

The Paradox of the Modern Yoga Practice

Flexibly Moving Between Rejecting and Embracing Late Modernity

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Abstract

Yoga permeates every corner, yet its contemporary meaning and significance remains somewhat elusive. As originally a spiritual practice rooted in Hinduism, yoga has transcended its origins and become an ubiquitous tool in addressing various issues seemingly caused by late modern lifestyle, e.g. stress and burn-outs. This study delves into the multifaceted nature of yoga's significance within contemporary society, exploring how something inherently spiritual can function as a pragmatic modern tool. In doing so, this study engages with literature on both yoga's spiritual-religious tradition and Western late modernity. It notes scholars that address the capitalistic, secular, and individualistic ethos of late modernity as well as the re-enchanting efforts that respond to these dynamics, such as the process of easternization and the New Age Movement. Most notably, this study draws upon and empirically adds to Hartmut Rosa's work on the social acceleration of society.

Through the qualitative method of 15 semi-structured interviews this study seeks to answer the question: how do yoga teachers negotiate yoga's value in context of the late modern West? Central to the inquiry is the exploration of modern yoga's inherent paradox, that is - how is it possible for something to both function as a part of late modern society as well as contradict and even critique it? The analysis reveals how yoga teachers adopt a fourfold typology of positions towards the negotiation of yoga's value operating within this paradox. It is shown how all positions take an antagonistic stance toward late modern consumer society. Furthermore, in alignment with Hartmut Rosa's theory, the analysis reveals the embodiment of a radical spiritual-religious and anti-modern deceleration, as seen in the instrumentalization of yoga as a gateway to enlightenment (position 1) and a token of the alternative (position 2). Conversely, there is also an attempt at deceleration that inadvertently accelerates and thereby reinforces the very late modern forces it opposes, evident in the instrumentalization of yoga as a technique of self-development (position 3) and a personal healing journey (position 4). In aggregate, these different positions serve as an explanation of how the modern yoga practice is both rejecting and embracing late modernity. More so, the identified positions reflect ideological narratives of religion, socialism and neoliberalism, i.a. contributing a gendered perspective and needed nuance to the discourse on yogic spirituality under the influence of neoliberalism.

KEYWORDS: *Yoga, Spirituality, Late Modernity, Intentional Deceleration*

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1. Introduction

Surveying a range of wellness guides, most recurrent titles span "3 Yoga Poses To Try When You Are Tired" (D'costa, 2019), "5 Yoga Poses to Boost Focus & Productivity" (Zuda, 2022), "9 Yoga Poses to Help You Lose Weight Fast" (Pathare, 2023), and "7 Yoga Poses To Help You Relax (Even If You're Really, Really Stressed)" (O'brien, 2024). It becomes clear that one practice promising everything from relaxation to increased productivity is advised for virtually all contemporary woes: yoga.

Indeed, yoga is everywhere. Almost every month a new yoga school opens its doors in the city of Rotterdam. Some schools offer the devotional-spiritual-guru type of yoga, others more of the get-fit-and-flexible type. In all cases, they are seemingly offering primarily physical postures, originally called *āsanas* (Bryant, 2015). The *āsana*-based yoga practice has seen immense popularization in Western society since the 1960s and is now firmly embedded in contemporary mainstream culture (Shearer, 2020). However, whether acknowledged or not, historically yoga entails much more than the physical postures to which it seems to be diminished in its modern commodification. Its philosophy focuses on "the realization of the oneness of all things" (Saraswati, 1976, p. 18) and on the aspiration to "still [...] the changing states of the mind" (Bryant, 2015). Originally, it is an existential philosophy more than a sport, and unmistakably related to "Indian religiosity or contemporary spirituality" (Newcombe, 2009).

The way Westerners engage with the religious-spiritual practice of yoga has undergone diverse rearticulations, highlighting the context-dependent nature of its meaning. Modern times are often described in academic literature as 'disenchanted' (Weber, 1969), with modern individuals experiencing a loss of metaphysical 'home' (Berger et al., 1973) due to the influence of Enlightenment thought. It is argued that late modernity is characterized by forces such as secularization, individualism, and radical social acceleration (Lee, 2010; Rosa, 2003). However, scholars also note that a spirit of re-enchantment and easternization significantly shapes contemporary society (Lee, 2003, Campbell, 2015). Understanding the intersection between ancient spiritual traditions and this contemporary late-modern Western context is crucial when researching yoga's significance.

Earlier research on yoga shows that people in the West are often initially drawn to yoga by the physical health benefits of the *āsanas*, such as flexibility and fitness (Csala et al., 2021). Additionally, as the article titles above illustrate, yoga is praised as a way to relax and

combat mental health issues, while it is also called upon to improve productivity and indirectly manage overflowing to-do lists. In light of all of this, it is striking that yoga remains positively associated with spirituality. That is, Csala et al. (2021) note that yoga provides Western practitioners with "a meaning or framework of life," and that over time, spiritual motivations even take precedence over the initial health incentives (p. 9). A paradox is revealed; how is it that something inherently spiritual seems to be utilized in such a pragmatic manner and additionally, is stands in opposition to late modern society while functioning as an integral part of it?

Transplanting the traditionally spiritual-religious practice of yoga into modern Western soil, yoga teachers are actively negotiating its contemporary value. With this study, I intended to examine how yoga teachers experience this intersection and how they embrace or reject spiritual and late modern values. By conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with yoga teachers, I have aimed to answer the research question: how do yoga teachers negotiate yoga's value in the context of the late modern West? A thematic analysis of the produced data has allowed me to discern relevant patterns in a sample of 15 interviews resulting in a fourfold typology of positions towards the negotiation of yoga's contemporary value.

Given yoga's widespread appeal, understanding the values it fosters is crucial. This study on the contemporary practice of yoga and its spiritual-religious essence serves as an examination of our current dynamics with late modernity, embodying both embrace and rejection. Therefore, this research offers insights into the contemporary meaning of the widespread phenomenon of yoga but more importantly, it aids in understanding the significance attributed to yoga practice and spiritual engagement, which reflects ideological narratives of contemporary late-modern Western context.

Thereby, this study adds to the literature on modern yoga specifically, with a necessary focus on its spiritual values, a dimension often overlooked in scientific research on yoga, as was highlighted by Csala et al. (2021). However, by drawing from literature on modernization, like theories of Berger et al. (1973) and particularly a more recent study by Hartmut Rosa (2003), this study also provides empirical insights into this theoretical work using yoga as a current case study. Concurrently, the integration of Rosa's theory on social acceleration into this research, facilitates the investigation into the aforementioned paradoxical nature of the modern yoga practice, which constitutes the central aspect of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following theoretical framework, I will first delineate a context of late modernity with a focus on dis- and re-enchantment as this shapes the Western relation to yoga. Secondly, I will conceptualize yoga by looking into its spiritual-religious origins, to then, thirdly, situate the practice of yoga within Western context.

2.1 A context of late modernity

The term 'late modernity' has been subject to various interpretations. However, the absence of an authoritative belief system is often believed to be a significant factor in its conceptualization. Whether it has to do with the loss of moral sources or an overwhelmingly new supply of them, contemporary times seem to have lost their anchor (Houtman et al, 2011). Grounded in Enlightenment thought and inspired by the Industrial Revolution, society in the 19th century became increasingly rational and secular. The process of modernization brought a growing emphasis on technology, reason, and scientific inquiry, prompting Max Weber to characterize modernity as 'disenchanted' (Hughey, 1979; Lee, 2010). With the world growing disenchanted, as Weber described, people increasingly came to believe that everything can be controlled through calculation and that “principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play” (Weber, 1969, p. 139).

Weber highlighted the protestant reformation in 16th-century Europe, not only as the antecedent of modern capitalism, but also as the primary cause for driving away the sacred, the mysterious and magic from the material world by its emphasis on a transcendental God. Furthermore, he emphasized the supremacy of science as being an essentially ‘irreligious power’, designating it as another dominant driver of modern disenchantment. Science, he argued, can merely discover *how* the world is, but is incapable of replacing religion as a source of meaning and purpose (Houtman et al, 2011). The rule of capitalism, endorsing principles of abstraction, then carried this process of modernization well into the contemporary late modern society (Lee, 2010).

Moreso, Dawson (2011) argues that the processes thriving in the disenchanted modern world, such as “individualization, detraditionalization, pluralization, commoditization and globalization” not only continued into late modernity but were fact radicalized (p. 310). Dawson most notably emphasizes individualization, noting that the absence of an external belief system, dumps a huge responsibility at the feet of the individual. More and more,

people find themselves in a position where they must seek out existential significance for themselves rather than having it handed down to them. “What to do? How to act? Who to be?” have become the central questions of late modernity, fostering reflexivity, but also cultivating a sense of uncertainty (Giddens, 1991, p.71), or in the words of Berger et al. (1973) a sense of homelessness.

Berger et al. (1973) had already argued modernization caused a “metaphysical loss of home” (p.82) pointing out the yearning for a collective integration of meaning which in premodern societies was traditionally facilitated by religion. In their thesis they describe the process of secularization or rather *privatization* of religion, as they argue “in absence of consistent and general social confirmation, religious definitions of reality have lost their quality of certainty and, instead, have become matters of choice” (p.81). Where in premodern times the institution of religion provided meaning and stability, now the individual is “thrown back upon himself” (p.92).

In their book *The homeless mind* (1973) the main argument Berger et al. propose is that modernity has restructured consciousness. They identify the economic forces of technological production and political forces of bureaucracy as modernity’s primary carriers, suggesting that external principles rooted in these carriers, such as rationality, componentality, multi-relationality, makeability and progressivity, correlate on the level of consciousness. For example, the way modernity deals with objects in technological production is directly transferred into the anonymity of social relations in the work field, which is again mirrored within the self. They point out that in response to modernization the modern individual has developed a management of the emotions that follows the procedures of modernization, which is not only highly rational but also assumes maximisation and progress. Hence the emotional and cognitive style of modernization extends to the self. On the level of ideology, they argue, this results in three positions towards modernization. One that directly endorses or legitimizes modernization, a second that is in opposition or resistance to modernization called counter-modernization, and a third that seeks to control or contain modernization (p. 159).

Alternatively, Hartmut Rosa (2003) argues that what is most essentially governing contemporary times is the blind force of social acceleration. He theorized that other important contemporary processes like individualization, differentiation and rationalization are in fact driven by the logic of social acceleration. Additionally, he noted that capitalism fosters this acceleration, as "standing still is equivalent to falling behind" in capitalism (p.11). In line

with Dawson, Rosa notes that “late modernity is nothing other than modern society accelerated (and desynchronized) beyond the point of possible reintegration” (p.18). Rosa describes how the radical dynamization of the world is generating a pace of life and rates of change which people cannot keep up with anymore. This creates the problem of what Rosa calls ‘psychological desynchronization’. The speed of our mind cannot match the current speed of society, feeding into existential anxiety and burnout culture (Rosa, 2011; Brown & Leledaki, 2010).

As a response to the state of society, Weber predicted, the perceived disenchanted reality would be confronted with a spirit of re-enchantment that attempts to re-endow contemporary times with meaning and sacredness (Houtman, 2020; Houtman et al., 2011). Raymond Lee (2003) considers this re-enchantment so important that he states that whereas modernity is grounded in the spirit of disenchantment, “the entire enterprise of postmodernism is predicated on *the reversal* [emphasis added] of disenchantment” (p. 351). He interprets re-enchantment as an ideology grounded in romantic imagination. He notes that, like with the Romanticism of the 19th century, contemporary re-enchantment draws on external Eastern (pre-modern) sources of enchantment, but additionally sparks the spiritual turn, redirecting the individual to sources within and to the self “as an independent source of re-enchantment” (Lee, 2003, p. 353).

Colin Campbell (2015) also notes the contemporary blossoming of a romantic imagination and conceptualizes it as part and parcel of the easternization of the West. He identifies romantic imagination as an alternative under stream re-emerging from time to time throughout history but argues that with the counterculture of the 1960’s it manifested a dramatic cultural change significant for late modernity. The counterculture of the 60s, leaning on earlier expressions of Romanticism such as British theosophy, German anthroposophy and American New Thought, wanted to construct an alternative society to overcome the alienation they ascribed to the dehumanizing ‘system’ and institutions focused on rationalization, efficiency and effectiveness. Campbell writes how they turned to Eastern religions and yogic scriptures for inspiration which have been present in collective psyche ever since, firmly adding to the ongoing process of easternization of the West.

Campbell’s thesis of the easternization of the West constitutes the process of Eastern metaphysical monism replacing Western materialistic dualism. The Western worldview of contrast between “God and man, flesh and spirit, [and] man and nature” replaced by a view of holistic metaphysical monism with an impersonal God that permeates and interconnects all

things (2005, p.64). Campbell argues the verity of his thesis is proven by the changing Western attitude towards the natural, both externally (nature, food and animals) as internally (health and psychology) which he explains is expressed by a number of sociocultural movements. These movements include those fighting for animal rights, vegetarianism, the green movement, the growth of environmentalism but also the human potential movement inspired by transpersonal psychology and the holistic health movement employing concepts such as 'energy', 'harmony' and 'balance'. Together these interconnected movements are part of a more fundamental movement, referred to by Campbell as 'The New Age Movement' which he deemed "the principal form in which a generalized Eastern outlook currently [2009] manifests itself in the West" (p. 184).

As a movement New Age is not always taken seriously and regularly referred to as a 'do-it-yourself-religion', targeting its individual bricolage to indicate it is fundamentally incoherent. Nevertheless, Aupers & Houtman (2014) convincingly argue the New Age Movement is more ideologically coherent than often presumed and in fact marks a significant cultural shift. They argue that it is an institutionalized misconception to boil New Age spirituality down to bricolage, while in fact the prominence of bricolage is an outcome of its underlying self-spirituality. In their discussion of self-spirituality, they refer to the conceptualization of Paul Heelas (1993) who indeed argues that although inspired by many Eastern spiritual-religious traditions and premodern religiosity, the crux of the New Age Movement is the underlying sacralization of the self; its self-spirituality. Self-spirituality according to Heelas essentially is the belief that everyone is a spiritual being by nature since all that is natural is fundamentally divine. New Agers therefore believe that to experience the self, is to experience God.

