance leads to another important question: what is the goal of yoga or dance practice, and what are people training themselves to do? Which choreographers practice yoga to become more expressive onstage, and what do they think they are expressing? Which practice yoga to increase their physical capacities? To increase their awareness and ability to attend to detail? To attain union with the divine—whatever their definition of the divine may be? How do the yogas they practice prepare them to attain these goals? Through tracing the specificities of which choreographers interacted with which yogis, I begin to understand of how each yogi's teaching choices prepared their students to respond to contemporaneous cultural needs or motivations, thereby positioning each yogi and choreographer within their cultural location.

To return to our brief yoga history: as has been explored by many yoga scholars during recent decades, the *Yoga Sutra* is not *the* text of yoga, but merely a yoga text, albeit an extremely influential one. Yoga studies scholars such as David Gordon White, James Mallinson, and Mark Singleton, among others, are part of the recent explosion in yoga studies scholarship that investigates the shifting purposes and practices of yoga over time (White 2012, Singleton 2010, Mallinson and Singleton 2017). According to White, "Every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga. One reason

this has been possible is that its semantic field—the range of meanings of the term "yoga"—is so broad and the concept of yoga so malleable, that it has been possible to morph it into nearly any practice or process one chooses" (White 2012, 2). The language used in yoga histories supplements this stance, as noted by yoga cultural historian Stefanie Syman: "American society has been able to assimilate any number of versions of [yoga], more or less simultaneously" (2010, 7). I therefore continue my brief outline of yoga histories, which will hopefully be beneficial to dance scholars' understanding of the various things that yoga is and has been over the past several millennia.

Beginning around the 9th century CE, *hatha-yoga* began to come into existence and focused more on the use of *asana* and *pranayama* to control the body and thereby realize liberation during life. It emphasized the use of various austerities in order to attain special powers (*siddhi*s), including flight, taking over another's body, stopping one's heart, and other feats. Through the influence of tantric traditions, the *hathayogic* conception of the body also shifted, with the development of esoteric anatomy based on channels (*nadi*) that carry energy *(prana*) and that meet along a central axis of the body to form centers, wheels or lotuses (*chakra*) (Flood 1996, 98). Two predominant yoga texts in the development of *hatha yoga* are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of Svatmarama, written during the 15th century CE,[12] and the *Gheranda Samhita*, written around 1700 CE.[13]

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[12] The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* sets out a list of practices of what yogis do, focusing on the use of bodily and mental disciplines to attain powers leading to liberation. Instead of the few *sutras* describing *āsana* in the YS, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* provides instruction for some fifteen postures, ranging from relatively simple seated postures to *āsana* requiring extreme flexibility, strength, and balance. It also recommends dietary and housing practices that are likely to lead to success as a yogi, and describes the connections between breath, mind, life, *nadis*, and *prana* (Akers tr. 2002, x). The *Hatha Yoga*

Unlike the earlier *Yoga Sutra*, which focuses on philosophy and has limited references to *asana* and other physical austerities, both of these later texts include numerous descriptions of *asana* alongside their focus on the attainment of *siddhis* (special powers) through the purification of the body (Bryant 2009, 283).[14]

There are several strands of medieval yoga practices that existed at the same time as the writing of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, including Tantric practices, the Nāth yogi sect, and goddess/yogini devotionalism (White 2003). It is difficult to delineate a singular 'hatha yoga' in this period, as influences from Tantra existed at the same time as Śaivite and Vaiśnavite groups to create yogis and yogas that went beyond what was transcribed in either the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* or the *Gheranda Samhita*. Indeed, a central question in these developments is how to discern the relationship between the variety of practices that have been called yoga. For example, in *Sinister Yogis*, David Gordon White

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Pradipika then delineates a variety of *karmans*, *kumbhakas*, and *mudras* that can be used to purify and discipline the body. Finally, it lists a series of ways to attain *samadhi*, which is translated as "This state of unity—when the prana decreases and the mind dissolves—is called *samadhi*. The similar state—the identity of *jivatman* and *paramatman*, in which all thoughts disappear—is called *samadhi*" (Akers tr. 2002, IV.6-7). The four chapters of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (*āsana, prānāyāma, mudra, and samādhi)* correspond to the four stages of its yoga.

[13] The *Gheranda Samhita*, composed roughly 200 years after the HYP, also focuses more on *asana* than is seen in the *Yoga Sutra*. It is unique in having seven means of perfecting the person (and chapters), which include cleansing techniques (leading to purification), thirty-two *asana* (leading to strength), twenty-five *mudras* (leading to steadiness), five techniques of *pratyahara* (leading to calmness), descriptions of where the yogi should live, what he should eat, when to start practice in the calendar year, and ten kinds of *pranayama* (leading to lightness), three types of *dhyana* (leading to the realization of the self), and finally six types of *samadhi* (leading to abstraction, the ultimate means of perfecting the person) (Mallinson tr. 2004, x).

[14] The main reference to *asana* in the *Yoga Sutra* is: "posture should be steady and comfortable" (II.46).

discusses the history of yoga practitioners as separate from textual traditions, analyzing what yogis *do*, not what texts say about their practices (2009). Ranging from narratives of yogis in ancient epics and folk tales to travelers' renditions of encounters with yogis, White's work emphasizes the plurality of yoga traditions, traversing yogis as evil spirits, as supporters of kings, as power brokers of medieval India, and predominantly as individuals capable of taking over the body of another. This wide differentiation of yogic practices is part of why it is impossible to speak of a singular "goal" of yoga practice.

Many medieval and Early Modern Indian yogic practices—such as militant asceticism, wandering naked, carrying a weapon, and militaristic organizing to disrupt the trade routes of the British East India Company—were banned by the British in India beginning in 1773 (Singleton 2010, 38-41).[15] These colonialist dictates often forced yogic ascetics into showmanship and mendicancy to make a living, resulting in images of yogis as dirty beggars in contorted and extreme postures. This perception was eventually reversed in the late 1800s, when the British in India, according to White,

[15] William R. Pinch articulates the history of warrior ascetic yogi sects in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, arguing that they played a crucial role in the consolidation and brokering of power in India. For Pinch, being a yogi has much to do with conquering death (2006, 15). Pinch argues that the yogi's ability to take on multiple roles was central to his ability to attain power: "Crucial to the transition to wide-scale military entrepreneurship in the eighteenth century was the ability of the *yogi* to be many things at once—to be Muslim and Hindu, emperor and mendicant, ascetic and archer, soldier and spy" (2006, 103). He also articulates British distrust of yogi sects as based not only on their military prowess, but also on vague concerns with their unbridled sexuality (2006, 189). David Gordon White also discusses the rise and fall of these sects, arguing that, while the Mughal emperors treated the yogi sects as power brokers worth reckoning with, the relationship between British and the Nāth yogis was generally much more adversarial (2009, 237). Eventually, British policy reclassified yogis, not as wandering members of religious orders, but as vagrants and criminals. This led to an eventual loss of power for yogi sects and a portrayal of a yogi as a dangerous wandering beggar, not a member of a powerful network of soldiers, spies, and traders.

> began to romanticize the yogis whose lifestyles and livelihoods their policies had largely contributed to wiping out. In urban middle-class society in particular, the bogey of the wild, naked, drug-crazed warrior ascetic was gradually airbrushed into the far more congenial image of a forest-dwelling meditative, spiritual renouncer, something far closer to the ideal of the sages of vedic lore. (2009, 244)

As a result of this pressure on yogi sects by British colonists, and Orientalist insistence on textual precursors to the so-called development of Hinduism as a religion, yogis and yoga practice were separated from yoga texts, and English translations of yogic texts in the 1800s focused on the meditative, Sanskritic, and textual aspects of the practice (Singleton 2010, 44).

This shift towards yoga as a textual and philosophical practice was epitomized in Anglo-American Victorian culture by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Vivekananda's *raja yoga*—which positioned yogic spirituality as universally beneficial regardless of the practitioner's religion and minimized the importance of *asana*—made yoga appealing to middle- and upper-class members of countercultural groups, artists, and members of non-traditional Christian religious groups (de Michelis 2004). Vivekananda was one of the first popularizers of yoga in the United States, and his work negotiating colonialist terrains to popularize *raja yoga* set the stage for future interactions between yoga, physical culture practices, and concert dance.

As yoga began to regain popularity in the early 1900s in India, it also had to position itself as beneficial according to a broader range of metrics. Joseph Alter describes the modern medicalization of yoga under the influence of Swami Kuvalayananda in the 1920s, arguing that science was central to the institutionalization of yoga research in pre-independence India. Kuvalayananda's efforts in measuring the

effects of meditation and pranayama were related to the trend to attempt to understand the body's functionality through a plethora of new or improved devices—such as microscopes, X-ray machines, and blood pressure gauges—that could be used to attempt to find "new laws of universal nature" (2004, 76-77). His turn to science to support the benefits of yoga created the conditions of possibility for yoga as a global secular exercise project, even as it also was intimately linked to his own interpretations of Indian nationalism and ideas of spirituality (2004, 78). The use of yoga in support of the Indian nationalist movement was also accomplished through the highly athletic and physical practice crafted by Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) and his students, who worked to assert Indian male strength, virility, and capacity for self-governance in the face of British colonialism (Singleton 2010). Yet, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, this yoga was itself radically changed by its encounter with Euro-American spiritual seekers of the early- and mid-1900s, as Indian yoga practitioners were influenced by translations of Delsarte techniques, Swedish Ling gymnastics, and harmonial gymnastics. The influence of the religious philosophies of New Thought and Theosophy served to position yoga in the United States as "spiritual stretching" and to make its conceptions of the relationship between spirit, self, and divine palatable to American audiences (Singleton 2010, 143-162). Beginning in the 1930s, *vinyasa*-based yoga practices, which focus on the connection between breath and movement and use rapid and repeated sequences of poses, rose to prominence.

Even as yoga took on nationalist overtones in India, yoga in the United States came to be increasingly associated with stress-relief and flexibility, and with medicalized

scientific benefit. This can be seen in Swami Sivananda's teachings through the Divine Life Society, Swami Yogananda's teaching of "Energization Exercises" beginning in the U.S. in the 1920s, as well as in Yogi Vithaldas's 1957 book on yoga titled *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension*.[16] As I will explore in Chapter 3, in that era, the transition solidified from the yogi as sole informant and a necessary symbol of authenticity, to the yogi as a culture bearer whose work could be taken up piecemeal. Vithaldas's book provides a thorough introduction to the practice of yoga through *asana*, *pranayama*, clean eating, and yoga philosophies around the control of the body as a means of leading a happier and healthier life. Unlike Vivekananda 50 years earlier, Vithaldas does not aim to convert readers to see yoga as a universal expression of philosophical truth, but rather presents his teachings as a scientifically and medically sound means of creating increased health (1957, 37-38). Vithaldas's emphasis on yogic techniques as physical, mental, and spiritual healing modalities, as well as his emphasis on the relationship between the self and the divine positioned his yoga as appealing and useful to many postmodern dancers and choreographers, including Merce Cunningham and many dancers in his company and social scene.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the direct influences of yoga on modern dance become harder to trace as yoga proliferated, immigration laws changed to once again permit Indian arrival, and Indian-derived spiritual practices gained momentum in the United

[16] According to a caption of a photo of an elderly Vithaldas by John Prieto (Getty Images), he was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1909, and began to study yoga around age 14 or 15. He began teaching four years later, and photographs of him providing instruction to students in Euro-America appear by 1941. http://www.gettyimages.com/license/162106764

States. By that time, yogic philosophies and breathing techniques had been embedded in modern dance practice for several generations of artists, and the use of yoga *asana* and forms of *pranayama* became increasingly common in technique classes (see, for example, Kara Miller's discussion of her own slow realization of yoga's embeddedness in her modern dance training (2015), Cynthia Novack's account of yoga in contact improvisation practices (1990), Bill T. Jones's participation in ISKCON and use of *asana* in choreography (1995)). As American students learned yoga from dance teachers who did not always explicitly name the practices they were drawing on, the particularity of the yogic practices in use often became diluted. Choreographers and dance teachers had a stake in positioning themselves as individual geniuses, which often led to them eliding the influence of yogis and yogic practices on their dance techniques and choreography.

This variety of ways that yoga has existed over the past several millennia has only begun to be explored in dance studies scholarship on yoga's relationships to modern dance. For example, Mark Wheeler's 1984 dissertation, "Surface to Essence: Appropriation of the Orient by Modern Dance," discusses the incorporation of yoga (and various other "Eastern" practices) through the rhetoric of a gradual increase in the level of authenticity seen in the versions of yoga practiced by selectively appropriative dancers. Eileen Or presented a paper at the 1995 Conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars on the relationships between Graham's technique and yogic breathing practices, "Body and Mind: The Yoga Roots of Martha Graham's 'Contraction' and 'Release.'" Solveig Santillano's also takes up connections between contemporary dance and yoga practice, analyzing, as the title states, "The Effects of Hatha Yoga on

Contemporary Dance: Pitfalls, Practices, and Possibilities" (2007). Her work also provides further evidence of the continuing interrelationship between yoga and modern dance practitioners, including Peentz Dubble, Cynthia Novack, Richard Bull, and a multiplicity of other dancer-yogis. Kara Miller's 2015 dissertation, "Re-imagining Modern Dance as Transnational Phenomenon through the Lens of Yoga," takes a different track and uses her experience as a yoga practitioner and dancer to lay out the various ways yoga has been used by modern dance choreographers, and to construct a genealogy of the lineage of modern dancers who use yoga in their work (2015, 27). Miller argues that the influence of yoga on modern dance can be seen through the similarities in movement vocabulary, the use of breath, and the internally- and experientially-focused visualization exercises or prompts used when teaching dancing (2015, 26). These works begin the process of articulating the relationship between yoga and modern dance, however, they often avoid theorizing the racial complexities of the relationship between the two practices. What's more, by focusing on a singular ahistorical yoga's impact on modern dance, they avoid having to grapple with the complexities of yoga history. This allows their articulations of the relationship between yoga and modern dance to uncomplicatedly focus on choreographers' innovations, rather than simultaneously seeing the innovations of yogis. In response to their work, I highlight the plurality of yogas that have existed over the past hundred years, and grapple with the variety of ways that different versions of yoga have impacted concert dance practices.

To illustrate this, I return to the anecdote that opened this introduction: The Performance Group's "not knowing then that it was yoga" (Novack 1990, 48). What

version of yoga did they not know that their practice was?[17] How did yoga almost miraculously appear in their warmups, and what were the racial politics of that appearance? I contend that, through Novack's framing of Schechner's statement, the focus remains on the performers state of not-knowing, instead of zooming out to question how yoga came to circulate without a connection to a specific lineage or teacher. Yet, as many theater scholars have demonstrated, yoga practices and exercises were used by actors and directors going back to Constantin Stanislavski, who inspired Jerzy Grotowski, who taught the exercises to Schechner and The Performance Group (Whyman 2008).[18] This example is precisely why it matters to name and pay attention to the Indian yoga teachers who made possible yoga's presence in modern and postmodern dance and other disciplines. If we continue to position choreographers' and performers' *uses* of yoga as more important than yogis' work to disseminate yoga, then we continue to replicate

[17] Schechner discusses the usefulness of yoga *asana* (but not yoga concentration techniques) for actors: "We began by doing yoga directed toward absolute concentration. Is it true, we asked, that yoga can give actors the power of concentration? We observed that despite all our hopes the opposite happened. There was a certain concentration, but it was introverted. This concentration destroys all expression; it's an internal sleep, an inexpressive equilibrium: a great result which ends all actions. This should have been obvious because the goal of yoga is to stop three processes: thought, breathing, and ejaculation. That means all life processes are stopped and one finds fullness and fulfilment in conscious death, autonomy enclosed in our own kernel. I don't attack it, but it's not for actors. But we also observed that certain yoga positions help very much the natural reactions of the spinal column; they lead to a sureness of one's body, a natural adaptation to space. So why get rid of them? Just change all their currents" (Schechner, Hoffman and Grotowski 1997, 42-43). See also Schechner 1997, 24-25.

[18] There now exists an entire subfield of Stanislavsky and Yoga scholars, who work to demonstrate Stanislavsky's reliance on the discipline in creating his acting method. Whyman provides evidence that Stanislavsky studied *prana*, performed exercises similar to *asana*, and was extremely interested in correct breathing (*pranayama*) by the late 1910s (2008, 78-85). Tcherkasski argues that Stanislavski had to hide his references to yoga due to censorship in Russia at the time (2016).

negative power relationships and perceptions. Thus, I use a circular method of writing in many of my chapters, first providing a brief movement example, then teasing out some of the teachers and philosophies that enabled the creation of that choreography, and finally returning to an analysis of what can be seen (or not seen) of yoga's influences on that dance example given that increased contextualization. This allows me to weave together movement description and analysis with an historicization of the conditions of possibility and the racial and cultural implications of that movement.

This dissertation therefore works to disrupt the false dichotomy between agentive white choreographers who practiced yoga and perceptually non-agentive Indian bearers of spiritual culture by highlighting more of the ways in which Indian yogis, swamis, and other creators of yoga culture intentionally and perceptively changed yoga practices to make them welcome on a global stage. In doing so, I build on the explosion of recent work in Yoga Studies that investigates the origins of, and developments in, twentieth century posture practice, and extend that work by connecting it to other related movement practices and artistic forms. Although there is logic to continuing to define Yoga Studies through yoga alone, one problem with that focus is that it underscores the idea that yoga exists separately from the movement practices, philosophies, and artistic practices that have, and continue to, influence it. By joining my analysis of changes in yoga practice during the twentieth century to an analysis of modern dance practices during the same period, I create space for future study of reciprocal relationships between movement and spiritual practices. Since so many yogis in the U.S. today also study modern dance, or capoeira, or aikido, or a plethora of other movement practices, it would behoove Yoga

Studies to begin to investigate the relationships between yoga and those practices. Doing so would situate yoga today in relation to its cultural milieu, rather than continuing to separate yoga from its proximal movement practices, which has the potential result of positioning yoga as ahistorical, ancient, and/or unchanging.

Seeing, recognizing, and analyzing the yoga in modern dance disrupts idea of choreographers individually discovering yoga and colonizing/appropriating it through their own appropriative genius, and instead positions yoga as a strong thread throughout the history of concert dance in the U.S. However, even as I argue that yoga has been much more impactful than is commonly recognized, I also acknowledge that it is not the only discipline of which that could be said. In the Coda, I provide the framework of the "also studied" as a means of investigating and highlighting the practices that also influence choreographers, but that are kept separate from the rest of their work, whether through choreographic choices, rhetorical moves, or audience perception. I analyze the stakes of choreographers continuing ability to position themselves as unique discoverers of practices, cultures, and movement disciplines that have existed for a long time, and argue that tracing the interrelationships between these practices will help our historicization more accurately reflect the complex race, gender, and economic power relationships that influence how each practice is viewed.

In order to disrupt the false dichotomy between agentive choreographers and non-agentive yoga culture bearers, I spend time tracing the changes made to yoga by Indian yoga teachers, and hypothesize as to why those changes were made and what purpose they served for the yogis I study. I therefore do not dally over the biographies of the

choreographers I study—there is already a plethora of writing on their achievements. I also rhetorically analyze how the choreographers position themselves and their yoga practices, scrutinizing the politics of affirmation and forgetting, claims to individual genius, and the separation or inclusion of their yoga practice in their choreographic production. In making my arguments, I use the tools of choreographic analysis, paying attention to how people move, and what that movement can say about how they conceptualize themselves, their art, and their relationship to the world. I link this work to an analysis of how various choreographers used versions of yoga in their personal lives, technique teaching, and choreography. Throughout, I draw on autobiography, published works and reviews by other scholars and historians, archival records of dance technique training and choreography, descriptions of yoga training, and dance and yoga videos. Because I need to demonstrate the use of yoga by each choreographer, I also relate instances of twentieth century yoga practice by modern dancers to a variety of historical yoga texts, particularly the *Yoga Sutra*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Yogi Vithaldas's 1957 *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension*, and Iyengar's 1966 *Light on Yoga*.[19] As this is primarily a dance studies dissertation, I spend more time on the transfer of knowledge and movement and breathing practices from yoga to modern dance, rather than vice versa. There is, I believe, ripe room for investigation in that

[19] Relying on these texts allows me to support my claims about the details of a particular choreographer's yoga practices, however, it has the drawback of using mainstream, Hindu-related texts (such as the *Yoga Sutra*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika,* or *Gheranda Samhita*) as a point of support to demonstrate the soundness or intentionality of an individual's yoga practice. I do not want to replicate the narrative that places those texts at the center of all yoga practices, so I instead point interested readers to the recently published *Roots of Yoga*, which provides a detailed and syncretic perspective on the history of yoga practices across various world religions (Mallinson and Singleton 2017).

direction, as demonstrated by the plethora of present-day yoga teachers who are also dance teachers, performers, and choreographers.

Chapter 1 explores the ways that yoga appears in Ruth St. Denis's teaching and choreography. I look at her contact with yogis and swamis, particularly Swami Paramananda and other teachers in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, and connect their influence to her 1907 dance *The Yogi*, and a section of the 1916 *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*. I also analyze the "yogi meditation" lessons she gave to her students at Denishawn, and their influence on conceptions of being and breathing in the nascent field of modern dance. I argue that, although her successors found benefit in characterizing her dancing as exotic arm waving, there was actually a deep and intentional aspect to her study. While she replicated and relied on tropes of the exotic yogi figure, she did so in a way that integrated yogic ideas on spirituality into what would become modern dance, and popularized yoga through her portrayals of it in front of international audiences.

Chapter 2 examines the international circulation of movement practices in the 1930s, using the specificity of a wide-legged seated forward fold as a point of focus. I examine Martha Graham's dance warm-up, the Deep Stretches, and their relationship to Ted Shawn's Floor Sets and Delsarte exercises, contending that her rhetorical erasure of the influence of Shawn and Delsarte on the development of her technique allowed her to position herself as a modernist individual genius. I relate this to the gendering and nationalism displayed in a 1938 yoga newsreel of Krishnamacharya, Iyengar, and several unidentified women and children, which includes a woman demonstrating *upavista*

konasana—a wide-legged, seated forward fold. I argue that the international circulation of gymnastic, spiritual, yogic, and dance exercise movements attached a remarkable diversity of meanings and intentions to very similar movements, and that attention to the details of how people create meaning with their movements allows us to see the simultaneous fluidity and specificity of movement practices.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the relationship between Merce Cunningham's *asana* practice, and the innovations of his teacher, Yogi Vithaldas. I position Cunningham in relation to a broader downtown Manhattan yoga, Zen Buddhism, and alternative spiritual practice artistic scene, and relate his yoga practice to Robert Ellis Dunn, Carolyn Brown, and other dancer's study under Vithaldas during the early 1960s. I examine the ways that yoga *asana* appeared in Cunningham's dance contributions to the collaborative work, *Variations V* (1965), and the rhetorical moves that separated his yoga practice from the rest of his dancing and dance making. This allows me to argue that, even as Vithaldas's books and instruction positioned yoga as a relaxation exercise system applicable to busy and stressed Americans, Cunningham used yoga to make his art elite, special and distinct.

Moving forward to the 1970s and 80s, Chapter 4 examines the various strands of yogic influences on Bill T. Jones's early choreography and personal practice. I examine the relationship between yogic breathing techniques and conceptions of the self, and the development of Contact Improvisation. I then turn to Jones's yoga practice and early participation in ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, commonly known as the Hare Krishnas). In grappling with both the bold or daring and more inherited aspects of his yogic practices, I argue that Jones's participation in this

wide-variety of yogic practices afforded him tools that contributed to his ability to claim space for himself as an African American choreographer in a predominantly white postmodern dance scene.

In the Coda, I explore two contrasting ways in which yoga appears in concert dance technique and choreography in the present day. First, I discuss the use of yoga as what I call an "also studied" practice for many modern dance teachers and choreographers, arguing that positioning yoga as a secondary influence allows dance teachers and choreographers to continue to forget yoga's enduring influence on U.S. concert dance. I contrast those examples with the work of Indian-American choreographer Ananya Chatterjea and her Ananya Dance Theatre, which innovates on the forms of yoga, the Indian martial art Chhau, and Odissi dance to create the Yorchha™ technique. I use her discussion of her technique as an example to interrogate how practices and influences are named, to suggest a respectful way forward for dancers who choose to incorporate yoga into their careers, and to problematize current naming practices across yoga and concert dance.

Together, these chapters create space for future investigations into the relationships between dance forms and movement practices, and position dancers to begin to see some of the histories that have been forgotten in plain sight.

Chapter 1: Yoga at Denishawn

Ruth St. Denis, Swami Paramananda, and the Performance of Spirituality

In the summer of 1916, Ruth St. Denis invited Swami Paramananda to lecture at the Denishawn School in Los Angeles. She and her students sat in a semicircle on one end of an oriental rug, and had left a cushion for the swami to sit on at the other end. When he arrived, he assumed his seat, closed his eyes, and began to breathe deeply. Minutes passed. The students began to get antsy, wondering when the swami would start his lesson. St. Denis recounts the moment in her autobiography:

> a peculiar aura of peace emanated from him. We waited and nothing happened. The girls looked at me, and earnestly looked back at the Swami; and as precious seconds turned into minutes I began to laugh inwardly, because I could read their minds. The active, pert member of the class was saying, "Well, why doesn't he begin?" and furtively looked at her watch. "We've waited for five minutes for him to say something." The meeker members were saying to themselves, "Yes, he is beautiful to look at. Strange how still he sits. But when is he going to begin?" The Swami sat on and on, and just as their impatience was becoming more and more pronounced an extraordinary tone came from his throat, the pronouncing of *Aum* (God) opened his prayer, and it was done with that extraordinary vibration which is like the striking of a great gong. It was deep and thrilling and seemed to sound throughout his whole body. Of course the girls did not realize that he was teaching them their first lesson of the East—patience, reverence, and humility—but I do not think any of them ever forgot the effect of that afternoon. (1939, 198-199)

While St. Denis's narration mostly focuses on the swami's lesson through her own fascination with his teaching and her sense of superiority or being in-the-know when compared to her students, reading between the lines paints a different picture of his actions that day. In St. Denis's recounting of the swami's lesson at Denishawn, Swami Paramananda serves almost as a prop in St. Denis's own spiritual authority; yet, as is evident by his insistence on starting the session with meditation, he was also an

authoritative teacher in his own right. His performance of spiritual authority—through his refusal to begin class in a way familiar to the Denishawn students and his "extraordinary tone" uttered in the face of the students' impatience—can be used to refute St. Denis's framing of the experience. Yet, his spiritual teachings also exist within St. Denis's appropriative early-twentieth-century culturally imperialist milieu. Reading against the grain of St. Denis's description of the moment at Denishawn creates space for Paramananda's resistance to be seen, even as he also actively participated in the construction of a narrative putting forth spirituality as the most important cultural legacy of the Indian subcontinent. Thus, I explore this point of tension between St. Denis's portrayal of yogi figures in her teaching and choreography, and the yogic practices and techniques she learned, as outlined by swamis in the Ramakrishna/Vedanta tradition and in other yogic texts. I explore the transfer of philosophy and ways of being and breathing from Paramananda to St. Denis, and investigate how those philosophies and breathing techniques appear and disappear in St. Denis's teaching and choreography.

This tale of an afternoon lesson in meditation and/or the power of assumptions about the "Orient" is just one of many instances where St. Denis's fascination with South Asian philosophy or movement practices directly impacted her teaching or choreography. Other objects of analysis indicating St. Denis's fascination with the figure of the yogi can be found through dances such as *The Yogi* (1908) and *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India* (1916), St. Denis's 'yoga meditation' classes at Denishawn, the swamis invited to lecture at the school, and her writings about the impact of yoga on her

conception of the world and the relationship between the self and the whole.[1] This chapter therefore uses yoga as a lens of investigation into St. Denis's teaching, choreography, and worldview as a way of continuing to complicate both her lineage in the worlds of American modern dance and dance studies, and current understandings of the development of yoga in the United States. I analyze how St. Denis's encounters with yoga as a philosophy, the creation of the figure of the yogi as an image in St. Denis's appropriative imagination, and St. Denis's time spent teaching elements of yoga to her students, impacted the development of both modern dance and yoga in the United States.

To do so, it is first necessary to contextualize my intervention in the already well-trod ground of Dance Studies writings about Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and the Denishawn school. This work tackles similar ground to that covered in Kara Miller's 2015 dissertation, which examined the intersections between yoga and Ruth St. Denis's teaching and choreography. I extend her work by questioning what exactly was meant by "yoga" for St. Denis, her teachers, and her students. What sort of yoga did they engage with, and how did their yogic explorations impact their worldview, body, and dancing?

The tale of St. Denis's impact on the development of concert dance in the United States has been told many times, beginning with the two volumes of Ted Shawn's panegyric *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet* (1920), and continuing with St. Denis's 1939 autobiography, *An Unfinished Life*. Suzanne Shelton's biography of St. Denis advances the mythologizing work begun by St. Denis and Shawn, and renders St. Denis's

[1] Indian dances and philosophies form just one sliver of St. Denis's and Shawn's overall interests, which also included dances and philosophies from China, Thailand, Burma, Japan, Persia, North Africa, Spain, and the Indigenous Americas.

recollections into a cohesive tale of the personal and professional development of a leading figure in the genesis of modern dance (1990). She relates St. Denis's career to general shifts in religious sensibilities in the United States and the growth of Orientalism, and positions St. Denis as an individual genius responsible for the birth of modern dance in the United States. Jane Desmond moves forward from Shelton's narrativizing of St. Denis's life to analyze an early solo, *Radha* (1906), for its presentation of categories of otherness, markers of race, and display of Orientalism and sexuality through the white middle-class female body. She argues that the dance functions "as a site of condensation and displacement of desire," mapping complex understandings of race, gender, and cultural otherness onto the female dancing body (Desmond [1993] 2001, 257). In her essay, Desmond creates links between the portrayal of female sexuality onstage, the chastity of St. Denis's transcendent spiritual experience as *Radha*, the perceived blackness of the character in contrast to St. Denis's known whiteness, and the positioning of the dance as both high art and popular entertainment.[2] This allows her to question how the dance participated in the social construction of Indians as exotic others and dancers as spiritually salacious (265).[3] Building on Desmond's work, Linda Tomko examines how

[2] According to Desmond, "at that time in North America, Hindus were perceived as black. In one of the first performances, when a Hindu first entered carrying a tray of incense, an audience member jeered in [B]lack dialect, 'who wants de Waitah?'" ([1993] 2001], 266). Srinivasan points out that some of the dancers who were jeered at were actually Muslim or Buddhist, not Hindu. She also notes that the performers who supported her "solo" were acutely aware of the complex racial politics that entangled their performance—including both colonial British and homogenizing American conceptions of race and Orientalism (2012, 88-93).

[3] Although her focus was not on questioning the complexity of St. Denis's portrayal of Radha, Desmond uncritically accepts the portrayal of the goddess figure—both as

St. Denis's choreography helped negotiate gender constructions at a time when women were mostly relegated to the "separate sphere" (1999, 37). She emphasizes the importance of networks of female patronesses who helped facilitate St. Denis's career, and the tension between the common perception of the female body as sexual and to be seen, and St. Denis's intentional framing of her work as artistic, maternal, and spiritual (1999, 37). According to Tomko, "she produced "transcendence" as a second, complicated signification for female dancing; thus she fragmented the singularity of sexual meaning that had previously been obtained for dance" (2000, 69).[4] While St. Denis's impact on women's ability to be considered dancers has come to be widely accepted, many scholars still unquestioningly replicate Shelton's choice to position St. Denis's work within a Christian universalist framework. Janet Lynn Roseman, for example, claims St. Denis's entire career existed in the realm of Christian sacred dance and emphasizes her ability to use the performance of the sacred to transform the minds of both performers and audience members (2004). Roseman perpetuates the racial politics that position St. Denis's appropriations of goddesses from other religious traditions as

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characterized in other authors' depictions of St. Denis and in St. Denis's self-fashioning of the importance of her dance—instead of examining the history and cultural importance of Krishna's consort, Radha, in the context of Indian traditions. Therefore, even as she critiques and ruptures the Orientalist framework around St. Denis's work, Desmond's framing of Radha as a goddess "character" that St. Denis could "put on" in the dance does not fully reflect the depth of engagement or level of appropriation that St. Denis had with some Indian traditions.

[4] In her discussions of early developments in concert dance in the United States, Tomko relies on Susan Manning's investigation into the viewing practices of the general public. Manning discusses the impact Isadora Duncan's dancing had on her audience, including their ability to see the dance/athletic movements they were already aware with in her movements (2004). This legibility of the movements to Duncan's audiences also applied to St. Denis's audiences' understanding of many of her dance steps.

fundamentally Christian, and does not grapple with how those acts allowed her to assert her dominance as a white female over racialized others. This framing of St. Denis's work ignores the racial politics of her worldview and spiritual choreography in favor of a view of her as a universally approachable spiritual artist.

As demonstrated by Michelle Timmons Summers, Dance Studies' general refusal to analyze the term 'spiritual' when applied to modern dance erases the racial and cultural politics of the term and bolsters the supposition that modern dance is universal and is not tied to any specific religion. According to Summers, it is necessary to problematize "the perceived universality of modern dance, which allows it to be spiritual without naming itself as Christian, under the auspice of an American Protestant normativity that parades as universalism" (2014, 61). She follows scholars such as Tomko (2000), Desmond ([1993] 2001) and Srinivasan (2010) in arguing that St. Denis's turn to goddess figures from other cultures and philosophies allowed her to be both spiritual and sexual onstage, and extends their arguments to contend that doing so onstage enforced and challenged St. Denis's fundamentally Christian worldview, which was based on a body/soul divide that "is somehow only bridgeable through accessing the Other" (2014, 71). According to Summers, this bridging of the body/soul divide resulted in the incorporation into Christianity of techniques drawn from "other" religious and spiritual practices. I agree that St. Denis's turn to "oriental" dance forms allowed her access to a different understanding of the self, but think that it is necessary to problematize the idea that her

spirituality should be read only through its Christian core.[5] As explored in the Introduction, the divide in yoga was not between body and soul, but between awareness and the materiality of the universe. Her yoga studies therefore complicated her understanding of existence, even as her Christian worldview bolstered her Cartesian dualist perspective. I am therefore interested in this tension between the body and soul, and how accessing the Other allowed St. Denis to both bridge the corporeal/spiritual divide and reinforce its existence. The overlap between St. Denis's construction of concert dance as universal spiritual expression and Paramananda's teaching about universal spirituality is a key facet of this chapter.[6]

Priya Srinivasan explores St. Denis's work through the lens of originality, ownership, and authority, examining the development of her choreography, racial impact of her touring, and influence on understandings of 'Indian' as a racial signifier in relation to changes in immigration status for South Asian natives in the early 1900s (2010). She argues that, despite the constructed mythology of the cigarette poster[7] and St. Denis's

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[5] The universalist ideas about Christian spirituality that Summers discusses may have entered into Christianity through the influence of the universalism of the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda movement, with its claims that all religions are one, which shaped the thought of authors such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. This argument has also been explored by yoga scholar Stefanie Syman (2010) and religious studies scholar Catherine Albanese (2008).

