

Buying a Balance:

The 'Individual–Collective' and the Commercial New Age
Practices of Yoga and Sufi Dance



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Thesis Abstract

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The individual's experience of inner authority takes centre stage in the majority of scholarship on New Ageism, with many writers highlighting this theme as a definitive characteristic of the spiritual culture. The aim of this thesis is to explore this topic and to ascertain the place of the individual and the collective within two commercial New Age field sites in London. The qualitative data which lead this investigation were collected from a yoga centre called Shanti and a Sufi dance organisation called the Sufi Order. From this data, the thesis identifies an individual-collective dialectic, one which manifests in particular forms and with divergent orientations; the result is a multiplicity of types of individualisms which include collective forces. The study makes the case for this argument by focusing on four modes in which, at both sites, the individual and the collective co-produce each other. One, the (collective) class culture of the practitioners informs and is informed by the (individual) ideologies of self that the informants assert. Two, the (collective) capitalist context of the organisations influence and are perpetuated by the ways the (individual) representatives of those organisations express themselves. Three, (collective) shared principles regarding 'positivity' and 'energy' enforce and are sustained by the (individual) feelings of the student. Four, the (collective) communities of practitioners depend on and contribute to the (individual) set apart status of the teacher. These four manifestations of the individual-collective dynamic appear with different orientations in each field context; in all versions and in both settings, individual and collective are both present and mutually-constituting forces, but at Shanti the dialectics lean more towards the personal and at the Sufi Order, the 'same' dialectics lean more towards the social. Each organisation reflects and adds to the intersections, both in their forms and their orientations. In so doing, the two New Age centres present divergent balances of the individual-collective dynamic that correlate with the personal and social dispositions of their respective student bodies.

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The purpose of this study is to explore how the individual and the collective co-produce each other within two commercial New Age field sites and to analyse some of the implications of those intersections. The motivation behind this dialectical approach to the individual and the collective lies in the current primacy of the theme of 'the autonomous individual' in scholarship about the New Age and the commercial New Age in particular. Experts on New Ageism consistently highlight individualism as a definitive characteristic of this spirituality. Moreover, these writers typically share the view that, in New Age contexts, individualism equates with the experience of unmediated inner authority. A related theme in the literature is the claim that the reason the New Age strengthens the experience of self-governance to such great extents is because of its affiliation with consumerism and consumer capitalism. The centrality and consistency of the portrayal of the 'independent individual' in these texts about New Ageism inspired this investigation of how the individual and the collective might inform one another, even in modes that go beyond the experience of extensive personal authority.

This study's approach of focusing on the co-dependencies between individualism and collectivism in the New Age seeks to further the conversations about the character, social significance and appeal of this growing spiritual trend. Tens of millions of people from around the world now participate in the New Age and recent estimates suggest hundreds of billions of pounds are spent on New Age products and services each year. Commentators conventionally assert that the reason why this spiritual culture survives and thrives is because of its individualistic nature: the capitalism-conforming New Age encourages the personal choice and freedom that those conditioned within postmodern consumer capitalist societies have come to value and expect. However, this dissertation's claim that individual and collective co-enforce each other and moreover, co-enforce each other in multiple ways, brings new insight into the narrative that autonomy is the crux of this spirituality's character and appeal.

This study undertakes the pursuit of examining how the individual and the collective co-penetrate each other by focusing on two commercial New Age field sites: a yoga centre called Shanti and a Sufi dance group called the Sufi Order. Both organisations function within present-day London: the type of urban, postmodern, capitalist city in which the allegedly 'individualistic' New Age is said to flourish. Within the scope of the two commercial fields in the one capitalist context, this research tries to better understand how factors that predominantly relate to the personal and factors that predominantly relate to the social, impact one another, why, and to what effect.

The ability to search for various forms of these intersections both within and across two distinct sites leads to the main argument of this thesis. Not only does the individual-collective dynamic occur in both New Age locations, but it does so in various, particular forms and contextually distinct orientations; different New Age situations reflect and enforce different balances of the individual-collective dialectic and different notions of self. Accordingly, there are numerous types of 'New Age individualism' and all of those types are at least partially influenced by (and indeed influence) collective factors.

The project reached this argument by adopting an ethnographic approach. During twelve months of fieldwork, with six months spent at each site, I collected qualitative data from Shanti and the Sufi Order. I solicited the data by undertaking participant observation during the lessons, workshops and other related moments of participant engagement. I also conducted 128 in-depth, one-to-one interviews with informants and took formal notes during 9 group conversations. Annotating and coding the records obtained through these methods led to the identification of four key themes: the class background of the practitioners, the capitalist milieu of the organisation, the students' emotional landscapes, and the status of the teacher. These pervasive, cross-field themes guide the structure of how this thesis presents the discussion of the intersections between person and group. Specifically, each ethnographic chapter considers one of the themes and the exploration of each theme leads to the elucidation of a corresponding primary 'individual-collective' interchange.

Findings indicate that some tendencies are shared across both fields and other tendencies are distinct to a specific centre. First, at the two sites, there is ample evidence of a dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective. Second, this 'universal' dynamic between the person and the group manifests in (at least) four particular ways. In both sites there are exchanges between: (collectivistic) class culture and (individualistic) ideology of the self; the (collectivistic) capitalist socio-economic milieu and the (individualistic) agent's expressions; (collectivistic) shared principles and the (individualistic) student's emotional transformation; and the (collectivistic) communities of participants and the (individualistic) set-apart teacher. Third, whilst the four exchanges between a chiefly collectivistic factor and a chiefly individualistic factor are apparent in both

field contexts, they appear with distinct orientations. Comparing the two fields to one another, we see that in the Shanti context, the four interchanges and the components that constitute them direct more towards the individual, while the (thematically comparable) exchanges in the Sufi Order context lean more towards the collective. Thus, the 'same' dynamic occurs in both centres and (in broad terms) in the 'same' four ways, but the weightings within those individual-collective interrelations are variable, either more individualistic or more collectivistic. Fourth, each organisation reflects and facilitates the intersections both in regard to the forms of the manifestations and their orientation towards the personal or the social. In these circumstances, both the individual and the collective are active, but the New Age institution functions in forms that parallel a particular balance in which one force is more heavily 'weighted' than the other.