Heelas differentiated two wings within The New Age movement; a pro-capitalist wing and a wing which he describes as counter-cultural that renounces modernity and attempts to discard society (1993). However, in the 21st century, Houtman et al. (2011) argue, the countercultural sentiments of the New Age movement are by no means counter-cultural anymore, but instead have become the dominant culture. They contend that, for example, the individualism that was demanded in the countercultural attitude of the New Age Movement became internalized by those disenchanting systems and regimes they were critiquing and, they state, now "fuel the engines of consumerism" (p.20).

Looking back at Hartmut Rosa (2003) and his theory of social acceleration resulting in a state of desynchronization, a similar distinction to that of Heelas (1993) is made when

discussing the corresponding phenomenon of social deceleration. Besides natural forms of deceleration (e.g. a tree can't grow faster than it does), oases of deceleration untouched by modernity (e.g. forgotten islands in the sea) and dysfunctional and pathological forms of deceleration (e.g. a traffic jam), Rosa discusses a movement of intentional social deceleration. The ideological movement of deceleration stands in opposition to the tension of desynchronization. Rosa argues that people are yearning to slow-down and therefore want to deliberately reduce the pace of the world around them. However, some of the decelerations are merely temporary, limited, and in fact end up creating further acceleration.

Herein, Rosa differentiates firstly; “accelerating forms of deceleration”. This category contains phenomena which, upon closer inspection, end up enabling conditions of (further) acceleration by allowing “a more successful participation in acceleratory social systems afterwards”. These phenomena create a temporal ‘time-out’ or ‘rest from the race’ but only pause in order to increase speed afterwards. The second form of intentional deceleration Rosa describes as embodying a radical and more fundamental ideology of slow-down. He notes that this radical deceleration exhibits an “intentional resistance to the speeding up of life” that can be considered “anti-modernist social movements” like religious or anarchistic movements (2003, pp.16-17). A prominent contemporary development that can be understood as this second form of intentional deceleration is how people increasingly turn to the ontological security of religion and the numerous new avenues of spirituality, disputing the hegemonic status of secularization (Brown & Lelesaki, 2010). Apparently, relying solely on the self as the primary source of re-enchantment, to provide a shelter from the threats of anomie, may not always be sufficient. Indeed, Berger et al. (1973) had already warned, the focus on the private as the ‘solution’ to the discontents of modernization is not able to supply enough stability or reliability to be experienced as a new ‘home’. Therefore, they argue that “the individual is to be liberated from this individualism to the solidarity of either old or new collective structures” (p. 196).

As an immensely popular practice with Eastern spiritual-religious roots, yoga, with its intention to facilitate a slowing down of the mind and body, is a perfect case study to empirically examine Rosa's theory on intentional deceleration (2003). Now, before diving deeper into how yoga operates in the West, I would first like to ensure a deeper understanding of what it traditionally is.

2.2 *What is yoga?*

That we owe yoga to Indian history is widely acknowledged. With many ancient Hindu texts and philosophies, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita, containing teachings and practices related to yoga, yoga is mostly considered to stand within the religious tradition of Hinduism. Still, it has also been influenced by and integrated into other religious and spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism (Bryant, 2015). Therefore, in this thesis yoga will be referred to as traditionally a religious-spiritual practice.

A much-debated question in the study of yoga is when in time it originated. Up until today this has remained unclear, since sacred knowledge in India has been an oral tradition throughout most of its history (Shearer, 2020). Some sources say yoga originated in pre-Vedic prehistoric times (before 1750 BCE) (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 2018) while others argue it's around 5000 years old (Bowers & Cheer, 2017).

Yoga's historic origins are not the only thing hard to pinpoint. Having more than 350 definitions in Sanskrit, yoga is known to mean many things. Tracing back its roots offers no single system or tradition, but varied approaches, often even in competition with each other (Bryant, 2015). What the oldest yogic traditions do have in common, is the primary focus on what Alistair Shearer (2020) coins; "mind-yoga", in comparison to "body-yoga", a distinction which, although useful, he himself also describes as provisional, since yoga ironically emphasizes interconnectedness and rejects dualism (p.3).

It is with the Yoga Upanishads (c. 100 BC - AD 400), one of the primary yogic scriptures, that body-yoga, including the control of the breath called pranayama, is mentioned for the first time. In the Upanishad scriptures, yoga āsanas are presented as a meditative technique for "steadying the body for prolonged meditation". Similarly in the sacred text The Bhagavad Gita, body-yoga is mentioned in service of the yoga of meditation. It is conceptualized as the path of self-realization that teaches how to renounce selfish attachment in order to purify consciousness (Easwaran, 2007). Its ultimate goal has very little to do with health or fitness but is about reaching Samadhi. Simply put, Samadhi means enlightenment through the spiritual-religious endeavor of uniting oneself with God (Bryant, p.18) or alternatively, in yogic terms; to unite Atman (God immanent) with Brahman (God transcendent) (Easwaran, 2007).

Even the scripture sometimes referred to as 'The Bible of Yoga'; The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, has very little description of physical postures. The Yoga Sutras are the oldest text

to be written on yoga alone. It distinguishes 8 limbs of yoga¹, of which āsana is merely one. The goal and main concern of this scripture is “the realization of the Purusa, [...] the innermost conscious self” (Bryant, 2015, p.17). To actually find a scripture that outlines physical yoga postures one arrives at the Hatha Yoga Pradipikâ written in the 15th century. The Hatha Yoga Pradipikâ caters to the more practical yogi and is understood to function “like a torch to dispel the darkness” around the more theoretical Râja Yoga of Patanjali (Swatmarama, 2011).

The brief overview above shows that an understanding of yoga as primarily or exclusively physical postures has very little emphasis in the most important premodern conceptualizations of yoga. Instead, the scriptures prioritize yoga’s spiritual-religious essence. In other words, body-yoga was fairly unimportant prior to the twentieth century (Jain, 2015). What also becomes clear is that there was never such a thing as one yoga. Although bravely summarized by Satyananda Saraswati as “realization of the oneness of all things” (Saraswati, 1976, p. 18), the spiritual-religious essence described in the scriptures in fact knows many different nuances and interpretations throughout history. Jain (2015) critically points out that, since yoga has never had a monolith tradition, it is nonsense to be worried about what authentic yoga is today. Like the concept of religion, Jain argues, yoga is a process of continuous assimilation to the contingencies of social life. It is “nonstable, ever-adaptive and never monolith” (Jain, 2015, p. 18).

Still, there is a lot of criticism in public debate on how yoga is transforming in Western society. The critique targets yoga’s commodification as profane industrialization and the dismissal (or ignorance) of its Indian traditions as appropriation at its worst (Bowers & Cheer, 2017).

2.3 What is yoga in the West?

Yoga’s initial introduction to the West at the end of the 19th century is often attributed to Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu spiritual leader, who reconceptualized yoga as the spiritual export of India (Strauss, 2004). A main theme in his approach to Indian spirituality was “the transcendent unity of all religion”, highlighting that all religions share a common

¹ 1. YAMA – Restraints, moral disciplines or moral vows. 2. NIYAMA – Positive duties or observances. 3. ĀSANA – Posture. 4. PRANAYAMA – Breathing Techniques. 5. PRATYAHARA – Sense withdrawal. 6. DHARANA – Focused Concentration 7. DHYANA – Meditative Absorption 8. SAMADHI – Bliss or Enlightenment. (Newlyn, 2023).

center. This message was received with great enthusiasm causing the Swami and his teachings to become extremely influential (Shearer, 2020, p.129). Although promoting 'authentic' yoga, Vivekananda paved the way for a Westernized interpretation of yoga and yoga spirituality. His ambition was to blend yoga with Western, scientific rationality by focusing on the practicality and discipline of body-yoga. He stated: "you will understand the Upanishads and the glory of the Atman better when your body stands firm upon your feet" (Vivekananda, 1897, as quoted by Shearer, 2020, p. 138).

Following Swami Vivekananda, in the beginning of the 20th century more and more Indian teachers travelled from India to the West on a mission to educate and enlighten (Bryant, 2015). Through the years disciples of these Hindu teachers started placing even more emphasis on āsana. Famous examples of these teachers are Pattabhi Jois who developed his version of ashtanga-vinyasa-yoga and Iyengar who established his Iyengar method, both generally thought of as "a technique of the body" (Hasselle-Newcombe, 2005).

Still, yoga experienced its significant rise in popularity during the countercultural 'hippie' movement of the 1960s. There, yoga's transcendental mind-aspect did play a pivotal role as it aligned with the hippies' quest for expanded consciousness. As mentioned before, this era saw a major surge in the process of easternization. Part and parcel of this shift, many turned to yoga as a pathway to explore deeper spiritual and psychological states outside the confines of conventional Western paradigms. Boosted by the media attention on the Beatles' interest in yoga and meditation, yoga truly became a household word (Newcombe, 2009).

Then, alongside the broader trend towards 'holistic well-being' in the 1970s and 1980s, a medicalization of yoga as a therapeutic technique transpired. Yoga further entered Western consumer culture, dropping its anti-establishment forces and metaphysical mind-yoga aspect, and instead becoming a tangible relief from stress. Further diminished to primarily a physical practice in therapeutic context, yoga entered the middle-class pop culture first as a form of slowmo-aerobics and then throughout the years it was culturally and financially appropriated in a myriad of forms leaning into this 'stretch-and-relax' format (Shearer, 2020).

Nevertheless, contemporary research by Ness et al. (2016) studying the perceptions on the spirituality of yoga in Minnesota identified a clear desire among teachers for spiritual engagement. However, they revealed teachers experience barriers to include this spirituality in their teaching, thereby illustrating the tension between the practice and its Western context. The barriers they identified as prohibiting spiritual engagement included studio and

classroom guidelines, the student's fear of non-Christian spirituality, the teacher's own lack of philosophical understanding and the fear of contributing to the cultural colonization (p.56).

Similarly, Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe (2005) studying a group of contemporary Iyengar practitioners in the UK, the type of yoga known for its physical emphasis, discovered that 85% of practitioners felt yoga added a sense of meaning to their life. Moreso, Csala et al. (2021) describe in a systematic review of empirical research on the relationship between yoga and spirituality that yoga practice “seems to be positively associated with spirituality” (p.1). They present how most academic research on yoga shows that initially, people come to yoga for physical health benefits, but that over time, spiritual motivations do take precedence.

However, this is quite hard to imagine looking at the contemporary offering of yoga. Today we see yoga take the form of goat yoga, boxing yoga, voga (voguing & yoga) and rave yoga, to name just a few. These alterations have less and less to do with the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and are perceived by critics as an unprecedented degree of commodification and a trivialization of ancient yogic tradition. They argue that yoga today is facing a transformation from an ancient spiritual practice to big business and premium lifestyle within consumer society (Al Jazeera Correspondent, 2014; Gregoire, 2013). And undeniably, yoga is opening up markets and providing new motivations to consume cultural products like yoga mats, yoga clothes, mindfulness apps, self-help books, posture patents and studio trademarks (De Michelis, 2008).

Additionally, Mary Grace Antony (2016) critically writes how secularization and appropriation of yoga within consumerist frameworks is erasing Hinduism. She argues it is problematic that yoga's complex spiritual-religious elements are being replaced with Western signifiers such as physical fitness, health and wellness. Her study illustrates how yoga instructors are compelled by students to “replace Sanskrit nomenclature with more relatable terminology, emphasize the physiological benefits of yoga practice, and include variety in āsana routines to prevent boredom” (p.298). With her research, she calls out the role of non-Indian yoga teachers play in the appropriation by resignifying yoga practice within individualist structures and thereby giving privilege to a consumerist stance.

Similarly, Munir et al. (2021) observe the latest transformation of yoga as a dual process involving both the de-essentialization of its true meaning and its further commodification. They describe that: “once yoga was bridged with fitness, new possibilities emerged, with yoga eventually becoming associated with an attractive, lithe body and a clean, disciplined lifestyle followed by people who were in control” (p. 886). This latest

rearticulation, they argue, has obscured yoga's Hindu roots and philosophy even further, shifting also yoga's mind aspect from religion to spirituality to mindfulness. Mindfulness in such a secular form, is understood to promote individual responsibility and encourages continuous self-improvement. This, Phil Arthington (2016) writes, has political implications that many are unaware of. Importantly, he states, the direction of an inward focus in the present moment in order to accept that what is outward, draws attention away from the possibility that maybe there is injustice or hardship to address in the world.

It has become a common thesis in academic debate that the reigning logic of neoliberal individualism has 'embraced' the spiritual turn, contending that "spirituality functions as an ideology of neoliberalism" (Watts, 2021, p.1). Yoga is interpreted as a secularized form of contemporary spirituality that has become embedded in the production and consumption dynamics of late modern capitalism. Scholars who adhere to this perspective point out how yoga is reinforcing productivity culture and neo-liberal strategies of self-governance and self-responsibility (Dawson, 2011, Houtman et al., 2011, Watts, 2021). Indeed, a multitude of self-help blogs that advise yoga for e.g. career advancement (Ekam, 2023), becoming more successful (Carmichael, 2021), and taking control of your life (Perry, 2023) place yoga in this narrative. In service of self-optimization yoga is portrayed as one of the many self-help hacks in line with 'The 5-o-clock Routine', biohacking and 'The 4-Hour Work Week' that subscribe to a neo-liberal ethic by emphasizing individual freedom and autonomy (Bril, 2024). Besides the instrumentalization of āsana-based yoga for physical health benefits and its medicalization as an antidote for mental health issues, yoga today is now also used as a tool for success and growth.

However, this neoliberal interpretation of yoga as a technology of the self perhaps calls for some nuance if yoga also still has positive association with spirituality. Surely, it would indeed be strange for its spiritual-religious essence, which has undergone thousands of years of continuous assimilation, to be stripped of its true meaning in just a few decades. In aggregate, the numerous interpretations of yoga today seem difficult to reconcile. Hartmut Rosa (2003) argued in his theoretical analysis of the movement of intentional deceleration that multiple contradictory truths can exist next to each other. However, how this precisely operates is an empirical question. Yoga, as an excellent example of deceleration, functions as a case study to research this paradox. With this study I have empirically analyzed the nuanced reality of the modern yoga practice, with this paradox serving as my central focus. However, before presenting the results, I will first explain the methodology for this research.