[6] The 2014 *Race and Yoga* conference, "Yoga and Access: Questions of Inclusion," particularly Jaqueline Shea Murphy's keynote address, highlighted issues of universaism and access in relation to yoga.

[7] While on tour in Buffalo, NY for a production of *Madame DuBarry*, produced by David Belasco in 1904, St. Denis saw a cigarette poster for the brand Egyptian Deities. It depicted the goddess Isis seated on a throne in a temple. According to St. Denis, the moment was the impetus for her later solo career as a dancer.

statements about her dances being drawn from research at the New York Public Library, St. Denis must have relied on the performances by *nautch* dancers at Coney Island for many of her dance steps. She points out St. Denis's self-admitted reliance on South Asian men during the choreography and performance of *Radha*, *Nautch,* and *Incense*, and argues that St. Denis's status as a star soloist was enabled by her consumption of Indian male labor, which she accessed through the dancers that she collaborated with, toured with, and used in the background of her 'solos' to lend an air of authenticity to her suite of Indian dances (2010; 69, 83-102). Srinivasan looks at the ways that St. Denis staged Indian-ness for her predominantly white audiences, even as the Indian people whose culture she pilfered from were racially segregated, looked down upon, and eventually excluded from citizenship in and immigration to the United States.

Srinivasan's work informs my reading of St. Denis's relationship with Swami Paramananda, as I believe he forms the other side of the metaphorical coin describing her relationships with the South Asian men who served as her dance teachers, touring cast, and spiritual authorities. While some of the men discussed by Srinivasan were Columbia University students, cooks, and other laborers, the Swami, by the time their relationship began, was an internationally recognized spiritual authority. So, while Srinivasan's South Asian men were ignored in plain sight by most dance histories and St. Denis's own writing, the swami occupied a different space in St. Denis's dance making and spiritual life, as evidenced by her rapturous discussions of her encounters with him. Yet, Swami Paramananda shared the same racial designation as the cooks and law students, which complicates readings of his spiritual significance in her life. In the thought patterns of the

time, he was both her spiritual authority and racial inferior, which changes the implications of his tutelage both for St. Denis and for our understandings of the development of spirituality in concert dance.

St. Denis's history is also interesting in terms of how she positioned herself as an original artist and possessive individual. Dance scholar Anthea Kraut describes St. Denis's choice to preemptively copyright two of her works in 1905—*Radha* and *Egypta*—before either work was choreographed or performed (2016, 83-84). St. Denis's attempt to gain copyright protection was, according to Kraut, "a bid to secure and protect both economic and artistic capital….it would theoretically prevent others from capitalizing on her ideas. And too, it signaled her status as a possessive individual rather than a racialized, sexualized commodity" (84-85). Kraut builds on Srinivasan's exploration of the Indian men who authorized and contributed to St. Denis's choreography, arguing that her ability to position herself as an artistic genius was "an act of gendered resistance against a patriarchal system and an assertion of racial privilege within a system of white dominance" (90). This ability to position herself as the sole originator of unique artistic productions relied on her consumption of Indian male labor, and was different from Swami Paramananda's positioning at the time. While he was respected as a teacher and invited to lecture at Denishawn, he did not, to my knowledge, attempt to copyright or trademark his teaching or otherwise attempt to position himself as a possessive individual. In this way, St. Denis's use of Indian knowledge and movement practice in her artistic production worked to underscore her racial privilege.

Across the work of all of these authors, we see the development of a complex view of St. Denis's impact on modern dance, her personal politics, and her choreography: St. Denis explored the boundaries between spirituality and sensuality through playing "other" onstage, which allowed her to claim stage space for herself as a "solo" artist; however, she did so at the expense of the Indian individuals who taught her, choreographed with her, and authorized her performances. Analyzing her yogic practices allows me to rupture the (increasingly contested) trend in dance studies to position St. Denis as an individual genius who uniquely impacted the development of concert dance through her innovative appropriations, and instead to see her as one more person working within a global colonialist framework that created particular relationships between Indian yogis and swamis, and choreographers working in the United States. Although many authors mention yoga and Indian philosophy in their list of traditions that St. Denis appropriated from, a specific investigation into how those investigations impacted her understanding of herself and her spirituality is necessary in order to disrupt the tendency to see St. Denis's orientalist dances as the putting on of characters over her inherent Christianity. St. Denis's Christianity was, like her modern dance, already infused with "other" practices drawn from Indic thought. I argue that the tendency to frame St. Denis's spiritual investigations through a predominantly Christian framework does a disservice to the complexity of her perspective and continues the erasure of early influences of Vedanta and yoga on concert dance in the U.S.

It is also necessary for this chapter to look at St. Denis's impact on the development of modern dance in the United States. Most dance scholars position

Denishawn at a place close to the origins of concert dance in the United States due to the institution's impact on developments in dance during the 1930s and 1940s, when Denishawn students Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman initiated the movement that was eventually dubbed modern dance. However, unlike Brenda Dixon Gottschild's methods in searching for the Africanist presence in American arts,[8] or Priya Srinivasan's focus on how St. Denis might have learned skilled renditions of mudras from performers working in the *devadasi*[9] traditions, I am also looking for the transfer of philosophy and ways of being, breathing, and conceptualizing existence. I turn to St. Denis's autobiography, archives, and the cornucopia of writing about her career to trace the influences of yoga on her thoughts, movements, and teachings. Her archives are a means of investigation not just into the traces left behind by dances or reproductions of their content, but also are evidence of the philosophy behind and inside of the dancing. Rather than only looking for bodies moving in what seem to me to be yogic ways, I also use this chapter to look for people conceptualizing the self, and the relationship between the self and the universe, in yogic ways. I question how those yogic ways of being can be seen alongside more common arguments about St. Denis's inherent Christianity, and

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[8] Gottschild argues that Africanist aesthetics have significantly impacted the development of white high art from modern dance to cubism, but the traces of those influences have been "invisibilized" to privilege the individual genius of the white artists. She works to bring those influences to the forefront as a political statement on the primacy of Africanist aesthetics in the development of 'American' arts. See *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1996).

[9] A dancer dedicated to a certain temple who entered into a marriage contract with the god of that temple. She would often perform in temple festivities, and her dances were part of the tradition that led to the development of Bharatanatyam dance. See Soneji 2012.

explore the impact of her explorations into yoga and Vedanta on her self-concept, performance, and teaching. What does seeing the yoga within her Christian worldview mean for our understanding of the spirituality of modern dance?

The first section of this chapter provides an analysis of St. Denis's investigations into yoga and Advaita Vedanta philosophies, which allows me to demonstrate that these two disciplines formed a fundamental part of her spirituality. This layers onto the 'St. Denis was fundamentally Christian" argument to create a more complex view of her religiosity as rooted in Christianity, but—as with many other choreographers and artists working in the early 1900s—inherently appropriative of non-Western conceptions of the body and the self. It is important to emphasize the impact of yoga on St. Denis's definition of spirituality in order to continue the process of re-visibilizing the South Asian influences on her understanding of body, self, and yogic spirituality.

The second section looks at the dances by St. Denis and Shawn that explicitly involved yoga in order to see the ways that the performance of yoga onstage allowed St. Denis to access an 'other' that was a recognizable trope (via turn of the twentieth century popular imaginations of the yogi as a mystic, fakir, etc.), while also re-working that trope through her own interpretation of spirituality and understanding of the divine. I draw connections between the philosophies that she studied and the yogis that she danced as to tease out links between the simultaneous performances of yoga, yogic spirituality, and dance, and their impact on audience's understandings of the purpose of stage dance.

The last section of this chapter examines the ways yoga was incorporated into training at Denishawn, and looks particularly at St. Denis's yoga meditation classes. I

argue that St. Denis's use of yoga and Indian philosophy was a part of her understanding of the divine, which was then incorporated into Denishawn classwork and performances, and which would have impacted both student's and audience's conceptions of the possibility of dancing the divine.

Swamis and Denishawn

By inviting Swami Paramananda to lecture at Denishawn, St. Denis exposed her students to a wealth of information on the neo-Vedanta tradition of Hindu philosophy. In order to fully understand the radical impact of the lecture, it is necessary to contextualize the other sorts of yoga available at the time and its relationship to the Ramakrishna/ Vivekananda lineage of Vedanta Societies.

According to religious historian Carl T. Jackson, the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda tradition was spreading throughout the major cities of the United States in the 1910s and 1920s, and was at its prime in Southern California under the leadership of Swami Paramananda during that time (1994; 50, 61-65). The societies were established by Swami Vivekananda and were fiercely anti-*hatha* in their approach to yoga.[10] Vivekananda's influential work, *Raja Yoga* (1896), highlighted the use of devotional

[10] Vivekananda rose to fame after an impactful speech at the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions and was himself a disciple of Ramakrishna, the mystic and devotee of the goddess Kali. According to yoga scholar David Gordon White, "While Vivekananda's influence on present-day understandings of yoga theory is incalculable, his disdain for the means and ends of *hatha yoga* practice were such that that form of yoga—the principal traditional source of modern postural yoga was slow to be embraced by the modern world" (2012, 21). Catherine Albanese supports Gordon White's claim for Vivekananda's dislike for postural yoga practice. According to Vivekananda, *hatha* yoga aimed entirely at making the body "'very strong.' 'We have nothing to do with it here,' … 'because its practices are very difficult, and cannot be learned in a day, and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth.'" (Vivekananda quoted in Albanese 2008, 357).

meditation as central to the attainment of *samadhi*.[11] Instead of focusing on the use of physical postures as a means to reach liberation, students in the Ramakrishna/ Vivekananda tradition emphasized the use of *bakhti* (devotion) in the attainment of union with the divine.[12] Swami Paramananda's choice to start his lecture at Denishawn with *pranayama* and meditation is therefore very much in line with the teachings of his lineage. Beyond his dislike of *hatha* yoga, Swami Vivekananda is famous for his message that "We [Hindus] believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true."[13] Rather than asking yoga practitioners to abandon their families, homes, jobs, and possessions, his message afforded listeners the room to combine the worship of the Christian god with a comfortable life, and select aspects of Hindu-derived religious practices. He preached a form of universal acceptance that would have been welcome to many listeners.[14] The interaction between Vivekananda's work and that of

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[11] *Samadhi* is often defined as the stilling of the mind, as single-pointed awareness, or as meditative absorption between the subject and the object of awareness.

[12] Elizabeth DeMichelis outlines the influence of the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda on yoga in the Western world and discusses the interrelations between the neo-Vedanta movement and the rise of Indian nationalism (2004).

[13] Vivekananda's lecture at the World's Parliament of Religions, September 11, 1893. Full text of the lecture can be found online, and is available here https://www.ramakrishna.org/chcgfull.htm.

[14] According to yoga ethnographer Sarah Strauss, "Vivekananda and Sivananda's versions of yoga… provide a way to navigate modernity's dangerous waters without succumbing to the undertow of materialist excess" (Strauss 2004, 31). Strauss also suggests that the four-fold definition of yoga set forth by Vivekananda has been used by many modern yoga practitioners to delimit the boundaries of yoga, and to make *bhakti* yoga (devotion), *karma* yoga (service), *raja* yoga (study), and *jñana* yoga (knowledge) more central or authentic than other forms of yoga. "In many contemporary treatments of the subject, this core appears as Vivekananda's four-fold set of *bhakti* yoga, *karma* yoga, *raja* yoga, and *jñana* yoga. The various other names and forms of yoga – *kundalini*,

Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy, Theosophy leader Helena Blavatsky, and the adherents of Swedenborgianism[15] and various other forms of esotericism popular in the United States during the early 1900s, created space for the widely appropriative and combinative version of religiosity, as well as the idea of the "enlightened body-self,"[16] that can be seen in St. Denis's written and danced work (Albanese 2008, 372). According to her biographer, Suzanne Shelton, "The genealogy of St. Denis's particular brand of mysticism can be traced through American Transcendentalism to the Swedish mysticism of her parents' Englewood colony, to her explorations of Christian Science, and ultimately, Vedanta, the spiritual and philosophical background of Hinduism" (1990, 93).

St. Denis's combinative approach to religiosity can be seen in the excerpt quoted at the beginning of the chapter describing her meeting with Swami Paramananda, when St. Denis translates the word *aum* as 'God.' While *aum* can be used as a mantra to signify the name of god, it is also often used in Sanskritic traditions as the beginning or end of a

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mantra, *hatha*, *laya*, and so on – are thought to be somehow less central or authentic than these four…. Vivekananda's characterization of yoga has become so entrenched that people today often assume that it represents the 'original' or 'true' backbone of yoga, out of which all of the other paths of yoga emerged" (Strauss 2005, 35). Vivekananda's focus on the four paths of yoga delineated in *Raja Yoga* instead of yogic forms involving the movement of spiritual energy through the body, the repetition of sacred phrases, the movement of the body, or the meditation on internal energy centers, was carried on by the swamis of his tradition, and was undoubtedly influential in St. Denis's study of yoga.

[15]Also known as the "New Church," this denomination was founded by the Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Adherents believe in the worship of God in one person, Jesus Christ, and hold that all Christians who believe in Jesus Christ as their savior and obey his commandments is a part of the New Church movement.

[16] See Catherine Albanese's exploration of the link between the mind and the body in new metaphysical understandings of the world in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (2008, 372).

mantra or prayer, or to signify the primordial sound of the beginning of the universe. By translating *aum* as "God," St. Denis takes a word that might have been unfamiliar to many readers and reframes it in a safely Christian worldview. This is in keeping with the neo-Vedanta idea that all gods are one god and that the student need not abandon their previous worldview or deities, but also maintains the Christian perspective that frames all gods as the one true (Christian) God. This double meaning of God (from her perspective) and god (from the Swami's neo-Vedanta perspective) speaks to the importance of context in interpreting a single moment. Finally, St. Denis's comment at the end of the narrative— "I do not think any of them ever forgot the effect of that afternoon"— demonstrates that the means through which the Swami's message was conveyed was perhaps more important to St. Denis and her students than the actual content of his lecture (1939, 199).

The 1916 invited lecture was not St. Denis's only interaction with teachers in the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda lineage. She speaks very fondly of her interactions with Swami Nikhilananda—another teacher in the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda lineage—in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, including dinners with him, Swami Paramananda, and other members of New York's alternative spirituality milieu (1939, 320-321).[17] St. Denis

[17] According to St. Denis, Nikhilananda is "one of those modern monks and proselytes of a radiant life. Occasionally he brought his group together at a dinner, and speakers of various philosophic trends met in complete harmony. One evening, I remember, found Claude Bragdon, Swami Paramananda, Dan Dopal Mukerji, the author of that prose-poem 'My Brother's Face'; Das Gupta, who steered an unerring course for his Fellowship of Faiths over troubled seas and into safe harbors every year; Hazel Krans; a small group from Denishawn; and myself, very pleased to be among the philosophers. To me the Swami harmonized in his own being and in his simple and lucid explanations, the deep,

also reminiscences over an earlier meeting with Paramananda in 1909, when she and a friend ate luncheon with him in a cottage outside of London where he was holding classes for students of Hindu philosophy. According to St. Denis,

> I had met a number of fake Yogis, trading upon women's leisure and curiosity. One or two of the younger intellectuals had crossed my path, but until now I had not met what Tantine calls 'an authentic Swami,' one whose evident sincerity of purpose and luminosity of mind revealed itself at once. This meeting with him was to prove the beginning of a liberal spiritual education, which later included friendships with many of those disciples of the great Ramakrishna who are bringing out into the world the unsullied truths of the ancient Hindu scriptures. (1939, 127-128)

St. Denis's tone in this excerpt is quite reverent, for example, she discusses Paramananda's "sincerity of purpose and luminosity of mind" and references the "unsullied truths of the ancient Hindu scriptures." Yet, claiming that Paramananda is not a "fake yogi" places her in a position of power or authority over his knowledge of "ancient Hindu scripture." There is also further evidence that her encounters with swamis were not her only, or even her most influential means of exposure to Indic philosophies.

In her autobiography, St. Denis discusses with reverence her first encounter with Ramakrishna's teachings through Vivekananda's book *My Master*, and is delighted to be able to visit his grave on her company's tour of India in the 1920s: "My soul had fed on that picture of this god-intoxicated man, whose spirit has penetrated to the far ends of the earth! And now, after all these years, I was coming to the tomb of Ramakrishna, and to the place where his monks meditate and send forth their spiritual beauty to the rest of the

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underlying spirit of that enduring Hindu philosophy which regards the being of man as sustained by and functioning within the great embrace of Brahma" (St. Denis 320-321).

world" (1939, 297). This sort of ecstatic and demonstrative spirituality is sprinkled throughout St. Denis's autobiography, and reveals her passion for the Vedanta tradition.

This enthusiasm for Vedantic spirituality is also supported by a list of the books that she habitually took with her on vaudeville tours in the 1920s, which demonstrates their importance to her artistic and spiritual life:

> I permitted myself to be lifted on the visions and faiths of other and deeper souls than mine. On these long train journeys, in hotels, in dressing rooms, they were all with me the Bible, *Science and Health*, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, the Bhagavadgita, *The Light of Asia*, the blessed Emerson, and Oupensky's wonderful *Tertium Organum*, so lucidly translated by Claude Bragdon. They fed not only my spiritual, but my aesthetic life—that art life which produced children of the brain rather than children of the body, and was forever at cross purposes with the so-called normal life. (St. Denis 1939, 306)

In emphasizing the importance of this diverse set of books in birthing her "children of the brain," St. Denis herself refutes the idea that her understanding of dancing the divine was solely Christian. The UCLA Ruth St. Denis archive holds several boxes containing books from St. Denis's personal library. Most of these books are dog-eared and have notes in the margins, and some also have notes on the end-paper written in St. Denis's erratic cursive. In the notes, she contemplates and questions the relationship between the divine and the individual, the meaning of worship, and the organization of the world. There are many books in the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda tradition of neo-Vedanta, books on *Advaita Vedanta*,[18] foundational texts on yoga, books on Christianity that rely on ideas drawn from various schools of Hindu philosophy, and theatrical and fictional works that

[18] A school of Hindu philosophy drawing on the teachings of Adi Shankara, who argued for the inherent non-dualism of atman (the true self, consciousness) and Brahman (highest reality, pure consciousness). Followers seek liberation by attaining knowledge of this non-duality.

draw on a non-dualistic understanding of reality.[19] These texts indicate St. Denis's in-depth engagement with the scriptures of the Vedanta tradition, and also include interpretations of those scriptures written by scholars working in both India and the United States. The texts span the breadth of St. Denis's life, indicating that she continued to purchase and rely on books on the Advaita Vedanta tradition even after the end of the Denishawn school and company. Her ongoing interest in and use of such books provides evidence for my argument that, alongside her Christian upbringing and ongoing Christian worldview, her interest in Indian philosophy was integral to her overall perspective on life and choreographic output.

St. Denis's personal library also included other books indicating a general interest in philosophers, mystics, spiritual leaders, and religion.[20] The presence of these books in her library supports the long-held position that her investigation of Indic thought coexisted with her Christianity. The complexity of St. Denis's Christianity is in line with

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[19] Selected works on Vedanta and yoga include a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *With the Swamis in America* by a Western disciple, Swami Nikhilananda's translation of the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, a translation of Paul Deussen's *Outline of the Vedanta System of Philosophy According to Shankara*, Swami Vimuktananda's translation of *Aparokshānubhuti, or, Self-realization of Sri Sankaracharya*, Swami Yogananda's seminal *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Christopher Isherwood's *Vedanta and the West*, Aldous Huxley's study of mysticism and Vedanta *The Perennial Philosophy*, George S. Arundale's *Lotus Fire: A Study in Symbolic Yoga*. She also possessed a plethora of books written by Transcendentalists and Theosophists.

[20] Her books also include texts on Buddhism by Ananda Coomaraswamy, several books by Indian poet and playwright Rabindranath Tagore, Russian mystic P.D. Oupensky's *A New Model of the Universe* and *Tertium Organum*, the complete writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was himself influenced by Indian philosophy, many books by Mary Baker Eddy on Christian Science, several copies of the Bible and hymnals, books on Episcopalianism, and books detailing the dances and other arts of China, Japan, and Egypt.

the general acquisitive tendencies of Christianity at that time, and yet not examining the particularities of how her yogic investigations impacted her choreography and characterization in her dances would do a disservice to her research. While St. Denis was perhaps not interested in some of the more austere devotions of a yogic path, and probably framed her world more around Christian conceptions of divinity in the form of an omnipotent entity than the quest to attain liberation from rebirth through realization of the oneness of the Self and pure consciousness, the fact that she carried with her and continually referenced such a diverse group of books speaks to her individual spiritual seeking as well as the combinative nexus of western orientalism, perennial philosophy (particularly as embraced by the Transcendentalists), and the development of neo-Vedanta on a global scale.[21]

The books St. Denis studied were more important to her understanding of Asia than her actual time on tour in India, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In her autobiography, she very clearly prefers the India of her imagination to the poverty and unrest she encountered while on tour in 1925 and 1926: "the India I had adored since my first reading of the Light of Asia no longer existed….To me, India had meant the highest flights into the realms of thought that the human race had attained; and in India I was shown a mile and a half of lepers on a road leading to a festival! (1939, 302). St. Denis privileged position allowed her to engage with India as a concept rather than the varied actuality of existence in colonized India. Furthermore, although she had access to plenty

[21] See de Michelis 2004 for a detailed investigation of the connections between the development of the Brahmo Samaj, Indian nationalism, and the early interests of Swami Vivekananda.

of Indian dancers and swamis and, as discussed by Srinivasan, employed them to act as choreographers or performers during her early "solo" career, St. Denis's positionality and orientalism allowed her to freely combine influences from throughout the non-Western world allowed her to promulgate the India of her imagination rather than the India of her eventual experience (Srinivasan 2010, 67-102). Therefore, while her relationships with Swami Paramananda and Swami Nikhilandanda were indubitably influential, they can be contrasted with her general disengagement from other aspects of life in India.

St. Denis's voracious reading gave her access to yoga as one of many modalities through which she could contemplate and create the divine in dance. Her research and interactions with Swamis taught her to see all gods as one, to search for the divine in ordinary experience, and to use dance as both a means of worship and as a way to present representations of transcendent experiences onstage. What's more, St. Denis's interactions with swamis in the Vedanta tradition taught her to define yoga as breath control, meditation, and absorption with the divine, but not necessarily as *asana*. So, if we look for the influences of yoga on her choreography, what exactly will we see?

Yogis on Stage: Dancing the Divine in *The Yogi* and *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*

St. Denis presented yogis onstage in two dances: her solo *The Yogi* (1908), and in a scene in the 1916 production *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India* that she created with her husband, Ted Shawn. While works from this time have been written about before, discussions of St. Denis's Indian-inspired solos from the early stages of her career usually focus on the sensual *Radha* or the whirling *Nautch*, while mentions of *A*

Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India usually focus on the famous *Tillers of the Soil* duet from the "Egypt" section. I shift instead to the dances involving the portrayal of yogis to illuminate how St. Denis's and Shawn's portrayals of spirituality gave them room to explore onstage their understandings of the purpose of human life and to grapple with the perceived divide between body and spirit, sensuality and spirituality.

As discussed in the previous section, St. Denis spent most of her time studying Indian philosophy through textual analysis and meeting with swamis in the American Vedanta tradition, and so her interpretation of what it was to be a yogi bears those influences more so than those of the nascent form of yoga as physical culture or the classical school of Indian philosophy that go by the same name.[22] Both of her yogic dances focus on the attainment of *samadhi* (which she defined as superconsciousness), the austerity of the renunciant's lifestyle, and the use of seated meditation to achieve yogic states. Unlike the emphases in other versions of yoga, St. Denis was more interested in bodily control as a means to attain a spiritually transcendent illumination, not a healthy body and excellent physique.[23] She speaks of her dancer's awareness of

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[22] See Alter (2004, 73-108) and Singleton (2010, 113-210) for information on the development of Modern Postural Yoga and its relationship to ideas of bodily improvement through exercise. See Larson (2008), White (2014), and Edwin Bryant's translation of the *Yoga Sutra* (2009) for more on yoga as a dualistic school of philosophy involving the distinction between *purusha* (consciousness) and *prakriti* (matter) as two separate realities.

[23] St. Denis's position as a white female American dancer means that her understanding of the meaning of her movements would be different from the male yogis in India, Europe, or the United States, or the strongman performers of the turn of the twentieth century. While some strongman performers of the early 1900s also went on tour with their performances—including Eugen Sandow's feats of strength on vaudeville stages, Bernarr MacFadden's presentation on body building in lecture halls, and Yogi Bava

bodily control leading to her interest in yoga, and her desire to use a display of bodily control to demonstrate onstage the heightened consciousness that can be found through union with the divine.

In Ted Shawn's pictorial ode to St. Denis's career, a picture of St. Denis in a pose from *The Yogi* is captioned, "The East Indian prince who renounced earthly things and retired to the forest to meditate, where he attained Samadhi (complete spiritual peace)" (Shawn 1920b, 55). The picture shows St. Denis standing in profile facing the left side of the frame. She wears a knee-length wrap around her hips, a top that blends with the tone of her flesh and makes her appear semi-nude, and several long string of prayer beads (*mala*s) around her neck (See Figure 1.1). *The Yogi* premiered in Vienna on Feb. 9, 1908 and was incorporated into a program with four other of St. Denis's Indian-themed solos—*The Spirit of Incense, The Cobras, The Nautch,* and *The Mystic Dance of the Five Senses (Radha*). Together, the suite was billed as *The Five East Indian Dances* (Schlundt 1962, 12). *The Yogi* was performed regularly until 1914, when Ted Shawn joined St.

Lachman Dass performance of forty-eight yoga postures as a sideshow at the Westminster Aquarium in London—their shows were usually framed around the admiration and display of their physique and the techniques used to obtain it, not the artistic representation of ecstatic experiences. See Michael Anton Budd (1997), David Waller (2011), and Mark Adams (2010). Richard Dyer (1997) asserts a link between this type of bodybuilding and the assertion of white masculinity through the tropes of Christian effort and ideas of the Übermensch, while Mark Singleton argues that a turn to Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theories of the inheritability of physical traits acquired through bodily training shaped the genesis of modern postural yoga and other forms of bodily training (See Singleton 2007).

Denis on tour and St. Denis's repertoire expanded to include more ensemble work.[24]

There is also indication that St. Denis continued to teach the solo until 1923.[25]

Figure 1.1 Ruth St. Denis in *The Yogi*. Note the rudraksha mala beads around her neck, the blouse which gives the appearance of semi-nudity, the brownface body paint, and her cross-legged seat. Photograph by Veritas circa 1906, courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library.

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[24] St. Denis taught *The Yogi* to Margaret Severn in the Denishawn summer course of 1915 (St. Denis 1939, 174-5). Severn may have given performances of the solo. She went on to dance with the Greenwich Village Follies.

[25] A dance titled yogi was being taught to intermediate Denishawn students in New York in 1923, and to advanced students at Mariarden in 1923. Ruth St. Denis Papers, ca. 1915-1958, folder 376. Dance Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

The music was by German composer Walter Meyrowitz. According to St. Denis, "He arranged some Indian airs, which were played very hauntingly by a cello when, towards the end of the plastique, I enter into Samadhi, that state of superconsciousness, to the sound of voices singing Yogi songs to Shiva" (St. Denis 1939, 98). Despite her concern that *The Yogi* might be too impenetrable to be appreciated, the dance was well-received and celebrated as capable of articulating a connection to the divine: "It requires the most rigid control…for there are but a few gestures and these must have telling effect" (Shelton 1990, 81; St. Denis 1939, 135-136).

The Yogi asked audiences to watch the simple and austere representation of an individual's experience of *samadhi*, danced with minimal recognizable dance steps or tricks, but endowed with St. Denis's remarkable ability to provide characterization through the subtlest of gestures. Even as St. Denis's minimal costuming and eroticized body allowed male viewers to sexualize her dancing, the movement techniques used in her dancing allowed her entire audience to consider her dancing through the lens of expressive subjectivity that would have been familiar due to their probable knowledge of Delsartian methods for bodily expression.

In terms of what St. Denis actually did in the dance, the dance was very slow and very still. According to Shelton,

> The curtain rose on an Indian forest. At center stage in a shaft of light lay a tiger-skin rug, and from the surrounding gloom glided a holy man in rags. He circled the rug and, depositing his bowl, sank into the cross-legged posture of meditation. Slowly he began a rhythmic rise and fall of breath. His arms extended from the torso to form a cross until his entire body folded forward, head resting between crossed ankles, hands before him on the ground. A breathless pause. In the distance, the thin, high voice of a yogi chanted an invocation to Shiva. The holy man, listening, slowly rose to full height until he stood erect. At the cry "Shiva!"

> one arm staggered overhead, then another, and the yogi strode into the darkness, his arms upstretched to eternity. (1990, 80-81)

This interpretation of the dance is both corroborated and contested by a recording of an elderly St. Denis performing *The Yogi* in the 1956, which is on file at the New York Public Library.[26]

In that video, St. Denis enters the stage alone, however, instead of carrying a begging bowl, "he" has a simplified bina strapped across "his" back.[27] St. Denis walks circularly around the stage, and stops downstage right. She flourishes her hand in front of her face repeatedly, as if rapidly wafting a scent towards her nose, and then reaches dramatically overhead, emphatically extending her arm. She repeats the gesture sequence using her other arm, and then circles the stage once more before finding a cross-legged seat on the tiger skin placed center stage. With her eyes closed, St. Denis then repeats a gesture motif that can be seen in many other Denishawn yoga references, including the yoga meditation class captured in the "[Denishawn Dance Film]"[28] and the pictures of St. Denis leading "yogi meditation" classes which will be discussed in Section Three of this chapter. In this quiet sequence, St. Denis has her hands clasped in her lap, and clearly and emphatically raises her hand vertically over her head, sweeps it out to the side parallel to the floor, and then quickly draws her flexed hand to touch the opposite shoulder. She stretches her arm out directly to the side once again, maintaining the flexion in her palm

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[26] https://catalog.nypl.org/record=b12144973~S1

[27] In both St. Denis's and Shelton's descriptions of the dance, St. Denis-as-*The Yogi* is referred to as a "he." This implies that the gendering of the dance is so inherently male that there is no space for St. Denis to perform *The Yogi* as a woman.

[28] http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/d08ab170-f875-0130-dc17-3c075448cc4b

and articulation of her fingers, and then quickly returns that hand to her lap once more. She then repeats the gesture sequence using her other arm. To conclude the dance, St. Denis dramatically opens her eyes with a start, rises from the floor, and picks up her bina. She places it across her shoulders once more, and then, with a repeated, almost vibrating, ascending hand gesture indicating the drama of the moment, cries out "Shiva, Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!" before turning in a circle, seeing a desired goal on the horizon, and walking offstage in that direction.

For St. Denis, *The Yogi* was about an individual seeking complete spiritual peace, and in her autobiography, she describes it as

> a natural flowering of my study of Yoga. This complex and highly developed concentration upon the development of the human personality in terms of spiritual and physical discipline had appealed to me strongly. As a dancer, intensely aware of the dominion which comes from the sense of bodily control, I was stirred to find that India had indeed given profound thought to this question. Perhaps in this dance of the *Yogi*, more than in *Radha* or any other I had ever done, is shown my inescapable necessity to manifest in outward form that state of consciousness which has attained a certain intensity of illumination. This, seemingly, is my use to life. (1939, 97-98)

St. Denis's conception of the goals of yoga are concerned with the development of the individual human personality as well as with attainment of bodily control. Perhaps this interest in bodily control explains St. Denis's use of repeated precise arm gestures in her moment of meditative absorption onstage? The answer to that question can only be speculative, yet, it is clear that St. Denis created *The Yogi* to demonstrate outwardly her desire for a higher plane of consciousness, and to use her dancing transmit to her audience as much of that desire as possible.

While the framing of the dance in St. Denis's writing, Shelton's biography, and Shawn's panegyric very clearly states that she displays the attainment of *samadhi* onstage, the gestural elements of the dance do not necessarily make that experience legible. The conclusion of the dance with the yogi walking offstage with "his" arms reaching up to the sky parallels Summers' argument about the "container theory" of expression seen in St. Denis's work, where the body becomes a tool for the expression of the soul, and the body's upward reaching is used as a metaphor for the soul reaching upwards toward a heavenly God.[29] In this instance, St. Denis's reading of Yogic philosophies and tutelage with Swami Paramananda come into tension with her Christian upbringing. Instead of the inward focus, asceticism, and turn away from sensory experience as tools leading to the attainment of meditative absorption, St. Denis's yogi character opens his eyes after experiencing *samadhi*, gestures upward while chanting ecstatically to Shiva, and then walks offstage. Although the character in *The Yogi* engages in seated meditation and *pranayama* as a means of approaching *samadhi*, one possible reading of the actual attainment of union with the divine is through Christian terms. St. Denis's body performs its spirituality through gestures, and reaches upwards towards the divine.