These findings have many meanings and ramifications. One, the collective has power and influence within these two New Age sites. The collectivistic factors show examples of community, external authority and shared values and tenets. Two, since the individual and the collective are interlinked, we cannot adequately understand one without grasping the other. For instance, in the two sites, distinct class cultures inform and are informed by distinct conceptions of the self; to 'explain' an ideology of the individual without sufficiently exploring the topic of class culture is to overlook the affinities and processes at work. There is an 'individual-collective' balance of some type (even if one factor dominates more than the other). Three, the individual-collective dynamic's numerous manifestations and orientations are indicative of the diversity that these two sites (and possibly the New Age at large) can accommodate; there are multifarious experiences of self and group available. Four, the organisational norms and culture of each centre are locally meaningful to their respective student population's particular contextual circumstances and understanding of individuality. Rather than the appeal of participation being an encounter with inner authority, this project suggests the appeal is situated in the ability of the New Age to echo a balance of individual and collective forces that are familiar for the corresponding sets of socially embedded persons.

These conclusions support the argument of the thesis that in the two field settings, individual and collective co-penetrate each other and that these processes occur in different ways, allowing for a multiplicity of experiences of individualism and collectivism. The New Ager's engagement with matters of concern to the self is not at the exclusion or to the detriment of engagement with matters of concern to the group. The two forces combine to allow for balances of the two that will resonate with the world views, social position and self-concept of the practitioner. This argument can add to the body of knowledge that currently venerates the place of the 'autonomous individual' in New Age culture by citing two cases in which the experience of individualism is mediated, various, and impacted by – as well as contributes to – the enduring collective.

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Chapter One – Introduction

The 'Individual-Collective' and the Commercial New Age Practices of Yoga and Sufi Dance

From the international bestsellers that fill the 'mind, body, soul' sections of book shops, to the holistic health therapies sold in every major city of the world, New Ageism is culturally conspicuous. Estimates of people who are classifiable as 'New Age' now mount up to the tens of millions¹ (Ankerberg and Weldon, 2011: 27; Aldred, 2000: 330) and a recent report estimates consumers spend nearly \$280 billion a year on New Age products (Turner, 2013). To employ Simmons' words: “there is something going on, everyone agrees. But what?” (1990: 203-4).

Many scholars try to answer this question but in the main, struggle. How can they not? This form of spirituality may be high in numbers, but it is low in consistency. New Agers typically have such “assorted interests, aims and expectations” (Bowman, 2008: 241) and are dispersed through so many networks

¹ Exact numbers are partly difficult to ascertain because not everyone who identifies with a group or product that the academic may classify as New Age would self-identify as a 'New Ager', as this chapter will address. Moreover, since much of the New Age is now prominent within mainstream culture, a person may not recognise an activity as distinctively New Age.

that wider trends are very difficult to identify. As Green writes, “insofar as it becomes theory, or system, it ceases to be New Age” (1992: 107). Accordingly, academics often couch their descriptions of New Ageism in broad terms, each characterisation including slightly different emphases.

There is one definitive feature, however, that is agreed upon more than the others: individualism. As the literature review in the next chapter details, individualism is a pervasive factor in scholarly depictions of New Age spiritual culture, and there is much consensus on what this individualism 'means' for New Age contexts. Typically understood as relating to an emphasis on the internal power of the person, in these portrayals, “authority is taken to lie within rather than without” (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 11), with the “ideals of self-determination and agency [dominating] over constraints of institutional membership and ideological boundary” (Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000: 8). In relation to this depiction, many scholars also claim the New Age's highly individualistic nature is due to the spiritual culture's relationship with consumerism and consumer capitalism. According to this argument, the buying and selling of New Age commodities reproduce capitalist, individualistic thinking and behaviours, rather than inspiring communal activity or group identity (Aldred: 2000: 330; Beckford, 1992: 19-20; Carrette and King, 2005: 170; Hunt, 2005: 154; Moore, 1994: 256; Zizek, 2009: 28).

After eighteen months of reading literature about the New Age and feeling a degree of confidence about my grasp of the culture's individualistic orientation, I began a year of fieldwork at two commercial New Age sites. It was then that my preconceptions began to unravel. Spending six-months at a yoga centre called Shanti, and another six-months at a Sufi dance organisation named the Sufi Order, gave me insights into peoples' engagements with two commodified New Age practices in the capitalist city of London². Yet from the very start of my involvements with each centre, I could not help but wonder why the individualistic character of the New Age, which I had read so much about, was not manifesting in the forms, and the extent one might expect. Moreover, it was difficult to pinpoint where examples of individualism or 'internal authority' stopped and elements relating to collectivism or 'external authority' began, and indeed, vice versa.

This thesis aims to explore some of these examples of individualism, collectivism and the mutualities between the two. In doing so, it makes the case that, at Shanti and the Sufi Order, the individual and the collective co-produce each other in multiple ways and in divergent directions. Each New Age organisation supports the forms and the orientations of the dialectic and in so doing, enforces multiple experiences of individuality that stretch beyond the

² Yoga is thought to be an example of New Ageism by: Heelas, 2008: 5; Lau, 2000, 95-130; York, 2000: 121, 127; Green, 2000: 57; Monteith, 2000: 113; DeMichelis, 2004: 35-36. Sufi practices are considered to be examples of New Ageism by: Heelas, 2008: 6, 22; Taji-Farouki, 2007; Sutcliffe, 2000: 26; York, 2000: 126; Hanegraaf, 1998: 13.

authority of the self (and also include, and even depend on, types of collectivity).

This argument can be broken-down into four parts. First, in both fields, the individual and the collective do co-enforce each other. This dynamic is a cyclical one. The individual perceives a collective form, internalises that form and then reflects and reproduces that form in subsequent self-concepts, decisions, emotions, thoughts, behaviours or a combination of expressions. In these instances, the collective contributes to the individual and the individual contributes to the collective.