3. Methodology

In the following section I will discuss the methodology of this study. Firstly, the sampling procedure and the process of data collection is outlined. Secondly, the operationalization and the data analysis procedures are explained. For now, I wish to note that this study adopts qualitative research methods, primarily due to the research question's emphasis on understanding experiences and valuations of the subjects studied, for which an in-depth understanding of context is crucial. Furthermore, the aim of this study is to generate theory, additionally making qualitative methods the most appropriate (Bryman, 2015).

3.1 Sampling procedure

While most research on yoga focuses on yoga consumers (Hasselle-Newcombe, 2005; Lewis, 2008; Dittmann & Freedman, 2009; Büssing et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020) this study centers on yoga teachers as its unit of analysis. As experts in the field, yoga teachers are capable of offering articulate insights into their considerations regarding their valuation of yoga. Furthermore, their role as gatekeepers in the production of yoga's meaning lends their perspective significant societal value. However, the decision to focus on yoga teachers did lead to a conspicuous absence of an engagement with yoga that was more superficial. To this I will return to the result section.

The sample is limited to Rotterdam-based yoga teachers. Besides providing a unity to the sample, the decision to only include Rotterdam-based teachers was driven by two main factors. Firstly, Rotterdam, being a metropolitan city, boasts a diverse array of yoga studio's, making it an ideal representative of late modern Western urban centers for this study. Secondly, focusing on Rotterdam facilitated a logistical aspect enabling me to conduct interviews in person. This approach not only enhanced the quality of the data by helping to foster rapport with participants, but also enabled me to consider nonverbal cues, such as body language. The final sample comprised five men, nine women, and one individual who preferred not to disclose their gender.

To ensure a rich and nuanced set of results, the aim was to sample with maximum variation and identifying "important common patterns that cut across variations" (Palinkas et al., 2015). As a sampling procedure, I initially employed a purposeful sampling strategy to incorporate teachers of different yoga studios in Rotterdam, as the difference in type of studio results in different types of teachers. As a yoga practitioner myself, I am well-informed on

the variety of yoga studios available in Rotterdam. I divided the studios into three categories based on my personal experience with these studios and information found on their website. In each category I selected five respondents, creating a total sample of 15 participants. The categorization made is: 1. gyms that provide yoga classes, 2. yoga schools with a fitness approach, and 3. yoga schools with a traditional approach. I will now briefly describe the difference between the three categories.

The first category, gyms that provide yoga classes, offers a primary individual practice with fitness equipment, but provides some group classes such as Zumba or boxing, but also yoga. Interviewees within this category were the hardest to find as they are less well connected to my network. Therefore, the purposeful sampling strategy was supplemented with snowball sampling, which is an effective recruitment method when a population is difficult to reach (Browne, 2005). By asking respondents to put me in contact with other instructors teaching in a gym environment I eventually found 5 willing participants.

The second category, yoga schools with a fitness approach, are bound together by primarily offering yoga while in addition also providing some fitness classes, such as pilates or sometimes even boxing. At these schools the yoga classes are usually not called by their traditional name, for example, an ashtanga class is called 'power', a vinyasa class 'flow' and a yin class 'stretch' (YG Studios, 2023), illustrating how they approach it as a sport. As I make use of these studio's myself, I was able to use my network to reach these participants.

The third category, yoga schools with a traditional approach, has a sole focus on yoga. These schools denote on their website from which lineage they teach and directly refer to yoga as a philosophy in the description of their school. Fitting to this category I found Yoga Vidya, teaching from the lineage of Swami Sivananda (Yoga Vidya Yoga, n.d.) and the studio Ashtanga Yoga Rotterdam dedicated to teaching traditional Mysore Ashtanga (Smaragd wings, 2023). These schools I physically visited to scout respondents and the first five people I approached within this category all immediately accepted to participate.

Name*	Gender	Age	Category**	Yoga school
Adam	M	44	2	Balanzs
Adele	F	30	1	Vondelgym
Amelia	F	45	2	Justflow
Finn	M	35	2	Yoga Grounds, Balanzs, Kula
Isaac	M	40	1	Fitforfree, Vondelgym, corporate companies
Isabella	F	42	2	Yoga Grounds, Balanzs, Kula
Isolde	F	44	3	Yoga vidya, corporate companies, highschoools
Maxime	F	28	1	Vondelgym, Trainmore, Rabobank
Matthew	M	52	3	Yoga vidya
Mila	F	32	2	Yogaschool Mayi
Mirjam	F	30	1	Integrale yoga school, Gym vlaardingen
Penelope	X	37	3	Yogaschool Mayi, Love at first tribe
Rachel	F	38	1	Sportclub de uitweg
Tobias	M	47	3	Yogaschoolrotterdam, Pauluskerk
Yvonne	F	46	3	Yogaschoolrotterdam

**These names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the respondents*

***Category 1: Gym with yoga classes, Category 2: yoga school with fitness approach, Category 3. yoga school with traditional approach*

What became clear after having done a handful of the interviews, was that my assumption that the studio where instructors teach indicates their type of approach to yoga was not completely correct. Within the first five interviews I came across a teacher out of the gym-category who turned out to be very traditional and a teacher out of the traditional category who kept emphasizing the physical benefits of yoga practice. Additionally, it turned out that often respondents teach in many different yoga schools which crossed the boundaries of my categorization. Therefore, it was already made clear that the categorization I made was oversimplified. Although purposeful sampling would have allowed me to adjust my sampling approach to respond to this misconception, I decided to stick to the original categorization as it remained my most reasonable estimation to reach maximum variation (Coyne, 1997).

3.2 Data collection

Empirical data was produced by conducting semi-structured interviews with a total 15 Rotterdam-based yoga teachers. This method of data collection allowed a natural flow of conversation. Although the interviews were guided by an interview guide (Appendix A) designed to cover key concepts, participants were encouraged to introduce additional themes into the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were the appropriate method for this study as they allow complexity and considerable probing. This flexibility indeed turned out to be important as important findings were revealed outside of the semi-guided questions (Bryman, 2015).

All interviews were recorded, with participant consent. Each interview lasted 65 minutes on average with a total of 975 minutes of recording. The interviews were conducted in-person in February and March 2024. They took place in Rotterdam, either at the yoga studio where the interviewee teaches or at my office at Theater Rotterdam which was a guaranteed quiet space I considered reasonably neutral. The interviews were conducted in Dutch with the exception of 3 interviews which were conducted in English as these participants do not speak Dutch.

3.3 Operationalization

The research question: “How do yoga teachers negotiate yoga’s value in the context of the late modern West?” was operationalized into an interview guide based on the main concepts; yoga, spirituality and late modernity. The interview guide (Appendix A) was organized into three primary sections: 1. Biography, 2. Current Practice, and 3. Yoga Today, with an additional section on 4. Spirituality. To provide transparency regarding the operationalization process I will now elaborate on each category.

The first section, biography, gave interviewees the opportunity to introduce themselves and asked about how they got into yoga initially, what their motivations were to start practicing and teaching, and what phases and styles they went through. This section, besides being an introduction, is conceptually connected to the concept of yoga. This first section was structurally quite similar in all interviews.

The second part of the interview guide; current (teaching) practice, is also still connected to the concept of yoga, but also ended up addressing spirituality quite often as well. In this section I usually referred back to something they had mentioned in the first part,

asking whether this was still how they felt about that now, and redirecting their focus from solely their teaching to their own personal practice. This, at times, took them by surprise as it was a more intimate topic for them to discuss. For example, if they indicated that they felt alienated by chanting mantras in their teacher training, I would ask them how they felt about it now in their personal practice. Specifically, in this part of the interview I asked respondents about their ideal yoga class, when they feel fulfilled, studio preferences, regulations, and styles they preferred.

The third section of the interview guide; yoga today, is connected to the concept of late modernity as it prompted interviewees to reflect on the context of their yoga practice. Respondents were asked about other yoga-related activities, when they consider something yoga, and what they think of yoga's popularization. Getting to the end of the interview, respondents would philosophize freely which brought up interesting new topics such as 'yoga aesthetics' and 'moral superiority'. My primary focus during this section of the interview ended up not to get them to reflect on societal context, as this emerged naturally, but on keeping them close to their personal experiences within their reflections.

The fourth section, connected to the concept of spirituality, was an optional part of the interview. To avoid steering interpretation I preferred not to address the concept of spirituality directly, unless interviewees brought them up themselves. However, each respondent introduced spirituality into the conversation to varying extents, which prompted me to delve deeper into the topic. For instance, if they mentioned reading "spiritual books," I inquired whether they perceived yoga as spiritual. Similarly, if the topic mindfulness was raised, I probed whether they distinguished it from spirituality. As mentioned, this mostly happened during the second part of the interview. However, when it was only thinly discussed, I made use of this fourth category of the interview guide.

To identify the concept of spirituality within the conversation I paid attention to the various measurable aspects of spirituality as identified by Csala et al., (2021) in their systematic review of empirical research on the relationship between yoga and spirituality. These include "spiritual experiences, spiritual intelligence, a level of hope, a sense of existence, presence, awareness of body-mind connectedness" and "a decreased level of existential anxieties" (p. 8). Still, for this thesis, I was not particularly interested in defining the concept of spirituality present in this data, but more focused on whether an experience of spirituality is part of the respondents' valuation of yoga.

3.4 Data Analysis

For the subsequent analysis all recordings were transcribed with the help of an A.I. transcription tool (Amberscript & Turboscribe) which I checked for errors. After all interviews were transcribed, I uploaded the transcripts in Atlas.ti to start a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as primarily converting data into key patterns they named ‘themes’ and which capture “something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82).

Driven by the research question and my theoretical framework I had intended for the coding to be mainly an inductive process. Nevertheless, I did create some pre-empirical codes such as ‘self-spirituality’ and ‘disenchantment’ in line with Kuckartz’s (2014) approach to thematic analysis, in which applying ‘topical categories’ to the data precedes the inductive coding. However, I experienced these pre-empirical themes to be too theoretical, that is, too abstracted in meaning. Since by the third interview I still had not applied them, I ended up casting these themes aside. Thus, the thematic analysis in this study followed the coding phases as described by Braun and Clarke (2006); 1. immersion in the data, 2. generate initial codes, 3. create themes by merging codes, and 4. revising and improving the themes. However, it also involved oscillating between these different stages.

After the immersion in the data by rereading all transcriptions, I proceeded to the second phase of generating initial codes. New codes kept emerging up until the 15th interview. Therefore, a second and third round of coding were conducted with a focused reading on the later developed codes. After coding all the data I ended up with 232 codes. Continuing to the third phase of categorization I first checked whether all 232 codes were necessary or that they overlapped with another similar code. This, for example, made me merge the codes ‘cultivating consciousness’ with ‘path towards consciousness’ and ‘valuing tradition’ with ‘respect for tradition’. Additionally, at this stage some codes were also deleted for not being relevant or for only containing one quote. During this initial phase of categorization, the number of codes was brought back from 232 to 203 codes. The final 203 codes, including notes on the merging of codes, can be found in the code list provided as appendix B.

Subsequently, with use of the network function of Atlas.ti, I then placed the codes in

overarching groupings of ‘initial themes’(Braun & Clarke, 2006) which are called ‘code groups’ in Atlas.ti. Using the network tool allowed me to have a visual overview of which codes are associated with each other and try out different combinations to see if it revealed an underlying theme. Although I did not make use of the function to add relations between codes in Atlas.ti, as this only made the overview visually messier and thereby negatively affected my understanding, the overview supported my analysis by offering me a snapshot view of all codes. The overview is included as appendix C and the code groups are listed at the end of the code list in appendix B.

Eventually, in the fourth phase of coding a fourfold typology of positions was identified which can be considered the four main themes. Other initial themes were cast aside or incorporated into one of the final themes. For example, the themes ‘traditional’ and ‘religious’ were incorporated in ‘spiritual-religious enlightenment’, as is visible in the overview. The four positions that were abstracted from the data will be discussed in detail in the result section below.

3.4 Validity, reliability and ethics

To ensure the validity of this qualitative research, careful attention was paid to integrating the main concepts of yoga, spirituality, and late modernity into established literature and theoretical frameworks. Throughout all phases of this study, the primary focus remained on addressing the research question at hand.

In undertaking this study, establishing trust with participants was crucial. By communicating to the participants that I am myself engaged in yoga practice I intended to create an environment of openness to encourage participants to share their experiences authentically. However, I was careful to prevent my subjectivity as a researcher from influencing bias. This approach ensured that the responses of the interviewees contribute meaningfully to the study's integrity and validity.

As thematic analysis is an interpretation approach it is important for the reliability of this research to explain the decisions made in the coding process, in which I have therefore intended to be transparent. Additionally, the analysis was made reliably by following the steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2006). This systematic process helps ensure that all relevant data is examined and that themes are derived in a consistent and comprehensive manner. Since there was not a second coder nor a discussion of themes with

peers, following these steps of coding was the best way to minimize the risk of subjective interpretation. Reliability in the preceding phase of data collection was ensured through the careful operationalization of the research question into an interview guide, however due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews the conversations will always somewhat vary in a different time, place or with a different researcher.

Furthermore, ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research. Participants were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix D) outlining the purpose and procedures of the interviews. This ensured transparency and allowed participants to give written consent before proceeding. Importantly, participants were informed of their right to decline answering any questions they felt uncomfortable with, thus safeguarding their well-being during the interview process. The established trust as fellow yogis contributed to this safeguarding.

4. Results

During the coding phase and subsequent analysis of the data, four positions were abstracted that reveal a particular negotiation of yoga's values with different instrumentalizations of yoga practice. These positions should be considered an abstracted typology and although some respondents exclusively commit to one position, others move between them and contribute to two different ones. This fourfold typology of positions, which will be discussed below, defines the instrumentalization of yoga as: 1. a gateway to enlightenment, 2. a token of the alternative, 3. a technique for self-development, and 4. a personal healing journey.

However, the respondents also have shared understandings and perspectives which I will outline first. What unites these respondents is their antagonistic stance towards late modern (consumer) society which is reflected in their rejection of mainstream perceptions and prejudices about yoga and spirituality. They express this by conveying that their understanding represents *true yoga*, *true spirituality*, and *true political enlightenment*.