[29] Summers suggests that "St. Denis replicates this emotive expressive theory that assumes it is the *body* that is consistently asked to serve as the expressive capacity for the materialization of a soul. I call this conception of dance the container theory of the body. The container theory of the body operates on a Christian conception of the Divine residing either above and/or within – thus the spirituality either exudes from an interior soul (expression) or is directed from that interiority toward a heavenly God (communication)" (2014, 71).

Although St. Denis's raised arms can be read as strictly Christian, they can also be seen in relation to the numerous versions of yoga that also rely on uplifted arms as a physical austerity or form of asceticism.[30] Like the dual meanings of Swami Paramananda's utterance of "*aum*" in the opening anecdote of this chapter, one's reading of the meaning of *The Yogi* is contingent on one's cultural context. This tension between yogic and Christian understandings of the relationship between the self and the divine, and the meaning of lifting one's arms overhead, is central to the message of *The Yogi*. Nonetheless, St. Denis's ecstatic experience in *The Yogi* is more about the performance of the attainment of *samadhi* than it is about the attainment of *samadhi* or the rigorous regime of meditation, *pranayama*, and exercise that are generally used to attain that state.

By depicting the attainment of *samadhi* onstage, St. Denis positioned herself in the minds of her audience not as an actual yogi, but as an individual with elite access to exotic knowledge of the divine. The dance represented an experience which St. Denis had certainly read about, but might or might not have actually experienced. What's more, *samadhi* is not usually considered something to be performed for an audience, but rather something deeply personal yet transcendent that often can experienced or attained only fleetingly. St. Denis was not onstage to *be* a yogi, but to represent or depict one in an artistic way. Her success at portraying a yogi is in tension with her failure to attain or demonstrate the experience of *samadhi*, and this heretofore unmarked absorption of the signifiers of yoga into concert dance has had enduringly pervasive effects.

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[30] See, for example, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the numerous fakirs and ascetics who lifted their arms overhead for years on end, resulting in images of Indian ascetics as thin men with upraised arms.

The dancing in *The Yogi* was quite different from the dancing in the more famous *Radha*: instead of a whirling delirium of the senses, *The Yogi* was a gestural and meditative dance that relied more on walking and sitting than on impressive turns. Nonetheless, the dances were similar in that the costumes for both played with the boundaries of propriety, and the music used Euro-American motifs and instrumentation to evoke an Indian atmosphere. The ideas about femininity, access to stage space, and the tension between sensuality and spirituality discussed by most authors writing about St. Denis also apply to *The Yogi*. As in her use of Radha as a character in the creation of *Radha*, St. Denis explored the persona of the yogi for the sake of making a dance, and crafted her representation of yogis to suit her desire to present transcendence onstage. Both dances relied on the portrayal of characters drawn as much from St. Denis's imagination as her encounters at the 1904 Coney Island show *Durbar of Delhi,* her meetings with swamis in the Ramakrishna/Vivekananda tradition and students at Columbia University, or her reading of Indian books (Srinivasan 2010, 69; St. Denis 1939, 127, 198, 302).

It is also important to note the similarities between St. Denis's character in *The Yogi* and historical descriptions of yogis. Shelton's description depicts St. Denis as a male renunciant meditating and performing an ecstatic chant to Shiva, the god of yogis, of destruction, of transformation, and the lord of the dance in the Hindu tradition (St. Denis 1939, 107). Her portrayal highlights the parallel between St. Denis's staging of *The Yogi* and the accouterments of the yogi described in various Hindu scriptures some 2000

years before St. Denis's dance.[31] The rags, the tiger-skin rug, the begging bowl and the discipline of the self all form key components of Hindu asceticism and are represented in *The Yogi*. In St. Denis's rendition, a yogi also seems to have been identifiable by his cross-legged seat, his meditation, his breathing, his gestures, and his inscrutable motivations. Her calculated use of these accoutrements of the daily life of the yogi indicate that St. Denis was invested in creating as much of an illusion of accuracy as possible in her rendition of her yogi character. Yet, her yogi did not necessarily have much to do with the actual practitioners of yogic meditation she studied with and toured with. By using historical referents to yogic practices and placing her yogi alone in a forest, St. Denis continued the separation of the yogi of her imagination (and Indic imaginations of Shiva) from the modern development of yogis living in the public sphere, including teachers such as Swami Paramananda and yogis living, practicing, and teaching in India.

Despite the disjunction between St. Denis's representations of *samadhi* onstage and contemporary yogic practices, the dance was quite popular on the vaudeville circuits on which it toured. According to Shelton, the dance was "far from banal," critical consensus positioned it as "'*highest* art," and a commentator at the time, novelist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, wrote that *The Yogi* was "the most beautiful, intense thing I've seen in my life" (Shelton 1990, 81). During the six years when *The Yogi* existed in St. Denis's

[31] *Bhagavad Gita* verses 6.11-12 read: "He should fix for himself / A firm seat in a pure place, / Neither too high nor too low, / Covered in cloth, deerskin, or grass. // He should focus his mind and restrain / The activity of his thought and senses; / Sitting on that seat, he should practice / Discipline for the purification of the self" (Stoller Miller 1986, 64). See also the *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads* and the *Manusmriti*.

solo repertoire, the dance used stillness, breath control, and discipline to expose her audience to a representation of transcendent 'otherness,' while making her dehistoricized version of the figure of the yogi familiar outside of other popular tropes of the yogi as a contorted performer, member of a militaristic sect, or outcast beggar.[32] By representing a yogi onstage, St. Denis was able to take a transcendent but individual experience, relate it to other representations of yogis in the popular imagination as well as Christian conceptions of the divine, and place it onstage for public consumption as spiritual yet potentially erotic high art.

Although *The Yogi* mostly disappeared from St. Denis's performance repertoire by 1914, she almost immediately developed another dance about yogis. The scene involving yogis in *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India* (1916) takes the form of an allegorical story about the dangers of feminine excess, the need for spiritual purification, and the liberation that can be found through following the path of yoga. According to the synopsis of the *Pageant* included in Ted Shawn's *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet*, St. Denis and Shawn first appear in the "India" section as a hunter and his wife. The hunter dies saving a friend from a tiger, and the hunter's wife commits *sati* on his funeral pyre.[33] They are both reincarnated: him, as a yogi in a bazaar, and her as a wealthy, frivolous, and famous beauty who eventually visits his marketplace with her

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[32] See Anya Pokazanyeva Foxen's *Biography of a Yogi: Paramahansa Yogananda and the Origins of Modern Yoga*, in production at Oxford University Press.

[33] The ritual suicide of a wife on her husband's funeral pyre. The practice was outlawed by the British in 1829, but persisted.

retinue. He sits cross-legged in meditation and, although she attempts to add him to her list of conquests, he is not impacted. Instead, he suddenly recognizes her as his wife from a previous incarnation and notices her desire for real peace. He takes her face into his hands and convinces her to renounce her superficial life; she sends her retinue away and "prostrates herself in the agony of the Spirit warring with the Flesh. Then comes the Yogi's song of peace, and around her neck he places the black beads of Yoga. As she arises he points upward, and there comes to her a vision of the peace and beauty of the Himalayas—typifying the attainment of Samadhi" (Shawn 1920a, 74). To my knowledge, no video recording exists of this section of the work, yet, as evidenced by Shawn's description of the dance, it provides fertile ground to explore some of the philosophical ideas that St. Denis and Shawn were grappling with during the time when Paramananda was lecturing at Denishawn.

The climactic moment of the dance centers on the battle of the "Spirit warring with the Flesh," which is a theme in much of St. Denis's work on Eastern subjects, and—as in the attainment of *samadhi* in *The Yogi*—relies on both Christian and yogic understandings of bodily impurity. The romantic drama of the characters is also in line with many of St. Denis's other characters, including *Radha*, and *Kwan Yin*, which rely on portrayals of the conflict between sensuality and spirituality; her autobiography details many instances in which St. Denis's concern with spiritual purity and chastity prevented her from entering, continuing, or escalating a romantic relationship (1939). Also, and despite the fact that many disciplines of yoga use physical postures to control the body as a means of stilling the mind, the implications of casting the search for *samadhi* as a battle

of the Spirit warring with Flesh are complicated from a yogic standpoint. Instead of the implicit Cartesian dualism of most of Christianity that would view the body as a container for the soul, where the soul must attain a victory over the body, an understanding of the search for *samadhi* based on the teachings that St. Denis encountered through the Vivekananda tradition would have centered around a stilling of the mind, supreme concentration, and eventually an absorption of the self into the universe (Summers 2014, 71). According to Bryant's translation of *sutra* III.3, "*Samadhi* is when that same *dhyana*[34] shines forth as the object alone and [the mind] is devoid of its own [reflective] nature" (2009, 306, insertions in Bryant). Both yogic and Christian practices rely on disciplining the body in order to attain some sort of union with the divine, yet they do so in different ways.

In *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*, the attainment of *samadhi* is represented through seeking and eventually being anointed with rudraksha beads and a vision of the peace and beauty of the Himalayas. So, why might it be that the tightly focused presentation of *samadhi* as peaceful and meditative attainment—as seen in *The Yogi*—shifted to the battle between flesh and spirit that the spirit ultimately wins, as seen in the scene from *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*? It is possible that the transition relates to the shift from solo to duet, as the gender of the characters comes into play. By having Shawn's yogi resist the temptations of the flesh offered by St. Denis's character, they simultaneously continue the trope of the male yogi as ascetic, while also nodding to beliefs around the need to control female sexuality that would have been

[34] *Dhyana* is meditation. Bryant translates sutra III.2, which definines *dhyana*, as: "Meditation is the one-pointedness of the mind on one image" (2009, 303).

ingrained in much of their audience. St. Denis's coquette turned yoga student also conforms to Christian ideals surrounding female sexuality, and by having St. Denis be converted to yoga by Shawn, they continue the pattern of Indian male gurus and female American disciples that was initiated by Vivekananda and that continues in many areas of American yoga (Syman 2010, 37-79). Since St. Denis's character eventually finds peace, it is possible that the goal for both men and women is to subsume all worldly desires to the drive to attain peace and beauty.

Like St. Denis's character in the earlier dance *The Yogi*, the yogis portrayed by St. Denis and Shawn in the scene from *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India* are more concerned with spiritual goals—such as the attainment of some sort of *samadhi*—than they are with the mastery of specific *asana*. Their yogis are figures who seek peace and beauty, who resist the demands of society, who reject carnal pleasures, and, at least for Shawn, who meditate in a cross-legged position. Unlike in the descriptions of *The Yogi*, however, there are fewer references in Shawn's description of the dance to meditation or *pranayama*, and the attainment of *samadhi* is represented by St. Denis's anointment with rudraksha beads and vision of an image of the Himalayas, instead of St. Denis's ecstatic Shiva chant and upward-reaching stride offstage.[35] This shift from using movement to demonstrate *samadhi* (in *The Yogi*) to using costuming and imagery (in *A*

[35] A triptych of the dance included in *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet* Vol. 2 shows the transformation of St. Denis's costume from the voluminous and embellished drapery and ornate headpiece of the initial seductress to the simple shift and strand of rudraksha beads worn after she has renounced worldly things and attained peace. In the triptych, the allegory of the story takes precedence over the movements of the dance, and the austerity of the costuming demonstrates the simplicity of the yogic lifestyle that St. Denis and Shawn wanted to represent (Shawn 1920b, 119).

Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India) might suggest that St. Denis and Shawn's conception of the connection between body and the divine had become less about doing and more about being.

In the scene from *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*, the use of Indian spirituality opened space for different understandings of the divine and the purpose of human existence. Instead of dancing Christian Bible stories, as St. Denis did in her solo career after 1930,[36] at this point in their careers St. Denis and Shawn were more interested in using Indian and other Asian philosophies to explore different ways of dancing the divine as a means to advance dance as a serious American art form. By appropriating yoga and using their own dance techniques to present a classical mythos Indian yogis framed through their own Christian beliefs onstage, St. Denis and Shawn created a dance that introduced yoga as a path to liberation to their audience. The fact that they had to dance as characters from somewhere else in order to do so was, at least according to many Denishawn dancers, relatively inconsequential, as they believed that their American-ness trumped the fact that they were dancing as Indian yogis. According to Denishawn dancer Walter Terry, "The fact that Denishawn danced exotica from the Orient was explained by saying that if you were an American dancer what you danced was American and that the Denishawners used their own techniques in adapting foreign themes to the American theater" (Terry 1976, 139). Yet, looking back, we need to grapple with the implications of their using Denishawn "techniques in adapting foreign

[36] Shawn did create a danced version of the Christian mass and several dances on Christian themes during his time at Denishawn, while St. Denis's career after the founding of the Society for Spiritual Arts in the 1930s focused mostly on Christian themes.

themes to the American theater." I argue that one implication of their choreographic choice was the conceptualization of concert dance as spiritual expression, and that that spiritual expression had a complicated relationship with the connection (or lack thereof) between body and mind. Yet, this recasting dance as able to evoke spirituality had consequences, namely the continued removal of Indian men from dance performance stages in the U.S. as St. Denis and Shawn's representation of the religious core of yoga was accomplished through their own white bodies.

In sum, *The Yogi* and *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India* created space for the presentation of yoga as a method of attaining liberation on American concert stages, but the appropriation of yoga (and the other dance forms that St. Denis and Shawn used in their wide-ranging performances) continued to place yogic practices as ahistorical and accessible to all. Through presenting their renditions of the yogic state of *samadhi* on stage, as well as through their other divine dances, they expanded the possible definitions of spirituality in dance beyond the strictly Christian, even as teachers such as Swami Paramananda, who facilitated that expansion of the meaning making of dancing, were themselves written out of the histories of the dances.

Teaching Yoga at Denishawn

St. Denis passed on yoga in two distinct ways: through teaching her dances and practices of yogi meditation, and through her use of yogic philosophy in her inspiration of her students. St. Denis and Shawn's teaching at Denishawn ensured that their conceptions of the divine and understanding of the importance of the dancing body were passed on not only to their audiences, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to a

generation of Denishawn students. This inculcated yogic ideas about spirituality and dancing the divine into the heart of modern dance. St. Denis's evening yoga meditation classes instructed her students in the art of using stillness to approach a yogic state, while Shawn's dance technique classes relied on movements similar to those found in many yoga *asana* classes.[37] These lessons in both yoga as spirituality and in yogic movements made the practice familiar to a generation of students that would go on to shape the trajectory of modern dance for decades to come.

St. Denis's yoga class is depicted in a photograph included in both *An Unfinished Life* (captioned as "teaching my first yoga class") and *Ruth St. Denis: Pioneer and Prophet* (captioned "Ruth St. Denis giving the pupils a lesson in a dance of religious meditation") (St. Denis 1939, 176; Shawn 1920b, 121). The image shows St. Denis seated at the front of a group of female students (see Figure 1.2). They all have their eyes closed and a peaceful expression on their faces as they sit with their legs crossed and their left hand in their lap. Their right arms are extended out to the side at shoulder height, the hand flexed back towards the face. Some of the students look less peaceful than St. Denis, and have less authority and uprightness in their posture. This meditative moment is also shown in the New York Public Library's "[Denishawn Dance Film]," where, rather than sitting still in the pose as suggested by the photograph, St. Denis and the

[37] Although there is a strong argument for grappling with Shawn's floor work and potentially yogic influences at the same time as St. Denis's "yogi meditation" classes, I pause my discussion of Shawn until Chapter Two in order to spend more time on the metaphysical implications of St. Denis's yogic teaching and dancing. This allows me to clarify the effects of her work; however, it has the drawback of separating her out from an important part of her scene and continuing to treat her as an individual genius. I accept these drawbacks, as I believe that the clarity provided by addressing her work alone will benefit this project.

dancers gesture with their arms. Keeping their hand flexed, they raise their hand from their lap to the opposite shoulder, sweep the arm out to the side at chest height (replicating the pose in the picture) and then return their hand to their lap before repeating the gesture with the other arm. This movement sequence is similar to, but not exactly the same as, the arm gestures in *The Yogi*.

Figure 1.2. Ruth St. Denis and Denishawn dancers in Yoga meditation. This arm gesture is also used in *The Yogi*. Note the turbans worn by the women, perhaps as a symbol of Indian-ness. Courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library.

These gesture sequences are not found in the renditions of yogic techniques commonly studied today, such as the *Yoga Sutra*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, or *Gheranda Samhita*, yet, due to the repetition of various versions of them across *The Yogi*, the yogi meditation class in the "[Denishawn Dance Film]," and the various reprints of the

photograph of St. Denis "teaching [her] first yoga class," it was clearly strongly associated with yogic practices for St. Denis. What about the gesture sequence was particularly yogic to her? How did the sweeping horizontals of the arm movement indicate yogic practice to her, and how do those gestures relate to St. Denis's desire for the dance to demonstrate the attainment of profound spiritual peace? Indeed, since the arm gestures all take place when in a pose most commonly used for seated meditation, it seems odd to me that St. Denis was moving her arms at all. Perhaps the wide laterals of the arm gesture were meant to indicate a clearing of obstacles between the dancer and their attainment of spiritual peace? Given the fact that St. Denis performs the gesture with her eyes closed in *The Yogi*, that might be the best possible explanation of the connection between the gestures and her intended meaning behind them. Indeed, Shelton writes about *The Yogi* that "The scaffolding of the dance was Delsartean, with the yogi's various postures and gestures suggesting his inward spiritual state and the progressive discipline of his body and mind" (1990, 81). This suggests some sort of connection between the Delsartean framework of the purposes of the various limbs, which link the arms and upper torso to the mind, and St. Denis's intended meaning of her arm gestures (Stebbins 1887).

The differences between depicting or performing yogi meditation and actually meditating are highlighted in this dance lesson. Unlike the stillness and concentration demonstrated by Paramananda in his lesson at Denishawn in 1916 (which was around the same time as St. Denis's instruction in yogi meditation and the creation of *A Dance Pageant of Egypt, Greece, and India*), St. Denis must have felt that simply sitting would

not provide adequate training for her pupil's ability to use dance as a tool for spiritual expression. Perhaps that is why she had her students gesture with their arms? Indeed, the difference between Paramananda's seated meditation and St. Denis's seated arm gestures indicates another important change: rather than having Paramananda give more "yogi meditation" classes, St. Denis chose to position herself at the front of the classroom, subsuming his authority as her own.

Although St. Denis was less known among her students for her dance teaching, she delighted in inspiring her students and in providing fodder for their spiritual development, including reading aloud from her library of books on spiritual subjects and lectures by swamis and other religious figures in the daily Denishawn classes. This interpretation of her teaching is supported by Jane Sherman and Martha Graham, who recall St. Denis saying that "I can't teach, but I can inspire like hell" (Stodelle 1984, 27). St. Denis herself makes it clear that she has no interest in teaching dance technique in *An Unfinished Life*, yet it is also clear that she did offer lessons in yogic meditation from the very beginning of the Denishawn school in 1915. She describes the experience of those early years at Denishawn in almost ecstatic language: "Faint murmurs arose from the distant activities of the city, yet when Ted would call the class to the bar for the first morning work, or when I would sit with them at the sunset hour in Yogi meditation, there was an intense world-forgetting concentration, fused with an awareness of a new order of life" (1939, 176-177). The transcendent tone of her recollection suggests that her meditation classes were special for St. Denis and took her and her students outside of the mental state of their quotidian life. The classes allowed them space to consider the

relationship between the self and the divine and how that relationship might impact their dancing. Her framing of dance as spirituality was also important to how her students conceptualized the act of dancing. For example, Martha Graham recalled that, upon her first meeting with St. Denis, St. Denis said to Graham that

> To me there is only one real drama: the drama of man's struggle to emerge from the limitations imposed by his own concept of time and space… My final use to art is impersonal, for when I dance I am really an abstraction, a creature set apart from time and space, unrelated to human things in the ordinary sense. I feel a certain limitless state of being, a curious unending movement not only of my dance, but of my very being. (Stodelle 1984, 21)

Therefore, although St. Denis did not teach much dance technique in a strict sense, her "use to life" as an artist was very related to yogic conceptions of being and transcendence, and to the manipulation of perceptions of time and space through movement and meditative practices. Although St. Denis's orientalist fascination was relatively typical of dancers of her time, the idea that one could use movement to explore the relationship between the individual and a higher power was not as common. Through her teaching, St. Denis attempted to use dance, yoga classes, and spiritual inspiration to create a new collective experience for herself and her dancers. As is the case in most of the instances in this chapter, St. Denis's ability to provide her inspiration for dancing and her meditation lessons was facilitated by her appropriation of yogic techniques and assumption of a spiritual authority that both displaced and highlighted the tutelage of Swami Paramananda and her other Indian instructors.

The presence of yoga at Denishawn impacted the development of American modern dancers, dance audiences, and yoga practitioners in the United States. By teaching audiences to see dance as a tool for spiritual expression, by teaching her students

to connect movement, and spirituality, and through her ongoing legacy through the generation of dancers that she and Shawn trained, St. Denis and Shawn set the course for the development of modern dance as a form closely associated with the philosophical and meditative lessons of yoga in the Vivekananda tradition. Although St. Denis's use of yoga techniques was quite imaginative, it would do a disservice to her teachers, especially Swami Paramananda, to continue to ignore their influence on the development of concert dance in the United States.

Chapter 2: Constructing Modernism

Wide-Legged Seats in Yoga and Modern Dance in the 1930s

"Modern *asana* practice emerged in a dialectical relationship to physical culture and harmonial gymnastics: it absorbed many of these teachings, claimed them as its own, and sold them back to the Western readership as the purest expression of Indian physical culture" (Singleton 2010, 154).

"Graham's justification that she was developing a new form of dance completely divorced from that of Denishawn denies her own deeply rooted connections to yoga. Graham discarded Denishawn's overt mimicry in favor of a more subtle, hidden appropriation. This became the new face of orientalism, couched in the rhetoric of modernity" (Srinivasan 2010, 107).

The 1920s and 1930s were marked by the heightening of flows of movement practices and philosophies that previously had begun to circulate internationally. As Mark Singleton and Priya Srinivasan argue in the above epigraphs, there was a strong connection between the development of modern postural yoga practice and modern dance. Yet, despite the growing number of authors who articulate the overlaps between the histories of yoga, modern dance, gymnastics, and various forms of bodybuilding, there have been few studies that have traced those overlaps as they appear in specific movement practices. In this chapter, I analyze several overlapping movement examples from the 1930s to demonstrate how the convergences between yoga and modern dance can be seen, while also illustrating the differing versions of modernism that developed out of (and through) intersections between modern postural yoga and modern dance.

This chapter returns to Lisa Lowe's argument that the "'coloniality' of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection" (2015, 8).

As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, yoga and modern dance each relied on principles and innovations of the other discipline during the 1930s, however, both disciplines also benefited from the conscious forgetting of previous influences that led to those connections. Hearkening back to my discussion of economies of affirmation and forgetting in the Introduction, I argue that the development of *modern* postural yoga was both enacted within and resistant to the colonial matrix of power, and that the modernist project of yoga was complexly intertwined with global conceptions around the embodiment of spirituality and the interiority of being in relation to knowledge creation. Modern dance, on the other hand, benefitted from the accumulation of yogic techniques over several decades, and from the forgetting in plain sight of yogic influences that enabled the development of the modern*ism* in modern dance. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, I delve deeper into the historical intertwinings of yoga and the various movement practices that enabled the development of Graham technique as a modernist project. I argue for a cohesive view of the particularities of those overlaps as a means of complicating the narrative of individual modernist artistic genius which Graham and her supporters so assiduously crafted. In the second section, I use a related movement example drawn from a 1938 Krishnamacharya yoga newsreel to question how the overlapping circulation of movement practices combined with the project of Indian nationalism to constitute his yoga as a gendered nationalist modernist project.

My ability to execute this task relies on the meticulous historicization done by Singleton in his 2013 essay, "Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga." In it, he analyzes the overlapping international transmissions of yoga and

various bodybuilding, gymnastic, religious, and spiritual traditions that shaped the formation of what he terms "transnational anglophone yoga" (2013, 38).[1] He concisely lays out the international transmission of movement practices and philosophies that led to the early 1900s resurgence of the previously derided *hathayoga*.[2] Singleton's essay includes the work of yoga innovators such as Shri Yogendra, Swami Kuvalayananda, T. Krishnamacharya, and connects their accomplishments to developments in international movement culture and religion. He links their work to the rise of gymnastic traditions, such as that created by Pehr Henrik Ling; the development of Muscular Christianity and its spread through international institutions such as the YMCA; and the development of bodybuilding and international popularization of bodybuilders, such as Eugen Sandow and Bernarr MacFadden, as well as their Indian counterparts, K.V. Iyer and Yogacarya Sundaram. He also discusses the overlaps between Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science movement—New Thought—and the teachings of Vivekananda, Yogi Ramachakara (aka William Walker Atkinson), and Paramahansa Yogananda. He highlights their efforts to

[1] Singleton defines the term as follows: "I will be using the term "transnational anglophone yoga" to indicate certain systems of yoga that began to appear in India, Europe, and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. There are many varieties, but they are all characterized by the fact that they cross cultural and national bounds, and are transmitted through the medium of English. I prefer this phrase over the more commonly used "Modern Yoga," insofar as it simply describes the phenomenon and avoids the suggestion that we are talking about a unified and categorical body of discourses and practices" (Singleton 2013, 38).

[2] According to Singleton, "*asana* practices were associated with low-caste mendicants, who were anathema to caste Hindus, the new English-educated Indian middle class, and the colonial authorities. Furthermore, extreme postural austerities had long been a focus of the European ethnographic gaze, and were subject to ridicule and scorn" (Singleton 2013, 38).

reframe *hatha* yoga within New Thought's ideas of autosuggestion and affirmation, and other markers of the tastes and needs of Euro-Americans in the 1920s.

Most importantly for my purposes in this chapter, Singleton also frames the development of transnational anglophone yoga in relation to the development of harmonial gymnastics, which, he argues, were "regimes, often developed by and for women, [that] privileged the physical as the locus of access to the divine, in what was sometimes a self-conscious rejection of the Calvinist denigration of the body within Protestantism" (2013, 49). Delsartism's body-affirming philosophy is interesting, as it goes against the idea that bodily impurity must be removed and controlled to achieve deeper connection to divinity, which is put forward by both yogic philosophy and Christianity. Despite this philosophical difference, according to Singleton, Genevieve Stebbins' version of the Delsarte technique "includes most of the elements that one would expect to find in a modern *Hatha* Yoga class, and was probably instrumental in paving the way for the popular conception of yoga as another means to "stretch and relax" (2013, 50). Singleton argues that this nexus of movement practices was drawn together by yoga innovators such as Krishnamacharya, Kuvalayananda, and Yogendra to create yoga exercise systems designed to combat the myth of the degeneracy of the Indian man, and that they adopted the techniques and methods of the colonial man-making project in the service of Indian independence (2013, 45).[3]

[3] According to Singleton, "extreme postural austerities had long been a focus of the European ethnographic gaze, and were subject to ridicule and scorn. Little was known about the deeper meaning of *yogasana*, but they were nonetheless often the target of censure" (Singleton 2013, 38-39). He continues to say that "While the new Indian physical culture movement retained a permeability to Western techniques (based on a

While I rely on Singleton's historicization of transnational anglophone yoga, I also take issue with his claim that it is counterproductive to attempt to "hang a date" on more recent innovations in postural yoga practice, and that to do so would draw attention away from "How cultural, religious, and philosophical meanings become attached to physical practice" (2013, 53). By both naming individuals and not discussing the particularities of their practices, Singleton continues the mythology of the individual genius at the expense of understanding international flows of movement practices in a global context. This is related to Singleton's choice to use the term transnational Anglophone yoga—instead of Modern Postural Yoga as theorized by Elizabeth DeMichelis (2004)—to circumvent the need to distinguish between contemporaneity and modernism, or modern and 'traditional' modes of practice (38).[4] I understand this move, as many people who study, practice, and teach yoga have used the distinction between newer and older yoga poses, "traditional" and "modern" yogas, or the idea that not all yoga has been passed down unchanged over the past 2000 years, to create claims to authenticity with which to police the practices of other yogis. Nonetheless, I also believe that there is something to be gained through theorizing the "modern" in Modern Postural Yoga and to placing a particular date and location on movements as they circulated in the 1930s. This enables, rather than hinders, our ability to remember that yoga has consistently been plurally defined throughout its history. Because of my training in dance

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deep appreciation for the benefits that modern exercise technology could bring them) it was often directed towards the overthrow of colonial authority" (2013, 45).

[4] I am similarly dissatisfied with DeMichelis's implied watershed moment of Vivekananda's 1896 publication of *Raja Yoga* as the true beginning of "Modern" Postural Yoga (2004, 4).

and Critical Dance Studies, I'm interested in how meaning adheres to and is created through movement, and how that meaning is transmitted. Thus, in this chapter I analyze the different meanings added onto/created through a single posture/position/exercise performed in different contexts: sitting on the floor with the legs spread wide.

Martha's Modernism: Graham Technique, Denishawn Floor Set No. 1, and Delsartian Yoga Breathing

Graham dancer Dorothy Bird is alone onstage at the Greek Theater at Mills College in 1938.[5] Wearing a black leotard and with her feet bare, she sits on the floor with her legs spread wide. Facing perpendicular to the camera, she demonstrates motions from Graham's "Deep Stretches," a floor exercise that Graham began to develop around 1929 (Helpern 1991, 11). On an exhale, Bird flexes her feet so her heels rise slightly off the floor, contracts her abdomen, extends her cupped hands horizontally and parallel to the floor, and flings her head backwards to gaze upward at the sky. Maintaining the relative position of her feet and legs, she curves her back and contracts her torso over so her forehead touches the floor. She abruptly extends her spine so it is straight, points her feet, straightens her arms palm-down, inhales, and raises her torso back up to a vertical position. She then repeats the exercise several times, adding in an arm variation where she reaches her arms parallelly overhead during the initial exhale-and-look-up phase of the movement. The emphasis on breath, movement of her torso, and sudden shift between

[5] 1938 was an interesting year for Graham and her company, as it was when her soon-to-be husband Erick Hawkins joined the company as its first male member.

contraction and release is particularly notable in the film clip.[6] Versions of this sequence continue to be used in Graham floor work to this day.

According to Graham technique historian Alice Helpern, the development of the "Deep Stretches"—the exercise demonstrated in the video—"came soon after [the premiere of *Heretic* in 1929], beginning in a wide second position, with a percussive contraction reverberating in the outstretched arms and legs" (1991, 11).[7] That percussive contraction was unique to Graham's version of the exercise; however, the overall principle of seated floor work was derived from her teachers at Denishawn and related to postural yoga practice and Delsartism. Nonetheless, the addition of the principle of contraction and release positioned Graham to claim her technique as a modernist invention. Graham's claims to modernism were supported by dance critic John Martin, who is renowned for his work to position dance as high art to rival ballet. According to Martin, modern dance consists of the negation of all that pertains to classical, romantic, folk, or theatrical dance forms, and is a fine art based on "free, personal expression of emotional experience" (1966, 3-4).[8] The expression of emotional experience was

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[6] 0:20-0:44, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpXOBHDiFD8

[7] Writing about the premiere of *Heretic* in 1929, Martin states that "couched exclusively in a modernistic idiom, her work in this medium is at once strikingly original and glowing with vitality. There is no taint of decadence about it, no touch of morbidity…Because she paints so skillfully with movement, she creates dancing where literally there is none, and arrives at a conclusive answer to the criticism that modernistic dancing is static and introverted and cannot be lyrical" (*The New York Times*, April 15th, 1929).

[8] Indeed, dance scholar Mark Franko argues that "Denying Graham's modernism has been one way for contemporary critics to argue the historical originality of later avant-gardes" (1995, 50).

cultivated through the dynamic use of the torso as a means of moving away from the previous Denishawn lyricism. Dance scholar Mark Franko argues that "Graham's experimental work in the late twenties and early thirties attempted to define human presence in purely bodily terms" (1995, 50). The late-1920s development of the "Deep Stretches," therefore, would have allowed Graham to develop the expressivity of her new technique through bodily manipulation. Yet, as I will demonstrate, the overall shape of the exercise was related to Denishawn floor work, which indicates how Graham's claims to modernism are in many ways predicated on her famous disavowals of the influence of Denishawn technique. Her ability to position herself as an individual genius relied on her rejection of the lyrical and exotic elements of Denishawn choreography (Srinivasan 2010, 107). Yet, her disavowal of Denishawn choreographic and thematic material does not mean that she entirely rejected her training at the school. Indeed, it is also likely that Graham's famous split from Denishawn was due to eminently practical reasons. The franchising of Denishawn began in the 1920s, as St. Denis and Shawn offered courses for teachers and, for a fee, allowed instructors to use their name and technique. Graham (and her contemporaries Humphrey and Weidman) likely could not afford the franchising fee of several hundred dollars. According to Horosko, "Shawn and St. Denis jealously guarded the Denishawn curriculum, requiring even favored excompany members such as Graham to pay a fee if they wished to teach their dance movement. This proved to be a blessing in disguise, because it forced Graham… to evolve her own teaching methods" (1991, 18; see also Gertrude Shurr in Horosko 1991, 37; Reynolds 2002, 4).

Even though she evolved her own teaching methods, however, elements of Graham's technique still relied on structures learned at the Denishawn school, and the precise extent of Graham's innovations on the fundamentals of Denishawn technique can be precisely examined. According to Horosko, "Yoga-like breathing was introduced into the classrooms of Western dance at the turn of the century, [but] Graham was the first to develop the contraction and release principle into an inherent principle of movement in her new dance form" (3). Therefore, in order to see how Graham's claims to modernism were constructed, as well as her relationship to yoga, it is necessary to move back one step to the exercises taught by her initial teachers, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis.