Second, again, in both fields, there are four identifiable manifestations of this 'universal' dynamic, in which a predominantly individualistic factor informs a predominantly collectivistic factor and vice versa. These manifestations are:

- i) The (collective) class culture of the practitioner intersects with the (individual) ideology of the self.
- ii) The (collective) capitalist context of the organisation intersects with the (individual) agent's expressions.
- iii) The (collective) shared tenets intersect with the (individual) feelings of the practitioner.
- iv) The (collective) communities of students intersect with the (individual) set apart teacher.

Thus, the dynamic happens in numerous, particular, shared ways.

Third, although the dialectic appears in similar thematic forms in both field contexts, in each centre, the four interrelationships show a distinct orientation. At Shanti, the intersections between individual and collective happen in modes which emphasise, or are 'more weighted towards,' the personal and the self. At the Sufi Order, the 'same' four intersections happen in modes which emphasise, or are 'more weighted towards,' the social and the group. This difference between the two fields correlate with the either more individualistic or more collectivistic contextual circumstances and self-concepts of the respective populations of attendees at each centre.

Fourth, both Shanti and the Sufi Order as organisations, enforce professional standards and institutional imperatives that parallel the shared forms and distinct orientations of the intersections. These areas of correspondence suggest that the two organisations echo and support different versions of the dynamic; these two examples of the New Age allow for variegated experiences of individualism, within which variegated experiences of collectivism play vital roles. The compatibility between the organisational culture and the respective population's social situations and understandings of 'the individual' imply that different New Age contexts are able to offer disparate balances of the individual-collective dynamic, which will have different degrees of resonance and appeal to different sets of social persons.

This argument for processes of co-constitution within two New Age field sites strives to contribute to the topic of “the individualisation of the spiritual” (Carrette and King, 2005: 4) that takes such a pivotal place in the canon on New Ageism. The dialectical approach suggests, in the cases of the two fields, one cannot describe factors of “individualisation” without explicitly acknowledging the role of factors of 'collectivisation' also. According to the two New Age fields that this project considers, to diminish the place of the collective in the discussion risks overlooking some critical characteristics, including disparate experiences of individualism, power and authority.

A First Glimpse at Key Terms

There is no doubt that the terms 'New Age,' 'individualism' and 'collectivism' have histories of complex usage. It is useful therefore to present a foundational understanding of what the key terms of this study sometimes refer to in broader literature. This exercise will illuminate the semantical 'starting point' that this thesis adopts and builds upon. Since the two practices under consideration have their roots in Hinduism and Islam respectively, this consideration of central definitive designations includes pervasive Hindu and Islamic notions of the 'individual' and the 'collective.' Following the discussions of 'New Age,'

'individualism' and 'collectivism', I will present my understanding of the term 'individual–collective', which this investigation at times employs to refer to the nature of the intersections under scrutinisation.

'New Age'

As Hanegraaf writes, the term “‘New Age’ in a general sense... emerged in the 1970s... when increasing numbers of people... began to perceive a broad similarity between a wide variety of ‘alternative ideas’ and pursuits, and started to think of them as part of one ‘movement’” (1996: 97). The majority of people who used the term ‘New Age’ at this time were those who anticipated an imminent apocalypse: ‘the dawning of the *new age* of Aquarius’. This apocalyptic vision became abandoned in the later 1970s, and the term ‘New Age’ subsequently “lost its resonance with spiritual seekers” (Aldridge, 2007: 213). Since then, it appears to have become more and more an etic term, which insiders perceive as irrelevant. Put another way, participants tend to distance themselves from the New Age label while continuing to partake in practices that the New Age category commonly incorporates (Lewis and Melton, 1992: x; Hexham, 1999).

Sometimes, in part response to this discrepancy, authors decide to use a cognate term instead. As the most influential scholar of the New Age, Heelas variously calls types of new spirituality: “expressive spirituality” (2000), “spiritualities of life”

(2008), “New Age spiritualities of life” (Heelas and Seel, 2003), and “subjective-life spirituality” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) as well as “the New Age Movement” (1996). Heelas' prioritisation of the 'inner' authority of the individual informs some of the other 'replacement terms' he uses, such as “self spiritualities” (Heelas, 1996: 2) and “inner spiritualities” (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 11). Beckford uses “holistic spirituality” (1992: 18) and Sutcliffe and Bowman adopt “alternative spirituality” (2000: 1). Other scholars employ terms such as: “postmodern religions” (Bauman, 1998) and 'Perennism' (Possamai, 2002: 197), the “religious consumer supermarket” (York, 2001: 373) or “spiritual marketplace” (Van Hove, 1999; Bowman, 2000).

The challenge with these recent terms is that, whilst they may helpfully allude to the scholars' understandings of new spiritual phenomena with more precision, the informants at Shanti and the Sufi Order do not accept them any more than they accept 'New Age.' I could not find a category that people from both settings were happy to self-identify with. Unfortunately though, not using any term at all is inappropriate in the academic context of this study, risking confusion and distancing from the relevant bodies of literature to which the findings of this work contribute. Sutcliffe employs Foucault's genealogical method to explore the new spiritualities taxon and concludes 'New Age' is the “the key taxon” in this field (2003: 13). 'New Age' is also the most common of the terms in popular parlance. Therefore, despite the term's etic status, the category of the 'New Age' cannot be

abandoned so quickly. Instead, it is necessary to establish to what the term typically refers, whilst simultaneously acknowledging its etic standing and striving to use as much of the informants' language and phraseologies as possible.