4.1 *True yoga is more than āsana*

Firstly, the analysis of the data showed an overall holistic understanding of yoga as more than a physical āsana practice. This means their personal practice of yoga is not confined to postural yoga, but includes a series of activities, on which Maxime stated: "yoga āsanas are only a miniscule part". Following the distinction of Alistair Shearer (2020), all respondents speak not only of body-yoga but mind-yoga as well. Besides meditation and pranayama, the two practices of yoga besides āsana most often referred to in yogic scriptures and often the more known elements of Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, respondents include i.a. their diet, cacao ceremonies, sound healing, chanting, ayurveda, journaling, (reincarnation) coaching and walking (barefoot) in nature as part of their yoga practice.

Moreso, across all positions it is agreed that physical practice is a tool, one of many, or as Adam puts it "a vehicle", for *something more*. He continues: "it's a car that you get into that helps you on your journey". The real yoga, the respondents suggest, lies beyond these activities or tools and incorporates something less tangible. Penelope summarizes this idea, saying: "āsana is just a really little part of yoga. Āsana is just a tool of yoga. So there are also other practices, like some values and philosophies to apply to life". What exactly these

philosophies consist of differs among the respondents and will be elaborated on below when discussing the four-fold typology of positions. However, what is clear is that for all respondents yoga has a substance that goes beyond a series of physical practices. It is connected to their worldview and is therefore, to different degrees, always present in their lives. Yvonne clearly expresses this and even takes it a bit further when asking her directly what she considers yoga, she answers:

Yoga is not just about āsana. Life itself is yoga. In fact, yoga truly begins once you step off the mat. We often associate yoga with what we do on the mat, but that's not it at all. Yoga is merely a tool to touch upon that. It has many layers.

Strikingly, as shown in the quote above, respondents frequently refer to a more general perception of yoga in society that, unlike their own, lacks a depth of understanding. Mirjam even defines her interpretation by the rejection of such a perception, she notes:

That's just a bit of a stigma that yoga has: all those very thin women and everything very chic. And I'm not like that at all and I would love to do it differently [...] I've often had people come to my class half in their pyjamas. Because appearance is just totally unimportant. It's about the inside.

Not only do the respondents prefer to do this differently themselves, they also strongly disagree with a superficial consumer-driven approach to yoga, which Adam outright states is “a large misconception”. Although in general this population tries to refrain from passing judgement, a shared yogic value, it becomes quite clear all agree with the outspoken Adam that popular engagement of yoga is a misinterpretation. In many ways they implied it is too superficial, too quantified and focused too much on beauty and fitness. Yvonne could not hold back her consternation: “Balance class in front of a mirror!? A mirror! I find that truly fascinating... It now all has very trendy names, with weights and things...That’s not about yoga anymore for me”.

Unexpectedly, such a consumer-driven engagement with yoga as an unreflective āsana routine deemed by the respondents as superficial was often reflected on but was not represented directly in the data. It is probable that this type of engagement with yoga is a more common position with yoga practitioners than yoga teachers. Indeed, Mila describes

how it is something she sometimes come across with their students, saying: "sometimes I see someone looking at one of those fitness watches to check how many calories they burned, or something like that... yeah... and then I think..oh that's so not what it should be about for me". Considering yoga a journey of growth, the respondents acknowledge that an emphasis on physicality is to be expected with beginners and also recall starting out the same way themselves. It is those who never go beyond a consumer-driven engagement with yoga as a fitness routine and adhere to a non-holistic understanding, that they seem to feel a moral superiority to.

4.2 True spirituality defies all labels

Secondly, in all positions, the depth or substance the respondents appreciate in yoga can very well be considered a level of spirituality. Spirituality stays, despite the vast amount of literature, a slippery concept that also takes different forms in the four different positions present in this data. And even though some respondents explicitly object to the word spirituality, all of them express values, experiences or a worldview that indicates a system of metaphysical beliefs in which yoga plays a central role.

Interestingly, even the respondents who did not outright reject the concept of spirituality were still critical of this label. Although some did eventually identify as either spiritual or even religious, respondents across all positions were at least hesitant at first. While Isaac argues that the concept of spirituality is too broad and “has become some kind of catch-all term²”, Amelia expresses she feels that it is too limiting, stating: "I feel very strongly, I don't need to label it. It's not really something that can be captured in a single word for me. [...] A word is a frame and that's, well, you know, a limitation". Both in the idea of the term being too broad and too limiting lies the concern that it fails to capture the true depth of meaning they experience. Instead of getting bound to the mainstream conception of spirituality and its associated prejudices they: “rather keep it open” (Tobias). Their hesitancy towards this concept reveals their concern for a stigmatization and trivialization of their beliefs. They therefore experience this label as a negative moral judgement. As a way to find footing in their opposition to the superficial consumer version of spirituality, they turn to language and address its limitations. As Finn points out:

² He uses the Dutch term ‘kliko-begrip’

Essentially, everything with language involves concepts that cannot fully describe what we mean. This might be why I preferably avoid certain words like also 'God' or 'religion', because they carry a certain kind of mental concept, image, or judgement attached to them.

With some respondents discussing the concept of spirituality brings up an antagonistic attitude that goes beyond this more subtle resistance via the critical discussion of language and instead directly targets the image of spirituality. When asking Mirjam whether she feels she is a spiritual person she first answers it depends on the context to avoid the topic. Questioning her further she says: “maybe I'm spiritual, but I just don't express it overtly. Okay... I feel a bit resistant towards people who are solely focused on being spiritual". Later she comes back to this saying; “like when people are spiritual and then very much... either in their clothing or in their way of speaking, like very softly. I mean come on! Okay. We're not going to just sit here all airy-fairy, are we!?”. This defensive attitude exposes the same rejection of superficial spirituality as the more polite hesitancy found with other respondents above. All respondents are careful of their spiritual beliefs not to be reduced to this fake commodified version of spirituality, as theirs is more true.

4.3 True political enlightenment is antagonistic

Lastly, it is striking that even though this study focuses on the interviewees personal experience of yoga, they often directed the conversation towards a more analytical level of societal significance. Many times they explicitly addressed topics like capitalism, consumerism, science or productivity culture, indicating yoga is a political phenomenon for them. What additionally binds the positions therefore, is an enlightenment that turns political. As Tobias notes: “I do think yoga is spiritual, because it generates reflection”. Instead of recklessly swimming in the main stream, these respondents make up their own minds. Through their engagement with yoga the respondents feel they generate an awareness that results in them reacting to and in fact taking an antagonistic stance towards late modern society. The nature of this stance is the main factor that distinguishes the positions from each other and will be separately discussed below in detail.

However, what all of them note is that life seems to be speeding up and they observe

how people are having trouble keeping up. Tobias notes it creates “a certain feeling of always having to hurry”. Admitting they were similarly affected before they got into yoga, now as teachers they notice the detriments in their students. Maxime observes: “I see many tense bodies. Tense eyes, as I call it. Many people are always in fight or flight mode. Always on, always running, always busy”. They believe that yoga, in different ways, can facilitate a slowing down of the mind and body and thereby, Amelia notes with a calm voice, “you can.... Hopefully...let all that hustle and bustle from outside... just pass you by...”. Adding to their antagonistic stance, the analysis of the data showed how all respondents oppose to the fast pace of society that has people unconsciously running from one thing to another.

Below I will describe the varying weight the positions attribute to the attempt to decelerate the increasing speed of social life through yoga. I will approach these positions with reference to Hartmut Rosa’s (2003) distinction of the two forms of deceleration in response to the social acceleration of society discussed in the theoretical framework. Rosa differentiates between; firstly, a radical deceleration carrying an anti-modern or religious sentiment and secondly, accelerating forms of deceleration that are limited and temporary. This same differentiation can be made between the first two and the last two positions, which I will now continue to explain.

4.4 Introduction to position 1 & 2

A main differentiation of the fourfold typology of positions can be made between the first two and the last two positions, corroborating Hartmut Rosa’s distinction of two forms of deceleration in response to the social acceleration of society. With positions one and two it is this first form of radical deceleration that emerges, as it typifies these respondents to not only use yoga as a quick rest from the race, but instead their yoga practice represents a coherent lifestyle that fundamentally opposes modernizing principles. These principles encompass not only the process of social acceleration, which Rosa considers the primary characteristic of late modernity, but also, notably, late modern consumerism deeply rooted in capitalism. Rosa identified capitalism as the main source of the aforementioned social acceleration (Rosa, 2003).

Besides using yoga as a way to decelerate, the first and second position abstracted from the data instrumentalize yoga as, respectively, a gateway to enlightenment and a token of the alternative. While all four positions adopt an antagonistic stance, the first two

particularly position themselves *against* late modernity as outsiders to the system, as they experience a distance from mainstream social reality by their embrace of a radical (yogic) lifestyle. I will now continue to present my analysis of this first and second position.

4.5 Position 1: Yoga as a gateway to enlightenment

Of the 15 respondents, four of them exclusively adopt this first position but two others sporadically contribute to it. Respondents who take up this first position place yoga in a spiritual-religious narrative. For them yoga is not merely a quick fix for lower back pain nor burnouts, although they recognize it will help with that as well, it is the central feature of their life. Yvonne passionately expresses this: “It's basically 24/7, I take it with me in everything, everywhere”. Yoga has an inherent presence in everything they do, up to the point they find the question to formulate their motivation for practicing a little disorientating. With big, surprised eyes, Rachel answers: “What is the motivation behind brushing your teeth!? It's just become such an evident part of my existence now”.

Many of these respondents wrestled with existential questions while growing up, wondering what life is all about. Their spiritual-religious understanding of yoga has been able to provide them with answers and has therefore become their existential fundament as well as their purpose. It is, using the words of Isolde, what they live for:

What I stand for is that yoga brings a sort of depth into your life and that you start feeling a sense of connection and purpose, that you live from purpose. [...] That's actually my driving force, my mission, and I find that very important within myself. That's what I live for.

Similar to religion in pre-modern society, these respondents engage with yoga as a source of meaning and purpose, the loss of which had caused Weber to diagnose modernity with disenchantment (Weber, 1969). Respondents have a deep appreciation of yogic scriptures and traditions. They frequently refer to gurus and swamis and Hindu beliefs e.g. reincarnation are a part of their belief system.

In this position yoga functions as a source of re-enchantment, foremost on an ontological level, but consequently it also surfaces in their daily lives in the form of a romanticism allowing them to perceive magic, mystery, and beauty. They express that as a result of their practice “unexplainable things happen” (Penelope) and “life regains a bit of its

luster” (Mila). The following quote by Adele nicely illustrates the way yoga re-enchants her life: “Being open to the mysteries of life.. The magic that can arise when you live from love and dare to connect with your heart. And that can happen through various paths. And for me, yoga is the main path”.

Yoga then, as their replacement for religion, also provides these respondents with moral guidance. The morals and values of yogic philosophy serve as advisory ethical guidelines in their lives. Penelope expresses she feels it would in fact be the best way to live to adhere to these guidelines, as she observed herself “sticking to the rules, let's say, and applying them, and then what is the effect in my life, and what happens when I am not doing it” affirming her “belief in yoga”. Asking her what these ‘rules’ entail, she immediately refers to the first two limbs of Patanjali’s Sutras:

The yamas and niyamas of non-violence, but in words and physical actions. So there is the social equation and the personal equation. And there are certain things, of course, no killing, and these kinds of things, but also hygiene, and having a curiosity to know yourself, and also surrender, in the sense that you have to be ready to also let go of your plans, you know.

Besides being a source of re-enchantment and moral guidance, most importantly yoga functions for these respondents as a gateway to enlightenment. Too humble to say they are on their way to becoming enlightened, they tiptoe around the term. As Rachel says: "Maybe that's aiming quite high, maybe, but at least finding 'being' in it, and that is special, yes. Pure 'being'". Still, these respondents believe that even when you start with a simple physical practice, it will eventually lead to enlightenment or, to use the yogic term; Samadhi. With a wink Tobias adds “at least, that’s what I’ve heard”. Adele describes how she herself once started with a focus on physicality as well, but how her interest has shifted from getting stronger and more flexible to a mind-focused yoga. She describes how this transpired: “I also noticed that I became much calmer mentally. And then you start to learn and better understand the philosophy. And you slowly realize that it really is a lifestyle and not just a quick fix". Now, being more developed yogi’s themselves, they observe this same progress, from muscle pain towards enlightenment, in their students. With a big smile Rachel notes:

You first came here for your hamstrings, right? You had lower back pain? Yes, for many people, that often stops being the reason to come. Of course! I also came for more energy, and you end up fascinated by simply being or wondering what consciousness is.

They are convinced that for this gateway to enlightenment to open you basically just have to do your practice. Samadhi, Penelope points out, cannot be actively pursued but is something that comes to you. She explains: “you can practice concentration, you can practice āsana, you can practice pranayama, you can practice meditation. But Samadhi you cannot practice it. You just wait until it comes. Usually in meditation. So I just keep on doing my practices”. As teachers therefore, they take a humble position in the spiritual development of their students. Although they feel they are on a mission to spread yoga, they often mention the importance of being careful not to push or preach. They believe in the power of yoga that will attract people ‘when they are ready’, like Mila asserts: "I'm actually firmly convinced that it comes to you when you're ready, like a magnet, it draws you in when you need it".

Interestingly, when it does, they feel the yoga practice will manifest spiritual growth without them intentionally pushing it. They maintain: the yoga does the work. Csala et al. (2021) did conclude that “yoga can cultivate spirituality” (p. 10) but left it open how this cultivation takes place. For these yoga teachers this process is of a metaphysical nature and they therefore minimize their role as teachers, as they note; “Sometimes you teach a yoga class and then it seems as if you're not giving it yourself [...] but it just comes from within me" (Mila) and “it transmits through somehow, but it's not something that I'm transmitting” (Penelope). This belief that ‘the yoga does the work’ serves as an important indicator of spirituality that shouldn't be overlooked in research on yoga's association with spirituality such as that of Csala et al. (2021). It profoundly shapes the role teachers adopt and the extent to which they seem to convey spirituality. When teachers do not explicitly address spiritual elements or values, it doesn't necessarily imply a lack of spirituality; rather, they may be relying on the inherent metaphysical power of yoga.