As I noted in Chapter 1, Ruth St. Denis was invested in inspiring her students through her own interest in "Oriental" philosophy, and through her lessons in "yogi meditation." Her husband, Ted Shawn, was also invested in using dance training to explore bodily expressivity, and was responsible for the more technical training at the school. One exercise set taught by Shawn is of particular interest for this project, as the bodily positions used in it overlap with Graham's "Deep Stretches." Floor Set No. 1, taught at Denishawn by Shawn, was probably notated sometime in the 1920s as the Denishawn school was franchised.[9] It asks dance students to roll on the floor in various

[9] The Denishawn Floor Sets are in the same section of the New York Public Library archives as a "Fundamental Chart," instructions for other warm-ups, and a plethora of notes for dances in the Denishawn repertoire, all of which were typed on the same typewriter and are in the same pagination/hand/authorial voice (Ruth St. Denis Papers). I am convinced that the Floor Sets dated from the franchising of the Denishawn schools in the 1920s, since the multiple locations and dispersed teacher's network created during the franchising process would have necessitated the written documentation of dances to maintain artistic continuity across the schools, which would not have been necessary

configurations to increase the suppleness of their bodies and the flexibility of their limbs and hips. In Exercise III, dancers are instructed to take eight measures of music to "Sit facing L. Legs spread out to sides as wide as possible. Bend forward touch forehead to floor (1 meas.)" (Ruth St. Denis Papers, Folder 364). It is unclear what exactly is intended to happen during those eight measures of music—is the dancer to remain in a static pose with her head touching the floor? Or should she use one bar of music to touch her forehead to the floor, another to return to her seated position, and repeat that sequence four times? There are other obvious differences between the Denishawn Floor Set and Graham's Deep Stretches: What do the Denishawn dancer's arms do? Did the teacher give instructions for the breath? How specific was the instructor as to how the spine should be articulated? Because the notation of the Floor Set was probably created to provide newly trained Denishawn teachers a mnemonic device to use upon their return to their home dance schools, it is likely that the version of the Floor Set given in the classroom was richer and more detailed than the written version in the St. Denis archives. Nonetheless, the fact that the Denishawn Floor Set contains an exercise that is so

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when St. Denis and Shawn were the primary teachers at their Los Angeles location in the 1910s (Pischl and Cohen-Stratyner 1982).

I also speculate that the existence of such an impressive collection of written instructions for dance teaching and execution could be due to the work of Jane Sherman, a Denishawn dancer and dance historian, who describes her process of notating dances for Ted Shawn in her 1983 book *Denishawn: The Enduring Influence* (1983). Sherman frequently called for recognition of the rigors of Denishawn technique, arguing that the dancing was quite technical and not the mere exotic arm waving and costume manipulation it was characterized as by Denishawn detractors and defectors in the 1920s and 1930s. This claim is supported by the extensive documentation of Denishawn technique classes in the NYPL St. Denis archives.

externally similar to Graham's Deep Stretches indicates how much her "new" technique still relied on elements of her Denishawn training.

The overlaps between Graham floor work and Denishawn are supported by several other commentators, which suggests that the connection between their techniques extends beyond the similarities between the "Deep Stretches" and "Floor Set No. 1." For example, Graham dancer Bessie Schönberg stated in her contribution to Horosko's compendium on Graham technique that "As I look back, there was a continual transition for Martha from the Delsarte and Denishawn training into her own path" (quoted in Horosko 1991, 26). Similarly, in her biography of Graham, Agnes DeMille writes that "Every class began with the class seated cross-legged in Yoga position, performing deep-breathing exercises that were centered very low in the pelvis. This is what Ruth St. Denis had done in her dance *The Yogi*, and what she did in all her practice classes. But St. Denis knew nothing of the Kundalini theories. Graham carried the idea further" (DeMille 1956, 250-251). By saying that Graham "carried the idea [of using yoga/*kundalini* theories] further," mentioning St. Denis, and disavowing St. Denis's dance training as superficial or mimetic, Graham and her supporters position Graham technique as innovative and modern. DeMille's assertion that St. Denis did not fully understand the breathing and *kundalini* exercises that she used in *The Yogi* positions Graham as a true interpreter of Indian techniques that were impenetrable to St. Denis. This frames Graham as superior to both St. Denis *and* the techniques on which St. Denis drew, which is problematic as yoga had by then existed in Euro-American movement practices for several years, and had been intensely studied by St. Denis, by the time Graham developed the "Deep Stretches."

In addition, DeMille's claim that Graham was uniquely capable of adopting Kundalini and other yogic principles into modern dance technique ignores the fact that many swamis—including Paramananda—had been teaching yoga principles in the United States for decades. Based on the training at Denishawn and the increasing proliferation of yogic technique classes throughout the U.S. in the 1920s, it is quite likely that other choreographers also began to explore similar leg positions and breathing exercises. Therefore, while DeMille's argument that "Graham carried the idea further" might be true, as Graham did add elements of contraction and release onto the preexisting leg position and up-and-down torso movement of the Denishawn Floor Set exercise, it is a stretch to say that she invented either the leg position or the breathing techniques used in her "Deep Stretches" entirely by herself.[10]

Indeed, the links between breathing practices and "modern" dance technique go further back than even St. Denis's 1907 *The Yogi* and her related movement and breathing exercises; it is important to see those links because their intentional forgetting enables Graham's claims to modernist individual genius (Lowe 2015, 3). It is well known that Shawn was a student of Delsarte techniques, which were first developed by François

[10] Eileen Or also made this argument in her 1995 contribution to the Society of Dance History Scholars annual conference proceedings, "Body and Mind: The Yoga Roots of Martha Graham's 'Contraction' and 'Release.'" Her work, however, falls prey to a simplistic definition of yoga that does not historicize the practice and instead assumes a continuity of yoga traditions across centuries of practice. Nonetheless, she argues for a connection between Graham's yogic training and the expressivity of her dance technique: "The idea that Graham had based her movement discovery on yogic breathing principles…adds to our understandings of its seemingly magical capacity to convey psychological truths. In working with breath, Graham had stumbled on a yogi secret—that the body and the mind are one and the same, that every physical act carries with it a psychic resonance" (Or 1995, 205).

Delsarte in the mid-1800s to help actors and singers become more natural in their movements.[11] Popularized in the United States through the work of Steele MacKaye and Genevieve Stebbins, Delsarte was predicated upon ideas of bodily harmony and mind/body unison. Delsarte's techniques and philosophy were embedded in an extended matrix of similar approaches to exercise and spirituality. Therefore, Graham's exercises partially derive from transnational nineteenth-century currents of spiritual thought and related movement practices.[12] (However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, they were also related to the international popularization of yoga as spiritual practice.)

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[11] François Delsarte was a singer and elocutionist who developed his system based on the belief that correct gestures could express the inner emotional experience of the actor. Initially developed to correct damage to his vocal cords from improper training, he systematically organized bodily expression based on his observations of the world around him. In its true form, the Delsarte system does not consist of gestures or exercises disconnected from emotion and expression, yet many 'Delsarte' classes at the turn of the 20th century reportedly did not remain true to Delsartian principles of correspondence, and instead were reduced to something more like calisthenics or statue posing. Dance historian Nancy Lee Chafla Ruyter traces the development of Delsartism in the United States in *Reformers and Visionaries*, arguing that initial importer Steele Mackaye was the first to incorporate aesthetic gymnastics into Delsartian training. She also argues that the Reverend William R. Alger was the first in the Delsarte system to conceptualize man's physical nature as the manifestation of his spiritual nature (rather than its antithesis). Alger's Unitarian Universalist idea of the body as a pure or divine (rather than in need of purification, as in yogic philosophy and other strands of Christianity) could be a driver for the conceptualization of the body as divine that exists in some of St. Denis's and Shawns writings.

[12] According to Ruyter, the foundation of Delsarte's system was heavily influenced by a Christian understanding of the world cultivated in Swedenborgianism, a religious movement founded in the late 1700s. As she writes, Delsarte's Law of Correspondence and Law of Trinity were influenced by "[Emmanual Swedenborg], whose doctrine postulated correspondence between two aspects of life—the visible outer world and the invisible spiritual realm—and three spheres—the natural, spiritual, and divine (Ruyter 1999, 76)." Delsarte argued for a relationship between the tangible and intangible, outer and inner, movement and meaning that would also eradicate the distinction between mind

Exploring the connection between Graham, Shawn, and Delsarte also leads to the discovery that the strands of Delsartism practiced in the United States relied on yogic breathing techniques. Ruyter states that Delsarte popularizer Genevieve Stebbins's innovations included the use of yogic breathing techniques learned from a Hindu "pundit" in London, and the incorporation of exercises from Swedish Ling gymnastics, resulting in the full arrival of Delsarte into high society and onto fashionable stages by the late nineteenth century (1979, 19-22). Stebbins describes a "Yoga Breathing" exercise (1898, 21, 26-30), in which pupils are instructed to imagine cosmic energy flowing into the hollow limbs of their body through the breath, "in one grand surging influx of organic life" (30).[13] It is important to note the use of yogic breathing techniques in the development of an otherwise Christian expressive discipline, as it demonstrates the international circulation of movement practices long before Graham's use of *kundalini* in modern dance technique.

Indeed, the concept of an inherent connection between mind, body, and spirit traveled back and forth from Asia to Euro-America, and vice versa. Christian disciplines

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and body and rehabilitate the body as encompassing the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of existence.

[13] The yogis most internationally popular at the time, such as Vivekananda, were decidedly against physically oriented yoga practices. Therefore while, according to Singleton, there were distinct overlaps between the embodied spirituality seen in Stebbins' technique and the placing of the body in various postures in *hatha* yoga, *hatha* yoga was itself not particularly popular at the turn of the twentieth century (Singleton 2013, 40-41). Indeed, Vivekananda and other early yoga exporters insisted that the physically oriented exercises seen in Delsarte and *hatha* yoga were not useful to the project of spiritual development. Vivekananda thought that Hatha yoga aimed entirely at making the body very strong. According to Vivekananda, "'We have nothing to do with it here,' … 'because its practices are very difficult, and cannot be learned in a day, and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth'" (quoted in Albanese 2008, 357).

interacted with ideas from Asia even as they also relied on sometimes inaccurate pre-conceived notions of Asian metaphysics and spirituality. Religious Studies scholar Catherine Albanese describes how Euro-American spiritualists in Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Christian Science, New Thought, or the Theosophical Society simultaneously sought for (and found) metaphysical Asian philosophies, and encountered an Asia that was itself selectively westernizing (2008, 329).[14] For example, Vivekananda used Euro-American conceptions of the body and soul to position yoga as a universally applicable spiritual practice (Strauss 2005, 31; DeMichelis 2004; Syman 2010). Even as Stebbins relied on the concept of yogic breathing to bolster her version of Deslarte, and Swedenborgianism influenced Delsarte to create his Laws of Correspondence and Trinity, yoga was itself being recast to appeal to Euro-American audiences. It is therefore probable that the influence of yoga on Denishawn dance practices—and therefore on Graham's breathing techniques—did not just come from St. Denis's "yogi meditation" classes and readings of yoga texts, but might also have arrived through Shawn's training in Delsartian breathing techniques.

While St. Denis's "yogi meditation" classes and accompanying breathing exercises taught students some basic principles of seated meditation, Shawn also brought his own strand of Delsartian training to the school, and influenced students to see an inherent connection between life and art. He studied with Mrs. Richard Hovey (née

[14] According to Albanese, "What they found… was the metaphysical Asia (mind correspondences, energy, and healing all there) that they had molded out of a Hermetic and vernacular magical past and the pluralism of an American present. Meanwhile… the Asia of their discovery had also been mediated to them by the European West and an East itself undergoing selective westernization" (2008, 329).

Henrietta Russell), who taught a strand of Delsartism in the United States that had as its ultimate goal teaching students to treat life as art (Ruyter [1973] 2009, 2022).[15] This suggests that the movement styles seen in the Denishawn Floor Sets and "Fundamental Chart" carries on the tradition of previous movement, breath, and expressive training systems in the United States that Shawn and St. Denis would have studied (Shelton 1981, 147-150).[16] Graham's Deep Stretches, then, also relied on this back-and-forth transfer of ideas of spirituality and the importance of breathing. According to Stodelle, "She would sit on the floor for hours trying to discover the movement path that the simple act of breathing takes" (Stodelle 1984, 48).[17] As I have demonstrated, however, Graham's investigations also relied on her ability to recast the lessons of her teachers through her own movement vocabulary, and frame those investigations in ways designed to advance her individual career.

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[15] According to Ruyter, Hovey "studied the principles [of Delsarte] with Gustave Delsarte [Francois' son] in Paris, and Edmund, her husband, who had probably learned them from his wife" ([1973]2009, 2022). Ruyter goes on to analyze descriptions of Hovey's teaching in the 1890s, and concludes that her Delsartism "sounds like diluted Stebbins" ([1973]2009, 2024).

[16] According to Ruyter, "The Delsarte movement was over by 1900, but the best of its principles and innovations fed into the new dance movement and provided that with a foundation of ideas and techniques that it would draw on for the next 25 or 30 years" ([1973]2009, 2024-5).

[17] According to Or, this exploration into breathing led to her use of contraction and release in less conventional ways. Or argues that the "release" in "contraction and release" derives from the breath retention after exhalation that is taught in some yoga disciplines. When holding the breath out of the body after exhaling, according to Or, "When one is finally ready to inhale, the sensation is dramatically one of 'release'" (Or 1995, 208).

I am not the first scholar to argue that Graham's choreography during the 1930s relied on absent presences of culturally Other figures (Shea Murphy 2007, 157). Indeed, the turn away from the overt mimicry seen at Denishawn towards, first, metaphorical minstrelsy and, later, mythic abstraction, has been articulated by dance scholars with regards to blackness and Native American-ness. For example, the relationship between the staging of whiteness in the 1930s and the institution of blackface minstrelsy was theorized by Susan Manning, who states that metaphorical minstrelsy can be seen in the choreography of Graham in the 1930s, through her creation of dances that did not employ overt blackface, but referred to subjects of color through costuming, movement style, or music, thereby using dancers to abstract or personify Others onstage (2004, 10). By the 1940s, Manning argues, choreographers began to employ mythic abstraction, which used mythologized universal figures to allow white choreographers to stage themselves as universal subjects without the mediation of bodies marked as culturally Other, thereby redefining whiteness through the absorption of culturally other techniques (2004, 118). Yet, I argue, that transition is not as straightforward as is commonly thought, since the techniques of "others" were employed during the phases of both metaphorical minstrelsy and mythic abstraction. That is to say, yogic techniques were used in concert dance during both phases, therefore the transition from one mode of representation to the other cannot be strictly delineated. In this way, the abstraction of techniques that walked the line between culturally other and culturally homegrown also occurred in the studio, and not just onstage.[18]

[18] Thank you, Anthea Kraut, for prompting me to make this argument. Any need further

This use of yogic techniques in Graham's technique is hard to see, as it does not appear onstage, but is equally important to our understanding of the development of modernism in modern dance. This position is supported by Srinivasnan's epigraph to this chapter, in which she states that Graham's modernism only existed because she erased the traces, not only of her "Othered" subjects, but also the traces of the technique taught by her predecessors. As Srinivasan argues, "Graham discarded Denishawn's overt mimicry in favor of a more subtle, hidden appropriation. This became the new face of orientalism, couched in the rhetoric of modernity" (Srinivasan 2010, 107). As Graham moved away from early mimetic pieces such as *The Flute of Krishna* (1926) and towards more abstract works such as *Heretic* (1929) or *Lamentation* (1930), her dancing relied less overtly on the mimicry she learned at Denishawn, even as her nascent technique continued to build on Denishawn (and Delsarte) heritage.

Despite the similarity in overall bodily positioning between the two movement exercises, the percussive rhythm and intricate arm and torso movements of the Deep Stretches were different from the simpler movements of the Denishawn Floor Sets. Graham's insistence on a strict break between herself and Denishawn served to turn attention away from the legacy of yogic techniques across Delsarte, Denishawn, and Graham, and contributed to her ability to position herself as a modernist individual genius. I posit that this connection between Graham's Deep Stretches, the Denishawn Floor Sets, and Delsartian yogic breathing, is one way to see Graham's disavowal of her teachers even as she continued their practice of (not-so-) subtly utilizing yoga-derived

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for clarification is entirely my own.

techniques for her own ends. By having her dancers use the dramatic tension between contraction and release as a driving impulse for their movement, Graham separated her Deep Stretches from the Denishawn Floor Sets and other forms of spiritual stretching. The sense of interiority required to excel at Graham's technique, with its reliance on breath and principles of contraction and release, was related to previous conceptions of the relationship between body and spirit as expressed through movement. Her claim to possessive individual subjectivity relied on her use of breathing techniques that were initially drawn from yoga, and that were inculcated in U.S. dance techniques beginning around the turn of the twentieth century. Rhetoric expurgating yogic, Denishawn, and Delsartian referents from Graham technique contributed to her ability to position white female modern dancers as universal subjects during the 1930s, even as her innovation on their techniques contributed to her reputation as an individual genius (Reynolds 2002, 6). The taken-for-granted privilege of erasing references to yogic elements of her dancing was crucial to this development.

While the previous section has demonstrated the influence of yoga on Delsarte, Denishawn, and Graham, the flow of movement practices in the 1900s was not unidirectional. Graham's modernism was accomplished through embroidering over yogic influences and disavowing the innovations of her instructors, both affirming the existence—and encouraging the forgetting—of the relationship between her technique and her training in Delsarte and Denishawn techniques. Modernism in yoga in India, on the other hand, interacted with ideas of spirituality, strength, and movement that flowed from Euro-America to India, including ideas of medicine, eugenics, and spirituality. The

next section examines the global circulation of movement practices from a different angle, starting with the gendered, racialized, and nationalist development and dissemination of Modern Postural Yoga in India.

Creating Modernist Bodies in Mysore

In the middle of a 1938 newsreel of Krishnamacharya and Iyengar demonstrating yoga *asana* and *pranayama*, a woman joins them to demonstrate a variety of poses.[19] She performs *upavista konasana*, sitting on the ground with her legs straight and spread wide and flexed feet pointing directly to the sky. She reaches out to grasp her big toes with her fingers, briefly lifts her chest to extend her spine, and then lowers her torso to bring her face close to the ground. Her elbows remain lifted in the air even as she brings her nose towards the floor. Keeping her fingers on her toes, she raises her torso upright. She then changes her grip on her right foot and bends over sideways while keeping her torso facing directly front. Her left hand joins her right hand in grasping her right foot, and she meticulously rotates her torso so it faces even more towards the sky. She lifts herself back to vertical, and then bends her torso to her left. Finally, she returns her fingers to their grip on her big toes, and curves the top of her head down to touch the ground (34:35-35:00). As with the body position seen in Graham's Deep Stretches and Exercise III of Denishawn Floor Set No. 1, the woman in the newsreel sits with her legs spread wide and bends her torso down towards the floor.

[19] I've tried to identify the woman, but have not been able to. Since, according to the notes accompanying the video on YouTube, the yogis were filmed in 1938, it is not Iyengar's daughter, Geeta (1944-). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML9yZd7bIvY

When seen in the context of the entire 45-minute-long newsreel of Krishnamacharya and Iyengar demonstrating various yoga *asana* and *pranayama*, the woman's exercises are remarkable for several reasons. By having women and children in the newsreel with them, Krishnamacharya and Iyengar demonstrate that yoga is an appropriate practice for most able-bodied people. This is a marked change from previous strictures around yoga instruction, which usually held that yoga was a practice for men only.[20] Even though the yogis all demonstrate *asana*, there is a slight gendered difference between the poses performed by Krishnamacharya and Iyengar differ and those done by the woman. The men's *asana* emphasize strength, flexibility, and contortion, including arm balance poses such as *astavakrasana* (1:41), *padangustha dhanurasana* (18:01), and *sirsasana* with one leg in *eka pada sirsasana* (28:42). They also demonstrate *pranayama*, while the woman is not shown doing any sort of breathing exercises. She appears only intermittently, and, despite her flexibility and proficiency, occasionally looks like she might fall out of her poses.[21] Many of the poses included in the newsreel—such as the men's *kukkutasana* and *mayurasana*—are described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* or *Gheranda Samhita*, while others could be derived from the global circulation of bodybuilding, Delsarte, and Muscular Christianity, and the influence of Euro-American movement practices and ideals in the project of Indian nationalism and anti-colonial resistance (Singleton 2013, 45). There is also a marked similarity between her

[20] Indeed, Indra Devi is held to be Krishnamacharya's first Western student, as well as his first female one (Syman 2010, 182).

[21] In the part of the video that demonstrates the woman entering *utthita parsvakonasana* (37:40), she requires several balance checks and looks somewhat unstable in the *asana*.

movements and those done by dancers in the Denishawn and Graham traditions in the first decades of the twentieth century. This overlap is important to this chapter, as it demonstrates how Krishnamacharya (and other yoga innovators working in the 1920s and 1930s) relied on selected aspects of Euro-American philosophy and exercise practice in order to position yoga as a modernist project applicable to people of all castes, genders, and nationalities. I argue that her position in the newsreel demonstrates Krishnamacharya's astute assimilation of select aspects of international movement culture for women, even as the newsreel itself supports his overall project of constructing yoga as an indigenous Indian, nationalist, modernist project.

As demonstrated by Singleton, Krishnamacharya's formulation of yoga was influenced by a wide variety of movement practices and philosophies drawn from Euro-America, including Delsartism and eugenicist ideas of inheritable traits.[22] From the mid-1800s through the early 1920s in Euro-America, eugenic concepts calling for the improvement of the body as a nationalist endeavor provided the impetus for many exercise systems. These notions were based on the idea that an improved body is an inheritable trait that could be passed on to future generations in order to improve the 'stock' of the (racialized) nation. Some of these ideas were drawn from the theories of French scientist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who argued that traits developed during an

[22] According to Singleton, "Certain varieties of neo-Yoga were conceived, I argue, as a transgenerational fast track to genetic and spiritual perfection—a vision which generally usurped perhaps more traditional otherworldly connotations of Yoga as a technique of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This occurred through the "indigenization" and naturalization of a number of late nineteenth-century social ideologies within the landscape of Indian neo-Yoga, including Social Darwinism and Eugenics" (2007, 126).

adult's lifetime could be passed down to their offspring.[23] Several exercise movements developed over the course of the 1800s, and influenced globally circulating ideas of exercise, training, and bodily comportment. Of particular importance here, the Swedish system of gymnastics developed by Pehr Henrik Ling was designed to strengthen (and potentially repair) bodily limitations through the use of a set of exercises adopted for all, regardless of age or gender (Tomko 1999, 16).[24] Increasing muscularity through exercise became a means of asserting masculine "racial dominance" during the early twentieth century. Euro-American strongmen trained in these traditions eventually made their way onto vaudeville stages, demonstrating their health and strength in front of enraptured audiences. They relied on repetitive exercises and weightlifting to develop their physiques, and contributed to the spread of the idea that exercise could be used to change one's body and perhaps one's soul.[25]

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[23] Lamarckian ideas of inheritable traits in combination with burgeoning ideas of nationalism led to outdoor gymnasiums such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn's *Turnverein*s, created to train stronger German soldiers after their defeat in the Napoleonic wars. Jahn founded the *Turnverein* system in the early 1800s, creating an outdoor gymnasium with apparatuses such as parallel bars, rings, vaulting horse, ladders, and stairs that were designed to provide a platform for the individual to interact with apparatuses in order to extend the body out into space (Tomko 1999, 11-12; Budd 1997, 16).

[24] Ling's system, developed in the 1810s, is militaristic in similar ways to Jahn's Turner system, but relies more on callisthenic exercises than it does on external apparatuses. According to Jan Todd, Ling's exercises were 'scientifically based' and designed to treat poor posture, spinal curvature, and problems arising from too-tightly laced corsets. Todd also discusses the impact of his work in Swedish public schools, and the number of U.S. exercise advocates—including Diocletian Lewis, Catharine Beecher, and Russell Trall—who mimicked his system of simple limb extensions performed without music (Todd 1999, 36-37).

[25] Prussian-born Eugen Sandow, for example, had some initial training in the Turner style of gymnastics (Waller 2011, 20), but his rise to fame was due to his performances on

While Euro-American men gained popularity through their strongman performances and health and fitness empires, men performing as yogis from India also began to gain popularity on vaudeville stages (Singleton 2013, 38). Other yogis also began to explore bodybuilding in the Ling system or use the YMCA's physical culture programs (Singleton 2010, 8). Singleton discusses the work of Yogacarya Sundaram and K.V. Iyer, arguing that "[their] synthesis of bodybuilding and yoga presented a path to religious wholeness through the aesthetic perfection of the body, just as Sandow had conceived of his system as a 'religion'" (Singleton 2013, 48). Their work relied on and replicated patterns that placed ancient Indian yoga as a direct predecessor of modern bodybuilding, however, they also positioned yoga as a scientifically modern practice. In the early 1900s, markers of physical success were framed through scientific measures like chest size or scientifically-identified health benefits (Singleton 2013, 42-43). According to yoga scholar Joseph Alter, scientific yoga experiments began in 1924 under the leadership of Swami Kuvalayananda. The experiments focused on a variety of

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music-hall stages, where he impressed audiences through his feats as a strongman. Sandow's system was based on the premise that a healthy appearance signifies health in the brain and soul, and that the secular trinity of body, brain, and soul are interconnected (Budd 1997, 67). Interestingly, Sandow recommended that his exercises be performed to music in order to keep time while exercising, and advocated for a repeated set of exercises as appropriate for almost everyone, with variations based on relative physical strength, but not necessarily on individual physiological needs (Waller 2011, 144). A follower of Sandow working mostly in the 1910s and 1920s, Bernarr Macfadden, was a renowned exercise purveyor and performer in his own right. He attempted to perfect the human body through the use of diet and fasting combined with vigorous exercise (Adams 2010). At one point, Paramahansa Yogananda (of *Autobiography of a Yogi* fame) took out a series of advertisements for his meditation in Physical Culture, the flagship magazine in Macfadden's publishing empire (Adams 2010, 112). The content of these advertisements is unclear, but their presence speaks to the circulation of yoga in physical culture circles during the 1910s and 1920s.

markers, including "changes in blood pressure, intra-esophageal air pressure, and heart rate during and after the performance of various *asana* and *pranayama* exercises" (2004, 34). Their combination of yoga with bodybuilding, according to Singleton, "distinguishes the merely material West from the spiritual East, thereby reinforcing yoga's religious and physiological superiority" (Singleton 2010, 127). This tension between the superiority of ancient yogic practices and the need to medicalize yoga is at the heart of yoga's modernization. Unlike Graham's modern dance technique, which relied on body positions and breathing techniques derived from yoga in its construction of modernism as expression, yoga in India in the 1920s and 1930s relied on Euro-American ideas of the medical benefits of exercise and the use of exercise in creating an ideal body through medical modernism.

These various threads of exercise and artistry circulating globally, from bodybuilding to Delsarte to scientific exercise to individual expression, push us to question the racialized, nationalist, and gendered politics of modernism in yoga and dance. Because of the power dynamics inherent to colonialism and orientalism, the changes to yoga during the early 1900s did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, in his investigation into yoga as scientific exercise, Alter asks us to consider whether the frame of Indian nationalism is the best lens to use to understand modernities developed in India. He argues that "a preoccupation with the nationalism/colonialism conundrum has, ironically, meant that Indian versions of what is possible in the field of *human* experience have not been recognized for what they are—alternative global modernities and not just alternative modernities for and of India" (74-75). His perspective encourages us to think

of the global implications of the type of modernity developed in and through Indian yoga. Yet, as Mignolo argues, "there is no modernity without coloniality," and the colonial matrix of power is inescapable (2011, 3). Although Indian yogis were innovating in their own right, the building of Western modernity both necessitated and encouraged the developers of modern postural yoga to frame their work through Euro-American notions of health and fitness. Therefore, Krishnamacharya's choice to have the woman in the newsreel do things similar to and recognizable as western spiritual stretching was astute, as it helped him position yoga as a modernist and nationalist project. The economies of coloniality necessitated the affirmation of connections to Euro-American trends in movement practice and conceptions of the self, yet that same economy of coloniality also necessitated the forgetting of the origins of those characterizations in order to maintain continuity with perceptions of yoga as ancient, spiritual, and unchanging.

In terms of the movement, the woman's movements are superficially quite similar to the Graham Deep Stretches, yet they also vary in key ways. Unlike the Graham dancer, the yogi has direct contact between her fingers and toes throughout the stretch. Furthermore, where Bonnie Bird arches her back at the top of the movement, lifts her head to the sky, and then moves from a contraction to a release while in the deepest part of the stretch, the yogi's torso is more static throughout the frontal portion of her stretching. When she stretches to the side, she does manipulate her torso, however, it is not contraction and release but a twist initiated from the base of her pelvis to bring her chest more towards the ceiling. This is to say that, while the position of the dancer's and the yogi's legs is the same, and while they both perform various stretches from that

position, the particularities of those movements are quite different. Yet, both exercises relied on movement principles that circulated globally and were positioned as modern (Singleton 2013, 49-51). By combining poses that have long been part of *hatha* yoga practice with *asana* based on or related to exercises from bodybuilding, harmonial gymnastics, Delsarte, or modern dance, the yogis in the newsreel demonstrate the construction of gendered, nationalist yogic modernism.

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, developments in yoga and modern dance in the 1930s were frequently marked by verbal erasures of otherwise visible influences. Nonetheless, through the movement examples presented in this chapter, we can see two contrasting but intertwined ways of being modern. Yoga's modernism in the 1930s relied on a turn towards spiritual gymnastics, medicalization and bodybuilding, whereas Graham's modernism during the same time was linked to her disavowal of yogic influences on Delsarte, Denishawn, and her own technique. Seeing the overlapping development both forms of modernism is an important means of rupturing narratives that locate the development of modernism solely in Euro-America or that position Indian modernisms as derivative and colonized (as opposed to intertwined in coloniality). By seeing how influences circulate in multiple directions, it becomes possible to turn away from a lineage-based narrative of modern dance history that ignores the plethora of yogic influences on the field, and to contribute to the historicization of yoga in relation to other global movement practices and modernities.

Chapter 3: Seeing Yogi Vithaldas

Merce Cunningham and the *Asana*-Performing Dancer Onstage

In the same year that famed choreographer Merce Cunningham officially created his dance company (1953), Yogi Vithaldas appeared in an issue of *Life* magazine instructing famed violinist Yehudi Menuhin in various yogic techniques (February 9th, 1953; 93-94, 96).[1] The article shows Menuhin and Vithaldas practicing a variety of yoga techniques, including *simhasana*, *urdvha padmasana*, *bhastrika*, *ardha matsyendrasana*, *neti kriya*, and *sirsasana*.[2] In my favorite picture from the article, Menuhin is upside

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[1] Merce Cunningham was born in Centralia, Washington in 1919, and began his dance training there under the tutelage of Mrs. Maude Barrett, before enrolling at the Cornish School of the Arts under Nellie Cornish, where he began his life-long relationship with John Cage, who was dance instructor Bonnie Bird's accompanist and music director. (Macaulay, Alistair. "Merce Cunningham, Dance Visionary, Dies." The New York Times. July 27, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/28/arts/dance/28cunningham.html) Cunningham was invited to participate in a summer dance workshop at Mills College in 1939, where he met Martha Graham and was invited to become one of the first male members of her dance company. He danced with her for several years, but then broke off and established his own dance company with his partner in work and life, John Cage.

[2] "Yehudi's Yoga: He tries twists to help him as violinist." Violinist Menuhin is usually connected to yoga history through his work with B.K.S. Iyengar around the same time, yet the *Life* magazine article demonstrates that his initial interaction with yoga also involved contact with the now-lesser-known Vithaldas. According to Michelle Goldberg, Menuhin met Iyengar while on tour in 1962 http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/iyengar-invention-yoga. According to the *Life* article, "A year ago in New Zealand, Menuhin came upon a book of yoga, studied it and began twisting himself in the prescribed contortions. Back in New York, he started to work under the tutelage of Yogi Vithaldas" (1953, 93). The *Life* article predates the publication of Vithaldas's book, so it could not have been his book that Menuhin encountered. The pictures of Menuhin and Vithaldas focus equally on the yoga modalities of *asana, pranayama,* and *kriya*, which is different from other yoga manuals at the time, which often focused primarily on *asana* and *pranayama*, with few mentions of *kriya*. This is also true of the book Vithaldas published in 1957, which states that many

down in *sirsasana*. He is wearing belted pleated shorts with a zipper fly and a simple t-shirt. He is making eye contact with the photographer/camera lens and, because of the set of his mouth and angle of his head and arms, he looks slightly uncomfortable in the pose. The image is captioned "Seeking contentment, Menuhin takes things easy in a *sirhasana* [sic] (upside-down pose), which he says refreshes his brain. Although Menuhin says he will never attempt to play the violin while on his head, he wryly recommends this pose for orchestra conductors because then 'they could conduct with their feet and still face the audience which is so dear to them'" (1953, 93). Menuhin's sense of humor in the caption combines with his expression and vaguely bent legs to give the picture a sense of fun, even as other yogic techniques depicted in the brief article (particularly the nostril threading practice of *neti kriya*) seem designed to fetishize the aspects of the practice least likely to be familiar or palatable to the average reader of *Life*. Together, the humor combines with the unfamiliar to position "Yehudi's Yoga" as a potentially beneficial, perhaps un-serious, and strange endeavor.

The instructor in the article, Yogi Vithaldas, is today a somewhat unknown figure in both the scholarly and popular histories of yoga in the United States. Vithaldas's book, *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension* (1957), was a jumping off point for Merce Cunningham's lifelong use of yoga asana as a morning ritual and choreographic element, while Vithaldas's yoga classes in New York City in 1961 were a site of exploration and discovery for dancers including Carolyn Brown, Robert Ellis Dunn, Judy

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kriya—including *neti kriya* (which Menuhin performs in the Life article)— are not to be taught to Westerners (87).

Dunn, Remy Charlip, and Sylvia Kim (Brown 2007, 23-24, 338).[3] Despite Carolyn Brown's statements in her autobiography suggesting that Vithaldas was extremely popular in the early 1960s, little information on Vithaldas is currently available, and scholarly and popular searches for his name return little information (2007, 338).[4] This suggests that his popularity rapidly decreased sometime after his heyday in the 1950s and 1960s.[5] With the recent interest in historical forms of yoga in the United States, his book has since regained attention as an early guide to yoga in the United States, and was returned to print by various presses that provide reprints from a digital scan of the original. The book provides a thorough introduction to the practice of yoga through *asana*, *pranayama*, clean eating, and yoga philosophies around controlling the body as a means of leading a happier and healthier life.