The question of what 'New Age' means however, is not at all straight forward. Badone contends that it is virtually impossible to define 'New Age', and she is not the only one (1991:4; cf. York, 1995; Rose, 2005; and van Hove 1999). Such hesitancy is largely because New Age spirituality “lacks predictable content and stable referents” (Sutcliffe, 2003: 29). There are no pervasive organisational structures, nor any official doctrines or normative practices (Hanegraaff, 1996: 7; Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000: 8). New Ageism's lack of defined boundaries has meant the term is sometimes used to refer to almost any spiritual idiom; it often seems as though 'New Age' can cover everything including astrology, channeling, numerology, communing with nature, meditation, management self-transformation training, meditation, discourses on quantum physics, neo-paganism, aromatherapy and devotion to angels, to name but a few examples (Sutcliffe, 2003: 29; Heelas, 1996: 1). Degrees of commitment and engagement can also vary widely. Heelas identifies three modes of involvement. The “fully-engaged” who “devote their lives to the spiritual quest”, the “serious part-timer” who “turn to courses and workshops on a part-time basis”, and the “casual part-timer” who “treat what is on offer as something akin to their other equally in/significant consumer activities” are all 'New Agers' (Heelas, 1996: 117-19). In

sum, the diversity is so immense that imposing fixed boundaries around the concept in an attempt to 'legislate' for the term's use, is, paradoxically, likely to be self-defeating (Hedges and Beckford, 2000: 170).

Despite this complexity, many scholars who employ the term 'New Age' do so with the intention of referring to at least some defining properties. As the next chapter details, of all of the defining traits that are proposed, individualism is the most prominent; it is the characteristic that features most frequently within the definitions and it is typically the property that is prioritised above other attributes. Moreover, individualism is understood in very similar terms in this canon; the seminal scholarship conveys individualism as concerning the experience and exercise of unmediated inner authority (Hanegraaf, 1999; Heelas, 1996, 2000, 2008; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Introvigne, 2001; Sutcliffe, 1995; Woodhead and Heelas, 2000).

This emphasis on internal authority as the defining characteristic of the New Age is an example of what Hospers classifies as *sine qua non* (without which not); i.e., “a characteristic in the absence of which the word would not be applicable to the thing in question” (1990: 118). As Heelas writes, “if there is too much external authority... one can conclude that one is no longer with the New Age” (1996: 35). According to this approach, without inner authority, the category of New Ageism no longer applies. Therefore, a reportive definition of the New Age (i.e. a report of how others have defined the spiritual culture thus far) centres on the

preeminence of the individual and the significance of the individual's autonomy in particular.

Rather than adopt a *sine qua non* (without which not) approach to characterisation, this study employs Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' (1953) to reach a stipulative description of what 'New Age' will refer to in this project. The philosophical idea of 'family resemblance' opposes the view that a concept relies on fixed, necessary features or essences that are common to all items within its category. Instead, the notion of 'family resemblance' claims that things which are considered to be connected by one essential feature may in actuality be connected by numerous overlapping similarities, where no single trait is common to all examples (Wittgenstein, 1953). Hence, by adopting the 'family resemblance' approach, this study can identify various similarities that many New Age items share, without requiring any one New Age item to possess all of the traits, or requiring any one trait to be present in all New Age items. Thus, this approach can allow for the feature of substantial internal authority to be present in New Age contexts, but the categorisation of the context as 'New Age' does not depend on this trait necessarily.

With the idea of 'family resemblance' in mind, this study identifies the following 'accompanying characteristics' (Hospers, 1990: 117) as similarities that connect phenomena within the 'New Age' category. When the text that follows in this thesis utilises the term 'New Age', it will do so to refer to that which shares in some

of the following resemblances:

- emphasis on spirituality;
- new origin (post World War II);
- acceptance of eclecticism;
- encouragement of a worldview;
- discourses concerning energy;
- attempts at healing through alternative health modalities;
- inclusion of Eastern philosophical or religious beliefs and practices;
- veneration of nature and achieving greater harmony with the natural;
- celebration of the ancient or resources from allegedly ancient origins

This stipulative characterisation is useful because, by demarcating broad points of similarity for the New Age category, it allows for flows of New Age sentiments, experiences, practices and products to be at once various but compatible. Such an approach is highly appropriate for a polythetic culture.

'Individualism' (I)

In Lukes' (2006 [1973]) consideration of the semantic history of 'individualism' in Europe and North America³, he records some “basic ideas” of the word. Out of

³ Lukes' semantic history of 'individualism' is limited to the contexts of France, Germany, England, and North America (2006 [1973]).

this list, Lukes purports that some values have more social prominence than others, with liberty and equality (as well as the closely related ideas of dignity, autonomy, privacy, and self-development) being of most significance⁴. Lukes writes that Europeans and Americans understand 'the individual' as being, in Geertz's oft quoted words, “a *bounded*, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organized into a distinctive whole and set *contrastively* both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background⁵” (1975: 48). In this way 'the individual' indicates a state of separateness from other persons (cf. Abbs, 1986) and an 'individualist' is one who promotes the exercise of the individual's separate objectives, needs and wishes; individualists traditionally venerate independence and oppose outside control upon the individual's interests (Reese, 1980: 251).

Within many Hindu traditions, a prominent teaching regarding individualism implies that the person is *not* a separate being. This discourse wills the adherent to seek detachment from self-oriented desires and wants and ultimately to become one with the universal Self (cf. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I, iv, 10). Marriott and Inden's findings support the notion that the (Hindu) Indian understanding of personhood is different to Western conceptions. They write that, in (Hindu) Indian contexts, the concept of the person revolves around a belief in the transferable

⁴ Lukes' full list of the “basic ideas” of 'individualism' also includes: the abstract individual, political individualism, economic individualism, religious individualism, ethical individualism, epistemological individualism, and methodological individualism (2006 [1973]).

⁵ Italics added.

and mutually impacting particles that form each person's substance; the interchangeable fragments render the person “dividual” rather than an individual (1977: 109-110). Dumont's study of (Hindu) Indian society goes so far as to suggest we should not use the word 'individual' at all unless regarding a context in which people understand the term as those in the West conceive it, i.e. as emphasising agency, liberty and separateness. He writes that, in the (Hindu) Indian milieu, only 'the renouncer' can approximate the qualities of Western notions of 'the individual' (1970: 191-192).