Consequently, to allow this power to transmit, the teachers in this position feel a certain responsibility to respect yoga's traditions and to “express gratitude to the old masters, (teachers and gurus) who have preserved the practice” (Penelope). Even teaching in a fitness environment, Rachel sticks to the traditional teaching of Sivananda yoga, including the chanting of mantra, which she recognizes is quite controversial. However, she firmly

states: "That's the tradition. My lineage is what it is". Penelope, on the other hand, expressing the same desire for spiritual-religious purity has had to yield to the consumerist stance of her students. She explains:

I was teaching Ashtanga Mysore. If there were people coming for the first time to class I would give them a shorter class. Because in the tradition, you start learning the Bandhas, the Ujaji breath, and then sun salutations only. [...] so I was still giving them a shorter class, like less information. But then people would complain to the owner of the yoga studio because I was not giving the full one and a half hour, which is what they pay for. So, then that I could not do anymore.

The situation Penelope describes reveals how their desire for traditional yogic purity, coming from this felt responsibility to be a link in the chain to facilitate the power of yoga, places them in opposition to consumer society. How can they stay true to their lineage while also answering to the consumerist preferences of their students? Particularly for the teachers in this position the tension generated by the commercialization of yoga in Western context presents a delicate balancing act. Like in the example given by Penelope above, the deliberate but slow pace of the Ashtanga tradition that builds up the practice throughout multiple years conflicts with the pace of late modern capitalism. People want their money's worth, preferably today rather than tomorrow. Penelope is very aware of this, as she continues with resignation:

I'm dependent on the system that is now here in this modern city, and Western thinking also, and capitalistic rhythms, so there's too many, like, the structure is just too fixed. So it doesn't really allow, like, to do it in the way my teacher did, for example. It doesn't really allow it.

Additionally, Rachel expresses running into a similar tension in her own practice that also directly results from placing a traditional practice of yoga in Western context. Fully immersed in her Sivananda lineage Rachel at times she gets confused herself:

Then you're pouring milk over a statue again.. And putting flowers somewhere (laughs) And then I also think yeah... I know it's an expression of... The swami also

told me... but If it's not your background, then you actually don't know what the fuck you're doing. And then a headstand is more accessible than placing a date in front of a statue.

As Rachel reveals, besides the spiritual-religious essence, they encounter an Indian cultural aspect in their traditional engagement with yoga. And while all respondents in this position align with a Hindu tradition (using Sanskrit terminology, chanting mantras, praising Hindu guru's) this can still feel culturally disorienting.

Their solution for this is to cling to a perennialist philosophy because this allows them to keep a distance from the culturally alienating elements. Perennialism can be understood as the belief that “all religious traditions are equally valid, because they all essentially worship the same divine source” (Aupers & Houtman, 2014, p.6). Or as Vivekananda had preached when he brought yoga to the West, there is a “the transcendent unity [in] all religion” (Shearer, 2020, p.129). For Isolde her commitment to Vedanta, a strand in Hindu tradition, feels right precisely because it contains a form of perennialist philosophy. She notes: "It's actually the only religion, if I may call it that, that I've experienced where there's also a genuine openness". Since Isolde believes in a fundamental unity underlying all religious traditions, she feels comfortable in different places of worship:

I enjoy going to church. If I have the opportunity, I also go to the mosque. To the quiet room. To the temples. I find it nice to find that peace and to pray. To tune in to Jesus, but I can also tune in to other aspects.

The perennialism held by these respondents additionally exhibits the process of easternization described by Colin Campbell (2015) in which Westerners shift their belief system from materialistic dualism to holistic metaphysical monism with an impersonal God. God, for them, is a non-personal immanent force. The respondents that take up this position have embraced an Eastern idea of oneness that is believed to underlie all phenomena, including other religions.

Notably, while they express a gratitude for the sense of meaning, re-enchantment and moral guidance yoga offers them, they experience this as something they are blessed with more than consider it the reason to practice. With their ontological level of engagement, they go beyond practicing yoga in order to extract certain benefits. In line with the pre-modern

yogic scriptures the main 'goal' for practicing yoga in this position has nothing to do with material or personal gains. In fact, in accordance with the teachings of Samadhi in yogic scriptures, respondents are not in pursuit but in renunciation of benefits (Easwaran, 2007).

Part of their yoga is the practice of non-attachment in which they attempt to renounce not only objects, thoughts and emotions, but also detach from identity and as a result from mainstream society. Reminiscing the teachings of one of her adored Swami's, Rachel resolutely states: "I am a woman, or I am [Rachel], I am a project manager. I am this, I work there. None of that matters". This process of renunciation takes real effort and is easier said than done for Rachel, as she admits: "I would like to have a better butt.. but I immediately have problems with that, because that is of course 'desire' in Vedanta. [...] Being attached to my buttocks, that will not be seen by the swami as a higher pursuit". Moreso, Rachel continues, letting go of identity is not only hard but can also feel daunting:

It's also scary sometimes. It's part of it that it's scary.. [...] Because you also lose a part of yourself. Swami says, it's like a ladder. When you climb a ladder, you always have to let go of a step. Otherwise, you won't get higher on the ladder.

As devoted yogis their practice is such a big part of their lives that they start to feel a distance to the society around them and that, they say, can be a lonely experience. Thus while at the one hand the spiritual-religious engagement with yoga provides them with an antidote to their existential alienation, at the other hand it creates a disconnection to social reality because it makes them feel very different to the non-yogis around them. Again their depth of practice results in adding to their antagonistic position towards late modern society. Just as their reverence of traditional purity places them in opposition to consumerism, their practice of renunciation positions them against mainstream lifestyle. As announced above, with this stance against consumerism and mainstream lifestyle of late modernity yoga is instrumentalized in this first position as a form of radical deceleration carrying a religious sentiment as described by Hartmut Rosa (2003). They observe society's accelerating forces from a distance, finding stillness within.

Isaac discusses this distance to society and points out an important aspect:

The majority of society has a certain lifestyle that simply doesn't resonate with me as much anymore, because it just doesn't quite fit, you know. You do become a bit

detached, so to speak. Yeah.. and then it can sometimes get a bit lonely too [...] But you could also completely withdraw yourself and reject society or something, I don't think that's the right way either.

With this last comment Isaac importantly highlights that the experience of detachment from society dominant in this position is not deliberately created out of protest but is a consequence of their dedication to a traditional yogic lifestyle. In fact, their faith in an underlying divine plan in which everything always unfolds as it should, reassures them that what is meant to be will be. They are unconvinced that life is "formable and constructible" and distancing oneself from this neoliberal conviction, Mila continues, makes everything "not so scary anymore. What comes in the future has mainly become very... I just feel a curiosity about how it unfolds". This faith not only alleviates their late modern anxieties but also fosters acceptance of a society that does not fit them anymore. Despite their opposition, they refrain from rebelling due to their faith. This marks the primary distinction between the first and second positions, which I will elaborate on next.

4.6 Position 2: Yoga as a token of the alternative

This second position is taken up by four of the interviewees. Similar to the first position, asking them about their yoga practice almost immediately resulted in a conversation about life in general as they expressed how yoga "flows through daily life, so to speak, it applies to everything" (Tobias). For both the first as this second position, yoga directly relates to their belief system and therefore defines their entire life. It can even be said that this second position too, situates yoga within an ontological framework as it alters their experience of reality, which will be elaborated on below. Furthermore, as was described in the introduction of position one and two, I suggest both embody a form of fundamental deceleration that comes at modernity from the outside and thus takes a stance against it. In this second position, instead of finding relief in spiritual-religious depth, respondents opt for a radical anti-modern alternative. Within this position engagement with yoga encourages an analytical and critical mindset that results in the desire to break with mainstream lifestyle and society as a whole. As a result, I characterized this position as a countercultural 'alternative'.

With a disappointment in his voice Tobias describes how he feels the general lifestyle in Rotterdam has people focused mainly on themselves "unconscious of what is happening around them". He explains: "With yoga and meditation, you often have some kind of broader

perspective or something. Or a wider mind. And then you come into the city. And then it's much more narrow". Considering themselves more conscious, this self-centeredness is one of the features of mainstream lifestyle they reject, and they align themselves against. Similarly, Isaac notes, on the mat yoga āsana allows you to lift up your consciousness or even "expand your reality". Then, stepping off the mat, he continues, your mind is "reframed" and your outlook on life "broadened". So instead of having a narrow and unconscious mind, they identify by having a broad, reframed and conscious worldview.

Moreso, asking Isaac how exactly this process of mind expansion occurs, he explains how first the physical postures create space in your mind and that then "suddenly deeper layers come to light that could otherwise be easily brushed aside or suppressed". Being able to see those deeper layers is experienced by them as an awakening, allowing them to see reality as it really is. This broadening of consciousness brings about a sort of shock that "comes pretty close to 'the earth is flat, the earth is round'" (Isaac). This sentiment of awakening is captured by Tobias in the following quote: "I noticed after class my mind was so empty. And that I just had a sort of space to think like: oh yes! I'm still here!".

However, typical for this position, this awakening surpasses the micro level of personal experience. Isaac refers to the Matrix, forgetting which color pill it was again that Neo took in the movie, he says: "the pill I took, I think is the same pill you took. I believe we should have a kind of alertness with each other, that we also point out certain dynamics that are happening". With this statement Isaac reveals how the sentiment of awakening within this position carries a suspicion towards society, suggesting we should be on guard. Those who took this (red) pill, are now comrades in arms, generating a community of the awake, to which I will return later.

Taking a closer look at what else they position themselves against in today's late modern society, besides the reigning narrowmindedness and self-centeredness, further displays the macro perspective these respondents hold. Utilizing a form of "sociological imagination", they contextualize their personal experience with yoga within a broader socio-historical framework (Mills, 1959). They abstract their experience by referring to 'the system' and 'dynamics,' believing that involvement with those is incompatible with the path of yogic awakening, plus by emphasizing society's temporal aspects of 'rhythm' and 'pace'. I will now examine their critique of these two temporal aspects to further illustrate their position as 'the alternative'.

Firstly, with an analytical distance they repudiate the rhythm of society. They note the predictability and repetition of mainstream culture with a sense of astonishment. Respectively Tobias and Isaac observe:

I find it somewhat alienating... so there is the weekend. And then you're allowed to be free. Then anything goes. And then Monday we have to work. [...] And so it goes in a loop, you could say. And yeah, that's just... That's the lifestyle I've kind of stepped away from. Because yeah, it just doesn't make any sense.

The construct of society is so tightly knit that it's all about, you go to work, you enter the system, you build your little pension, you have your mortgage, and that's it. But yeah, I've always felt like, that's so absurd, that's so superficial.

Feeling estranged from this life-loop they indicate it is something they no longer want to participate in or contribute to. Compared to position one, where respondents also take a stance against society but still maintain faith that everything is as it should be, the respondents in this second position lack this reassuring faith and therefore wish to “step away”.

Secondly, they antagonize the pace of social life, accentuating that it is not only fast, but also accelerating. As noted, to some extent this is present with all respondents resulting in a general instrumentalization of yoga for deceleration. However, it is important to emphasize this again in this position as these respondents really experience this is a huge obstacle to happiness. Finn points out:

Smartphones, distractions, many more stimuli, so much further away from nature. A system so heavily created by the mind, probably even then, but now even faster, that it's even more destructive for your mind, causing so many people to be unhappy.

Hartmut Rosa (2003) argued late modernity's most defining feature is its social acceleration, considering it even more pervasive than processes like individualization and rationalisation. The respondents align with the belief of Rosa that despite technical developments increasing efficiency, people experience an acceleration of the pace of life which is really at the center of mainstream lifestyle. Tobias notes that for him it is the reason why he is considering to

move away from the city, he notes: “this busy life, you know.. in our society it's always go, go, go, you know. Yeah, that's definitely one of the reasons why there's a lot of stress”. The respondents in this position do not address such stress or unhappiness as private problems but always refer to the societal cause it. This is illustrated by Isaac when he remarks: “yoga provides the best solution to the pace at which we live. The speed of society is merely conditioned for the pursuit of effect. So, okay, quickly! packed schedule! More more more!”.

By noting the pursuit of effect, Isaac reveals again how the institute of capitalism, the main source of the social acceleration (Rosa, 2003), is singled out as the primary principle of late modernity they oppose. Finn prudently marks: "This whole thing, what we maintain, what lies behind it, and that, perhaps that's my economic background speaking, but it's capitalism, leading towards more and more, at the expense of things we might not always fully see". The respondents in this position, however, *do* see and they object. Tobias notes:

I see that it's very much about making money. And I see it in the world in general. That everything costs money. And a lot of things revolve around money. And actually, you are trained from a young age to make money. And sometimes it seems a bit pointless.

In this statement Tobias reveals how their critique of the institute of capitalism translates to a broader anti-institutional sentiment within this position, here exemplified by his skeptical view of education, where he discerns capitalistic dynamics at play. Tobias continues:

You have to go to school. You have to learn all these things. It's all conceptual. And really, you don't learn anything about yourself. It's all about learning to work later on. [...] But you don't learn how to deal with your own suffering. Or how to deal with death.

Healthcare and science are discussed with this same critical detachment. Although Isaac anticipates that despite the friction between science and spirituality “eventually science will demonstrate that there is indeed more between heaven and earth”.

This anti-institutionalism and particularly anti-capitalism, together with the opposition to society's temporal aspects illustrates how this position can be typified as ‘the alternative’. Yoga is employed by these respondents as a carrier of countercultural ideology. Respondents

seem to be reviving the sentiment of the counterculture of the 60s that includes a focus on the transcendental mind element of yoga, has not yet dropped its anti-established forces and has not yet replace faith in a socialist revolution by a pursuit of individual liberty (Campbell, 2015; Houtman et al, 2011). Instead, their approach to yoga has them thinking not merely about their personal needs, but of communitarian and collectivist ideals:

I believe that human connection, human encounter, will be the new gold of the near future. And I don't say this to profit from it, but rather I mean gold in terms of radiance, in terms of significance. You can have three houses, you can possess ten cars parked outside, but it will never come close to touching the deep, meaningful power of the connection you have with each other. (Isaac)

As they contrast social connection to capitalist consumerism, they place their engagement of yoga in a socialist narrative more than a neoliberal one, as socialism “defines itself in opposition to a specific image of capitalism, which emphasizes its allegedly intrinsic exploitative and divisive characteristics” and importantly posits capitalism as “bringing about the alienation and isolation of the individual” (Berger et al., 1973, p.171-172). This second position aligns with the ideology of counter-modernization that stands in opposition to modernization as described by Berger et al. (1973). It does not take the form of traditionalism or nationalism, noted in their description, but it takes form as a socialist ideology.