In his book, Vithaldas follows other yogis teaching in the West, and does not frame his discourse through the perspective of *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth and death) suggested in parts of the *Yoga Sutra*. He is instead concerned with convincing Americans of the validity of yoga through arguments around its potential for relaxation, increased

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[3] Composer Phillip Glass also studied with Vithaldas in the early 1960s in New York (Glass 2015; 72, 106, 151).

[4] Deepest thanks to Carrie Noland, who, in a chance encounter at the NYPL archives, first pointed me to Brown's autobiography, thereby leading me to Vithaldas's work.

[5] According to a caption of a photo of an elderly Vithaldas by John Prieto/The Denver Post (Getty Images), Vithaldas was born in Bombay around 1909, and began to study yoga around age 14 or 15. He began teaching four years later. Photographs of him providing instruction to Westerners appear by 1941. http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/cooked-it-at-aspen-for-30-people-and-everyone-enjoyed-it-news-photo/162106764, http://www.gettyimages.com/license/162106764

health, and ability to inculcate equanimity. Vithaldas's book does not aim to convert readers to Hinduism, Yoga, or (neo)Vedanta, but rather presents yoga as a scientifically and medically sound means of creating increased overall health. In doing so, Vithaldas positioned his work to be palatable to individuals such as Cunningham, his dancers, and other participants in the Downtown New York arts scene, who were all interested in exploring the boundaries of human motion and studying "Eastern" philosophies. For them, even Vithaldas's somewhat familiarized yoga remained "exotic" or "Eastern" enough to be attractive—after all, they were turning to yoga to increase their health, not to other forms of exercise or medicine.

In this chapter, I argue that intentional moves by yoga teachers such as Vithaldas facilitated the popularization of yoga during the 1960s. The influence of his work, however, has not been attended to by dance historians, due to moves made by choreographers such as Cunningham, who used some parts of Vithaldas's yoga practice in their daily practice and choreography. This resulted in the presentation of yoga *asana* onstage by white dancers and choreographers, and contributed to the trend to position yoga as a physical practice that could be treated as a buffet from which techniques could be selectively chosen. I break the chapter into three sections. First, I examine Yogi Vithaldas's teachings, contrasting him with other yoga instructors and movement teachers working in the United States and internationally during the 1950s and 1960s, and arguing that he actively framed his yoga to make it familiar and comfortable for white (countercultural) America. I then turn to an analysis of how Cunningham learned yogic techniques, what sort of yoga he practiced, and how that yoga appears and is seen in

writing about Cunningham's career. Finally, I analyze how yoga *asana* taught by Vithaldas simultaneously appeared and disappeared from view in selected pieces of Merce Cunningham's choreography in the early 1960s. I contend that Cunningham's interest in yoga was facilitated by its popularization under previous modern dancers such as Graham, Shawn, and St. Denis, but that his use of yoga took a much more physical turn, focusing on *asana* instead of mysticism or breathing techniques. This *asana*-focused incorporation of yoga into concert dance performance enabled later manipulations of yoga *asana* with and through dance techniques, as will be explored in Chapter 4 and the Conclusion.

Vithaldas's Yoga: Physical, Psychological, and Medical Appeals

Vithaldas's work appeared in the United States at a particularly fertile time for meditative "Eastern" practices, when famous Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki was giving his lectures on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University and the push towards postmodernism was beginning to coalesce in various arts scenes. During the late 50s and 60s, both Zen Buddhism and yoga fell into a generalized category of "Oriental" meditative and introspective practices that encouraged the practitioner to turn away from worldly concerns to still the mind and control the body. Both disciplines were of particular interest to people who were not convinced by the post-war materialism that otherwise held sway during the 1950s, and provided an avenue of exploration for artists and members of the counterculture who were grappling with questions around the integration of mind and body in an age of increased technological advances (Larson 2012).

Vithaldas addressed *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension* directly to Euro-Americans.[6] In it, he claims that yoga is useful to all people interested in bodily and mental poise and equanimity of spirit, and argues that yoga therapy will help each individual control their nerves and "expand his own latent powers, physical, mental, and spiritual, to their fullest possible extent" (1957, 14). His fame may have been based on his interactions with violinist Menuhin, as well as on his book publication, and he certainly attracted a wealthy following in New York, as evidenced by his student Carolyn Brown's description of his sumptuous residence on the Upper East Side of Manhattan (2007, 338).

Despite the strictures of immigration law, which severely limited immigration by South Asians until 1965, Vithaldas was by no means the only famous yoga instructor in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Paramahansa Yogananda's 1946 *Autobiography of a Yogi* approached the world of yoga through the lens of mysticism and meditation, which differed from Vithaldas's more practical and physically focused approach to yoga. Yogananda founded the Self Realization Fellowship, and spent most of his teaching career in the United States, where his various temples and retreat centers reached a wide variety of disciples in Southern California, Arizona, and the rest of the

[6] For example, Vithaldas writes on the first page of the book that "The question is whether the Western world needs Yoga and is ready to attach to it the significance the East attaches. The Westerner must perforce admit that the modern world is one of agitation and nervous tension. Does he get along satisfactorily or does he just 'muddle through'? …The need for Yoga therapy, which deals so exhaustively with nerves and their effects, is thus seen to be very real…. Yoga is not advocated to teach the Western city dweller the Indian rope-trick or any other abnormal practice (and among these false ideas must be included the use of Yoga to effect indefinite prolongation of life), but to expand his own latent powers, physical, mental, and spiritual, to their fullest possible extent" (1957, 1-2).

United States. The form of yoga he propounded, Kriya Yoga, was based around the idea that meditation, *pranayama*, *mantra*, and *mudra* used together can lead to a higher understanding of, and communion with, god-consciousness.[7] Yogananda's book, *Autobiography of a Yogi,* was eminently popular even after his death in 1952. The book does not provide instruction in *asana* or meditation, and instead illuminates a profound examination of the inner life and lessons of a spiritual leader (Yogananda 1946). Yogananda's rhetoric around the scientific nature of yoga, the superiority of the mind, and the inherent oneness of all religions is similar to rhetoric utilized by other yoga teachers, including Swami Vivekananda, Swami Paramananda, and others in the neo-Vedanta tradition discussed in Chapter 1. Whereas *Autobiography* focuses on Yogananda's experiences, Vithaldas's yoga instruction provides very little information on his life, and instead gives a thorough description of exercises and techniques that can be performed by individuals seeking greater health, bodily control, and equanimity.

Another yoga instructor working in the United States from 1947 to the mid-1960s was Russian-born Indra Devi (née Eugenie Peterson), whose yoga instruction differed in tone and clientele from that taught by Yogananda, instead serving a similar population to Vithaldas (Goldberg 2015). Devi studied under Krishnamacharya at his school in Mysore

[7] As listed on the foundation's website, Yogananda's Aims and Ideals for his organization were "To disseminate among the nations a knowledge of definite scientific techniques for attaining direct personal experience of God…To reveal the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ and original Yoga as taught by Bhagavan Krishna; and to show that these principles of truth are the common scientific foundation of all true religions…. To demonstrate the superiority of mind over body, of soul over mind. To overcome evil by good, sorrow by joy, cruelty by kindness, ignorance by wisdom. To unite science and religion through realization of the unity of their underlying principles." http://www.yogananda-srf.org/Aims_and_Ideals.aspx#.WQkyFonytE4

in the late 1930s. She then taught yoga in China under the auspices of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek in 1939, and, upon the death of her Czech attaché husband, immigrated to the United States in 1947. While in the U.S., she opened a yoga studio in Hollywood and began teaching Hollywood stars, including Gloria Swanson, and an elderly Ruth St. Denis (Syman 2010, 179-198; Goldberg 2015).[8] Her books, *Forever Young, Forever Healthy* (1953) and *Yoga for Americans* (1959), entered an expanding market for yoga training manuals, and provided instruction on *asana* and *pranayama* in a tone geared towards acclimating hesitant potential practitioners through jokes and stories.[9] Unlike Vithaldas, she used her students to demonstrate the *asana* included in her book, a move perhaps designed to indicate the ease through which Euro-Americans could practice *asana* such as *sirsasana, sarvangasana,* and *padmasana*. She also appealed to her audience through arguments about yoga's ability to increase one's youthfulness, vitality, and beauty; she includes diet tips and instructions for which poses are best for "reducing," as well as an entire section of reviews from satisfied—and sometimes famous—students (Devi 1953, Devi 1959). Unlike Yogananda's mystical, devotional, and meditative approach to yoga, Devi's books focus on ways to make yoga fit into the everyday lives of Americans. She does not ask her readers to contemplate the inherent oneness of divinity, and instead assumes that readers will continue to practice within their

[8] Devi's book *Yoga For Americans* (1959) includes a picture of Ruth St. Denis practicing a shoulderstand in her 80s (143).

[9] For example, in *Forever Young, Forever Healthy*, Devi recounts a lecture she gave where a woman in the audience was convinced that Devi had spent the entire time discussing the benefits of yogurt and asked at the end "How often do you take yogurt?" (1953, 23).

preexisting religious traditions. Her savvy use of her famous students in advertising combined with her sari-wearing cosmopolitanism to make her yoga appealing to wealthy white women; this approach differed from Vithaldas's medicalized and psychoanalytic approach to yoga as a tool for increased health and (masculine) vitality (Goldberg 2105).

Given this brief context of other yoga practices being taught in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, we are now prepared to examine Yogi Vithaldas's contributions to the pedagogy and dissemination of yoga in the United States. Like many other yogis writing for Euro-American audiences, Vithaldas drew on a wide variety of sources and philosophical perspectives in his efforts to position yoga as something beneficial, familiar, and necessary. His writing contains advice that is similar to that offered by Devi and Yogananda, and blends elements of mysticism, an appeal to worldviews common in the U.S., and medicalized healthy living. Like Devi, he focuses on how easy it can be for Westerners to practice yoga; like Yogananda, he includes descriptions of rarefied yogic practices such as *kriya*s. Vithaldas also refers to a plethora of Western doctors to support claims that yoga practice can help oxygenate the brain, tone the muscles of the abdomen and spine, and relax the nerves (1957, 17-21). He also cites psychologists, discusses the importance of the subconscious, articulates the function of neurons, and emphasizes the need to conceive of humans as both "psychical and physical" (1957, 18-19). Through references to psychoanalysis and a discussion of the different levels of consciousness, Vithaldas suggests that yoga therapy will be able to cure a variety of mental disorders that continued to perplex Western doctors and

psychologists. Throughout the book, he offers his version of yoga as a uniquely beneficial tool for creating increased overall health and wellness.

Vithaldas's book does not express any interest in using yoga to supplant existing religions or conceptions of divinity, which continues in the trend established by earlier advocates of yoga in the West, such as Swami Paramananda (who taught at Denishawn and led the Vedanta Society in the 1910s and 1920s) and Swami Vivekananda (of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and the founding of the Vedanta Society in America). He argues that the practice requires no blind belief and is not religious, although it does require belief in some sort of divine source. He places the responsibility for change and enlightenment on the individual: "rather does Yoga reveal the God in man and put the responsibility of spiritual awakening on the individual, who must seek Him for himself by a practical and scientifically worked out method" (Vithaldas 1947, 32). This practical and scientific method relied on moral precepts and meditation as much as *pranayama*, *kriyas*, and *asana*, and thereby mixed familiar contemplative practices with less familiar elements, such as *neti*. This combination would have fascinated the practitioner choosing to eschew the conventions of Judeo-Christian society and attempt a different way of making sense of a rapidly changing world through alternative techniques, such as yogic cleansing rituals and breath control. During a time when youths, intellectuals, and the elite were again turning away from Christianity and towards Eastern religions in search of different ways of understanding their existence, Vithaldas used his writing to position himself as one more attractive alternative spirituality option for the dancers and artists in the downtown Manhattan scene.

Ideas about religion and the relationship between body and soul were not the only things changing during the 1950s. Notions of bodily permeability and immunity, and how disease and health were related, were also reconceptualized in the 1950s, as the polio epidemic and other diseases forced advances in immunology and changes in overall conceptions of health. According to anthropologist of science and medicine Emily Martin, in the 1950s the body was conceived of as a seamless whole whose surface was besieged by germs of all sorts: "It was the opening left in the body's surfaces—a literal physical breach—that would allow disease to get in" (Martin 1994, 27). Much like the rapidly increasing mechanized technologies of post-WWII American industry, the interior of the body was conceptualized as a machine made up of parts that could break down and require overhaul. Children were taught personal hygiene habits to create a healthy mind and body, so that the surface of the body would not be breached by germs or diseases (29). According to Martin, by the 1940s and 1950s, "people were more apt to think in terms of their own immediate environment…. Enormous attention was devoted to hygiene, cleaning surfaces in the home, clothing, surfaces of the body and wounds with antiseptics" (24). The yogic practices taught by Vithaldas, including techniques for bodily purification, breath control, and bodily discipline, fit this notion of the healthy body, as they conceptualized the body as something to be cleansed, controlled, and disciplined in order to attain a less anxious and more healthy existence (1957; 37-38, 62-64). Vithaldas's instructions in cleansing practices such as *neti* and *dhauti*, and claims that yoga *asana* could detox organs and purify the liver, would have been appealing to

readers who were already accustomed to think of the body as something to repaired and defended from impurity (1957).

Vithaldas's health-oriented conceptualization of yoga is also timely given the shifting ideas around exercise and body-building in the mid- and late-1950s. For example, Jack LaLanne's television show, *The Jack LaLanne Show* (1951-1984, nationally syndicated in 1959), built on the militaristic exercise systems discussed in Chapter 2. In the show, he encouraged viewers ranging from children to housewives to the disabled to the elderly to work out in their living rooms to create and maintain strength.[10] He taught using simple props such as a broomstick, a chair, or a rubber cord, and was concerned with both exercising to the point of muscular fatigue and the use of "clean" nutrition to support full-body health.[11] Renowned for his many feats of strength—which often involved towing boats while swimming with his arms handcuffed and legs shackled—LaLanne popularized conceptualizations of exercise and healthy living on a national level. While Vithaldas probably appealed more to nonconforming artist types, spiritual seekers, intellectuals, and the wealthy, LaLanne encouraged TV-watching children to wake their suburban housewife mothers so they could exercise in the comfort of their own (mass-produced) living rooms.[12] Yet, both teachers encouraged the use of

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[10] Dave Tuttle, "Jack LaLanne," *Life Extension Magazine,* August 2006, accessed August 19, 2015, http://www.lifeextension.com/magazine/2006/8/report_lalanne/Page-01

[11]Richard Goldstein, "Jack LaLanne, Founder of Modern Fitness Movement, Dies at 96," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2011, accessed August 8, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/24/sports/24lalanne.html

[12] Claudia Luther, "Jack LaLanne dies at 96; spiritual father of U.S. fitness movement," *The LA Times*, January 23, 2011, accessed August 8, 2015,

bodily exercises and clean eating habits to create a longer-lived and healthier existence, and used rhetoric emphasizing the need to reduce nervous tension to incite Americans to exercise.

Due to the overlap in practitioners and occasional conflation of Buddhism, Hinduism, and various other "Eastern" religious practices in the 1950s, *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension* and Vithaldas's classes must also be contextualized through the long history of Buddhism in the United States.[13] The resurgence of Buddhism

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http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jan/23/local/la-me-jack-lalanne-20110124

[13] The history of the arrival of various forms of Buddhism to the West has been thoroughly explored, from initial interest in the mid-1800s, presence at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, lectures by D.T. Suzuki at Columbia University in 1952-1957, through to the eventual development of Buddhist-inspired or Buddhist-influenced practices such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (Tweed 2000, Snodgrass 2003, Morgan 2004, Wilson 2014). Religious studies scholar Thomas A. Tweed argues that Buddhism was initially appealing to esoterics, rationalists, and romantics during the Victorian Era due to its ability to reinforce the principles of activism, individualism, self-reliance, and optimism that were so engrained in US culture (2000, xxxvi). Following in the same trajectory of studies of global Buddhism, Judith Snodgrass contends that one of the main purposes of the Japanese delegation to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religion was to counteract mainstream perceptions of Buddhism as atheistic, nihilistic, and pessimistic; opinions that had formed due to the radical differences between Buddhist and Christian worldviews and perspectives on what happens to the individual after death (2003). Whereas Christianity is centered around a creator God and individual worship, and goodness is seen as leading to salvation, many Americans during the latter half of the 1800s perceived Buddhism as encouraging adherents to negate their individual selves, reject salvation after death, and hope for the annihilation of the self in nirvana (Tweed 2000, 1). These perceptions limited the draw of Buddhism on a broad scale in the early 1900s, although the religion was still appealing to many of the Transcendentalists, Swedenborgians, Free Thought followers, Christian Scientists, mystics, and Spiritualists who were also interested in yoga, Vedanta, and various strands of Hinduism around the same time. Therefore, as Tweed argues, although Buddhism was popular among esoterics, rationalists, and romantics, it did not gain truly widespread appeal until partway through the 20th century, which coincided with the rise in popularity of Suzuki.

The overall trajectories of both yoga and Buddhism in the United States are quite similar, with initial popularization through intellectuals, spiritual seekers, and the elite,

prompted by D.T. Suzuki's rise to fame in the 1950s is particularly relevant, as the people who were interested in Vithaldas were often also interested in Suzuki's Buddhism. Suzuki first gained acclaim through his translations of Eastern texts in the early 1900s, and then published commentaries on Zen Buddhism that skyrocketed him to fame. *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (1926) and *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series* (1933) were extremely influential at a time when Zen centers were few and far between, and when most would-be Zen students relied on books. His third period of residence in the United States, which included lecture tours and a seminar at Columbia University (from 1952-1957), skyrocketed his work into the public consciousness, and exposed the downtown Manhattan arts scene to Zen (Larson 2012). Vithaldas's physicalized and non-esoteric approach to yoga would have appealed to artists and members of countercultural movements who were also interested in the non-dualism found in Suzuki's Zen teachings.[14]

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some representations onstage in the 1910s and 1920s, a slight decrease in visibility due to changing public sentiments and the 1924 change to immigration laws, and a resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s as post-World War II America became more culturally plural and permissive and immigration laws were loosened once again in 1965.

[14] People who studied Zen with Suzuki permeated Cunningham's downtown arts scene and personal life. Erich Fromm, Allan Ginsberg, and—significantly, for my argument here—John Cage were among the participants at Suzuki's seminars at Columbia University (1952-1957), and Suzuki's teachings on the nature of reality and non-dualist thought were extremely influential in the development of beat poetry, minimalist art, and sound-based music. Due to his artistic and romantic partnership with Cunningham, John Cage's interest in Zen Buddhism is particularly important for this study.

Interestingly, Cage was initially interested in the teachings of Ramakrishna (an Indian mystic who was the teacher of the primary founder of neo-Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda) and studied his writings in the 1940s, he seems to have become dissatisfied with the disjunction between Ramakrishna's mysticism—and the world negation implied in disappearing into *samadhi*—and the demands of daily life (Larson 2013, 152). While

In sum, Vithaldas astutely positioned his yoga teaching in relation to cultural trends of exercise, religious practice, and other yoga practices that were becoming increasingly popular during the 1950s and 1960s. Like Devi, his yoga was approachable and appealing; like Yogananda, he positioned the practice as universally applicable. He used medical terminology that was cutting-edge at the time, and he spoke to a similar audience of seekers and artists as Suzuki. As I will demonstrate in the next section, Vithaldas's calculated positioning of his yoga teachings led to elements of the practice being taken up by Merce Cunningham and other artists in his social group.

Cage did study some of the neo-Vedanta that influenced previous generations of dance artists in the U.S., he eventually focused his studies around Zen. Cage had heard a lecture on Zen Buddhism and the Arts while at the Cornish School in the 1930s, and picked up a reprint of Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* sometime around 1950. In it, he found a path for liberation from suffering that provided instruction on ways to integrate the mind and the self to be more at peace with the world, while maximizing the release and production of creative energy (Larson 2013, 153-154). Suzuki's lessons on the nature of ego led Cage to question how to best make choices while composing, which soon led Cage to use the *I Ching* and chance procedures as compositional tools (Larson 2013, 171-174). Cage, Cunningham, Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Earle and Carolyn Brown, Robert Rauschenberg, and others coalesced over the next few years into a group interested in changing the relationship between the self/ego/will and the process of artistic production.

When Cunningham formally started his own dance company in 1953, he would have recently heard Cage present his treatises for the use of Zen in the arts and life, "Lecture on Something" and "Lecture on Nothing," at The Club in 1951 and 1952 (Larson 2013; 219, 222-227). He began to use chance procedures in his own compositional process shortly after, culminating in the first piece composed entirely via chance procedures, *Suite By Chance* (1953). Although Cunningham was reportedly not as interested in Suzuki's seminars as Cage, their impact on his community, and therefore on his choreography, was paramount (Larson 2013). He continued to use various forms of chance-based compositional procedures throughout the rest of his career, and, like Cage, maintained an interest in minimizing his habitual choreographic choices to create choreography that allowed the movement to be viewed as just movement, separate from both his own choices and from any musical accompaniment.

"Every Morning Merce Cunningham Does His Yoga"

Cunningham's interest in yoga was mentioned in passing throughout his career by both Cunningham and Cunningham scholars; however, a sustained inquiry into the influence of yoga on Cunningham's career has not yet been attempted. In doing so here, I highlight the ways that yoga—as a mode of philosophical inquiry, a daily practice, and, in the next section, as a visible trace in his choreography—impacted the development of Cunningham's technique and choreography. I examine the shift from Vithaldas's teachings as they were outlined in *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension* (1957), and as Cunningham eventually used them in the creation of his choreography. Cunningham's work with yoga in the early- and mid-1960s signifies a shift from the appropriation of cultural signifiers (becoming or performing the yogi, as done by Ruth St. Denis) to appropriating methodologies (doing *asana*, and representing an abstracted version of yoga onstage), as I will argue was done by Cunningham. Cunningham's personal yoga practice led him to include yoga *asana* in his choreography, which continued the separation between yoga instructors and yoga's use in artistic productions by Euro-Americans. This process led to Vithaldas being removed from the picture as an influence on Cunningham. In that sense, Cunningham's position as an individual artistic genius was used to diminish Vithaldas's individual contribution to the global spread of yoga practices, even as Cunningham's use of yoga *asana* continued Vithaldas's project of familiarizing and popularizing yoga.

By the time that Cunningham began to practice yoga *asana* in the late-1950s, his version of it was quite different from the Ramakrishna-inspired mysticism that his

partner, John Cage, studied in the late-1940s and early 1950s (Larson 2013, 152).[15] Instead of attempting to use meditation and devotion to become one with the divine, Cunningham relied on the teachings of Yogi Vithaldas and Vithaldas's idea that yoga could allow the practitioner to exist in the world as s/he meets it. Cunningham did not blindly follow Vithaldas's prescriptions for yoga practice as set out in *The Yogi System of Health and Relief from Tension*, and was not interested in the full-on transformation that could have been created through the practice of the *prana* control exercises described in Vithaldas's book.

Indeed, many mentions of Cunningham's yoga occur in relation to a single story of his experience in seated meditation. Cunningham muse Carolyn Brown describes Cunningham's involvement with yoga as follows:

> Cunningham, on the other hand, taught himself the physical exercises of hatha yoga from Yogi Vithaldas's book *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension* and practices it to this day, but after one disquieting experience when the force of energy known as *kundalini* rose like a fiery serpent from the base of his spine, he avoided the special exercises whose goal is the brain, the mind, and the discerning of things on a spiritual plane, recognizing instantly the dangers that might befall him without a spiritual master. (2007, 23)

In this story, Brown suggests that Cunningham draws a distinction between the safety associated with *asana* practice, and the relative danger of exercises involving *kundalini*, *prana*-control, spiritual practice, or meditation.

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[15] It is safe to say that Cunningham had a dedicated yoga *asana* practice by the late 1950s, due to the title of a section in *Rune* (1959)—"Yogi"— and Carolyn Brown's anecdote that Cunningham had a yoga practice several years before her study with Vithaldas began in 1961, (Brown 2007, 338).

This same story of Cunningham's encounter with *kundalini* and his process of learning yoga is also recounted by Cage, who does not use the term *kundalini* in describing the force rising up Cunningham's spine:

> Every morning Merce Cunningham does his yoga. He is self-taught by means of books he collected on the subject. Aware of the intimate connection of body and mind, and not having a yogi's assistance, he proceeds with caution. Once, while breathing deeply in the lotus position, he noticed that an unfamiliar force seemed to be rising up his spine. He changed his mind and very shortly was standing on his feet. (Kostelanetz 1970, 182-183)

Instead of an experience potentially leading to spiritual mastery and a new understanding of the energetic relationship between body/self and the divine, as might happen in a yoga text, Cage's framing focuses the reader's attention on Cunningham's sudden movement from seated to standing, and his respectful approach to the mysteries of yoga.

The story appears again in *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance*, where dance scholar Roger Copeland quotes Cage's entire story about Cunningham's yoga practice, and frames Cage's story of Cunningham's yoga by saying that "John Cage tells a story about Cunningham that neatly sums up his 'fear of flow' and his persistent tendency to 'change his mind'" (Copeland 2004, 114). According to Copeland, in Cunningham's technique "What we see are *thinking* bodies in the business of frequently 'changing their minds'—perhaps even 'contradicting themselves'—the very opposite, in other words, of 'free' flow" (2004, 114, emphasis in original). Instead of referring to the experience as a sudden surge of *kundalini* energy, Copeland relates Cunningham's sudden need to stand to Cunningham's use of chance-based procedures to avoid creating an easy flow between movements in his work.

Across these narratives of Cunningham's experience in seated meditation, we see several common threads: a comfortable seat, a rising energy, and an impulse to stand on his feet. Unlike Cage and Copeland, Brown names the sensation as *kundalini*, perhaps because of her own experience with yoga. She also specifically names Vithaldas, whereas Cage (and by extension Copeland) refers to "books he collected on the subject." In doing so, Cage and Copeland erase the specificity of Cunningham's yoga exercises, and position yoga-related practices as unchanging and available for appropriation. All three authors draw connections between Cunningham's interest in chance-based choreographic choices—which may have derived more from Cage's interest in the *I Ching* than Cunningham's study of Vithaldas's book—and his sudden need to rise to standing. Their renditions of Cunningham's yoga prompt many questions: what did Cunningham's yoga practice look like? How did it impact his daily life? Did it influence his choreography beyond his desire to be constantly prepared for movement in any direction and to have few logical connections between movements?

I therefore turn to a more in-depth examination of Yogi Vithaldas's yoga manual to determine more precisely what Cunningham would have practiced in the early 1960s. The anecdotes recounted by Brown and Cage suggest that, while perhaps influenced by the ideas around the need for relaxation and relief of tension outlined by Vithaldas, Cunningham avoided most of the *pranayama* and meditation exercises Vithaldas provided. Instead, Cunningham would have practiced a wide range of *asana* outlined in the "Physical Culture, With Exercises" chapter of Vithaldas's book, including poses such as *halasana*, *sarvangasana*, *salabhasana*, *mayurasana*, *sirsasana*, *simhasana*, all of

which are frequently used to tone the abdominal muscles and to strengthen and mobilize the spine. In introducing the poses, Vithaldas states that "the exercises given here cater for every need of the body, and that systematically practised and made a habit, a great improvement in the constitution of the student will result, making for a renewed outlook on life generally, of optimism, confidence, and happiness" (1957, 38). Given that Cunningham practiced mostly the *asana* and not the *pranayama* or *kriyas* described by Vithaldas, it is possible that he turned to yoga for stretching, mobility, and strength, which would have enhanced the mobility he had already developed through his ballet classes at the Juilliard school and extensive modern dance training under Martha Graham. According to David Vaughan, the longtime archivist for the Cunningham Dance Company, Cunningham started to practice yoga while looking for healing from a back injury; this practically oriented approach could indicate why he was less interested in the *kundalini* aspects of Vithaldas's teachings. Even without the *pranayama* or meditation outlined in later chapters of Vithaldas's book, such poses would still have afforded considerable benefits to Cunningham's general equanimity and bodily control. In most references to his yoga practice later in his career, he says "I did my yoga exercises," which suggests a more physical approach to yoga practice.[16]

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[16] For example, in "Rehearsing the Human Situation" (1989) a dialogue between Cunningham and Cage, moderated by David Vaughan, the following exchange occurs beginning at 21:50:

> Cage: What did you do today?
> Cunningham: Uh. What did I do? I'm remembering. I did my yoga exercises and then I went shopping and then I had some lunch and then I went to the theater to work on the new piece that we're going to present this week and I looked at the two drops that I haven't seen, two decors for two pieces which will be presented

Despite his lack of interest in—and fear of the effects of—*kundalini* and *prana*-control exercises, Cunningham also enjoyed other practices related to yoga, including clean eating, healthy digestion, and vegetarianism, mentioning them at several times throughout his career, and perhaps drawing on cooking ideas learned from Robert and Judy Dunn—who were also involved with Vithaldas—or from Vithaldas's book.[17] Cunningham's continuous references to his yoga practice beginning in the early 1960s suggests that it played a significant role in the development of his career at a time when he was just beginning to gain significant attention in the United States and abroad.

> here. Both pieces are in a sense premieres. And then I came home and had a conversation with you.

Later in the same conversation, an audience member asks about Cage and Cunningham's routines as artists (73:31). Cunningham replies:

> In the case of this situation now, for example, and it's much like it's been, as far as my life is concerned, for years, I get up in the morning and do my yoga exercises, and then when I get to the theater I give myself a workout, a barre. Then I give the company a class, then there is a short break for lunch, and then there are three or four hours of rehearsal.

Recording hosted by the New York Public Library:
http://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb16430253?lang=eng

[17] In 1992, Cunningham contributed an article to *Tricycle, The Buddhist Review* with instructions on "How to Cook a Macrobiotic Meal in a Hotel Room." In it, he outlines the preparations necessary to eat healthily while on tour, and comments that "The cooking of the beans is done in the early morning during my yoga period, they only require an occasional stirring to keep their spirits up. The yoga and the beans take roughly an hour, you turn them off (and if it's a nervous hotel, hide the container in a drawer) and leave for the day's schedule at the theater, which includes class and rehearsal" (75). The article is accompanied by drawings by Lois Long, one of which shows a man with curly hair quite like Cunningham's in a headstand. This article is one of many little references that show that, despite his lack of interest in *kundalini* or meditation, Cunningham continued to practice *asana* and utilize the dietary lessons learned from Vithaldas's book throughout his life.

Cunningham's yoga was not limited to physical exercises, or dietary choices, however. Beginning around 1964, he also began to use yogic discipline as a concept to frame his dance technique in lecture-demonstrations.[18] He structured his lecture-demonstrations differently each time, and repeatedly reworked and revamped sections from previous lectures and dances to more accurately and interestingly describe the creation of his dance technique, the use of chance procedures in choreography, and his philosophy on dancing and dance-making. In previous lecture-demonstrations, Cunningham had used D. T. Suzuki's story of Japanese swordsman learning to count to 10 and then returning to 1 again to suggest that— through their incessant focus on moving forward—Americans in the 1960s had lost the ability to find stillness (return to 1). When his lectures referenced yoga, Cunningham related yoga to this sort of meditative return to the beginning, to stillness.

In a lecture-demonstration given on March 19th, 1964, he asks: "What is technique for me? I practice it every day. It is a yoga, a discipline daily instilled, but also a form of meditation, and although there is no guarantee of freedom, that is, as in the Japanese swordsman discipline, the final step. First we count 1, 2, 3 to 10, and return to 1 again."[19]

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[18] Lecture-Demonstration from March 19, 1964 (Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation, Inc. records, Additions, (S) *MGZMD 351, Box 29, Folder 2). These were often given at social group and club meetings, and provided information on Cunningham's methodology in dance composition, which was supported by demonstrations of dancing that were often drawn from whatever was in the repertory at that time. Somewhere between an "Event" and a lecture, the pieces helped initiate audience members into Cunningham's methodology.

[19] Lecture-Demonstration from March 19, 1964 (Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation, Inc. records, Additions, (S) *MGZMD 351, Box 29, Folder 2). As evidenced by the rest of the notes in that folder, Cunningham continued to refer to yoga as a daily discipline

In this anecdote, yoga is a technique for finding stillness, but it is also construed as a discipline with final goal of freedom. This is similar to Vithaldas's conception of yoga as a practice that can reduce stress and create increased equanimity in the practitioner, and to Vithaldas's interpretation of yoga as having an ultimate goal of creating "a life force within himself" (1957, 22).

Like the freedom from individual attachment or from the cycle of rebirth and death found in various versions of yoga, Cunningham's phrasing in his lecture-demonstrations suggests that his technique is a discipline that will ultimately allow for freedom of expression in movement. Even though he used the concept of yoga to frame his technique during the 1960s, there has been little scholarly study of how those yogic conceptions interacted with his more well-known use of the *I Ching*, penny tossing, dice rolls, and other chance procedures.[20] I therefore propose that Cunningham's yoga be conceptualized alongside his chance procedures. The freedom and discipline that

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and relate it to meditative freedom and the Japanese swordsman throughout the rest of 1965.

[20] Cunningham utilized chance procedures to determine various things in his dances, including where dancers should enter from or exit to, what path their movement should take, what movement should follow another movement, or what order to use for various sections of a dance. According to Cunningham, "When I choreograph a piece by tossing pennies—by chance, that is, I am finding my resources in that play which is not a product of my will, but which is an energy and a law which I too obey… the feeling that I have when I compose in this way is that I am in touch with a natural resource far greater than my own personal inventiveness could ever be, much more universally human than the particular habits of my own practice, and organically rising out of the common pool of motor impulses" (Brown 1968, 23). His phrasing around the "natural resource" that is "universally human" and "organic" indicates that he sees his chance-based operations as a means of accessing something beyond his own human inclinations, while his statement that he finds resources in "a play which is not a product of [his] will," but is "an energy and a law which I too obey" speaks to the intentional negation of predictable artist-driven choices in Cunningham's work.