A pervasive Islamic characterisation of individualism focuses on the notion of the integrity of the person. Two concepts influence integrity according to this perspective: purity and wholeness. Purity or *fitrah* is the natural inclination of the human being. Although every human being is born in a state of innate goodness, the external social environment induces subsequent deviation from that natural condition (Esposito, 2003; Cowan, 1994). Islam is considered the ideal means for the restoration and maintenance of that primal state of purity, which is vital to the individual's integrity⁶. The sustaining of *fitrah* relates to the second concept, 'wholeness,' which refers to the need for a comprehensive alignment of all areas of life. The realisation of *fitrah* occurs when the 'whole' or totality of one's life is in accordance with the principles of the Islamic community. The Islamic notion of the integrity of the individual thus concerns the extent to which the accountable

⁶ Mohamad, Yasien. 'Ibn Taymiyyah's View on Fitrah (The Islamic Concept of Human Nature),' <http://islamicstudies.islammessage.com/ResearchPaper.aspx?aid=630> (Accessed: 5/3/2014.)

person is actualising in totality his or her pure disposition by conducting life in ways that ally with Islamic precepts (Ahmadi and Ahmadi, 1998).

Mauss' famous essay, 'A Category of the Human Mind: the notion of person; the notion of self' (1938), convincingly argues what these three characterisations of individualism suggest: that the concept of the individual as an autonomous, separate being is a particular social phenomenon to the West. To rephrase: the individual's "sense of personal inviolability is a violable social gift" (Shweder and Bourne, 1984: 194; cf. Goffman, 1971). Thus, the concept of the "autonomous distinct individual living in society," may not necessarily be applicable beyond discussions of personhood in Western cultures (Shweder and Borne, 1984: 191).

Given these claims that the notions of 'individual' and 'individualism' are culturally variable and highly complex, making distinctions *within* the concept of the individual can allow for nuance and greater analytical precision. This approach can highlight particular characteristics of numerous aspects of the individual. For instance, some scholars distinguish between the terms 'individual,' 'self,' and 'person.' Harris differentiates 'individual' as the biologicistic way of referring to a member of the human kind; 'self' denotes psychologic concerns and points to a locus of experience; and 'person' is sociologic and alludes to a conception of the agent-in-society (1989: 599-612)⁷.

Complications occur, however, when authors employ the same term to signify

⁷ For more discussions of 'individualism', see: Burge, 1979, 1986, 1989; Devitt, 1990; Egan, 1991; Owens, 1993; Shapiro, 1993; Wilson, 1992.

different meanings, or even cite one of the terms to signify all of the meanings. For example, in the canon of New Age scholarship, the word 'individual' appears to at times be used as the 'umbrella' for all of the categories that Harris recounts. This project will make use of distinctions where it is helpful, but maintain use of 'individual' and 'individualism' to refer to broader combinations of the biologicistic concerns of the human being, psychological and experiential issues of the self, and sociologic engagements of the 'agent-in-society' or the person. At some of the points in the discussion, when it is useful to indicate that a factor is designated as predominantly individualistic, it will be shown by stating: '(i)'.

'Collectivism' (C)

'Collectivism' is often understood as that which prioritises the power and interests of the collective. In these instances, the term typically serves to contrast 'individualism,' as that which focuses on the separateness and primacy of the rights of the individual (Daphna, Coon and Kimmelmeier, 2002). One renowned example of a collectivist view is Marx's contention that, "it is not men's consciousness which determines their being, but their social being which determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1977 [1859], preface). Durkheim also emphasises the importance of social engagement and its impact on individual cognition. He claims that sociality dominates over the ambiguity of the person's

desires and it is this disproportionate influence that enables social continuity (1912).

As Singelis et al. explain, the works of 'collectivists', (such as Marx and Durkheim), centre around the interdependence and cohesion of the members of a group, and thus, often focus on 'community.' Community in the forms of the tribe, clan, society, state, nation, race, class band, or a combination of groupings, is of pivotal significance in collectivistic monographs (1995). Of relevance to Singelis et al.'s observation, is Triandis and Gelfand's review, which concludes that studies of the collective regularly show 'collectivism' has two typifications. One of the exemplars is horizontal (or egalitarian) collectivism, which concerns group decision-making among equal individuals; the other is vertical (or hierarchical/authoritative) collectivism, which regards hierarchical structures of the authoritative and those who conform to that authority (1998).

(Religious) hierarchy and conformity are chief features of Dumont's (1970: 105, 108)⁸ conception of traditional (Hindu) Indian understandings of collectivism. These factors of collectivity are due to the caste-based division of labour that organise (Hindu) Indian society as a whole. Since each "particular man in his place must contribute to the global order..." (9), the communal structures submerge (what the West might view as) 'individual identity' (9-10). Rather than

⁸ Although Dumont's work (1970) is not the first prominent scholarly depiction of collectivism in (Hindu) India (see also: Weber, 1958: 49-51), it is Dumont's view that has dominated the discussion over the last few decades.

the status of the person deriving from individual endowments or attainments, in the (Hindu) Indian milieu, it is the socially inherited hierarchical placements and judgements that endow the person with a particular worth (Bayly, 2001: 21). The Dumontian view of the relationship between collectivism and individualism in India has provoked, and continues to provoke, much debate. Although a number of Dumont's critics (most notably Mines, 1992) charge Dumont with exaggerating the place of the collective over the individual (cf. Raheja, 1988; Dirks, 1987; Beteille, 1986), many of the core features of Dumont's description remain salient in pervasive understandings of 'Hindu' notions of collectivism.

'Collectivism' in Islamic contexts relates to the concept of *Ummah* (Esposito, 2004). Translating as 'community' or 'the people with a common ideology and culture,' *Ummah* most typically refers to the collective community of Muslims (Houtsma, 1987: 125; Nouh, 1993). This community is supra-national and for this reason, *Ummah* may also be used as a synonym for *ummat al-mu'minīn* (the 'commonwealth of believers') (Browne, 1984). This Islamic conception of the collective inspires a distinction between the group of people who are Muslim and the group of people who are non-Muslim (although as 'children of Adam' humankind may still constitute 'one family') (Abduh, 1966). According to al-Nahwi (2008), in Islamic thought, one of the fundamental instruments for developing an effective collective is the individual. Just as the self requires the *Ummah* to actualise and maintain *fitrah* (the pure, natural disposition), so the

composition of the *Ummah* requires individuals who are accountable for seeking *fitrah* (cf. al-Wa'yi, 1990; Ali Mohammed, 2006).