This socialism surfaces in their appreciation of and need for community. The respondents address the earlier mentioned community of the awake, a differentiation that in their experience has been brought about by modernization itself. Such a community Tobias expresses, is very important to him as it helps to stay knowledgeable (and awake) as a collective. He notes: "you create a community [...] I find that to be of great value. People you interact with. And who teach you something. And you teach them something".

Correspondingly, Isaac, critical of the church because he finds it dogmatic, but also wanting to create a similar sense of social unity within yogic community, expresses:

That is perhaps the good thing about what the church used to have, it's simply the moment when you come together, that sense of community. So for me, that's where the comparison lies mainly, that it's really a kind of sense of community, that you literally meet each other again.

The idea that neoliberalism has embraced yogic spirituality and that it now functions as a representative of its ideology (Giddens, 1991; Watts, 2021) is disputed within this position. In addition to their strong anti-capitalist sentiment, respondents place community in opposition to individualism, so often accentuated in the discussion of contemporary yogic spirituality as proof a neoliberal approach. Additionally, while neoliberalism is understood to downplay structural and systemic factors this is the main focus within this position.

With *The Homeless Mind* Berger et al. (1973) described that the global effect of modernization is the feeling of homelessness and that therefore demodernizing attempts can be understood as “a quest for new ways of ‘being at home’ in society” (p.214). The socialist sentiment identified in this position corroborates their additional argument that a refuge in the self cannot function as a new metaphysical ‘home’, since it cannot supply enough stability or reliability. Therefore, they argue that “the individual is to be liberated from this individualism to the solidarity of either old or new collective structures” (p. 196), in this case: socialism. However, the following two positions will reveal how at the same time yoga is also instrumentalized as a neoliberal technique of the self with individualism being its reigning logic. I will now continue to the third and fourth position abstracted from the interview data.

4.7 Introduction to position 3 & 4

The second part of the result section that will now follow, reveals a third and fourth position present in the population. While critical of society, these positions function from within the societal system and create an accelerating form of deceleration with their approach to yoga. It will be detailed below that for both positions, yoga is a technique for growth of the neoliberal self, while there is also still a spirituality present. More specifically, the third position instrumentalizes yoga as a personal development technique and the fourth position as a personal healing journey. Additionally, it will be shown that the essential distinction between these two positions is gendered.

4.8 Position 3: Yoga as a technique for self-development

The five respondents who take up this third position, of which two stick to it exclusively, instrumentalize yoga as a tool for personal development. Their conviction is that yoga will make them not only stronger but also better. Utilizing a terminology of progress

and maximalization, their instrumentalization of yoga adds to the secularization of the Hindu practice by emphasizing late modern markers like practicality, effectivity and most importantly; individuality. Their approach to yoga, and consequently the body, is of a very technological nature, as Adam states:

Yoga is a process, a technique if you will, to gradually grow and evolve and become better as a human and become better as a soul, so that you can ascend and transform to the future self that you seek, your best self.

More prominently than with the other positions yoga is a technique, one of many possible techniques, and therefore even replaceable. Finn admits "it didn't necessarily have to be yoga, by the way; it could have been another path to deeper understanding as well". The reason Finn ended up with yoga, is because it seemed the most efficient. He explains:

I was looking for an efficient way to start my mornings, and I began with a cold shower, meditation, practicing gratitude, movement, and just a moment of silence. Well, everything comes together in yoga. So, I thought: if I just do yoga in the morning, then I've already accomplished everything I wanted to do for myself, for that day.

They perceive the practice of yoga as going through different levels of growth, which is portrayed as quite a linear process, endorsing the idea that "you can't run before you can crawl" (Adam). Looking for a way to quantify this process, Finn suggests it can be perceived as a funnel or a pyramid: "Maybe it's a kind of funnel, and each layer needs something to move on to the next step", later he comes back to this idea noting: "Perhaps it's a pyramid towards self-realization? Towards delving even deeper within, even more self-reflection". While others don't use this exact term their ideas are very compatible with this measurable way of portraying the levels of development.

All agree the lowest layer of this pyramid has a focus on body-yoga, which they consider a more superficial approach, but necessary to be able to take the next step. This perspective is reflected in the data when respondents compare their current practice to when they first started, but also when they discuss other yogis or new students in their class. Reflecting back, Yvonne notes it is "easier to start with the body. To become aware of it.

Instead of just talking or discussing Sutras or what yoga really is. So, that distracted me a bit. I noticed that then". Therefore, to address the mind in the lower levels of the pyramid at least, popular self-help literature is thought to be more fitting than yogic scriptures. Discussing the book *Seven habits of highly effective people* by Stephen Covey, Finn explains:

It has brought me a lot of awareness. Especially at that time, it was the entry point, because when I was in the corporate world in that finance job, if I were to read a yoga philosophy book, I would think: what is this about?

Additionally, to conclude this description of the pyramid of self-development, it is worth looking at Adam's comprehensive description of how he perceives the different levels of practice:

It will always be physicality first. Because it's tangible.[...] So once you get that. You get into your body. You feel your body. You start by getting some form of control in your breath. Then suddenly it becomes a mind space that you're playing with. Like oh this is too hard. Oh this is too hard to maintain. And then you're really refining your ability to frame your mind through the physicality.

What is additionally conveyed in this statement by Adam is how yoga for these respondents is about dealing with something that is experienced as "hard" and how their approach to that is one of "control". 'To take control' is the first goal that lies at the top of the pyramid for these respondents. 'To take control' means; take control of breath, mind, and eventually life. While Matthew points out that yoga "teaches you to accept what can be accepted and to change what you can change", it seems emphasis in this position is certainly more on change than acceptance. With a masculine directness they captured it in a three-step-plan; "signal, observe and respond" (Matthew) or similarly; "awareness, acceptance, transformation" (Adam). The idea they express is that "you focus your mind on the things that you can actually convert and can change, then you start to take at least a small form of control" (Adam). This small form of control starts on the mat, with the body. For Finn, exercising control over the body, even took the extreme form of biohacking, meaning to 'hack' the body's biology with specific practices. He explains:

I was always interested in a kind of body optimization, which is also called biohacking. It's essentially about knowing how your body works and how you can interact with it more efficiently. The impact of nutrition, sleep, concentration of the mind, and so on.

The respondents believe that when practicing this control first on the body, they will learn how to then take it beyond the body into daily life. In stark contrast to the first position which *is* in fact characterized by acceptance based on their faith that everything unfolds as it is supposed to, here faith is put in the effective agency of the self. Life is hard, they say, so you better learn how to deal with it by taking matters into your own hands. As Finn states: “simply take control of your life, that's also personal development. Personal leadership, personal development”.

To conclude this first goal of ‘taking control’, I want to highlight the respondent’s valuation of independence and self-responsibility which I consider part of the same objective. The respondents believe that through yoga, one regains a form of control which then allows them to find independence. In a literal sense, control over the body means they can stay physically independent allowing them to continue working, e.g. “stand behind my counter for six to seven hours a day” and stay “out of the hands of the white coats” (Matthew). Preferring a yoga exercise over a pill, Matthew very strongly feels he is responsible for his own health, he clarifies:

I believe that I am responsible for my own health, and I don't want to entrust it to the hands of the general practitioner. Healing oneself as much as possible by keeping the body active and calming the mind. I think that's somewhat the essence of why I do this [...] Being able, you know, to move yourself around on two legs, function independently.

The second goal for practice within this position is 'self-purification'. The respondents that take up this third position believe that part of walking the path of yogic self-development means going through the process of purification in order to find the true self and thus has a very individual focus. Finn states:

What I consider yoga to be is essentially your own quest, your own self-realization of who you are, what you are, what you are not. [...] Yoga is simply a comprehensive method to engage with everything, to purify yourself, until you reach the core. So that eventually, you discover who you naturally are.

The questions yoga triggers in this position are no longer “what is life about?” (position 1) or “is this really true?” (position 2), but are now in service of identity. Much like the typical questions posed by the reflexive but anxious late modern individual, as stated by Giddens (1991), Finn notes that his yoga practice brings up questions such as: "Who are we? What are we? Why are we that way? [...] What are we beyond those conditioning?". Through āsana “the fire that you step into to purify”, these yogi’s aim to empower themselves as to “not be a puppet to the reactivity of your conditioned mind” (Adam). The respondents seek to distance themselves from their conditioning, not to reach the impersonal Self, but so that a *better* and *truer* self can be obtained.

Moreover, what lies at the core is an inner spirituality. The respondents sacralize the natural self, even naming it Guru or God. When fully purified, Finn states: "we become our own guru", and Maxime declares: “I am my own God”. This sacralization of the self was identified by Paul Heelas (1993) as the key aspect of the doctrine of self-spirituality underlying the New Age movement. Part of the doctrine of self-spirituality, Heelas described the pursuit of “liberating the Self from the contaminated outer personality” (p.105). This outer personality is referred to in this position as ‘conditioning’. Self-spirituality can therefore be understood to be a central feature of this third position of self-development, advocating individuals to discover their own truths and "pursue their personal spiritual journeys" (Aupers & Houtman, 2014, p. 23).

This extreme focus on the self within this position, exhibited in both the first goal of control and the second goal of self-purification and sacralization, reveals the inherent individualistic mindset and more generally their neoliberal ideology. Berger et al. (1973) theorized the modernizing forces of technological production and bureaucracy, are carried over to the level of consciousness. By internalizing the fundamental logic of technological production people adopted a cognitive style and management of the emotions characterized by rationality, maximization and progress which is recognizable within this position. More specifically, the respondents taking up this position internalized the fundamental logic of late modern neoliberalism, placing high value on individuality, control, independence and self-

responsibility. This shows that besides the more socialist uptake in position 2, the modern yoga practice is at the same time in keeping with the idea that “spirituality functions as an ideology of neoliberalism” (Watts, 2021).

Although introduced as an attempt to decelerate, these respondents have turned their yoga practice into a technique to generate a more successful participation in the accelerating social systems, it is meant to improve their functioning in late modernity and thereby they in fact end up enabling conditions of (further) acceleration instead of offsetting them. Therefore, their apparent attempt to decelerate can be understood as a form of limited, temporary and accelerating deceleration (Rosa, 2003). Thus, they position their negation of yoga *within* late modernity instead of *against* it, as we have seen with position one and two.

However, it would be a mistake to interpret this position as a purely quantified neoliberal ideology, a dominant viewpoint in scholarly debate. There still is a form of spirituality present in their mindset. As Matthew points out: "the harder-better-stronger-faster is indeed the mentality to roll out your yoga mat, but once you're on the mat, something else emerges". As stated earlier, in all position's respondents have a set of metaphysical beliefs and even in this position respondents express an appreciation of yogic scriptures, refer to Buddhism and Hinduism, and adhere to the notion that everything and everyone is made up out of energy. Talking about one of his first experiences with yoga Adam notes: “It was a hell of a workout. And also something sits beyond. Let's call it ‘something’ that was always of interest to me”. Asking him to elaborate on this ‘something’, he tells me a story:

When I was 16 the Bhagavad Gita was given to me by a Hare Krishna. And I was like ‘oh this is cool’. And I kind of touched on it. I never delved deeper. Now looking back it was like such a sign from the universe. But yeah, there were all these hints looking back. That there's something beyond the structured Western cultural norm.

They combine their belief in ‘something more’ with their neoliberal convictions without experiencing any friction in this themselves. This intersection of ideology brings much-needed nuance and amends the theory of the neoliberal embrace of the spiritual turn.

To conclude the analysis of this third position, I want to direct the focus to the masculine attitude of their instrumentalization of yoga since this is the main factor that differentiates this position from the fourth position that can be understood as more feminine. This gendered differentiation does not refer to the gender of the respondents that take up

these position's but indicates an attitude and approach to yoga that are generally associated with either masculinity or femininity.

Besides being already quite apparent in the description of this position so far, this masculinity is directly revealed in their annoyance with what they perceive as a trend of comfort and softness in society. Yvonne wants to make it crystal clear she disagrees with such a mentality: "It should just be fun and feel good? But that's just not how it works. That's why I also do āsanās that are difficult or painful. Because life isn't just about having fun." Adam expresses the same sentiment, provokingly saying "shit happens all the time but what are you going to do? Are you going to let all this shit bring you down? Are you going to let this defeat you?". He urges that to survive in this harsh world people need to learn to be independent. He states: "You need to be able to stand on your own feet, find your strength to take on the world and all its harshness, because by definition, the world is trying to kill you at every turn." It is important to them to take yoga out of the discourse of softness, as this undermines their belief that yoga can train you to take control.

Additionally, they emphasize yoga's disciplinary side. When asked about the moments they find most fulfilling in teaching a class, both Adam and Maxime describe similar situations. Maxime says: "What I enjoy the most is when some crossfitter guy joins my class and says 'I'll do some yoga with you. I'm having a rest day.' And then I think, 'I'm going to break you' [...] And in the end, they say, 'I really respect people who do yoga'". The fact that this is what gives them most fulfilment as a teacher, indicates how important it is in this position to consider yoga as a tough, masculine technique of the self in opposition to a society that has gone soft. On the contrary, the interpretation of position four rejects such masculinity, which I will now elucidate next.

4.9 Position 4: Yoga as a personal healing journey

The analysis of the data illustrated the presence of a fourth and last position which is exclusively adopted by three respondents and sporadically taken up by another two. For these respondents engaging with yoga means embarking on a non-linear healing journey in aid of mental, physical and spiritual health. As Isabella puts it: "It's not just about, you know, learning all the āsanās. It is a transformational journey. You're gonna go on a journey as a person because you need to experience some kind of growth". The fourth position, like the third, centers on personal growth and stands in contrast to the first two positions that adopt a

macro perspective and take a stance against late modern society. Prioritizing inner work over societal issues, the third and fourth positions are characterized by a micro-level focus and the instrumentalization of yoga as a technique for the neoliberal self. As announced above, the third position essentially represents a feminine variation of the position of self-development.