Cunningham suggests can be found through yoga parallels the impetus driving his use of chance procedures in creating choreography. Although chance procedures inspired by the *I Ching* and Zen Buddhism directly influenced his choreography through dice rolls and hexagram readings, the daily nature of his yoga practice also framed his life, and by extension, his choreography. By taking that perspective, we can see the daily discipline of physical yoga practice as an influential training that Cunningham and his artistic community relied on, but which has heretofore been ignored in plain sight by many scholars.

Of course, Cunningham was not the only (post)modern dancer interested in yoga in the early 1960s, and it is important to recognize the ways in which Cunningham's yoga practice was not unique, and was instead related to the common vogue among dancers in downtown Manhattan in the early 1960s. In her autobiography, Brown describes the circumstances under which she and other Cunningham dancers began to take class from Vithaldas in 1961, upon their return from their 1961 world tour. Brown indicates that she began to study yoga in order to gain a similar level of breath control to Cunningham. According to Brown,

> Years earlier, Merce had taught himself yoga from Vithaldas's book *The Yoga System of Health and Relief from Tension*, and he'd practiced it faithfully every day. Since then Vithaldas had become something of a celebrity, but he charged according to one's ability to pay, and I think he really enjoyed teaching our little group: Remy [Charlip], Judy and Bob Dunn, ballet dancer Sylvia Kim, and me. After his class we'd chant "om," and he would lecture us upon the evils of materialism as we sat on the plush wall-to-wall carpeting of his Upper East Side high-rise, with its spectacular views of the city through floor-to-ceiling glass. Then he'd teach us how to cook Indian food, which we ate sitting cross-legged around a sheet spread on his living room floor. Well fed and thoroughly chastened about the materialistic life, we'd return to our own digs, some without heat or hot water, in considerably less glamorous parts of town. Obviously, our purpose in

> studying yoga was not to shed the shackles of materialism; mine was to learn how to breathe properly while performing. Merce's breath control always amazed me; no matter how difficult the dance or how great his exertion he never panted, never appeared to be out of breath. I hoped studying with Vithaldas would provide some insight into how he accomplished this. (2007, 338)

Brown's description of her sessions with Vithaldas, and her desire to learn yoga in the first place, focuses equally on the use of yoga as a tool to learn to be a better dancer, yogic eating, and the incongruously anti-materialist aspects of Vithaldas's teaching.[21] As evidenced by Brown's recollection, Cunningham was not alone in his participation in yoga activities in the early 1960s.

Robert Ellis Dunn was also a member of the Vithaldas yoga evenings in 1961, which was coincidentally right when he was giving his seminal workshops on choreography at the Cunningham dance studios that led to the formation of the Judson Dance Theater. Dunn—whose then-wife, Judith Dunn, danced with the Cunningham company, and also participated in the yoga lessons—also made repeated mentions of his own yoga practice, although it was mostly discussed in conjunction with his practice and teaching of Tai Chi.[22] These overlaps between the leaders of the downtown dance scene and the development of the Judson Dance Theater indicate that yogic ideas on diet, bodily discipline, and the connection between yoga philosophy and ways of being and

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[21] Brown also mentions that, although Cunningham encouraged Cage to practice yoga or some other form of physical exercise, Cage was not interested in *asana* or in meditation (whether in a yogic or a Zen lineage) (2007, 23-24).

[22] Mary Edsall's 2003 dissertation contains several references to Dunn's yoga practice. It is also described in Sally Banes's *Democracy's Body*: "In the fall of that year [1958], Dunn moved to New York, where he worked for Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham as a pianist for rehearsals, classes, and performances…. He no longer danced, but he studied Tai Chi Chuan and Yoga" (1983, 2).

breathing permeate throughout the development of post-modern dance. Since Dunn's workshops at the Cunningham/Cage studio are frequently positioned as the initiation point for postmodern dance, it is important to recognize the breadth of influences that led the involved artists and facilitators to create the principles of postmodern dance (Banes 1983).

Because of all these connections between a key moment in the history of postmodern dance and a renewed turn to yogic practice in the discipline, questions around the representation of yogis and recognition of their work becomes more important than ever. As I have demonstrated in this section, the rhetorical moves of Cunningham and other authors discussing his work often position yoga as an ahistorical practice ripe for the taking. Although Cunningham frequently referred to his yoga practice throughout his career, he also treats his version of yoga as if it were a non-specific, generalizable practice: "I did my yoga exercises."[23] To my knowledge, he never names Vithaldas himself—only Carolyn Brown does that. Although understandable, this move is racially charged. It privileges Cunningham's ability to learn yoga from Vithaldas's book over Vithaldas's work in writing that book, collating the exercises, and generally making them available for Cunningham (and his contemporaries) to use in his daily yoga practice. Of course, Vithaldas's choice to write the book and make his yoga available for public consumption outside of *guru*-disciple teaching systems also speaks to the increasing separation between yoga teachers and yoga students that increased across the twentieth century. Nonetheless, Cunningham's choice to focus on *asana* instead of the spiritual or

[23] Cunningham in the interview "Rehearsing the Human Situation" at (21:50), http://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb16430253?lang=eng

meditative or *kundalini* aspects of Vithaldas's yoga underlines his ability to pick and choose from among the practices offered in Vithaldas's yoga buffet.

Seeing Cunningham's Yoga Onstage: *Rune* and *Variations V*

Although I have demonstrated the impact of yoga on Cunningham's personal life, other dancers in Cunningham's social scene, and the development of the Judson dance theater, there remains one more aspect of Cunningham's work that we must analyze to understand the influence of yoga on his career: his choreography. Like St. Denis's desire to connect all religiosity to a universal human truth and to relate that divine spirituality to the place of dance in society—or Graham's mishmash of yoga, Delsarte, eurythmics, and Denishawn technique in the creation of a modern dance technique that could be used to express the great mythic stories of the human experience—Cunningham and his cohort were similarly fascinated by "the Orient" and influenced by the dance techniques and spiritual practices that were part of their milieu.

Yoga appears (and disappears) in two dances created by Cunningham: he nicknamed a section in *Rune* (1959) "the Yogi,"[24] while *Variations V* (1965) was an early, if not the first, dance by Cunningham to incorporate yoga *asana*. Drawing on examples from Cunningham's choreographic notes, observations of yoga *asana* in recordings of his work, references to yoga in Cunningham's written work and interviews, and writings by Cunningham dancers and related artists, this section analyses the use and visibility of yoga *asana* in Cunningham's choreography. In doing so, I position yoga as a

[24] Vaughan 2005, 117-118; Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records, (S) *MGZMD 295, Box 12 Folder 3.

discipline influential to artistic production, although its impact has not always been noticed or recognized.

The first time that yoga appears in relation to Cunningham's choreography, it is not actually discernable onstage, but rather exists only in the choreographic notes for a section nicknamed "the Yogi" in the piece *Rune* (1959).[25] The "Yogi" section happened about halfway through the piece, and consisted of two trios, with a movement motif repeated by both groups.[26] His notes do not include many references to the section, and the descriptions of the steps make it seem balletic, with extended lines and relatively upright carriage. The motif, a slow series of leg extensions and lunges with only one member of a trio moving at a time, interweaves the dancers to create sculptural poses that travel slowly and that have a quietly contemplative quality.[27] There are no notes in the Cunningham Company Choreographic Records to indicate why the section was given the nickname that it has, and the notes describe the section as "two trios" just as frequently as they name it "yogi." Perhaps the quality of movement contained in that part of the dance

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[25] Rune was constructed out of five 5 minute long sections, which were designed to be presented in random order. The piece is one of Cunningham's major investigations into the use of indeterminacy in the ordering of a dance, was one of his most rigorously uncompromising and classic pieces, and, according to David Vaughan, "was one of Cunningham's first dances to use space in a layered way—the eye simultaneously takes in events in the foreground, middle, and rear of the stage, and these, while not necessarily related, do interact" (Vaughan 2005, 118). It uses six dancers, two male and four female, and makes deliberate use of stillness as an element of equal value to movement. Rune was in the Cunningham repertory several years, and there were revivals of it in 1982 and 1995 (Vaughan 2005, 117-118).

[26] Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records, (S) *MGZMD 295, Box 12 Folder 3.

[27] *Rune* recording from 1999, I believe the "Yogi" section starts at 14:56 and lasts until 17:11. http://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb16304122?lang=eng

was conceived of as particularly yogic? Perhaps the tone of the performance during that moment was deemed yogic? Or maybe the movements brought to mind a yogi's meditation? While the audience probably had no idea of the section's nickname, the fact that there *is* a section nicknamed "the Yogi" in 1959 indicates at least a base level of awareness of yoga at that juncture in Cunningham's career.

By 1965, this oblique reference to yoga in Cunningham's work was superseded by the appearance of yoga *asana* onstage in Cunningham's choreography for *Variations V*. The dance begins with Barbara Dilley Lloyd in a supported headstand, and Cunningham's solo partway through the dance features him in *mayurasana*. It also includes movements that resemble both the rolling on the spine seen in the Denishawn Floor Set No. 1 Exercise VII, and Floor Set No. 2 Exercise III, and the pose *salamba sarvangasana*. While the yoga *asana* in the piece are distinctively recognizable, they may have been overlooked due to the sheer number of things happening onstage during the piece.

Variations V was a collaborative creation, and included a sound score facilitated by Cage that was created through proximity sensors that reacted to dancer's movements when they were adjacent to Theremin-like antennae and light-sensitive photo-voltaic cells (Miller 2001). When the dancers were within four feet of the twelve antennae arranged onstage, or when they disrupted the light in front of the photo-cells located at the bottom of the antennae, they triggered switches in a mixer, which was used to control the plethora of radios and tape recorders used to create the sound score. The apparatus required several technicians to operate, and the movements of the dancers created the

conditions of possibility for the sound scape (Miller 2001, 546). Several other elements that the dancers interacted with also influenced the sound score, including microphones attached to a rubber plant that was disassembled and reassembled throughout the piece, a microphone attached to the bicycle that Cunningham rode around the stage at the end of the piece, and a microphone attached to a pillow on top of Barbara Dilley Lloyd's head that she used while performing a headstand and being gently lifted and rotated by Gus Solomons, Jr.[28] These interactions between the movement and the music exemplify Cage's and Cunningham's advancements in collaboration, as do the massive film projections by Stan Van Der Beek and video by Naim June Paik (Copeland 2004; 41, 149).

According to Susan Leigh Foster, "The overabundance of activity in the performance space… accentuates the lack of a single authorial message. The unpredictable sequencing of different parts of the body and the unusual changes in dynamics and interactions between dancers offer multiple, diverse references to the world, none of which occur in logical order" (Foster 1986, 41). The lack of singular authorial message was tied to the need to attend to multiple things at the same time, and was an intentional part of Cunningham and Cage's design of the piece. According to Roger Copeland, *Variations V* asked viewers to "divide our attention so as to simultaneously apprehend two or more unrelated phenomena. This is a prime example of what Cage called 'polyattentiveness,' and he [Cage] proposed this mode of attention as a

[28] Because of its use in the creation of the sound score for the piece, reviewer Clement Crisp referred to the plant as "the loudest aspidistra in the world." "Merce Cunningham" in *The Financial Times*, November 25, 1966.

discipline to be practiced daily, like meditation or yoga" (Copeland 2004, 285).[29] This disruption of bodily expectations and mixture of performance elements from different mediums typifies Cunningham's aesthetic during the mid-1960s, and potentially explains why the use of yoga *asana* in the piece was not highlighted at the time, even as the supposedly yoga-like discipline of "polyattentiveness" was emphasized.[30] (It is interesting that Cage relates yoga to polyattentiveness, when most yogic techniques revolve around creating single-pointed focus.)

While most descriptions of the work focus on the "polyattentiveness" required by the piece, the innovations in the creation of the sound score, or the video projections, some reviewers also make oblique references to the yoga-related aspects of the piece: "There is an air mattress and what looks like an ice bag. When lain upon, the one crackles; when used as a pillow for a pretty girl's headstand, so does the other."[31] Both of the props described by reviewer Thomas Willis are used in the yoga-related sections of the piece: the "air mattress" is used by Cunningham during his yoga *asana*-inspired solo,

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[29] Copeland quotes Cage at length: "I think that one of our most accessible disciplines now is paying attention to more than one thing at a time. If we can do that with equanimity, then I propose paying attention to three things at the same time. You can practice it as a discipline; I think it is more effective than sitting cross-legged" (Copeland cites Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage,* 20).

[30] Indeed, according to *New York Herald Tribune* dance critic Walter Terry, "These projections were amusing, and the dancing, when one could drag one's attention away from the screen and back to the stage, was extremely well done by the performers. Choreographically, this is not one of Mr. Cunningham's more inspired efforts. It contains some interesting movement adventures but it wanders about and peters out" ("Parting Shot Applause" July 24, 1965).

[31] Thomas Willis. "Two Dance Ages—Dada and Milhaud 'Miroir.' *The Chicago Tribune*. November 24, 1965.

while the "ice bag" is used by Barbara Dilley Lloyd as a cover for a microphone during the headstand that opens the piece. This "air mattress" is probably what Cunningham called a "yoga pad" in his notes for the piece (See Figure 3.1).[32] Despite Willis's reference to yoga through "a pretty girl's headstand," the focus is more on a description of the props and the sound they create than it is on the yoga-inspired movements that were used to make those sounds. This verbal framing of the work turns attention away from the yoga in the piece.

[32] Cunningham's notes for the piece refer to it as a "yoga pad," so I maintain that terminology throughout this section. It could be a traditional Indian thin cotton-stuffed mattress (*gaddā*) that could have been used in India for yoga. It is dark with lighter stripes, and is approximately the size of a modern-day yoga mat. It is only shown in the videorecording of *Variations V* during a solo by Cunningham that takes place on it. It functions in the piece in a similar way to the bicycle, the plant, and the set of table and chairs: as one more not-conventionally dance element that the dancers interact with, and that adds to the multimedia pastiche of the piece. The pad appears more fluffy and padded than any of the yoga pads used in the United States today, and is somewhat between a yoga mat and the "air mattress" mentioned in the review. It is described in the Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records S*MGZMD 295, Box 16 Folder 1.

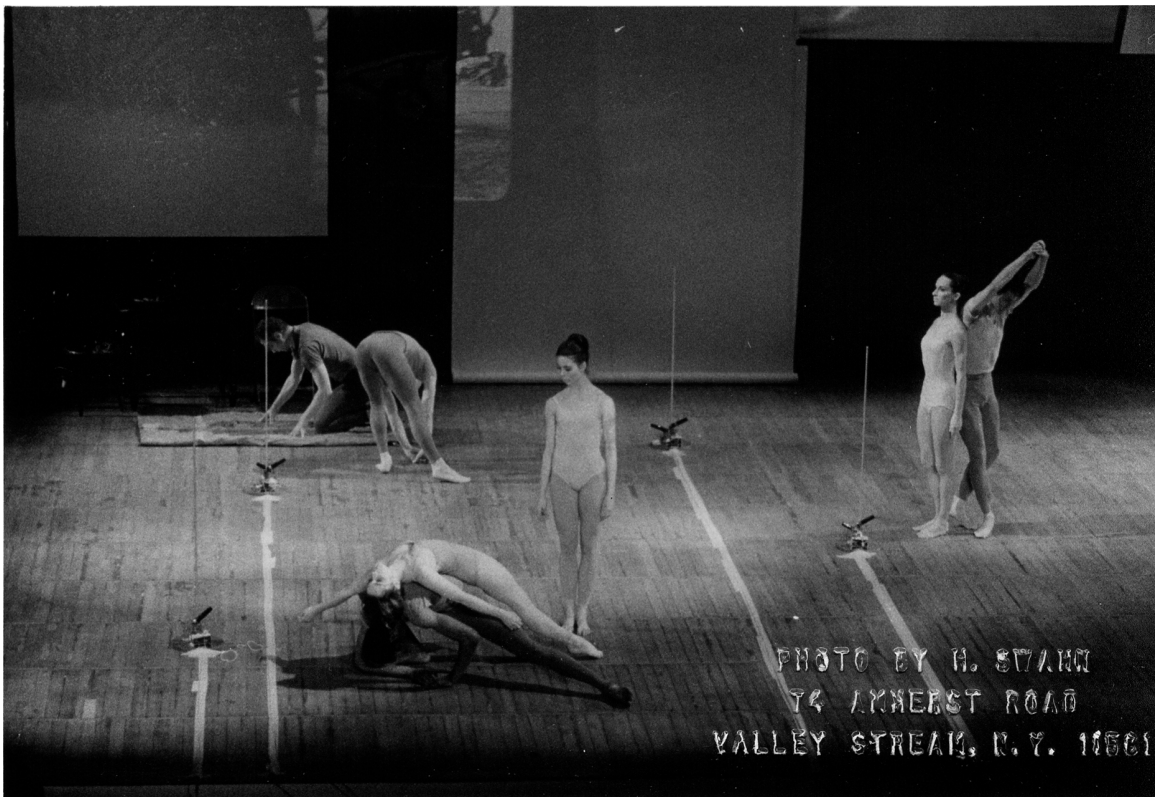

Figure 3.1 Merce Cunningham Dance Company in *Variations V*. Cunningham and his yoga pad can be seen at the upper left. This is the only picture of Cunningham's solo or of the yoga pad I was able to find in the Cunningham archives, and it indicates that the placement of the mat differed between the stage and screen productions of the piece (Cunningham's interactions with the yoga pad occurred directly in front of the camera in the film version, which was placed just in front of the dancers downstage center in this photo.) Photo Harold Swahn (1967). Courtesy of the Merce Cunningham Trust. All rights reserved.

In terms of movement, distinctly recognizable yoga *asana* appear at the very beginning of the piece through Barbara Dilley Lloyd's opening headstand (Arnbom 1966, 6:50). She walks onstage followed by Gus Solomons, Jr. and squiggles an elastic band down from around her waist to mid-thigh level, where it serves to keep her dress close to her body as she changes in orientation. Solomons hands her the microphone-pillow contraption, which she places on her head and then ties in place using a string.

Meticulously keeping the microphone cord away from her head, she kneels, places her forearms on the ground, and grasps her hands together to enter into her headstand. She lifts her hips, distributes her weight equally between each forearm and the crown of her head, keeps her legs glued together as she raises them off the floor, and pulls her shoulders away from her ears to support her weight. Lloyd holds the pose for a few minutes as Solomons carefully picks her up by her ankles or calves, rotates her, and sets her back down. He keeps his hands around her ankles for a moment to help her regain her balance after each rotation, and then steps away, allowing her to support herself upside down unassisted. Her balance never wavers. Her arms do not vary from their precise placement, her torso does not buckle, and her legs remain together throughout. The movement could easily be used in a yoga textbook to demonstrate a quintessential headstand. (See Figure 3.2)

Yet, despite her control over the pose, Cunningham does not highlight the use of yoga techniques in creating that particular sound/movement combination. This is similar to many other discussions of the movement in *Variations V*, which similarly do not highlight the use of yoga. For example, Clement Crisp, speaking of the production put on at the Saville Theatre in London in 1966, said "A young lady stood on her head at the other side of the stage, but later abandoned this exercise when the rest of the dancers came onstage and indulged in some Modern Dance calisthenics."[33] While the action of standing on her head is recognizable as yoga-related, if not outright yoga, it tends to be

[33] "Merce Cunningham" in *The Financial Times*, November 25, 1966.

highlighted more for its sound production than the physical exertion and technical mastery demonstrated by Lloyd and Solomons.

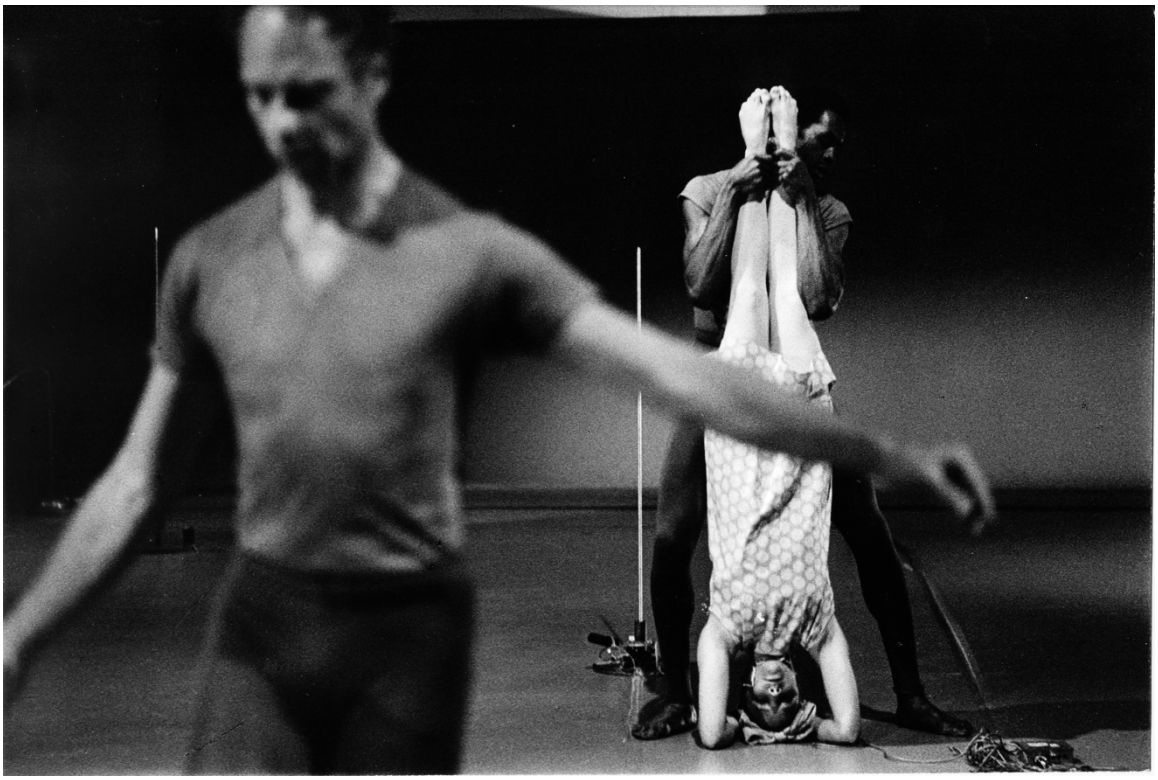

Figure 3.2 Merce Cunningham, Barbara Dilley Lloyd, and Gus Solomons, Jr. in *Variations V*. The contact microphone on Lloyd's head, antenna, and photovoltaic cell at the bottom of the antenna pole are visible in this photo. Photo by Herve Gloaguen (1966). Courtesy of the Merce Cunningham Trust. All rights reserved.

In Cunningham's notes on that section, and in his repeated references to it in interviews and published works, he refers to her as being 'upside down' or as 'standing on her head,' but does not focus on the yogic connections implied by the movement (Vaughan and Cunningham 1999).[34] Instead, and like several critics, Cunningham draws

[34] In fact, in the *Variations V* choreographic notes, Cunningham wrote "bounce (BL?/SN) [Barbara Lloyd or Sandra Neels] on her head—put large pillow on her head and rubber band around legs" (Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records, (S) *MGZMD 295, Box 16 Folder 1).

attention to the microphone she ties on her head and its use in executing the sound score for the piece. He also emphasizes the pillow/towel contraption used to cover the microphone, and Gus Solomons Jr.'s role in lifting and rotating Lloyd. For example, in an interview, he said that

> Oh, there was one thing I devised for Barbara Dilley [Lloyd] and Gus Solomons. There was an arrangement so she could put a pad on her head, and a contact microphone was underneath in some way. And I had Gus turn her upside down and lift her up and down. So, again, there was a sound possibility, but it was visual. Because the point about those actions is that they should be something that you could look at. And it didn't matter how long they were. So in that sense they were indeterminate. I never made it precise. (Kuhn and Cunningham 1998, 30)

Even as she physically assumes a pose that was probably only incorporated into the piece because of Cunningham's quotidian yoga practice, the attention is not on Vithaldas's teachings or Lloyd's use of yoga technique, but rather on Cage's sound score, the props used to create it, and Solomons' action of "turning her upside down and lift[ing] her up and down." This works to minimize the appearance of yoga in the piece.

If you are actively looking for it, the influence of yoga on *Variations V* can also be seen in Cunningham's solo partway through the dance.[35] In a section beginning at 32:20, Cunningham is shown at the front of the screen, in front of three slow male-female duets where the men support the women on their backs in various poses (Arnbom 1966). Cunningham is the only dancer to interact with the yoga pad, and his solo dominates most of the screen space. In the solo, he riffs on a movement that was executed earlier in the piece by the other male dancers, rolling onto his back with his legs behind his head in

[35] My thanks to Jens Richard Giersdorf, who, during an undergraduate lecture course for which I was his TA, showed a brief YouTube clip of *Variations V*. That clip happened to contain Cunningham in *mayurasana*, and was the jumping off point for this entire chapter.

what looks like a variation on *halasana*, before returning to a seated position at the front of the mat. He lies down on his back in what could be *savasana*, and then comes back to a seat. After another repetition of this pattern, Cunningham turns around on the mat and enters *mayurasana* with his hands planted on the ground, his torso resting on his bent elbows, and his body extended and lifted to hover parallel to the yoga mat. (See Figure 3.3) He comes back out of the pose to kneeling, and then turns around again to face the right side of the screen. He rolls onto his back, rolls down, and jumps twice into the air with his legs tucked under him, executing a half turn with each jump, before returning to the ground to roll onto his back once more. This time, instead of the previously used *halasana*, he takes a recognizable *sarvangasana*, with his hands supporting his upper back, elbows on the floor, and legs extended directly to the ceiling. Finally, he comes to a cross-legged seat at the front of the mat, places his hands on his knees, straightens his spine, closes his eyes, and sits for a few moments in a meditative posture. The section lasts about two and a half minutes, and, in the recording of the dance, is intercut with clips of the video installation by Stan Van Der Beek and Nam June Paik, and closeups of the other dancers' duets. Cunningham is not shown exiting his yoga mat or removing the yoga pad from the stage space, the gaze of the camera simply shifts to focus on the other six dancers.[36] Cunningham's solo displays his facility with yoga *asana* despite the fact

[36] Foster reads this section as one of the strategies Cunningham used to mark himself as separate from his dancers, and thereby subtly attest to his homosexuality and resist the white matriarchal lineages of modern dance. She writes "In group works he often remained alone or off to the side, assigning himself the most unusual, preposterous, or quirky tasks. In *Variations V* (1966) he strips a large potted plastic plant of all its leaves, later rides a bicycle, and still later exercises on a blanket, doing situps and a headstand, while three male-female couples perform nearby…Cunningham fashioned himself as a

that he never received formal instruction from a teacher. Although his athleticism and dance training certainly enabled this ease, only a rigorous yoga practice would have allowed him to roll into and out of *sarvangasana* with precise hand placement on his upper back, or to enter into *mayurasana* with the level of direct simplicity of movement that he displays. All the *asana* that he demonstrates during this section are included in Vithaldas's yoga handbook, which Cunningham would by then have been using to direct his practice for at least four years.

There are very few notes on Cunningham's solo, which makes it difficult to determine which techniques he drew on as he created it, and therefore to determine whether he considered the movements in the solo to be yoga, dance, or something else.[37] It is possible that the solo was not notated because, as Carolyn Brown states in James Kolsty's book on Cunningham, "He once remarked to me that he does not consider making solos for himself 'choreography'" (1975, 20). Perhaps the yoga techniques used in Lloyd's headstand and Cunningham's solo were not worth mentioning because they were not considered dance technique?

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maverick, incidentally isolated and then nonclimactically reintegrated into the group's activities. Like the boys who saw through [Ted] Shawn's closet, any who would look for it could find Cunningham's difference. But the dancer's and dance's insistence that movement meant movement, their neutral and absorbed execution of each task at hand, effectively obscured his distinctiveness. This strategy, a personal and aesthetic negotiation of white matriarchal modern dance on one hand and vicious homosexual prejudice on the other, would sustain his work for the next forty years" (2001, 177-178).

[37] His notes on the rest of *Variations V* are quite thorough, and the various sections of the dance are repeatedly laid out, but none of these notes include any sort of mention of the placement of the solo in the dance or of the content of the movements (Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records, S*MGZMD 295 Box 16 Folder 1).

Figure 3.3 Merce Cunningham in *mayurasana* on his yoga pad. Screenshot from the *Variations V* film directed by Arne Arnbom (1966, 35:00). Courtesy of the Merce Cunningham Trust. All rights reserved.

Indeed, in a lecture-demonstration given to the Philadelphia Art Alliance in 1966, Cunningham refers to Lloyd's movement as one of the "non-dance activities" used in *Variations V*, alongside his bicycle ride and the interactions with a potted plant:

> There were a number of *non-dance activities* that I had figured out, for the dancers to do. I potted a large potted plant, and Carolyn Brown repotted it. The plant had a cartridge microphone attached to it so that any quiver could produce sound. Barbara Lloyd put a towel on her head which had a contact microphone attached to it, and proceeded to stand on her head, and then was moved gently back and forth by Gus Solomons, while upside down. At the end of the piece, I rode a bicycle through the space, around the poles and the photo-electric cells, and then exited. All of this activity, dancing and non-dancing, could cause sound, at the same time the visual sense was attacked by the movies, by what the dancers

were doing, and by what the musicians were doing. (Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation, Inc. records, Additions, (S) *MGZMD 351, Box 31, emphasis added)

This distinction between dance and "non-dance" activities is particularly fascinating, as it distinguishes between the different sorts of bodily training Cunningham had and assigns them value. Based on statements on the derivation of Cunningham technique, ballet and Graham technique are dance activities that Cunningham included in his lecture demonstrations and workshops; we can infer that yoga *asana* practice, plant potting, and bicycle riding are not.[38]

Because of this distinction between dance and non-dance activities, the only way to see Lloyd's *sirsasana* and the *mayurasana* Cunningham's solo as yoga is if you recognize yoga *asana* and are already looking for yoga in Cunningham's work. In this sense, the visual recognizability of yoga *asana* trumped Cunningham's apparent lack of interest in discussing how his daily yoga practice impacted his choreography. This suggests that—unlike his Judson Church Movement contemporaries and their interest in seeing any movement as a potential dance movement, and despite his innovations in the use of chance procedures to create dances and choice to separate dance from music—Cunningham conceptualized "dance activities" strictly through his technical background in ballet and modern dance (and his own innovations), to the exclusion of all other movements. Between their focus on the sound-based outcomes of yoga movements and Cunningham's insistence on a separation between dance and non-dance activities in *Variations V*, Cunningham and other authors and dancers effectively turn attention away

[38] Notes for workshops 1974-1982 in Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records, (S) *MGZMD 295, Box 22 Folder 15.

from how that yoga was learned, who taught it, and where it came from. In doing so, they continued the separation between yoga teachers and yoga practices that had already existed in U.S. cultural production for several decades, and continued to naturalize white dancers as performers of yoga *asana* onstage. While it is possible to recognize the yoga in *Variations V* if you know to look for it, and while some yoga-related elements of the piece are named in reviews, archives, and other written work, overall, the yoga in *Variations V* disappears in plain sight. This would not be a problem, were it not for the racial implications of those maneuvers for yogis and yoga practice. If we accept at their word the critics' opinions on Cunningham's yoga in *Variations V*, Yogi Vithaldas's role as a translator of yoga practices for Euro-Americans becomes diminished. By insisting on seeing the yoga in *Variations V*, we also see Vithaldas's influence on what was, by all accounts, a lifelong practice for Cunningham, and an influential practice for his entire dance career and arts scene.

In this chapter, I argued that intentional moves by yoga teachers such as Vithaldas facilitated the popularization of yoga during the 1960s. The impact of his work on the downtown dance scene and development of postmodern dance has not been attended to by dance historians, however, due to moves made by choreographers such as Cunningham, who selected parts of Vithaldas's yoga practice to use in their daily practice and choreography. This ability to pick and choose which parts of yoga to learn, and to include in onstage representations, facilitated later innovations in the use of yoga in modern dance. As I will argue in the next chapter, the direct incorporation of yoga *asana* into choreography, and exclusion of many other yogic practices, paved the way for

choreographers to innovate on the shapes, forms, and uses of *asana* in their choreography.

Chapter 4: The Yogic Practices of Bill T. Jones

Bill T. Jones is in a headstand onstage, but it is not a standard yoga headstand. His legs are bent backwards to rest on the torso of Arnie Zane—his partner in life and dance—who is standing behind him. Jones's hands are placed on the floor near his head, and his body is arched in an extreme backbend to bridge the space between his head and hands on the floor and Zane's torso several feet behind him. The year is 1980, and the piece is one of Zane and Jones's early collaborations, *Blauvelt Mountain*.

Most people don't talk about Bill T. Jones in the context of headstands. He is widely regarded as one of the most prominent Black choreographers working in the United States, and has been internationally popular since the early 1980s. His work was subjected to an infamous 1994 not-review written by Arlene Croce in *The New Yorker*, in which she refused to "discus[s] the undiscussable" and to even see his piece *Still/Here* (1994), which used workshops and interviews with people dying of various diseases to grapple with death, mortality, the AIDS crisis, and the aftermath of Zane's 1988 death. Her scathing critique of Jones's "victim art" demonstrated just how polarizing and provocative his choreography can be. Other works such as *Floating the Tongue* (1978), *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* (1990), and *Fondly Do We Hope… Fervently Do We Pray* (2009) tackle identity politics, the Black experience, slavery, and the legacy of Abraham Lincoln through pastiches of movement, song, and spoken word. Scholars and critics also discuss Jones in terms of his exploration of identity politics in his work; in terms of his relationship with his deceased partner and collaborator, the white Jewish dancer and photographer Arnie Zane; or in terms of his

artistic formalism, use of Contact Improvisation, and the overtly political nature of his work. Jones himself moves away from limiting views of his work as being solely about 'identity politics' or 'blackness' or 'gayness,' but also firmly maintains that recognizing the specificities of difference is crucial to art making, writing, and existence. Yet, in all the discussion of Jones's life and work, one aspect of his career remains mostly untouched: his interest in yoga, early participation in ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness), and the impact of yogic philosophies and embodied techniques on his life and dance making.