These characterisations show that 'collectivism' is understood in many ways, from the power of communal forces like society or class grouping, to hierarchy and interdependence, to common ideology and group identity. This list of factors offer prospective means for how to identify and delineate examples of collectivism. This project will draw on these traits and distinguish particular manifestations of collective forces when possible, signifying the elements' predominantly collectivistic orientations with: '(c)'. The discussion will also utilise 'collective' or 'collectivism' to refer to a combination of factors that predominantly concern or prioritise the group.

'Individual-Collective' (I-C)

With reference to the data derived from Shanti and the Sufi Order, it is appropriate to signify 'individualism' and 'collectivism' (or the prioritisation of 'the individual' and the prioritisation of 'the collective') in a way that explicitly suggests that the concepts relate to each other. Accordingly, this study will employ the term 'individual-collective' (or 'i-c' for short) to reference the dynamic of co-production between the personal and the social. This conjunctive approach echoes the tendency of some scholars (e.g. psychologists Hui and Triandis, (1986)) to use a

hyphen between the two separate words to allow for distinct characteristics but also, mutualities and co-dependencies.

At different degrees of this dimension, the prominence of either the individual or the collective may be more or less dominant, without being exclusive of one another. At Shanti and the Sufi Order, the individualistic end of the dimension shows high intensities of a factor or factors that primarily regard the person, agent or self. Prominent manifestations of this 'individualism' include:

- i) Ideologies of the self, in which inner authority can feature to different extents
- ii) Agency and the abilities to have personal preferences and make decisions
- iii) Psychologic concerns; 'inner' experiences and feelings
- iv) Thinking or behaviour based around a concept of individuality

The collectivistic end of the dimension exhibits a force or forces that primarily relate to the group and sociality, such as forms of commonality or interdependencies between the multiple individuals of a collective. At Shanti and the Sufi Order, some notable manifestations of this 'collectivism' are:

- i) Shared values, experiences and social powers of a socio-economic group
- ii) Societal mores and common cultural traits
- iii) Mutually held tenets, beliefs and expectations
- iv) Community; verbal interaction, shared consciousness and traditions

The manifestations of the 'more individualistic' or 'more collectivistic' factors can be various because their nature is engaged with, conceived of and contributed

to in different ways by different individuals, across different collectives. People have the ability to experience, contribute to and contest these forms in distinct ways. For example, 'within' the single example of 'an ideology of self', one person's notion may stress independence, whilst another person's self-concept may focus on his or her relationships with others or an occupation. Thus, even within one (either more individualistic or more collectivistic) factor, degrees of individualism and collectivism can be various depending on the viewpoint of the social person who engages with that form. This conceptualisation of an 'individual-collective' dynamic offers the manoeuvrability required for discussions of two concepts that so often interrelate with each other and appear in so many different modes and extents.

Cultural Histories of Yoga and Sufi Dance in Western Milieux

Historical portrayals of how yoga and Sufi dance developed in Western cultures, and Britain in particular, are useful ways of acquainting the reader with the two New Age practices under examination. These chronological accounts offer insights into the “microdevelopmental processes”⁹ involved in the changes and

⁹ Ortner describes “microdevelopmental processes” as transactions, careers and developmental

reproductions of yoga and Sufi dance, as well as some of the transnational systems with which the practices interact. Both disciplines' cultural histories cite the critical agents within those historical narratives who continue to influence contemporary yoga or Sufi dance collectives in Western contexts today.

Yoga

Traditionally yoga has predominantly been a philosophically grounded set of practices designed to advance the spiritual enlightenment of Hindu men (Strauss, 2005: 5). If you go to one of the thousands of yoga studios in the West today, however, you would be forgiven for thinking otherwise. With an emphasis on physical practice, a white and female majority, and great flexibility for what the 'aim' of yoga may be, many Western yoga centres now present a very different situation. So how did this transformation occur and why?

The remarkable history of yoga in Western cultures is largely shaped by the decisions of three actors. Swami Vivekananda (1863- 1902) and Swami Sivananda (1887- 1963) play vital roles in the chronicle of yoga in the West; and Bagot Stack (1883- 1935) had a pivotal influence on yoga's development in Britain in particular (De Michelis, 2004: 125; Miller, 1996: 22; Singleton, 2010: 100; Strauss, 2005: 8). These three individuals provide key referral points in this historical account.

cycles. She relates the term to a view of history as “something that people make, despite the powerful constraints of the system in which they are operating” (1984: 159).

Vivekananda (1863- 1902) perceived the West as lacking in spirituality, but as having an abundance of material resources. This disparity inspired Vivekananda's prediction that Westerners would pay to learn yoga in order to enhance their spiritual awareness (Strauss, 2005: 35). He said to the people of his hometown of Kolkata: “We must go out and exchange our spirituality for anything they have to give us; for the marvels of the region of spirit we will exchange the marvels of the region of matter” (Vivekananda, 1990c: 109).

Vivekananda's subsequent presentation of yoga to the Western public is thought to be the turning point in the way the entire system of yogic ideas and practices is understood (Miller, 1996: 22; Strauss, 2005: 8; De Michelis, 2004: 125). Vivekananda's lecture at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 was particularly influential (De Michelis, 2004: 110; Lau, 2000: 102; Strauss, 2005: 5). He also communicated his understanding of yoga in a series of public lectures and pamphlets¹⁰, which he developed and expounded during his travels in the United States, Europe and around India. These pamphlets then circulated among a subset of the literate middle-class people of North America, Britain and the colonies¹¹ (Strauss, 2005: 2-3). Thus, the 'multidirectional cultural flows' (Appadurai, 1996), that Vivekananda initiated, enabled audiences of people in Britain and other Western countries to become acquainted with yoga.

¹⁰ See Vivekananda's *Raja Yōga* ([1896] 1990b).

¹¹ Burke argues that the existence of a literate, English-speaking middle-class is a significant contributing factor to how Vivekananda was able to make his name and style of yoga internationally known (1984: 28).