This gendered differentiation is shown in how respondents in this position place the emphasis not on *improving* but on *recovering*. Highlighted as a big part of this recovery is (re)learning how to feel. Talking about her motivation to teach, Mirjam notes she finds it important that people experience “a conscious relaxation”, which for her means they are able to recognize and articulate what it is they are feeling. However, Mirjam notes, unfortunately “many people are not able to feel”, and as a teacher she feels it is her job to help people reconnect to their emotions. She explains: “Occasionally I’ll prod. Occasionally I’ll say, hey, but what are you really feeling now? And some people immediately shy away from it. (adopts a male voice and makes an angry face) ‘What do you mean, feeling? I don’t want to feel at all. Just muscle pain’”. Putting on a male voice Mirjam reveals how respondents in this position explicitly reject a masculine approach to yoga, similar to how respondents in position three detest feminine softness. Both in pursuit of growth, the third position urges to ‘toughen up’, while this fourth position advocates a softening in order to recover.

Moreso, the respondents that take up this position connect masculinity to the productivity culture and accelerating state of late modernity from which they feel the need to recover in the first place. They believe the mentality to “just shoulder on, keep going, pick it up, put it in” (Mila) is the reason for many health issues which they consider a huge problem in contemporary society. Struggling with mental health himself, Tobias observes this is not uncommon in the West: “we are really right in the middle of it here. When you see the number of sick people here with depression and psychoses. All sorts of mental illnesses. We have a lot of them”. In fact, many of the respondents who take up this position have experienced mental health issues and feel yoga played an important part in their recovery. They believe that through specific āsanās, emotions that are congested in the muscles can be released. Isabella explains how this works for her:

What's certain postures make you feel... like a frog, which is like when you widen your knees and put your body down like. That posture can be very good if you're suffering from anxiety or some kind of trauma or some kind of. You know, if you're

holding a lot inside, it can be released so much by just surrendering into it and allowing yourself to feel it.

Burn-out, stress and anxiety are considered individual issues that can be managed in this way by yoga. Therefore, the respondents in this position refrain from addressing socio-economic causes to these conditions and stick to a psychological perspective. In this position it is not premodern yogic scriptures or self-help books but literature on therapy and psychology that is being referenced. Continuing the conversation about congested emotions, Isabella brings up the popular book *The body keeps the score* by Bessel van der Kolk about how therapists together with scientists integrate the latest research on i.a. body-awareness into treatment of trauma (Van Der Kolk, n.d.). Inspired, she states: “I want to learn more about this trauma related thing. Like how you can heal trauma through yoga. I’m into, like, the whole science behind it, biology and psychology behind it”. In this way, yoga is framed by the respondents in a semi-scientific, psychological context to legitimize the Eastern spiritual ideas they hold like the connection between mind and body or the existence of consciousness.

Still, although their focus is inward, their healing journey is a response to, what they experience as, the masculine productivity culture around them. Isabella explaining why she feels yoga is “such a luxury nowadays” says: “we're all running around doing so many different things except for focusing. And with social media.. [...] with all of that is around us.. I feel like everybody's mind is everywhere, you know, even more so than ever. We have so much information coming through”. Very clearly, yoga is used to intentionally create a moment of deceleration. The attempted deceleration is however, of a temporal nature, as Tobias points out that for him, in response to the rush of everyday life, yoga offers “the best counterbalance” and relatedly Mila states yoga is her way “to take a step away from the busyness of the whole day”. Within this healing-journey position, respondents want to offer a counterweight to the acceleration more than oppose it. With their yoga practice they intend to cultivate calmness to deal with busyness, and stillness to balance out speed. While antagonistic to these late modern principles, in this way they don’t take a stance against society but attempt a deceleration from within it. However, by treating yoga as a temporary get-away, they end up creating an accelerating form of deceleration. The general idea being that; as long as they have their yoga, they will be able to persevere in this society. Similar to

position three, where respondents represent the idea that if they have their yoga, they will do better and conquer the issues in society.

What is unique about this position is their embrace of the body. However, this does not mean they are beginner yogis, approach yoga merely for fitness benefits or have another superficial consumer-driven engagement. For the respondents in this position, the body serves as the primary access point for healing. Predominately in position three, emphasis on the physicality of the body was interpreted as a lower level of yogic development, but in this position this (masculine) hierarchy is missing. As Isabella states: “All yoga will transform you in some way physically and spiritually”. Therefore, she sees no need to make any differentiations or ranking.

A common phrasing with these respondents is therefore to use yoga to get ‘into the body’, which from a traditional point of view this is quite a strange notion. As Shearer (2020) points out, the idea of getting *into* the body is in contradiction with the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali where the paramount point is to transcend *beyond* the body instead of descend into it. According to this scripture, yoga should not tighten but loosen the connection to the body. Shearer quotes Anandamayi Ma to expand this point; “When the mind receives proper sustenance, man moves Godward; whereas by catering to the body he only increases his worldliness” (Anandamayi Ma, 2007, as cited by Shearer, 2020, p. 293). However, these respondents have no problem with their worldliness. They seem to connect more to a spirituality of “staying in the moment, being more present” (Isabella) than that of pursuing enlightenment or Samadhi beyond the material realm. As Mirjam clearly states:

You are here and it will have to make do. With your hands and feet on the ground.
You just have to make it work. And then you can sit on your mat for hours. But you don't really achieve much with that.

Subsequently, they intend to keep the more spiritual inclined elements of yoga that they engage with ‘down to earth’. To do this they take it to the physical level of the body. For example, Amelia notes: "The pranayamas I learned, I didn't really see the usefulness of them, actually. [...] I could do them maybe once during a season of colds or something". Similarly, Mirjam, who specializes in teaching yoga to musicians, notes how the practice of pranayama extends beyond the mat to help (brass) musicians breathe effectively and manage the adrenaline of performing.

This valuation of groundedness facilitates accessibility, which they hold in high esteem. In fact, accessibility is given such priority that it can be understood as their main motivator for secularizing yoga. Although Amelia expressed a personal interest in pranayama and chanting of mantra, she is very certain this will never be part of her teaching. She notes: "I enjoy it (chanting) when I'm somewhere, but I don't enjoy facilitating it. Because for me, I want it to be easily accessible". However, despite their efforts, at times they express their spiritual beliefs more strongly than anticipated, prompting them to try and conceal any mysticity and undermine their own words. For example Amelia notes: "Like.. I don't mean it like heavy, but I'm on earth to reconnect people with themselves". Similarly, discussing her conviction of having a particularly strong intuition, Mirjam feels obliged to emphasize this is not something metaphysical. She explains:

When I feel a certain stress or tension that I can't relate to my work or anything else. Then there's just tension overall. [...] And then I watch the news, and something has happened. You know, there's been an earthquake somewhere. And sometimes something happens and you didn't feel it at all. And that's okay too. But, I'm not like... psychic or anything.

When directly addressing their spirituality, like all respondents, they express a resistance. Specific to this position is the preference among these respondents for the term 'mindfulness'. Switching from spirituality to mindfulness returned an ease in the conversation with Amelia, who indicated that for her the concept of mindfulness was more concrete. Interestingly, her description of mindfulness that followed very closely aligns with traditional yogic spirituality. She shares for her mindfulness entails "noticing yourself, drawing your senses inward. Noticing without judgement. Be without expectation, without wanting. Exploring your boundaries. Not bringing violence to yourself or others". Her interpretation of mindfulness includes the subtraction of the senses, building consciousness, decreasing reactivity, judgement and violence, all part of the 8 limbs of yoga by Patanjali.

Encompassing a clear easternization of their belief system, as with the New Age movement they abstract the Eastern fundament of their spirituality. This means they no longer refer to *God* at all but rather to immanent *divinity* or *consciousness* (Campbell, 2015). Or as Mirjam prefers: "God can also be the universe. It can also be the source. You can see it as the sun". It is striking that the need in this position to keep yoga accessible and down-to-

earth is so strong that they start denying their own spirituality. Clearly the respondents are knowledgeable on yogic spirituality, but they persistently underplay yoga's spiritual-religious and Indian roots to appeal to Western disposition. They insist on medicalizing yoga as a psychological technique placing it firmly within the material practicality of late modern Western society. Maxime notes:

I really love Ayurveda, I really love Upanishads, I really love old traditional Chinese things, I really love Buddhism. There is also this one Buddhist monk I like [...] Sometimes those books can be very difficult, very difficult to read, very difficult to apply, and he makes it very practical. So I'm a big fan of that.

The combination of appreciation of Eastern spirituality with a preference of practicality is typical for this position. While advocating a feminine softness, these respondents are also conveying these more pragmatic values of groundedness and practicality, which suggests a duality in their convictions. Based on this data is hard to say whether these more rational values are rooted in their personal beliefs or are perhaps molded by the prevailing neoliberal ethos, potentially leading to an inner conflict.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

This study has attempted to provide insights into how yoga teachers negotiate the value of yoga in the context of the late modern West, with the aim to explore the paradoxical ways of how yoga is instrumentalized. Moreso, with yoga as its lens, this research has sought to ultimately generate a wider understanding of how the modern individual is navigating, embracing and rejecting, the continuously modernizing forces ruling and accelerating contemporary society. This makes this thesis of value to scholars in the fields of sociology, cultural studies and religious studies but also to yoga teachers themselves to understand the, often overlooked, political implications of their teaching practice.

It was illustrated in this research that yoga has spiritual-religious roots in India and specifically Hinduism, and that therefore traditionally the essence of yoga practice is understood to be a philosophical belief system. Although it was shown that the practice and understanding of yoga has never been monolith throughout its history, it was also made clear that the rearticulation and extreme diversification of yoga today incites discussion. Since its arrival in the West, yoga has been embraced by the counterculture precisely for its metaphysical mind aspect, as well as interpreted as slow-mo aerobics solely focusing on physical practice. It was then highlighted in the theoretical framework that although yoga today knows many forms we mainly see an āsana-focused yoga that puts emphasis on physical fitness, mental health and neoliberal control.

To understand the significance attributed to yoga and spirituality a context of late modernity was given. This illustrated how scholars like Dawson (2011), Weber (1969), and Berger et al. (1973) have theorized on the effect of modernization arguing it is governed by principles like capitalism and individualism causing a disenchantment, but also noted re-enchanting efforts and movements such as the process of easternization (Campbell, 2015), intentional deceleration (Rosa, 2003) and specifically the New Age Movement (Heelas, 1993). However, the current standing of these dynamics is fundamentally an empirical question. Yoga has proven to be an excellent lens for examining these mostly theoretical claims, specifically the movement of intentional deceleration. Throughout this study, it has become evident that yoga's contemporary value is deeply intertwined with the socio-cultural dynamics of late modern Western society described in this literature.

It was revealed in the result section how modern yoga represents an antagonistic stance towards late modern consumer society. Specifically, yoga teachers assert their

understanding of yoga as representing *true* yoga, *true* spirituality, and *true* political enlightenment, rejecting - with a sense of moral superiority - the mainstream perceptions and prejudices that reduce yoga to a consumer-driven practice. In addition, it was noted that yoga teachers, in what can be seen as an attempt at re-enchantment, strive to decelerate society's accelerating pace through the practice of yoga. Observing the complaints stemming from social acceleration, yoga is meant to serve as an antidote. This study has examined the deliberations and application of yoga as a tool to slow-down which yielded empirical support of Hartmut Rosa's (2003) theoretical consideration of intentional deceleration. Employing this theory has provided insight into the paradoxical nature of the modern yoga practice: while it operates in opposition to late modern principles, it also facilitates and legitimizes the very elements it opposes. It was revealed that this paradox operates through a fourfold typology of positions adopted by yoga teachers in the negotiation of yoga's values which can be considered the most relevant finding of this study.

The first position was shown to embody a spiritual-religious interpretation of yoga and to instrumentalize it as a gateway to enlightenment. Displaying a resurgence of romantic imagination (Lee, 2003) and exhibiting the process of easternization of the West as described by Colin Campbell (2015), respondents within this position are dedicated to a traditional yogic lifestyle in accordance with the teachings of premodern yogic scriptures. Moreover, they find relief from their existential alienation in a Hindu belief system in which they emphasize a perennialist philosophy and metaphysical monism. Functioning as a religion, yoga was shown to provide the respondents with meaning and purpose, re-enchantment and moral guidance. Additionally, it was revealed that in this position it is a central belief that 'the yoga does the work'. This finding expands upon Csala et al.'s (2021) conclusion that yoga can cultivate spirituality, addressing the gap in their explanation of how this process unfolds. As an implicit but crucial indicator of spirituality this belief should not be overlooked in research, as it significantly shapes the role and spiritual conveyance of yoga teachers. For the respondents in this position it emphasizes the importance of traditional purity which, together with their commitment to renunciation, puts them in further opposition to capitalism, consumerism and mainstream lifestyle. Despite the resulting detachment from social reality, their faith that 'what is meant to be - will be' generates a sentiment of resignation and acts as a barrier to overt explicit rebellion.

The second position, however, although shown to be ideologically aligned with the first position lacks this faith and instead carries a suspicion towards society. These

respondents experience being awakened to the *real* state of society, which leads them to intentionally oppose it, specifically its reigning capitalism and temporal aspects; ‘rhythm’ and ‘pace’. Thus, they opt for a radical alternative. It was established that in this position yoga is employed as a carrier of countercultural ideology, with which respondents revive the anti-establishment and pro-transcendentalist sentiment of the 60s counterculture (Campbell, 2015). Instead of a neoliberal ideology, which contemporary literature often associates with yoga and spirituality, this position embodies a socialist perspective, prioritizing a pursuit of societal change over individual development. Thereby, this second position aligns with the ideology of counter-modernization described by Berger et al. (1973).

Additionally, a third position was identified that views yoga as a (replaceable) technique for self-development. It was denoted how this position structures their spiritual growth around the idea of a multi-leveled pyramid with two main goals: taking control and self-purification. Additionally, the natural self they strive to obtain is sacralized, revealing how the doctrine of self-spirituality as noted by Heelas (1993) and Aupers & Houtman (2014) is central to this position. It was revealed in the analysis that this position - in reference to the logic of Berger et al. (1973) - mirrors the individualistic and neoliberal ideology of late modernity on the ideological level of consciousness, particularly in its emphasis on individuality, control, independence, and self-responsibility. Nevertheless, they maintain a spirituality inspired by Eastern sources, which illustrates that in the modern understanding of yoga, spirituality and neoliberal convictions coexist.