This chapter considers what Jones's headstand in *Blauvelt Mountain* can show us about the position of yoga in modern dance around 1980, a time when yoga was rapidly popularizing in the United States. Although it might seem counterintuitive, looking at the use of yoga by a Black choreographer can help us better understand the stakes of whiteness, because the legacy of whiteness involved in property, ownership, and the acquisition of movement practices and spiritual techniques is also inextricably linked to the racial position of blackness and South Asian-ness in the United States. Although there was a long history in the United States of Black/South Asian intermarriage (Bald 2013), and perhaps because of restrictive immigration laws that prevented significant growth of the South Asian artistic community during the mid-twentieth century (Srinivasan 2010), most concert dance done in the U.S. up to the 1960s existed within a black/white binary (Manning 2004). Jones's negotiation of identity politics through the use of yogic movement modalities and philosophies more commonly used by white artists helped him access enduringly white post-modern dance performance stages, even as the content of

his dance creations often challenged viewers to reconsider their preconceptions of him as a black gay dancer of imposing stature and emphatic masculinity.[1] I use an example drawn from *Blauvelt Mountain* (1980) to tease out the relationship between Jones's use of yoga practices and the racial implications of the acquisitive practices of whiteness.

By the early 1970s, yoga practice had proliferated so widely that it could be seen in many performance milieus in the United States. As discussed in Chapter 3, yoga in the 1950s and 1960s was increasingly positioned as a physical practice, existing alongside Zen Buddhist philosophies and exercise systems that were also gaining popularity at the time. I argued that the influence of yoga on the downtown arts scene became increasingly apparent, as yoga practices became increasingly physical in orientation, and as instructors such as Yogi Vithaldas gave instruction to a new generation of artists. Here, I argue that Jones's use of a variety of yoga techniques both continues and ruptures the systems of attention that allowed white concert dance artists to erase or minimize the influence of their yoga instructors, and claim their use of yoga in choreography as an indicator of their individual artistic genius. As I will explore in the fourth section of this chapter, for many viewers, Jones's use of the authority of whiteness that was by then associated with yoga practice was superseded by the implications of his intimate partnering of another man. Furthermore, dancers had been doing yoga-derived or –related practices for such a long time, and audiences and reviewers were so focused on his representation of gay sexuality

[1] According to scholar of Black dance Edward Thorpe, Jones and Zane's duets during the late-1970s contained "little or nothing of the Black experience in their work; what they tended to emphasize, in the context of social progression, was overt homosexuality, a courageous 'coming-out' in dance terms" (Thorpe 1990, 150-151).

onstage, that there was little discussion of the ways practices such as yoga influenced his work. I contend that Jones's uses of yoga constituted a similar claim to "superspirituality" as was accomplished by St. Denis, Graham, and Cunningham; however, his position as a gay, black choreographer made that claim both more innovative and less visible (Wong 2001, 13).

I examine the relationship between yoga and Jones's work on three fronts: as it appears in Contact Improvisation, as it appeared in his early technique classes, and as he interacted with it through his early participation in ISKCON. Finally, I draw those three examples together to analyze a moment where yoga appears in the piece *Blauvelt Mountain* (1980). Throughout these examples, I argue that the simultaneous assimilation and appropriation of yoga over preceding decades served to maintain yoga as a specifically nameable or discernable practice, even as some yogic techniques were invisibilized within their use by generations of modern dancers (Gottschild 1996). The affirmation of yoga's existence within modern dance—even as choreographers intentionally turned attention away from their use of yoga and towards their personal innovations—enabled future generations of choreographers to include yogic techniques as one more practice within an international circulation of yoga and other gymnastic, expressive, theatrical, or callisthenic activities. I argue that this malleability of definition of yogic practices is linked to the process of separating yoga from South Asian yogis that continued and deepened in the 1970s and 1980s. During that time, the link between South Asian yogis and the culture they produce and transmit was both ruptured and strengthened. In some instances, such as the proliferation of yoga among concert dance

practices, it was no longer always necessary to have an "authentic" Indian yoga instructor, and the ties between yogi, yoga practice, and yoga as product were no longer fixed. In other instances, such as the rise in devotional sects led by charismatic leaders, the link between yoga-related devotional practices and Indian spiritual authorities was inherent to the popularity of the discipline. The separation between yogi as culture-bearer and yoga as amorphous product will be explored through the examples of the use of yogic breath practices in Contact Improvisation and the yoga classes that Jones taught to his fellow dancers in the 1970s.

The use of *bhakti* (devotional) yogic practices in contexts such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON, often colloquially referred to as the Hare Krishnas) relied on the exotic allure and perceived authenticity of the practice.[2] Unlike the physical yogic practices seen in Contact Improvisation and Jones's yoga practice, the approach to yoga seen in ISKCON was religious and devotional. Countercultural movement participation made it possible for artists working in the United States to explore their identity and express their dissatisfaction with the cultural status quo. The sort of collective yogic-inspired practice seen in ISKCON was one way in which yoga remained communal property, even as the reverence of founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada as guru figure and group leader led to solidification of yogis and other Hindu spiritual leaders as individual enlightened geniuses. As I will argue in the third section of

[2] ISKCON was founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in New York in 1966, and teaches its followers to devote their thoughts and actions to pleasing Krishna. Followers dress in Indic-inspired orange garments, sing the *Hare Krishna* mantra in public places, and sell books written by Prabhupada.

this chapter, Jones's brief but personally impactful participation in ISKCON allowed him room to first deny and then return to explore his identity as a gay black choreographer.

Seeing and analyzing yoga as invisibilized influence on Contact Improvisation, devotional yogic practices as means of personal exploration, and yoga classes as means of physical training matters because it helps to rupture the singular definition of yoga that is often problematically replicated in works that attempt to pin down when Yoga entered into modern dance. By looking at multiple strands of yogic influences in this chapter, I continue the work begun in the previous three chapters, and extend it by examining yoga not through the relationship between one choreographer and one yogi, or one yoga-inspired dance teacher and one dance student, but rather across a variety of yogic influences on one choreographer. Using yogic techniques can help dance choreographers to construct multiple different identities, yet, that use of yoga is still predicated upon systematic differentiations in the perceptual value of people, bodies, and traditions. I argue that, like the other choreographers in this dissertation, Jones used yogic techniques to assert his individual artistic genius and explore his spirituality; however, he also used yoga to meet the expectations of white modern dance and assert his position as a black choreographer working within a heretofore predominantly white aesthetic and performance space. His use of yoga was both normalized (as seen in the relationship between yoga and Contact Improvisation and Jones's yoga teaching) and quite bold (as in his participation in ISKCON). To flesh out this argument, it is first necessary to trace the assimilation of yogic practices into predominantly white concert dance forms, as seen through the development of Contact Improvisation in the 1970s.

Yogic Breathing: The Early Development of Contact Improvisation

In Contact Improvisation, dancers work in groups or pairs to explore shifting points of contact between their bodies, using improvisation to find ways to remain in contact while rolling, climbing, falling, swinging and moving alongside, under, on top of, or next to each other. The form is based around ideas of momentum and the egalitarian sharing of weight between dancers, regardless of age, gender, weight, race, sexuality, or ability. It is a primary means of investigation for many choreographers, and it is well known that the practice was integral to the development of Jones's early choreography (Jones 1995; Schaffman 2001, 138; Pallant 2006, 3, among others). What is less known is the influence of yogic practices on the development of Contact Improvisation itself. Yoga is listed alongside aikido, tai chi chuan, judo, and karate as a practice that impacted the development of Contact Improvisation (Schaffman 2001, 10; Novack 1990, 52), but the specific form that that influence took, or how yogic influences came to exist within Contact Improvisation, has not been thoroughly studied.[3] This section discusses the early development of Contact Improvisation in order to illustrate how invisibilized yogic

[3] Contact Improvisation officially began in 1972, when white dancer and dance-maker Steve Paxton began to explore contact between two dancers as a means of better understanding perception and performance in dance (Pallant 10). (Interestingly, Paxton was a student of Merce Cunningham, whose yogic explorations were the focus of Chapter 3.) According to formative Contact Improvisation scholar Cynthia Novack, it tried "to realize a redefinition of self within a responsive, intelligent body" (1990, 3). Its origins, practices, and issues have been thoroughly discussed by a plethora of other dance scholars and practitioners, including Ann Cooper Albright, Susan Foster, Karen Schaffmann, and contributors to the magazine *Contact Quarterly,* which has existed since 1975. These scholars address contact through its ability to create space for all dancers to explore and understand how their bodies move and play while in physical conversation with other dancers.

influences appear in the form, and to demonstrate how the influence of yoga on Jones occurred through multiple strands of dance training.

The yogic influences on Contact can be seen in essays reflecting on the very beginnings of the practice. In an editor's note in *Contact Quarterly*, influential Contacter and author Nancy Stark Smith discusses the feeling of being in early Contact Improvisation classes with Steve Paxton at Oberlin College in 1972, and describes a breathing technique that was used in the classes:

> Steve's Soft Class woke me up; the Soft Class put me to sleep. The Soft Class met every weekday at 7 a.m. that January. *Snappy short exhalations all in a row, followed by a few slow deep breaths, followed by twenty more short attacks on the diaphragm, three long slow deep ones*. Sitting, standing, watching mind watch sensation: feeling gravity, my standing body's "small dance" of balancing, the tiny shifts of weight, of bones, etc.… Steve's voice was low, slow, hypnotic, but at the same time easygoing, matter of fact. A nearly subliminal story told directly to my body, to follow along and feel. (Stark Smith 2003, 172, emphasis added)

Stark Smith's reminiscence about those early classes includes a description of what is, to a knowledgeable yoga practitioner, a clear description of the *kapalbhati* breathing technique, a yogic practice designed to cleanse the sinuses and invigorate the body (Mallinson 2004, 1.56 and 1.12).[4] Smith includes her description of the breathing practice directly alongside a sense of the overall feel of Paxton's morning classes, which implies that the breathing technique was a constant practice within the early development of

[4] According to the *Gheranda Samhita*, a late-17th century text outlining the practices of yoga, kapalbhati breath is among six cleansing techniques that should be performed by the yogi prior to beginning *pranayama* practice (5.37): "*Dhauti*, *Basti*, *Neti*, *Nauli*, *Trataka*, and *Kapalabhati*; one should practice these six cleansing techniques" (GS 1.12). It is described in detail as follows: "Inhale and exhale quickly and do not hold the breath. By using this practice one keeps imbalances of *kapha* at bay" (GS 1.55). The *Gheranda Samhita* is considered by scholars such as Singleton (2010), Gordon White (2010), and others to be a primary source text linking the *Yoga Sutra* and modern yogic practices.

Contact Improvisation.[5] The rapid sharp exhalations in *kapalbhati* can be used to invigorate the body, a necessary process during the early morning classes in the chilly Oberlin College gymnasium. *Kapalbhati* breathing is also a discernably specific yogic breathing technique, which includes practices focused on breath retention and control alongside exercises designed to smooth or stabilize the breath (see *Gheranda Samhita* Chapter 5). As demonstrated by the phrasing in Stark Smith's letter, Contact Improvisation practitioners do not seem to name this practice as *kapalbhati*, or to explicitly link it to yoga in any way. Yet, between the breathing itself, and the sort of single-pointed attentive awareness to minutia cultivated in many yogic practices, the breathing Stark-Smith describes must be categorized as at least related to yoga. This disappearing in plain sight of yoga techniques is an example of how the earlier appropriation and assimilation of yoga—such as Carolyn Brown's choice to learn yoga to attain Merce Cunningham's level of breath control, discussed in Chapter 3—led to the diffusion and forgetting of yogic influences on later stages of modern dance history.[6]

The way that Steve Paxton speaks about the beginnings of Contact Improvisation also touches on this invisibilized presence of yoga in the form. Paxton writes in *Taken By Surprise* that, in the development of Contact Improvisation, he planned to "omit mention of sexuality, psychology, spirituality. These I would leave in the hands of the experts, and proceed with what seemed more immediate: the senses and the physical body" (Paxton

[5] This yogic influence on breathing practices is supported by descriptions of various breathing techniques included in Cheryl Pallant's *Contact Improvisation,* which demonstrate the continuing importance of breath-based warm-ups (2006, 17-18).

[6] See, for example, the discussion of Ruth St. Denis's and Martha Graham's breathing practices seen Chapters 1 and 2.

"Drafting Interior Techniques" 175-176). This turn away from the spiritual is subtly contradicted in a statement later in the same essay, where he describes the usefulness of "the stand"[7] through concepts that seem drawn from yoga, Zen, or another meditation practice. According to Paxton,

> What gets exercised in there, inside the standing body, is the habit of observation; a noticeable movement of consciousness throughout the body. Within this exercise there are encounters with parts of the body that tick along or breathe along as we watch. It clearly seems to be one subsystem, consciousness, examining others. The other subsystems are not obviously connected to the wandering consciousness, except that the encounter happens in what one calls "my body." The consciousness-as-observer regards the other subsystems as separate from itself. The consciousness can travel inside the body. It is analogous to focusing the eyes in the external world. There is also an analogue for peripheral vision, which is the awareness of the whole body with the senses open. (Paxton 2003, 176-177)

This sense of separation between a consciousness-as-observer and a breathing, sensing, physical set of subsystems is related to the concepts of *purusa* and *prakriti* seen in the parts of the *Yoga Sutra* that are based on Samkhya philosophy, where the awareness is considered separate from the object of awareness or the more daily aspects of the experience of being. Despite this connection, Paxton's concept of consciousness-as-observer is probably drawn more from his study of Zen Buddhism, and less from his yoga practice and participation in the downtown dance scene in the 1960s with Cunningham, musician John Cage, dancer and musician Robert Dunn, and their attendant assimilations of philosophical concepts from yoga and Zen. What is clear, however, is that, whether through direct appropriation or assimilation from previous teachers and leaders in the

[7] The stand is an exercise in which Contact Improvisers are instructed to stand as still as possible and pay detailed attention to the shifts their bodies make to compensate for gravity and remain upright. It is used to increase the mover's sensory awareness and increase attention to the body.

post-modern dance movement, Paxton and Contact Improvisation were influenced by conceptions of the relationship between the self and reality that were derived from some form of Eastern philosophy and practice. The unremarked influence of yogic practices on the development of Contact Improvisation demonstrate the assimilation of yoga into mainstream American culture, even as other threads of South Asian practice, such as those employed by ISKCON, were still considered exotic and countercultural.

Differentiating between how Paxton incorporated yoga into the development of Contact Improvisation and how previous choreographers used yoga in their dance-making and personal practice allows us to see how the ability to use and enjoy yoga played out. As discussed in Chapter 3, Cunningham used yoga in the creation of *Variations V* (1965) as a "non-dance" element, insisting, perhaps futilely, that the execution of yogic *asana* be perceived separately from the dancing. His desire to separate his yogic solo and Barbara Dilley Lloyd and Gus Solomons Jr.'s partnered headstand from the rest of the dancing in the piece served to delineate yoga as an element that could be incorporated into the dancing, but not as something integral to the dancing itself. This is different from Paxton's use of *kapalbhati* breath in early Contact Improvisation warmups, and his meditation-inspired conception of the observer and the observed in "the stand," as the breathing and conceptualizing were perceived as being integral to the process of preparing to dance, and therefore to the act of dancing. By having early Contact Improvisers use *kapalbhati* breath and "the stand" to analyze, energize, and invigorate themselves, Paxton placed unnamed but discernably yogic techniques in Contact Improvisation, and deepened the inclusion of yoga in modern dance practices.

Therefore, when Jones learned principles of Contact Improvisation through his classes with Richard Bull at SUNY-Brockport in the early 1970s, he would also probably have learned techniques such as "the stand" and the *kapalbhati*-inspired breath that Stark Smith describes. These unnamed-but-present yogic influences are one way in which Jones's interactions with yoga continue the pattern established by previous generations of white choreographers. As can be seen in his choreography, Jones used principles of weight sharing drawn from Contact throughout his career; I will explore one shape that that use took in the fourth section of this chapter.

Jones's Yoga Practice and Teaching

While Jones's use of Contact Improvisation is well known and, I argue, led to a less immediately apparent influence of yoga on his career, he also had more direct links to yogic practices, some of which also fit into the realm of things that he "also studied." (I will explore this concept in further detail in the coda.) In his autobiography, *Last Night on Earth*, Jones reminisces about his time at SUNY Brockport around 1972, and writes that "Every morning I did yoga exercises and then went off to the university for classes in technique and composition" (Jones 1995, 114). Jones's phrasing in how he introduces his yoga practice demonstrates the ways in which it remained separate from the rest of his movement practices, even as it also places yoga as a quotidian practice from the very beginning of his career. Like Stark Smith's description of *kapalbhati* breath in early Contact Improvisation classes, however, Jones does not provide details about how he came to learn those yoga exercises or what the exercises were. It is possible that his yoga practices were drawn from the morning devotional practices that he might have acquired

during his time with ISKCON, and were not physical at all. However, due to the way that his yoga teaching was discussed by his peers, I believe that his morning yoga exercises were at least partially *asana*-based. (In order to get a closer view of how Jones framed his yoga practice during the 1980s and early 90s and the ways that that practice appears and disappears, I rely here on writing by Jones and his collaborators, rather than directly interviewing Jones in the present day.)

The existence of Jones's yoga is supported by a statement made by frequent collaborator Lois Welk, who described the early days of working with Jones and Zane in their collaboration, the Dance Asylum (1974-1979). Welk explains Jones's contribution to the collaborative through his movement technique instruction: "Another important way that Bill contributed in the early days was that he very often gave us a technique class, taught us yoga, and often had us do a ballet barre" (Welk 1999, 84). Because Welk includes Jones's yoga classes alongside "technique class" (which, in the context of modern dance training, usually means a set of physical exercises designed to challenge the body and prepare the dancer for the rigors of choreography), and "a ballet barre" (a series of standing exercises done holding on to a waist-high barre; the exercises are used to warm the muscles and prepare the dancer for more expansive and traveling movements), I believe that his yoga teaching was predominantly physical and used as a warm-up or preparation for further movement. Another piece of evidence that mentions Jones's yoga classes appears in an essay by his college friend, Phil Sykas, who describes his experiences as a member of Jones and Zane's circle in the 1970s: "I have left out so much, the other artists and dancers, the musicians, the children. The enjoyment of other

people's work…. The terrible car crash, celebrity magazines, yoga classes, the celebrations, the laughter, the names of so many comrades" (Sykas 1999, 81). As with Jones's mention of his daily yoga practice in *Last Night on Earth*, the quotidian nature of Welk's and Sykas's descriptions of his yoga speak to the importance of yoga in Jones's life and dance career. Based off just this evidence, however, it is unclear whether Jones considered his "yoga exercises" to be integral to his dancing, or some sort of preparation for movement that must otherwise remain separate from the dancing itself.

This question begins to be answered in an editor's note in *Body Against Body: the dance and other collaborations of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane*, which contains a dialogue between Jones and Zane that bears full inclusion for its description of a routinized morning yoga practice and illustration of the dynamic between the choreographers and partners:

> "I was compelled," Bill told Burt Supree in 1981, "to get Arnie more involved physically. I encouraged him to do yoga…."
> "It was terrible," Arnie interrupts, "I had tears in my eyes. Bill was trying to get me to do the plow.[8] Three mornings in a row I was crying. The pain—from trying to put my toes to the floor behind my head."
> "I don't know why I pushed him so," says Jones. "But sure enough, once he got a taste of it, he was quite precocious."
> "The best thing for me," says Zane, "was that, from the outset, people encouraged me to choreograph. It was lucky, because I wasn't about to put everything on hold while I took ten years to make my dancer's body." (Zimmer and Quasha 1989, 56)

[8] "The plow" probably means *halasana*, a pose in which the shoulders and back of head rest on the floor while the feet are brought overhead to touch the floor behind the head; the arms can either be used to support the lower back in the air, or can extend out on the floor and be used to increase the proximity of the chest to the chin (Iyengar 1966, 216-220). The pose is a deep spinal stretch, and is also useful for increasing mobility in the shoulder girdle.

As evidenced by this interaction, Jones saw yoga as a useful skill in the toolbox of any aspiring dancer or choreographer, one that would help Zane in his endeavor to acquire the increased flexibility and physicality that were considered necessary for the development of his "dancer's body."

Like Jones himself, the plethora of collaborators and authors who describe Jones's yoga did not feel the need to elaborate on which kind of yoga Jones practiced, from whom he learned it, or what his yoga lessons entailed. This implies that the concept of doing or practicing yoga was familiar enough to not need explanation. The volume and casualness of the references to Jones's yoga practice cements the idea that yogic practices were increasingly common among dancers in the early 1970s, while the very non-remarkableness of the allusions to it further solidifies my argument that yoga was an unexamined yet integral part of both his career and the overall development of modern dance practices. Everyone in Jones's social group knew what yoga was, had a relatively shared image of what yoga practice looked like at the time, and therefore did not need to be specific about what that yoga was, where it came from, or how it was practiced. As seen in the examples in this chapter thus far, this yoga was predominantly *asana*- and *pranayama*-oriented.

Even if yoga in modern dance at that time was so familiar that its origins were no longer named, Jones's use of yoga remained a radical act. It asserted familiarity with a cultural practice associated with whiteness and South Asian-ness, but generally not associated with blackness at that time. In so doing, Jones positioned himself as a creator in the predominantly white performance world of avant-garde concert dance. His use of

yogic techniques combined with his use of Contact Improvisation in pieces such as *Blauvelt Mountain*, and afforded him room to partner with Arnie Zane in ways that disrupted conventional expectations around gender, masculinity, and race (Foster 1999). In the segment of *Blauvelt Mountain* mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, for example, the contact between the two dancers turns racial expectations around labor and physicality on their head. Zane, a slight, white, Jewish man, uses Contact Improvisation technique to lift and support Jones in his precarious headstand.[9] The point of contact between their dancing bodies—Jones's feet to Zane's chest—also served to disrupt conventional ideas of how men should touch each other onstage. Instead of men lifting women, as seen in ballet or more traditional modern dance, a smaller white man supports a larger black one. For dance scholars, this argument may sound markedly similar to many other arguments made about Jones's work. For example, dance scholar Gay Morris writes about Jones's work through the lens of symbolic emasculation, arguing that, despite and because of his identity, Jones succeeds at finding and expressing strength through his use of heterosexual tropes, even as his sexuality and ethnicity might be seen to emasculate him (2001, 261).[10] Thus, in their precariously partnered headstand, Jones and Zane combine the ethos of Contact Improvisation with movement techniques from

[9] The links between Jones and Zane's partnered, improvised, yoga-inspired dance and the development of aerial yoga and partner yoga are an interesting route for future study.

[10] Dance scholar Gay Morris wrote that "In his battle to control the perception of his own identity Jones often manipulated the myths of a dominant society to his advantage. He used his body as a lure, even as he challenged the fantasies that centered upon it. At the same time Jones's refusal to be locked into any prescribed role served to disrupt an abundance of preconceived notions of race and gender" (2001, 261).

yoga to make room for themselves to create meaning onstage, while their physical positioning also disrupts the norms of race, gender, and sexuality.

Thus far, I have focused on the impact of yoga on modern dance primarily through the framework of embodied practices, such as headstands and *kapalbhati* breath. But Jones's use of yogic techniques also entailed participation in yogic lifestyles and yogic philosophies, which went deeper for him than might have been indicated by his colleagues' offhand remarks about his yoga practice and teaching. I will discuss *Blauvelt Mountain* further in the fourth section of this chapter, but first I turn to Jones's participation in ISKCON, because practices that rely on a visible return to a "traditional Indian lifestyle" exist alongside unmarked or forgotten yoga (Palmer 1994).

ISKCON: Yogic Practice as a Means of Identity Exploration

At around the same time that he was practicing yoga exercises before going to Richard Bull's improvisation classes in 1972, Jones became a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a devotional group founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada based on principles of *bhakti* yoga (Jones 1995, 114). ISKCON's form of *bhakti* yoga is a style of yogic practice that encourages adherents to lovingly devote their lives to pleasing Krishna through their every action, and especially through chanting the mahamantra *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram, Ram, Hare Hare* (Gelberg 1983).[11] According to Religious Studies scholar Lola Williamson, ISKCON has "attempted to create a particular type of culture that is antithetical to American culture;" they consciously

[11] Jones chants this mantra onscreen in *Still/Here with Bill Moyers* (1997), a documentary exploring the process of creating Jones's infamous "victim art" piece, *Still/Here*.

"dress, eat, and socialize in the manner of traditional Indian society" (2010, 7). Jones's turn towards ISKCON during the early 1970s helped him to negotiate the tensions between his queer identity and the expectations placed upon him by a more straight-laced society. While his yoga practice in the early 1970s was normalized (at least among dancers), his choice to turn to ISKCON to find meaning in life demonstrates an interest in the parts of yogic practices that were still viewed as decidedly exotic in comparison to mainstream American culture.

In his autobiography, Jones speculates about the motivations behind his participation in ISKCON: "Perhaps in its oath of celibacy I sought relief from my socially problematic sexual identity—not that I managed to observe the oath for even two weeks. I wore robes, chanted, and sold 'religious' books on the street. Arnie tried to be supportive, but he wouldn't accompany me that far. He'd made a home for us and waited for me to come back to it" (1995, 119). It is possible that he was trying to suppress his gayness by trying to be a Hindu celibate during the few weeks that he maintained the oath. ISKCON's general heteronormative stance and firm delineation of the responsibilities and needs of the sexes would have made it challenging for Jones to maintain both his relationship with Zane and full ISKCON membership.[12] Nonetheless,

[12] According to Susan Palmer, ISKCON devotees are "dedicated to living what they considered the traditional Vedic way of life, based on surrender to Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of the Godhead" (1994, 16). She goes on to explain that in ISKCON, "men are held to be more advanced than women, physically, intellectually, and spiritually," and that "In ISKCON, men advance spiritually through celibacy and nonattachment; women advance through motherhood and devotion to their husbands" (1994, 16-17). She later states that this concern with the clear delineation of gender roles leads organizations such as ISKCON to be "egregiously intolerant of homosexuality—an

Jones's choice to "cocoon" within ISKCON might have afforded him room to temporarily explore the paradigm of heterosexuality, while the overtly Hindu aspects of the religious movement created space for him to explore an alternative spirituality (Palmer 1994, 259).[13]

Although Jones did not adhere to the strictures of full participation in ISKCON, he continued to rely on its precepts in the spiritual foundation of his life. According to Jones,

> Arnie and I both found ballast in Krishna Consciousness. It underlay many aspects of our life. We kept an altar in our bedroom. I gave Estella [his mother] yoga lessons in her apartment and proselytized within the ranks of my family, inviting them to 'love feasts' at the temple [in San Francisco] on Sunday afternoons…. In time, our interest in the Krishna movement passed away, but never completely. In moments of great stress, I still find myself chanting my mantra envisioning a blue-skinned avatar. (1995, 122)

Based off this narrative, Jones seems to have turned to the devotional practices of ISKCON as a way to temporarily explore strictly heteronormative roles through adherence to the oaths of celibacy, yet, as he states, he soon chose to privilege the needs of his romantic relationship over those oaths. Nonetheless, through his ISKCON participation, he found productive tools to use therapeutically in moments of stress. This

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orientation that 'messes up' or otherwise undermines their attempts to keep those [gender] boundaries unfuzzy" (1994, 225).

[13] In a discussion of why many young women in the 1970s and 1980s chose to enter into New Religious Movements for a brief time, and why gender roles in NRMs can be so rigid, Palmer suggests that "the simple, clear-cut roles created in NRMs might appear as alluring, protective cocoons to young women with egos as wobbly as caterpillars. Their cocoonlike function might account for the stiff, masklike, or stylized quality of some of these new spiritual roles" (1994, 259). Thank you, Amanda Lucia, for pointing me to this concept.

sort of turn towards spiritual seeking as a means of making sense of the world is a common thread throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as LSD, Zen, Transcendental Meditation, and a variety of other countercultural practices rose to or gained in popularity (see Goldberg 2010, Syman 2010, Grogan 2013).[14] This sort of appropriation typifies the power dynamics at play in the "Turn East," as the increase in availability of Indian spiritual practices combined with rhetoric around spirituality as the primary cultural legacy of the Indian subcontinent to create a situation where picking and choosing among

[14] Jones was not alone in this turn towards ISKCON and other New Religious Movements; ISKCON was a haven for seekers and hippies of the early 1970s because, according to founder Prabhupada, "they are already dissatisfied with material life" (quoted in Goldberg 2010, 179). In *Turning East*, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox wrote that young seekers were looking for community, immediacy of experience, trustworthy authority, and involvement in something natural, less patriarchal, and more ecological (1977). The turn towards "Eastern" practices was facilitated by the change in U.S. immigration policies in 1965, which allowed persons of South Asian origin to immigrate to the United States in numbers that had not been seen since before 1917. More gurus, swamis, and monks arrived in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, which combined with the desire for a trustworthy but not patriarchal authority to lead many spiritual seekers to the guru who inspired Beatle member George Harrison (Goldberg 2010). Yet, even as ISKCON provided a home for some spiritual seekers, other cultural markers made mockery of their practice, as seen in the musical *Hair* (1967), which parodied hippie cultures and ISKCON's practices through the song "Hare Krishna/Be-In." See Goldberg 2010, 180, which references the song "Hare Krishna/Be-In," in which the chorus alternates singing "dropout, dropout, be-in, be-in" with the Hare Krishna mahamantra of *hare Krishna, hare Krishna, hare Rama, hare Rama*.
Jones's participation in ISKCON exists somewhere between ISKCON as a plausible alternative to mainstream Christian religiosity and mainstream fears around ISKCON as an extreme practice of believers (Gelberg 1983, 15), in that he used his devotional practice at first to grapple with his sexual identity, and then to find a deity to pray to in times of duress. The personal and idiosyncratic nature of Jones's quest typifies many Americans' interactions with ISKCON and other alternative spiritual practices in the 1970s, when a range of people experimented with the parts of practices that worked for them and left behind the parts that seemed less necessary.

spiritual practices became a tenable means of exploring identity and spirituality in the United States (Cox 1977).[15]

By the early 1980s, Jones practiced yoga *asana*, did breathing exercises and paid attention to the minutia of experience in exercises learned through his experience with Contact Improvisation, and framed at least some of his spirituality through mantra-repetition learned from ISKCON. The boldly overt Hindu-ness of his brief ISKCON participation contrasted with the invisible impacts of yoga on Contact Improvisation and his inherited or naturalized yoga teaching. This sort of selective utilization of yogic practices is related to the practices of other choreographers investigated in this dissertation, and to the long tradition of artists in the United States taking on alternative worldviews in order to bolster their self-conception, spiritual life, and/or artistic practice. In doing so, Jones joined a lineage of white choreographers who used yoga to position themselves as "superspiritual" avant-garde artists, however his bold participation in ISKCON also ruptures the "yoga as invisible tool of whiteness" narrative that I have thus far established (Wong 2001, 13).

***Blauvelt Mountain*: Seeing Yoga in Jones's Dancing**

Jones's "superspiritual" yet bold yogic movements can be seen in his dancing, but only if we know what to look for and, indeed, how to look. Other than in select circumstances where the choreographer is seen as a 'spiritual' artist, the inner life or

[15] The rise in popularity of ISCKON from the mid-1960s (when it was founded) to the 1970s points to the overall trend towards familiarization of some South Asian practices in U.S mainstream culture. As physical *hatha* yoga became familiar, other yogic practices (such as those of ISKCON, with its public devotion, sexual chastity, proselytizing, and Hindu lifestyle) also rose in popularity.

spirituality of choreographers is often under-examined or treated as inconsequential to their artistic production. Yet, as can be seen in Jones's narrative of his life, a different picture of his dancing can be painted if we look at the things that get into the cracks, the things that slip through the spaces between serious artistic production, personal life, and also-influential disciplines. I argue that Jones's turn to ISKCON, yoga practice, and use of Contact Improvisation demonstrate one of the many shapes that "also studied" practices took, and that examining the practices of movement and meditation that informed Jones's work can demonstrate the difficult to trace, hybrid, and cross-cultural flows of movement practices and spiritual modalities. Jones's use of various aspects of South Asian practices speaks to the importance of examining multiple threads of "also studied" disciplines. Seen separately, each individual practice is just one little interesting fact about a choreographer who is usually analyzed through other terms. Viewed together, however, a different picture of the stakes of Jones's raced, sexed, and gendered body-in-performance comes into view. I therefore return to the example of a single movement in the piece *Blauvelt Mountain* (1980) that was described at the beginning of this chapter in order to elucidate how yogic influences can be seen in a not-overtly-yogic piece of choreography. In doing so, I demonstrate how Jones's yogic techniques coalesced in his dance making.

Blauvelt Mountain was divided into two sections, the first of which was a carefully choreographed duet titled "A Fiction," which used Contact Improvisation and an increasingly rapid accumulation of movements with word association games. The second section, "An Interview," featured no contact between the dancers, with Zane

dismantling a cinder block wall and reassembling it, block by block, to divide the stage in half. Jones improvised, traversing the space from stage to audience to exit, and back again (Jones 1985, 147). Morris argued that the dance used accumulation, Contact Improvisation, and word association, and "matter of fact" stage personas cultivated by Jones and Zane to play with and around presenting homoeroticism onstage (Morris 2001, 256). Morris emphasizes the way that critics focused on the issues of race and eroticism between the two men in their reviews of the piece (Morris 2001, 256). Jones describes the work as

> a vital performance, perhaps even a defining one… we had taken our inspiration and impulse for analysis from non-narrative cinema and visual arts. We chose a range of activities, from pedestrianisms like walking, sitting, standing, to complex grappling. We dismantled this material, rearranged it, and manipulated it in an effort to provide an exercise in perception for our audience. And in the free-flowing word association, we in turn were challenged and learned to enjoy a special sense of accomplishment each evening as we solved this particular performance puzzle. We were very proud of the boldness and effectiveness of the cinder block wall. We felt a direct connection between the 'constructivism' of our choreographic sensibility and the obvious construction and deconstruction of the wall. (1995, 148)

His description focuses on the elements at play in *Blauvelt Mountain*, and gives a sense of the techniques that were incorporated into the piece, but does not mention yoga among those influences.