Subsequently, a portion of the international populations started to incorporate aspects of Vivekananda's portrayals of Hindu practice and philosophy into their lives (Joshi, 2001: 122; Smart, 1982: 144).

Vivekananda's presentations tended to explain yoga traditions and core elements of Hindu philosophy in non-dualist terms (e.g. Vivekananda, 1990a: 354-5), which could still allow for Christianity: the religion his non-Indian audiences were likely to be most familiar with¹². Regarding this tendency, Guenon wrote: “This so-called practice of yoga... which pleased the West all the better the more completely it is distorted, has practically nothing left in common with the metaphysical doctrine on which it is based” (French, 1974: 149). Although it is highly questionable that yoga is or ever was based on a singular metaphysical doctrine (Desikachar, 1995: 12), Vivekananda's dualist assertions are consistently clear.

The Swami's prioritisation of physical practice (*abhyas*) advanced the appearance of yoga's global accessibility. Professing the views that “one can get closer to God through football than through the *Bhagavad Gita*” (Nikhilananda, 1953: 167) and asking the question: “How will you struggle with the soul unless the physique be strong?” (Vivekananda, 1992 (1897): 155), Vivekananda suggests the Western practitioner need not subscribe to broader Hindu principles in order to access spirituality. Physical participation is sufficient.

¹² The Swami was educated in British schools and therefore, would have almost definitely been exposed to (dualist) Christian ideas from an early age (Singleton, 2010: 74).

Vivekananda's presentations greatly influenced Swami Sivananda (1887- 1963). Like Vivekananda, Sivananda also critically informs the historical narrative of yoga in the West. Sivananda knew the value of mass distribution. Indeed, one of the first things he did after establishing his spiritual organisation, the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, in 1936, was to organise a printing facility. This function has since developed to incorporate other media production such as photographs of Sivananda, CDs and DVDs. The global distribution of these commodities has made Sivananda's understanding of yoga cross-national, furthering Vivekananda's focus on the physical dimensions of yoga (Strauss, 2002: 233).

In addition to flows of material items, Sivananda's influence also inspired flows of people, who in turn contributed to the popularisation of yoga in Western milieux. One particularly noteworthy individual is Mircea Eliade, who Sivananda taught yoga to in Rishikesh during the 1930s whilst Eliade worked on his Ph.D. on religious philosophy. The young academic's choice of Sivananda as a teacher is indicative of the prominence Sivananda had already achieved within the international community of yoga practitioners. Eliade wrote of Sivananda in various published journalistic and fictional texts, at times reinforcing Sivananda's view that he would be “the next Vivekananda”(Eliade, 1970: 53; 1988 [1934]: 175). Upon his return to Europe after three years in India, Eliade discussed Sivananda with Carl Jung, who viewed yoga as an “Eastern counter-part” to his approach to psychoanalysis (Clarke 1994: 103). In these ways, the man who was

to produce the seminal scholarly treatment of yoga (i.e. Eliade, 1958) helped to circulate and 're-contextualise' Sivananda's version of a Hindu practice (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 76-77; Strauss, 2002: 227).

The mass of Western adherents that had begun with Eliade and his contemporaries continued to grow into the 1950s. During this time, Brits, Americans, Canadians, Austrians, Eastern Europeans, and French supporters either personally visited Rishikesh or engaged in written correspondence with Sivananda (Strauss, 2002: 235-6). The Swami's transnational community then developed to an even greater extent when Sivananda sent a number of his followers to North America with the explicit mission of teaching his style of yoga. Some of these disciples started their own yoga organisations, most of which are still active today (Strauss, 2002: 235).

Another seminal figure in the historical narrative of yoga's development in the West is Mollie Bagot Stack (1883- 1935). In fact, Stack's perception of not only the form and function of yogic practice, but also the type of actors it was most suited to, has had a lasting impact on the ways in which people experience yoga today (Singleton, 2010: 151; Dolan, 2005). Stack founded the most far-reaching women's gymnastic organisation in pre-WWII Britain: the Women's League of Health and Beauty. During a trip to India, she learned some *asanas* (yoga postures) and incorporated elements of these teachings into her programmes of gymnastics (though never referred to the poses as 'yoga') (Stack, 1988: 68). By 1935, the

league was a founder member of the Central Council of Recreative Physical Training, which was supported by the Board of Education. Stack's daughter argues that the source of her mother's quick success across Britain was describing the (yogic) exercise practices as “gymnastics,” not because of any stigma associated with Indian or Hindu practice, but because labelling *asanas* as gymnastics would immediately attract her mother's specific target audience: young women (Stack, 1988; 69).

Accordingly, at the same time as Sivananda and his adherents were popularising yoga in the West, a tradition of women's exercise which incorporated a lot of stretching movements became very popular in Britain (and also in the United States, due to the comparable actions of Cajzoran Ali and her yogic practice named “Breath Culture” [Mosse, 1996: 137]). Here we have a transfer from the practice which Strauss describes as being the domain of men in India (2005: 5) to a female gendered practice in the UK (and US). The currently disproportionate number of female yoga practitioners in the West is likely to owe a debt to this history.

Stack's alleged agenda (like Ali's in North America [Mosse, 1996: 137]) was to provide a practice that would enhance the beauty of the female physique whilst improving health and advancing spiritual growth at the same time (Stack, 1931: 12). The female practitioner may “bring herself into harmony with the great mysterious forces around her”, she claimed (Stack, 1931: 2). The more we train

the body in accordance with nature, Stack continues, “the more shall we set free the body's dormant powers of expressing in itself the rhythm of the Universe which welds all nature, and that includes human nature, into one beautiful whole” (Stack, 1931: 4). This rhythm “is the secret of personal magnetism” (Stack, 1931: 3). It thus seems probable that the stretching classes that exude references to nature, holism and self-improvement – which hundreds of thousands of people in Britain¹³ now attend every week as 'yoga classes' – recapitulate the “spiritualised gymnastics” some of the practitioners' grandmothers and great-grandmothers practiced in the 1930s (Singleton, 2010: 152)¹⁴.