In a fourth position detected in the data, a similar interpretation of yoga as a technique of growth and the neoliberal self was found. Again, respondents focus their yoga practice on addressing individual issues instead of structural and systemic factors. It was illustrated that here yoga is approached as a non-linear healing journey that is essentially a feminine version of the more masculine third position. They emphasize recovery rather than improvement and advocate for a softening rather than a "toughening up". Central to this recovery process is (re)learning how to feel for which they uniquely embrace the body, viewing it as the primary access point for healing. Respondents link the masculine attitude of productivity culture and the accelerating pace of late modernity to the prevalent mental health issues they perceive, such as burnout, stress, and anxiety. As a response, this position situates yoga within a semi-scientific psychological context and emphasizes a spirituality grounded in the here and now, striving to make yoga accessible by underplaying its traditional spiritual-religious aspects, although they do seem to value these in private.

Together this typology of positions provides a detailed answer to the research question posed in this study, namely how yoga teachers negotiate yoga's value in the context of the late modern West. All functioning within the paradox of modern yoga, positions one and two adopt their antagonistic stance *against* late modernity, rooted in a macro-level understanding that encompasses a spiritual-religious (position 1) and an anti-modern socialist interpretation (position 2). Their attempt to decelerate through the practice of yoga was revealed to align with the description of radical deceleration by Hartmut Rosa (2003), encompassing a fundamental ideology of slow-down. Conversely, positions three and four were demonstrated to exist *within* the system, endorsing a micro-level perspective characterized by an internalized, neoliberal individualistic outlook encompassing a masculine (position 3) and a feminine approach (position 4). Here, the aspiration for yoga to serve as an antidote to the overwhelming pace of life only has a limited and temporal effect. Limited, as position three approaches practice with internalized late modern productivity logic serving to improve functioning in the accelerated state of society and thereby unintentionally legitimizing it. Temporal, as position 4 yoga is counterbalancing the principles they oppose in that one hour of rest, in the hope they will persevere society's challenges afterwards. Thereby, they use yoga to preserve through or conquer the challenges of contemporary times. Together, these positions highlight the paradox of how yoga functions both as resistance to, as well as in reinforcement of late modern consumer society. In today's yoga class, the overwhelmed and rushed student is presented with essentially two options for deceleration, each transcending a mere fitness routine yet differing significantly in approach.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to offer a contribution to the contemporary discourse on the neoliberal embrace of the spiritual turn, as discussed by i.a. Aupers and Houtman (2014), Dawson (2011), Houtman et al. (2011), Munir et al. (2021), and Watts (2021). Firstly, it is an important finding that there is a gendered differentiation to be made in this debate which was revealed in the distinction between position three and four. This adds to a more nuanced understanding of the workings of neoliberalism within the context of spirituality. Secondly, while it has been established in this study that yoga teachers do adopt positions endorsing neoliberalism, this aspect represents just one layer of the multifaceted reality of modern yoga practice. Moreso, in addition to the coexistence of spiritual-religious and anti-modern socialist interpretations, there persists a spiritual-religious essence even within the context of its neoliberal re-articulation. This amendment enriches existing theories, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in contemporary yoga practice.

Hopefully, this study can serve as a steppingstone, urging further inquiry into the intersections of yogic spirituality and ideological responses to contemporary society. However, it has its limitations. First of all, on a methodological level, it's necessary to acknowledge that by confining the sample of this study to yoga teachers, the viewpoint of yoga practitioners who lack a yoga teacher education and financial gain from yoga is overlooked. The interpretation of yoga as merely a fitness routine, as reflected on by the teachers in this sample, likely still exists and contributes to the negotiation of yoga's value in the contemporary context but is missing in the data due to the sample criteria. Additionally, since a gendered differentiation emerged, future research should pay closer attention to gender within the sample. Although this distinction was not directly linked to the respondents' actual gender in the current study, recognizing and examining it further could yield meaningful insights.

Secondly, while the thematic analysis of the interviews has enabled me to identify thematic categories, which were presented as four different positions, it should be noted that the social reality is more fluid and infinitely more complex. Yet employing these abstracted categories contributes to our comprehension, which would suffer from more nuance. Additionally, this potential limitation presents an opportunity for further research, as the categorization established here may guide the design of quantitative studies on this topic.

Similarly, it's essential to recognize that portraying a socialist narrative in direct opposition to neoliberalism oversimplifies the political dynamics at play. More generally, reducing the relationship between socialism and neoliberalism to a binary opposition is an oversimplification of the nuanced interplay between these ideologies in contemporary society. Still, I believe it served a valuable purpose in clarification, and it may provide a starting point for understanding the ideological underpinnings of yoga practice in future research.

Moreover, I wish to highlight that my approach to this topic has been of an interpretivist nature rather than rooted in the tradition of critical theory. Consequently, my focus was not specifically directed towards unmasking inequalities or power structures although I want to note I acknowledge their presence. Therefore, contributions to the debate on cultural appropriation and colonization of yoga are lacking in this study and important for future research to address. Furthermore, the sample of this study consisted of Western, non-Indian participants. A study concentrating on the cultural appropriation of yoga would benefit from a more diverse sample that includes the voice of Indian yoga teachers.

As was revealed, the work of Hartmut Rosa (2003) was pivotal in addressing the research question of this study. However, the typology of ideologies delineated by Berger in the, somewhat older, work *The homeless mind* (1974) also intersected with the findings on several occasions and I wish to acknowledge their work here one last time. Their differentiation of ideologies was noted in the theoretical framework and entails the distinction of three different types of responses to modernization. In concluding their discussion of the ideological responses Berger et al. posed a question to which they did not have an answer. What are in fact the possibilities of stoppage of, or finding an alternative to, the discontents of modernity, when there is such an intrinsic linkage between modernity and consciousness? Berger et al. seem skeptical but write not to be “antagonistic to hope” (pp. 178, 230). The same question arises here. Indeed, in this study it was illustrated how late modern forces pertaining within the structures of consciousness were dragged into the rebellion against it, weakening the intended opposition. Moreover, the skepticism of Berger et al. prompts consideration of whether even the more foundational and radical endeavors can withstand the pressures of modernization. If the self cannot serve as a new metaphysical 'home', can *true* yoga in a spiritual-religious or socialist framework, existing on society's fringes, offer salvation? From my perspective, yoga does seem to offer a beacon for navigating the complexities of late modernity and helps people establish their position within it. Perhaps, the modern yoga practice is nurturing seeds of resilience that can evolve into transformative social movements; at the very least, it helps us maintain our balance in the meantime. In the words of Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar “yoga teaches us to cure what need not be endured and endure what cannot be cured” (Iyengar, 2015).

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

Topic: Biography

1. When did you first get into contact with yoga?
2. What motivated you to start practicing yoga?
Is that still why you practice?
3. What motivated you to start teaching?
Is that still why you teach?
4. How and where did you learn how to teach yoga?

Topic: Current practice

1. What kind of yoga do you teach and why?
2. Do you teach from a lineage, guru, or spiritual tradition?
3. Are there any written or unwritten teaching regulations at the studio('s) you work?
Do you agree with those?
4. When do you feel fulfilled after teaching a class?
5. How would you describe an ideal yoga class?
6. What do you hope to convey when teaching yoga?
How do you do that?
7. Would you be interested in starting your own studio? / Why did you?
What would you do differently?
8. Are there studios or places you would really rather not teach?
9. What does yoga mean to you?

Topic: Yoga today

1. When do you consider something yoga?
2. Do you engage in other yoga-related activities?
3. Why do you think yoga is so popular these days?
4. How do you perceive the yoga culture in the Netherlands?

Topic: Spirituality (only if it hasn't come up)

1. As you might know, for some people yoga is a spiritual practice. What do you think about that?

2. How do you relate to the spiritual philosophy around yoga?

How does that affect how you practice and teach yoga?

3. Do you consider yourself to be secular, spiritual, or religious?

4. What else would you like to say about this topic?

5. Do you use Sanskrit terminology?

6. Have you ever been to India?

Appendix B - Code list

ATLAS.ti Report: Report created by Linda Visser on 8 Jun 2024

- A new world
- a strange new thing
- a tool for continuing work
- a tool for wellbeing
- Accessibility
- aesthetics
- Against getting older
- against individuality
- Alienating elements
- All is connected
- Alternative choices
- anti corporate
- anti social media
- Anxiety
- appreciation of deities
- are you spiritual?
- aryuveda
- association with nature
- authenticity
- be your own guru
- Being in the body
- Being in the mind
- biohacking
- Body optimisation
- breathwork
- Bricolage
- Buddhism
- burn-out
- cacao ceremony
- Capitalism
- challenging times
- City life
- coaching
- Cold showers
- commodification
- community
- competition
- concious living
- confrontational
- connect mind to body
- connect to heart
- connect to self
- conspiracy
- control
- corporate background
- Covid
- Creativity
- cultivating calmness
- cultivating conciousness
- Comment:
25/04/2024, 11:17,
merged with
path towards
conciousness
- cultivating stillness
- Cultural appropriation
- cultural differences
- disconnect from busyness
- depression
- depth as a refuse
- depth of practice
- detach from body/mind/emotions/identity
- Comment:

25/04/2024, 11:22,
merged with
detach from identity

- detach from society
- diet
- discipline
- dislike hierarchy
- Distance to society
- Down to earth
- efficiency mindset
- emotional release
- emphasis on the physical
- Endless process
- energy regulation
- existential questions
- Experience to understand
- fantasy yoga studio
- Feel good in body (lekker in vel)
- flow
- Freedom
- Getting stronger
- God

Comment:
17/04/2024, 11:58,
merged with
Emphasis on asana's

- grounding
- growth
- guru / lineage
- gym-yoga
- habit
- harder than it looks
- harder-better-stronger-faster
- Healing journey
- Health issues
- Here & Now
- Hinduism
- Humble position
- identity forming
- Iki-guy
- independence
- India
- integrating yoga into normal life
- intuition
- it can't all be fun
- journaling
- journey inside
- Learning to feel

- Learning to know boundaries
- learning to let go
- Learning to relax
- less reactivity
- level of development
- lifestyle
- Loneliness
- Magic
- Mantra's
- materialism
- Meant to be
- meditation
- mental health benefits
- mindfulness
- Money
- moral guidance
- moral superiority
- more-more-more
- More-than-asana
- Motivation to teach
- Need for increased conciousness
- no preaching
- no room for ego

- No white coats
- not ready
- obstacles for depth
- On a mission
- overstimulated / overwhelmed
- past lives
- path towards enlightenment
- perennialism
- physical health benefits
- piramid
- planting the yoga seed
- popularity of yoga
- practicing gratefulness
- practicing less
- pranayama
- presence
- process of yoga
- Purifying
- quick fix
- racism
- Re-enchantment
- rebel
- reflection
- reincarnation
- Religion
- Repetitive life
- Resistance towards yoga
- Ripple effect
- Rotterdamse stads-yogi
- samadhi
- Sanskrit
- Science
- Searching for meaning
- sect
- self development
 Comment:
 10/04/2024, 15:42,
 merged with
 personal development
- self mastery
- self responsibility
- selfcare
- sign of individuality
- sleeping better
- social connections
- Social group element of class
- Social speed
- society as an abstract system
- something more
- space in the mind
- spirits
- spirituality
- stress
- structuring life
- Sufism
- superficial yoga
- sustainability
- Swami
- teacher and student
- The Divine
- The matrix
- The role of women
- the yoga does the work
- time for yourself
- to deal with physical health issues
 Comment:
 22/04/2024, 22:13,
 merged with
 physical pain
- transhumanism
- Type of yoga
- unhappiness

○ valuing tradition

Comment:
10/04/2024, 13:57,
merged with
respect for tradition

○ victim mentality

○ walking bare foot

○ West and east
combined

○ with softness

○ yin yoga

○ yoga apps

○ Yoga as a salvation

○ yoga as a sport

○ yoga beyond the mat

○ Yoga bubble

○ yoga can be
uncomfortable

○ yoga fashion

○ yoga for happiness

○ Yoga is meditation

○ yoga-related activities

○ yogic philosophy

Comment:
17/04/2024, 14:08,
merged with
Using / quoting yogic
philosophy

○ Zweverig

Code groups

● Spiritual-religious enlightenment

● The alternative

● healing journey

● Self-development

● religious

● traditional

● challenging times

● What is yoga?

● looking down on

Appendix C - Visual Overview of Codes



Appendix D - Informed Consent Form

Project Title and version	Yoga in the West A study of yoga in context of the late modern West
Name of Principal Investigator	Linda Visser
Name of Organisation	Erasmus University Rotterdam – Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication.
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by me, Linda Visser. I am inviting you to participate in this research project about yoga in the West. The purpose of this research project is to broaden our understanding of the meaning of yoga in Western late modern context.
Procedures	You will participate in an interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked questions about your teaching and practice of yoga and what this means to you. Sample questions include: “How would you describe an ideal yoga class?”, “What does yoga mean to you?” The interview will be audio recorded to allow me to transcribe and then analyze your answers. You must be at least 18 years old.
Potential and anti-cipated Risks and Discomforts	There are no obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.
Potential Benefits	Participation in this study does not guarantee any beneficial results to you. As a result of participating you may better understand your motivations and values behind your practice. The broader goal of this research is to understand how yoga functions in our society.

<p>Sharing the results</p>	<p>If desired, you may receive a digital copy the finished research. This thesis will be available in September 2024.</p>
<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p>Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. Moreover, only trained research staff will have access to your responses. Within these restrictions, results of this study will be made available to you upon request.</p> <p>As indicated above, this research project involves making audio recordings of interviews with you. Transcribed segments from the audio recordings may be used in published forms (e.g., journal articles and book chapters). In the case of publication, pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study will be stored in a secure location in the researchers' offices or on the researchers password-protected computers and will be destroyed within ten years of the initiation of the study.</p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the primary investigator: Linda Visser (570715lv@eur.nl)</p>
<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree that you will participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>For research problems or any other question regarding the research project, please contact the coordinator of the Master Thesis Class: Dr. M. Berghman (berghman@eshcc.eur.nl)</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>

Audio recording	I consent to have my interview audio recorded <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
Secondary use	I consent to have the anonymised data be used for secondary analysis <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
Signature and Date	NAME PARTICIPANT	NAME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Linda Visser
	SIGNATURE	SIGNATURE
	DATE	DATE