Jones is perched on the much smaller Zane, his legs wrapped around Zane's torso, and holds tightly to his biceps.[16] Throwing his head into a huge backwards arch, Jones relies on Zane's support to carefully lower his head to the floor, at which point, Jones brings his hands onto the floor into a tripod headstand position. One by one, Zane grasps

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Jsb1yROoak, 2:41-2:45.

Jones's ankles and moves his legs from around Zane's waist to position his feet against Zane's chest. This puts Jones is in an inverted headstand position touching Zane's torso with his feet. With Jones stable on the floor, Zane then dramatically releases Jones's ankles, taking a step backwards into a lunge position and giving Jones room to fully extend his upstage leg; Jones's downstage leg bends at the knee so his toe touches the knee of the upstage leg. The point of contact between the two dancers—Jones's feet on Zane's chest—serves to keep both dancers upright, while the dramatic arch of Jones's back creates a sculpturally dynamic image. Jones uses a still of this pose in his autobiography as the lead image for the chapter that discusses *Blauvelt Mountain* (1995, 142), and a rehearsal version of the move is captured in the photographs included in the collection depicting Zane and Jones's life together, *Body Against Body* (Zimmer and Quasha 1989, 65).

Jones's pose could be a combination of *salamba sirsasana II*, the tripod headstand in the Iyengar naming system (Iyengar 1966, 191), and a variation on *viparita karani*, a pose not listed by Iyengar (1966), but described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a medieval yoga text written by Svatmarama in the 15th century, and practiced in many *asana* systems today. The posture involves the yogi placing their legs vertically upright while reclining horizontally on the floor, a bolster, or a chair. An advanced version of the pose sees the yoga practitioner place their head and neck on the floor and support their arched back by placing their elbows on the floor and hands on the back of their pelvis. The legs

then extend vertically towards the ceiling (Akers 2002, 3.79).[17] The possibility of Jones's movement being drawn from either of the two yoga poses combines with his partnering with Zane, and speaks to his choreographic manipulation of yoga *asana* through the framework of Contact Improvisation. His headstand is yogic, and yet it is so altered as to not be immediately recognizable. Instead of the typical entry from the floor, with individual effort used to slowly raise the legs above the head, Jones is lowered into his headstand from above, and relies on his shared weight with Zane to remain upright. Unlike Barbara Dilley Lloyd's headstand in Cunningham's *Variations V* (discussed in Chapter 3), the technique involved in the execution of Jones's headstand is not precisely yogic. While Dilley Lloyd uses typically yogic technique and carefully places her forearms on the floor, lifts her hips, and then elevates her legs overhead to reach a precisely vertical orientation, which she maintains even as Solomons picks her up and rotates her, Jones's entry is unconventional and his ultimate position involves a deeply arched backbend and asymmetric leg position that he would not be able to maintain without Zane's support. This innovative headstand-that-is-not-a-headstand demonstrates Jones's manipulation of *asana* to suit his own choreographic purposes.

Seeing Jones's Yogas—Implications

While it is interesting and necessary to hypothesize about the yoga poses Jones's headstand might have been based off of, the exercise is also inherently imprecise. As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the international circulation of movement practices during the twentieth century means that simplistic definitions of modern dance

[17] My thanks to Jacqueline Shea Murphy for suggesting the similarities between Jones's movement and *viparita karani*.

exercises, or yoga asana, cannot be trusted to cohere into singular, easily traced movement sequences. Instead, a trickle of yoga in one choreographer's movement practice lead to increased familiarity with other yoga postures, which led to increased use of modern dance conceptions of the body in yoga teaching, or vice versa. The back-and-forth exchange does not end there—as Singleton (2010), Gordon White (2011), Jain (2014), E. Goldberg (2016), Singleton and Mallinson (2017), and many other scholars of modern yoga have argued, there is no coherent definition of yoga that can be separated from any influences or pinned down to a particular pose, philosophy, or lineage. Because of the plethora of (often untraced) influences on choreographers, the same can be said of modern dance techniques. This syncretic development of movement practices across space and time renders challenging any attempt to pinpoint where the yoga in modern dance came from, or when modern dance entered into yoga. Yet, as I've also demonstrated, those transmissions matter: it is not enough to say something along the lines of "yoga is constantly changing, modern dance is constantly changing, and the two practices have influenced each other," because to do so would allow the particularities of those transmissions to be lost in an endless sea of meaningless influences. Instead, we must look at *how* that influencing takes place, what direction perceptions of bodies and practices shifts in, how the syncretization of yoga and modern dance has been used to construct individual's identities, teaching careers, and/or choreography. This evaluation of the change in how yoga *asana* are used in modern dance is in line with my discussion of the transnational circulation of movement practices in Chapter 2, where I argued that the rise of yoga as a nationalist practice in 1930s India relied on ideas of masculinity in

movement drawn from gymnastics, calisthenics, and European esoteric dance. In Jones's case, attention to the multiple ways in which he learned yogic practices can show us the power and authority of whiteness that came to be associated with yogic practice, and which Jones intelligently deployed to bolster his choreographic career and personal life. In doing so, he participated in both the long lineage of modern dance choreographers who turned attention away from their yoga practices and instead focused on their own choreographic innovations, and also joined the long line of Euro-American spiritual seekers who turned to charismatic leaders and alternative spirituality to better understand their own identity. Yet, it is also important to grapple with the ways that Jones's yoga was not natural or inherited, but also a conscious choice on his part. As a Black choreographer, he *chose* to teach yoga, to use yogic techniques in his choreography, and to (temporarily) participate in ISKCON despite the markedly anti-gay, anti-Black agenda of that organization. Therefore, while some of Jones's choices regarding yoga fit within the framework of affirmation and forgetting of yoga in white concert dance that I have established in this dissertation, there are also important differences to how he used and interacted with yoga, including his role in changing who is seen doing yoga activities onstage.

While Jones innovated on strict interpretations of *sirsasana* in *Blauvelt Mountain*, that *asana* existed within an already translated or hybrid framework. In that sense, while Jones and Zane's headstand is innovative in the comparison to Cunningham's use of a precisely executed headstand in Iyengar yoga technique, the difference between the two headstands speaks to the ways that Jones and Cunningham choreographers approach the

incorporation of yogic techniques into their choreography and personal practice. Cunningham treated yoga as a distinct technique, useful for personal investigation and able to be put onstage next to dancing, but ideally to be kept separate from the dancing itself. Jones's interactions with Zane and other collaborators demonstrate his belief that yoga can be integrated into the training of dancers and creation of dances, as evidenced by both his yoga teaching and his use of yoga technique in the arching supported headstand. This distinction also indicates the overall changes in what could be considered dance that occurred between 1965 and 1980. Whereas Cunningham used innovative techniques for dance creation but attempted to maintain a strict delineation between dance and non-dance elements, Jones's choreography indicates his more syncretic approach to what constitutes dance, and towards the improvisatory, innovative, and individualized use of movement forms to create dance material.

The not-strictly yogic quality of Jones's headstand raises further questions: should someone standing on their head always be deemed yoga-inspired? Is it possible that Jones decided to include a headstand in *Blauvelt Mountain* because of some other dance technique that he had learned? Do I call his movement a headstand because I know about his yoga *asana* practice, or because a headstand is what I am looking for and hope to see? I argue that Jones's ambiguous headstand shows the influences of yoga on dance choreography, and the ambiguity of that influence. Seeing yoga means not just visual identification of strictly performed poses through some constructed rubric of what looks "yogic enough," but also involves seeing how and when various forms, interpretations,

and versions of yoga might have influenced choreography, even if that influence is not easily differentiated.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, yoga comes into American culture and modern dance through many strands, and it is impossible to pinpoint which strand inspired Jones's headstand. Seeing his headstand in light of this long tradition of American yogas, it becomes possible to argue that the rhizomatic translation of yoga across the twentieth century United States created the space necessary for Jones's alteration to strict headstand techniques. Even though Jones is not known as a yoga-inspired choreographer, and although many of his other dances do not have explicitly yogic elements, it is important to recognize the yoga where it *can* be seen in order to cease the trend to turn attention away from yoga where it obviously exists.

By breaking down some of the overlaps between yoga and modern dance, I call attention to the politics of visibility in relation to the naming of "also studied" practices.[18] Jones's use of yogic practices through Contact Improvisation, yoga teaching and practice, and his personal use of ISKCON *mantra*s showcase the ways in which multiple strands of yogic practices coexisted in American society in the 1970s and early 1980s. Looking at yogic practices across various aspects of Jones's personal development as an artist and human can also help us to better understand the incorporation of South Asian practices into concert dance *and* the ways in which such incorporations sometimes changed the 'incorporated' practices. By looking at the "also studied" practices of the past,

[18] Here, I take "politics of visibility" to encompass who is seen to be doing, teaching, or learning yoga, and what that 'being seen doing yoga' then means for their position as an artist, teacher, or possessive individual.

particularly the religious or spiritual ones, we can see how current iterations of those practices came to develop, begin to critique the previously unnamed acquisitions of whiteness, and understand how Jones's purposeful exploration of yogic techniques was one of many practices that he used to establish himself as a renowned choreographer and claim access to stage space.

Coda

Like many white women who practice yoga, I came to this project with a narrow, Patañjali-focused, and incomplete version of yoga history, predicated on views that I no longer entirely believed, but which had been allowed to flourish in my yoga teacher training at CorePower Yoga: that yoga has been passed down unchanged for almost 2000 years. Singleton's *Yoga Body* had recently come out, and I wanted to join the group of scholars filling in the gaps between the *Yoga Sutra*s that I had become acquainted with during my yoga teacher training, and the intensely physically driven, competitive, and *asana*-focused world of the studio system in which I practiced and taught. How, why, and when did mainstream yoga come to be associated with white women (like me) practicing in the United States? Why were so many of the dancers with whom I went to college gravitating towards yoga teaching as an alternative career? And why did I experience so many physical, perceptual, and emotional similarities across the yoga and modern dance classes that I regularly took? Why did it feel like both practices were training me, and my body, to do similar things? I embarked on this project knowing that I had a lot to learn about yoga history, and that there was *some* connection between yoga and modern dance—I just wasn't sure what.

As I got further and further into the project, I realized just how thoroughly my dance training guided my approach to yoga studies. I went straight from a college dance major to yoga teacher training at a school that focuses first on *asana*, treats *pranayama* as an addition layered over the beginner's practice, and relegates *yama*, *niyama*, *bhakti*, *mudra*, *kriya*, and other yogic practices to things that might be interesting to some

students, but are considered by most teachers to be too esoteric, challenging, and/or non-Christian for most of the clientele at the studio. Because of the intensely physical nature of my initial yoga training, I approached yoga through the lens of "*asana* first, all other modalities second." As I read more and more yoga texts, and as the online yoga community became increasingly diverse, I became aware of just how limited my initial version of yoga was.

While I learned more about the plethora of things that yoga is and has been, I also came to realize that the simplistic version of yoga I understood at the beginning of this project is one of the tools of whiteness through which white people (like myself) have continued to claim access to (or ownership over) all of yoga, even when what we mean by yoga is much more limited than the wide variety of yogas that exist in the world. When yoga is reducible to *asana* and the minimally challenging aspects of yogic practices, its definition can be controlled, sanitized, and used to support the privileges associated with whiteness. This is not to say that all yoga has been whitened, but that the versions of yoga history that treat Patañjali's *Yoga Sutra* as the sole authoritative Bible-like text of yoga—and in so doing gloss over the fact that many *asana* practiced today have little to do with the *asana* included in the *Yoga Sutra* and do not grapple with aspects of yogic practice beyond *asana*—reify the idea that, because those versions of yoga are accessible, *all* versions of yoga must be equally accessible.[1] Of course, this

[1] I am not the only scholar to make this sort of argument, indeed, there has recently been an explosion of work on race, gender, and yoga. The journal *Race and Yoga*, as well as the anthology *Yoga, the Body, and Embodied Social Change: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis* (2016, ed. Beth Berila, Melanie Klein, and Chelsea Jackson Roberts), provide

narrative also tends to erase the work of the (generally male, Indian) yogis who worked to export yoga and make it available for consumption in easily digestible forms. It also glosses over the ways in which those yoga teachers were invested in creating their own yoga schools and followings, Buddhist and Jain yoga practices, and the many ascetic yoga traditions that mostly were not exported to Euro-American audiences. By focusing on the (now thoroughly debunked) narrative that "all yoga is the same and has been passed down unchanged since Patañjali," mainstream white culture is able to subsume the various versions of yoga under a single umbrella term. This move happens rhetorically in some yoga teacher trainings and parts of yoga culture, however, the elision of yoga's multiplicity also can be seen through how dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers discuss their uses of yoga.

Yoga as "Also Studied"

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I suggested that yoga has been both affirmed and forgotten by modern dance (Lowe 2015, 3). Each chapter then examined how choreographers worked to intentionally affirm a relationship to yoga even as they also often encouraged the forgetting the specificities of how they learned that yoga. The forgetting of yoga's longstanding influence on concert dance did not stop in the 1980s, and continues to this day. I experienced this phenomenon in many ways. I took an Iyengar-based "Yoga for Dancers" class as a college freshman; it was essentially a yoga class marketed primarily towards dancers and offered by the dance department. My college modern dance technique classes frequently included warmups that utilized poses

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good points of entry for discussions of race in contemporary yoga classrooms, intersectional yoga pedagogy, and yoga as a tool of social change.

such as downward-facing dog, and we were regularly instructed to connect with our breath to motivate our dancing, but I only realized that those instructions might have been yoga-related after becoming a yoga instructor several years later. When I was about to graduate from college, and all the dance studios in town were closed for spring break, I enrolled for a free week of power *vinyasa* yoga classes at CorePowerYoga, and was astounded by how familiar and intuitive the classes felt. The rapidly flowing movement and encouragement of extreme flexibility stroked my dancer's ego, while the emphasis on upper body strength provided a welcome challenge. A few months later, I joined other practitioners in a CorePowerYoga Teacher Training, where two of the three primary teachers for the course were trained or had a career in ballet and modern dance. During that same summer, I was also an Assistant Stage Manager for Ananya Dance Theatre's Indian Contemporary Dance production of *Kshoy!/Decay!*, and enjoyed taking company class from a CorePowerYoga teacher before shows. As I delved further into yoga teaching and working for Chatterjea, I noticed more overlaps between the two disciplines that I studied, and had more and more questions about appropriation, authenticity and colonialism. How long had yoga techniques been used by modern dancers? Who facilitated that use? What were the politics of ownership and authenticity between the practices? How did colonial legacies impact yoga's export, reception in the U.S., and perceptions of the practice both within and outside of modern dance? Given the conversations I've had over the past several years, this set of experiences and line of questioning is in no way unique: it seems that most dancers or dance scholars that I talk to have experienced an abundance of ways that yoga was integrated into their dance

training, choreography, or performance. Many dancers and choreographers also question the politics of their uses of yoga. And, for most of those individuals, as for me, this integration of yogic practices into modern dance happened in an unremarked or haphazard way, with some intersections occurring because of their own innovations, even as they inherited other practices from the historical interweavings of previous generations of modern dance teachers and yogis. This combination of individual innovation and disciplinary inheritance is what renders interesting the continuing intertwining of yoga and concert dance.

Despite these historical relationships, many dancers, dance teachers, and choreographers working today list yoga among their supporting interests in their biographies, often naming their yoga study as if there were no historical intersections between the disciplines. The phrasing varies, but usually takes one of several forms. For example, one teacher writes "Paula has studied dance for more than twenty years including ballet, jazz, lyrical, modern, hip-hop, and contemporary…. She is also a 500-hour Registered Yoga Teacher Certification and Reiki master practitioner."[2] This format focuses on the attainment of a yoga certification rather than the lineage of yoga studied or specificities of practice, thereby minimizing the importance of her teachers and glossing over their impact on her conceptions of self and body in teaching dancing. Another form that mentions of yoga frequently take is to emphasize the teachers that the individual studied with: "Joy…has been dancing since the age of 2 ½. She has been teaching and

[2] I do not want to call out individuals, and have not talked to the people whose biographies I cite in this section, so I use pseudonyms here to protect their identities.

performing Modern Dance, West African, Jazz, Hip Hop and Tap for over 25 years throughout NYC… In 2011, Joy fell in love with Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga, studied and continues to study with Baron Baptiste and became Certified Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga Instructor." Another contemporary dance teacher writes "Eva also studied yoga and classical South Indian dance, Bharata Natyam, while staying in Chennai, India. During her stay there, Eva was invited by T.K.V. Desikachar to perform in sacred ceremonies at the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram." A dancer working with the same company writes that "Amanda also holds a 200-hour yoga teacher certification from Kula Yoga." A different dancer and yoga teacher writes that "In 2009, she obtained a Graduate Diploma in Dance Studies focusing in Contemporary Dance, Choreography… she also studied Pilates and yoga."

By naming the lineage of their yoga practice, but not specifying how that yoga practice impacts the development of their teaching, dancing or choreography, or referencing the plethora of other dancers who also "also studied" yoga, these dancers and choreographers position yoga as derivative or secondary to other aspects of their dancing, gloss over the specificities of the yoga they practice, and contribute to the erasure of the historical overlaps between the practices.[3] Mentioning yoga as an "also studied"

[3] Of course, the relationship between yoga and concert dance is not uni-directional, and many dancers have become yoga teachers over the past several decades. This includes internationally famous instructors such as Shiva Rea, who received an MA in World Arts and Cultures from UCLA, and whose Prana Flow and Yoga Trance Dance classes invite participants to dance their way to increased connection with prana (Champ 2013, 152-159); Katchie Ananda, who was a dancer in Switzerland and now teaches yoga internationally (Champ 2013, 268); and Sharon Gannon, who began to study Vedantic philosophy as a dance student at the University of Washington, was practicing asana by the early 1980s, and whose Jivamukti yoga focuses on ethical and spiritual precepts,

discipline is a gesture in the right direction, but does not do enough to specify which yoga they studied or how that yoga was incorporated into their dancing, dance making, and teaching.

This pattern of both using yoga and minimizing its importance within concert dance communities continues in other forms. "Yoga for Dancers" and generalized yoga classes have spread to many college dance programs, and encourage dancers to see yoga as one more modality in the well-rounded dancers' training. This trend does not stop at the student level. According to authors in the collected volume *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, professional dancers often substitute yoga *asana* classes for daily dance technique classes, and yoga constitutes a key part of the flexible dancer's multidisciplinary training (ed. Bales and Nettl-Fiol 2008; 15, 20, 40).[4] Despite this widespread use of and instruction in various forms of yoga as a distinct movement praxis, dancers for the most part continue to say that they study or practice generic "yoga." By homogenizing yoga into a thing that can be "also studied," some dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers gloss over this multiplicity in favor of the more straightforward ("superspiritual," flexible) connotations of the practice (Wong 2001, 13).

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veganism, and physical practice (Champ 2013, 205-206). The group of dancers-turned-yoga-instructors also includes a plethora of less-renowned dancer-yogis, including approximately one in six students in my college graduating class. These instructors, particularly when they teach vinyasa flow classes, tend to include dance-like flowing movements, and to focus on movements that maximize the benefits of their strength and flexibility. A future study of the intersections between yoga and modern dance could ethnographically analyze the impact dancer-yogis have had on yoga practices, and the ways in which their dance training prepares them (or not) for yoga teaching careers.

[4] This connection between professional dancers and yoga practice can also be seen through playful projects such as Pilobolus Dance Company's 2002 book of images of their dancers in partnered, yoga-inspired poses.

In doing so, they also circumvent the need to mention how their yoga practice influenced their dance training, creation, and teaching. This seems to imply that it is okay to say, "also studied yoga" without saying which yoga, who taught it, why that style of yoga was selected, and how that yoga reverberated across other aspects of the individual's physicality and experience. I take issue with that practice, since it elides how yoga practice influenced the individual's dancing, dance making, dance teaching, self-conceptions, and bodily knowledges.

Throughout this project, I have argued that it is essential to examine these "also studied" disciplines, as their impacts reach farther than is recognized by choreographers, teachers, critics, or other scholars. By claiming to have "also studied" various practices, choreographers claim some level of proficiency in each form, and thereby claim a level of ownership, as choreographers' "also studied" practices usually derive from cultures that are typically racially marked as "exotic," "Oriental," or in some way made "other" in public discourse. That is to say, studying ballet or modern dance techniques does not fit into the category of "also studied" for most concert dance choreographers; however, tai chi chuan, judo, aikido, or yoga all generally do. Examining "also studied" practices across multiple generations of artists creates space to see and analyze the enduring influence of supposedly peripheral practices on multiple generations of choreographers.

Dancers' reasons for "also studying" a practice are quite diverse, and not always reflected in the ways that dancers and choreographers write their biographies. As can be seen through the examples given above, "also studied" (or some variation thereof) is a phrase often used in discussions of the varied influences on individual choreographers' or

teachers' movement practices, and designates something that the choreographer investigated in their corporeal training. Its frequency speaks to the increasing trend for dancers to cross-train, and follows the logic of what dance scholar Susan L. Foster calls the "hired body." In a 1997 article, Foster argued that choreographers "require a new kind of [dancing] body, competent in many styles" (253). She calls this dancing body the "hired body" and emphasizes the occasional lack of technical specificity that arises when dancers do not specialize in a given technique, but rather attempt to master them all in order to be more hirable. Expanding on Foster's concept and relating it to neoliberalism and transnational capitalism through the work of David Harvey and Aihwa Ong, dance scholar Anusha Kedhar theorizes the "flexible body" that many South Asian dancers (in diaspora) are encouraged to have (Kedhar 2014, 24). She states: "I suggest that by looking at the flexible artistic practices of transnational dancers, we can see that flexibility is not just a political tool, but also an embodied and corporeal tactic to acquire various forms of capital (symbolic, cultural, and financial)" (2014, 29). By focusing on the forms of capital that can be accrued through trained bodily flexibility, Kedhar creates space for scholars to contemplate how other forms of bodily training likewise equate to the flexible accrual of capital.

The use of yoga by dancers today differs from the sort of flexibility discussed by Kedhar, as it is not used to acquire short-term contracts as dancers in lucrative dance markets (such as the UK), but rather for immediate personal gain based off yoga's preexisting circulation. Unlike the precariously transnationally mobile South Asian dancers Kedhar discusses, dancers who "also study" yoga accrue capital through the

connotations of "superspirituality," being in-the-know, or otherwise elite that come with practicing (and teaching) yoga. Yogi/dancers also frequently use their practice to gain increased bodily flexibility and strength (Santillano 2007). Dancers who become yoga instructors gain cultural cachet and, eventually, monetary compensation. Therefore, while the use of yoga as an "also studied" discipline is related to the flexible accrual of various forms of capital, those forms of capital are framed by the privileges that arose through a century of export and translation of yoga by Indian men for white female audiences, and are therefore quite different from the flexibilities required by the dancers discussed in Kedhar's work. Nonetheless, I follow her in using flexibility metaphorically to indicate the literal benefits of yoga practice for dancers, the changing ways in which yoga is practiced and used by dancers, and the various forms of capital that accrue through studying, teaching, and choreographing with yoga.

Because of these various benefits to "also studying" yoga, and the racial relationships implicit in that study, I argue that looking at the history, politics, influence, and use of yoga and other "also studied" practices can be a tool to rupture the narrative that renders invisible the acquisitive practices of whiteness. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, the politics of naming practices and teachers is one way that whiteness's acquisition of selected versions of yoga remains invisible. The next section, therefore, analyzes one company that highlights their use of yoga in their dance technique, and suggests some ways forward for dancers and choreographers who want to address their uses of yoga without homogenizing the practice or treating it as ahistorical and universally available.

Foregrounded Specific Yoga: Ananya Dance Theater's Yorchha™

The Ananya Dance Theatre, created and directed by Bengali-born Ananya Chatterjea, uses yoga as an integral and named element of their dancing and dance technique. The company's movement technique, Yorchha™ , is, according to the company website, a form of "Contemporary Indian American Dance that is the unique trademark of Ananya Dance Theatre's movement, [it] intersects principles from the classical Indian dance form Odissi (from the eastern Indian state of Odisha), yoga, and the martial art form Chhau (also from eastern India)."[5] The technique draws on Chatterjea's initial training in Odissi, as well as her yoga practice, and was developed in collaboration with dancers Pramila Vasudevan and Chitra Vairavan.

Yorchha™ specifically includes yoga *asana* and breathing principles throughout the process of movement training and choreography. In ADT's description, yoga is not positioned as an "also studied" technique, but rather is integral to the dancing and dance-making. According to the company site, "Yorchha™ draws on the practice of vinyasa yoga…. Breath work, spinal elongation, long-held balances, spirals, bandhas (inner connections of muscles), and positions that are "baddha" (characterized by external binds) are core to Yorchha.™ "[6] By naming the yogic discipline studied, and how its principles and techniques are used in dance training and dance making, Chatterjea and

[5] http://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/philosophy/yorchha/. Accessed May 18, 2017.

[6] http://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/philosophy/yorchha/. Accessed May 18, 2017. Of course, there are many forms of *vinyasa* yoga, however, even specifying "vinyasa" and adding in details of how that yogic technique is used in the dancing and dance-making is exemplary.

Ananya Dance Theatre work to refuse the politics of forgetting. Unlike Cunningham, who included *sirsasana* and *mayurasana* in *Variations V* (1965) but separated dance from non-dance activities, dancers in the Ananya Dance Theatre use yogic techniques in all parts of the dancing process, and name those uses.

Alongside their training in Yorchha, the dancers of Ananya Dance Theatre also sometimes use *vinyasa* yoga classes as warm-ups for their performances and rehearsals. For example, before performances of *Kshoy!/Decay!* (2010), a yoga instructor from the local CorePowerYoga, Nora Byrne, came to give a class to the dancers.[7] This class was probably an excellent warm-up for dancer Lela Pierce who, during the opening section of the show, "Seed," slowly moved from a curled position on her side into a headstand with her legs twisted around each other, as in *garudasana*.[8] Like Jones's headstand in *Blauvelt Mountain*, the shape of Pierce's headstand in *Kshoy!/Decay!* innovated on the typical shape of the headstand; however, unlike Jones's headstand, the impact of yoga on the company's dance training and creation is explicitly referred to across the company's website and promotional materials. In doing so, Chatterjea, and Ananya Dance Theatre, claim space for yoga within concert dance techniques, but they do so in a culturally specific way, drawing on Chatterjea's background in Odissi, yoga, and the Indian martial art chhau. Just as the company's general ethos revolves around the feminist empowerment of women of color, their use of yoga is not casually absorptive or blindly

[7] I was an Assistant Stage Manager on that production, and took Byrne's class alongside the company.

[8] https://www.tcdailyplanet.net/ananya-dance-theatre-explores-violence-through-movement-and-sound/

appropriative, but rather explicit, named, and intentional. By choosing to create and teach Yorchha™ to the women of color dancers in her company, and by trademarking the name of the practice, Chatterjea asserts the specificity of her dance technique and positions herself as a dance technique innovator.[9]

While other dancers using yoga in their dance technique often grapple with inherited yogic influences passed down by generations of dancers, Chatterjea's work to create Yorchha allows her space to specifically name which yoga she uses, and how. Of course, her ability to do so relies on her position as a Bengali-born woman creating an innovative Contemporary Indian American Dance technique. Her participation in the reimagining of Odissi after its erosion during the colonial era; her collaboration with other dancers also interested in creating a contemporary, Indian, American dance

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[9] Issues raised by attempts to copyright, trademark, or otherwise claim ownership have become increasingly common as the capitalist benefits of such claims increase. Like Graham, Cunningham, and the other dancers who created their own eponymously named techniques, Chatterjea's choice to both name and trademark Yorchha works to position herself as an artistic genius. This practice is also increasingly common (and contested) among yogis. For example, yoga entrepreneur Bikram Choudhury filed several claims against various yoga organizations working in the United States in an attempt to protect his patent on his sequence of 26 yoga *asana*, 2 *pranayama* exercises, and the specificity of performing those exercises in a hot (40* C) room. Ultimately, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld previous resolutions that Bikram's yoga sequence, while unique, was not was not copyrightable subject matter under 17 U.S.C. § 102(b). See https://www.eff.org/files/2015/10/09/yoga-copyright-opinion-ca9_0.pdf.

The use of the Iyengar yoga name is also quite restricted. The Iyengar Institute stipulates that, in order to use the name "Iyengar," Iyengar Yoga must be the only method taught at the institution, that teachers must have reached a specific level of training and that all teachers must be (or be in the process of becoming) Iyengar-certified (https://iynaus.org/teach/permission-use-iyengar-name). Furthermore, as the term "Iyengar Yoga" is trademarked, its use is also quite restricted, and teachers must have reached a specific level of training, have paid their association and certification mark fees, and have signed the annual ethics agreement to be able to use the term in their yoga class or program descriptions (https://iynaus.org/teach/trademarks). Thanks to Jacqueline Shea Murphy for pointing me to these resources on Iyengar naming policy.

technique in relation and response to the resurgence of Indian classical dance forms during the twentieth century; and her combination of Odissi and chhau with yoga all render her technique different from the layering of yoga onto various modern dance techniques seen in the works of the other choreographers I discuss. Chatterjea's choices around naming practices are therefore different from the naming practices of dancers who "also study" yoga or inherit yogic practices within their modern dance training, as she herself chose to combine yoga, chhau, and Odissi technique to create Yorchha. Despite this difference, her choice to name *vinyasa* yoga and expand on how her study of the discipline impacts the creation and use of Yorchha provides a framework that dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers might emulate as they tackle the politics of naming influences and objects of study. By stating which yogic principles and movements were integrated into Yorchha, Chatterjea provides an example of a more nuanced way to approach the integration of yogic practices into dance classrooms.

Dancers, teachers, and choreographers interesting in grappling with the politics of appropriation and ownership in modern dance in the U.S. could follow her example and attempt to both name their lineage and cite their training, while also reflecting on and speaking about how their yoga teaching and/or training impacts their dance teaching and/or training. As more concert dancers start to practice yoga and gain certifications in teaching yoga, the potential for yoga's continued existence within modern dance as an indeterminate, undefined, or ahistorical "also studied" influence also increases. I argue that this only furthers the need for dancers and choreographers to take up the burden of specificity. Rather than continuing to perpetuate the culture of "I want it, so I will take

it"—where "it" is a practice like yoga, with centuries of history and a wide variety of sub-practices—dancers who chose to use yoga could choose to name precisely who taught them yoga, what motivated them to use that yoga, how their use of yoga differs from other historical uses of yoga by concert dancers, and how their yoga training influences their dancing and dance making. In doing so, dancers will have to grapple with the very fraught racial politics of use and visibility.

Even through following the example provided by Ananya Dance Theatre's approach to naming practices in their description of Yorchha, problems still might arise. Due to the generational influences of various strands of yoga on Euro-American concert dance, yoga also appears and disappears in many dance practices. For example, the generalized "down dog" taught in many dance classes both mirrors and differs from the particularities of a specific yoga lineage's way of teaching *adho mukha svanasana*. It is unclear to me whether, or at what point, modern dance's "down dog" should be considered separate from *adho mukha svanasana*. The attention to the details of muscular engagement in *adho mukha svanasana* in many yoga classes is very different from the generalized 'stretch, move through the shape, only rest there for a few beats' version of the same general movement pattern that is seen in modern dance classes. There also exist much more rapid uses of *adho mukha svanasana* in yoga, such as the "jumpings" in Iyengar, or the *vinyasa* used in the *ashtanga* and power *vinyasa* styles, among others. This rapid and flowing *adho mukha svanasana* is quite similar to the "down dog" used in many dance classes as a transition within floor work. Should dance teachers be denigrated for not respectfully teaching the intricacies of *adho mukha svanasana* to their

students, when their main goal in including "down dog" in their warmup is often to stretch the calves and to get students' weight on their hands to prepare for floorwork? At what point (or after how long in the pose, or after what sort of technical instruction) does their "down dog" become yogic enough that it becomes disrespectful to not name the shape as yoga-related? How is the yogic *adho mukha svanasana* to be differentiated from the potentially callisthenic-derived down dog? Is there a certain number of hours of yoga classes or yoga teacher trainings required to teach the yogic shape? Does the history of appropriation of yogic practices in modern dance excuse present-day teachers from citing yogic sources when unknowingly teaching yoga-related or -derived poses? Does the history of yoga's export (and simplification) by Indian yogis and teachers excuse dancers from being critiqued for inappropriately using yoga or oversimplifying the practice? These questions point to the complexity of attempting separate yoga from concert dance, or prescribing when dance teachers should (or must) name the yoga practices that they use. They also provide ripe room for future investigations.

Throughout this dissertation, I have presented a number of ways in which the rhetoric of use, absorption, "also studying," or appropriation have been used to turn attention towards, or away from, the presence of yoga in concert dance in the United States. I have also analyzed and critiqued the naming practices that facilitate the appearance and disappearance of yoga in the development modern and postmodern dance. In doing so, I have demonstrated how the story of yoga in modern dance is more nuanced than straightforward theft, and highlighted the efforts of yogis who intentionally

changed yoga to translate their version of the discipline to Euro-American practitioners. In some ways, this amounts to a critique of the simplicity inherent in many appropriation arguments, however, I also recognize that the model of appropriation also has its benefits, in that it names and calls attention to racial politics present in the relationship between yoga and modern dance. As both practices continue to change, it is more essential than ever to use the plethora of theorists at our disposal to think through questions around ownership, the naming of influences, and the legacy of yoga within modern dance. As Amy Champ writes in her dissertation on female yogis, "If we reframe stories describing the route between Western seekers and the variety [of] Hindu cultural and spiritual heritage[s], we might also be able to view contemporary Yoga more as a series of networks, or pathways of exchange which have both drawbacks and positive aspects" (Champ 2013, 110). We must not only view the networks and pathways of exchange, but also attend to who and what moves—and is seen moving—along those pathways. If not, the history of yoga in modern dance will continue to be a history of individual artistic geniuses learning yoga practices from perceptually non-agentive yoga culture bearers, instead of a history of exchange, with complicated power relationships and various systems of value. By insisting on seeing the variety and diversity of yogis and dancers, past and present, we can begin to see all the other people practicing yoga next to, in front of, behind, and around the blonde white woman in athleisure wear who is the current face of yoga.

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