Sufi Dance

The chronicle of Sufi dance in the West is substantially shaped by the formations of two organisations: the Sufi Order International and Dances of Universal Peace. As such the principal actors within the story of these two groups' developments are also the seminal figures in the history of 'Western Sufi dance' at large. These influential individuals are: Pir-O Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927), Samuel Lewis (1896-1971) and Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916-2004).

¹³ Fox's study for Yoga Magazine estimates that there are between 300,00 and 460,000 people currently practicing yoga in the UK (<http://www.corestrengthyoga.co.uk/PDF%20files/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Yoga%20is%20big%20business.pdf> Accessed: 03/06/14)

¹⁴ Ali's “Breath Culture” in North America also suggests an early precursor of New Age versions of yoga that emerged in the West from the 1970s onwards (De Michelis, 2004, 184-86). Typical New Age themes are present in this practice which was designed to bring the person into harmony with nature, and a God who is “individualised within you” (Mosse, 1996: 137).

The organisational histories of the Sufi Order and Dances of Universal Peace intersect at points and today, many centres of the Sufi Order (such as the London centre where field work took place) combine their 'Sufi teachings' with the practical instruction of Dances of Universal Peace. Problematically though, many aspects of the intertwining historical narratives were either never written down or are the result of “inspiration” (van der Zwan, 2006: 12-13). As such, the presentation of the cultural history of Sufi dance offered here, will only include the details that are verifiable.

Pir-O Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan is the founder of the Sufi Order. He was born in 1882 to a noble Muslim family in Gujarat and became an initiate of the four main Sufi lineages in India, (but had his primary connection with the Chishti Order) (Ernst and Lawrence, 2002: 122). In his quest for a single spiritual teacher, Inayat Khan chose Shaykh al-Mashaykh Sayed Muhammed Abu Hashim Madani to initiate him, which incorporates Inayat Khan into a 'chain of transmission' (*silsia*) said to lead back to Allah. (This ancestry is still considered of central importance to the Sufi Order for its ability to: “link the students of the Order with the combined spiritual power of their spiritual antecedents” and for this reason, the *silsia* is recited at pivotal occasions such as initiation ceremonies¹⁵.) At the end of his apprenticeship, Inayat Khan's teacher told him to travel to the West and harmonize Eastern and Western culture with the 'Sufi message' of love, harmony,

¹⁵ (<http://www.sufiorderuk.org/silsila.php> Accessed: 15/01/14)

and beauty (Inayat Khan, 2013: 22).

On 13th September, 1910, at the age of 28, Inayat Khan began his journey (Ernst and Lawrence, 2002: 128). As a highly acclaimed classical Indian musician, he was able to travel as a member of the touring troupe, the Royal Hindustani Musicians. The group gave concerts throughout the United States, where Inayat Khan met modern spiritual dance pioneer, Ruth St Denis (1879-1968) (Shelton, 1990: 76). Inayat Khan then settled in Suresnes, a suburb of Paris, from where he travelled and lectured widely across Europe, North America and Asia. He established 'the Sufi Movement' in 1917 (Witteveen, 1997: 6).

During his sixteen years in the West, Inayat Khan developed the Sufi Movement to be a “school of spiritual training” (Witteveen, 1997: 5). The school was based on the traditional teachings of the Chishti Sufis and additionally, emphasised 'the unity of religious ideals', which stresses the validity of numerous religious paths (Ernst and Lawrence, 2002: 127). As the notion of 'the unity of religious ideals' became established, the language employed within the Movement became more universal. In fact, even the term “Sufi” was used less frequently and 'Sufi teachings' became more commonly referred to as “the Message” (Wali, head of the UK Order).

In 1923, when Inayat Khan was in San Francisco, he met Samuel Lewis (1896-1971): the man who was to become the originator of the Dances of Universal Peace. Inayat Khan initiated Lewis that same year. The two had a number of

meetings in the years that followed and Lewis also worked closely with Inayat Khan's appointed successor in the United States, Murshida Rabia Martin (Johnson, 2006: 25). Lewis established Dances of Universal Peace in a way which follows Inayat Khan's 'universalist' perspective, teaching that all religions offer powerful insights into the Absolute (van der Zwan, 2006: 15).

Inayat Khan understood that he needed to build an organisation to foster the proliferation of his teaching. However, it is said that he never proselytised or attempted to convert others (Ernst and Lawrence, 2002: 142; Inayat Khan, 2013: 24). Rather, he expressed “the Message” in ways that aimed to accommodate the diversity of peoples and faiths found in both Eastern and Western cultures, arguing for compatibility across all of the world's religions¹⁶. On this matter, he said: “As water in a fountain flows in one stream but falls in many drops, divided by time and space, so are the revelations of the one stream of truth” (Inayat Khan, 2010: 89). Some of Inayat Khan's followers in Holland wrote down his extensive lectures on unity and other topics and eventually these scripts were collected as *The Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* (2011). Through his classes, lectures, summer schools, books and private interviews, Inayat Khan communicated his values and devised a structure that the 'Five Activities' of the Sufi Order International still replicates; the elements of this structure include: the Esoteric School, the Healing Order, Universal Worship, Kinship Activity, and Ziraat¹⁷.

¹⁶ This view is echoed in the Sufi Order's present-day acceptance of spiritual eclecticism.

¹⁷ <http://www.sufiorder.org/activities.html> (Accessed: 12/01/14.)

Inayat Khan died on 5th February 1927, on a return visit to India. His sons carried on his work in the United States and Europe (Ernst and Lawrence, 2002: 136). Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916- 2004) was the eldest son and chief successor of Inayat Khan. Born in London, Vilayat spent most of his youth in England and France, graduating from Paris University with a degree in psychology, studying philosophy at Oxford University, and learning about music at l'Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris. He later travelled to India where he trained in meditation, including long periods of seclusion.

Vilayat founded 'the Sufi Order International' in 1982 to bind the Sufi groups in different countries under one umbrella group. His teachings are comparable to his father's in their tendency to champion the unity of religious wisdom and discourage proselytisation (van der Zwan, 2006: 19). Vilayat did however bring new emphases on the ancient Sufi mystics and poets, as well as a new engagement with teachings concerning psychology and emotional wellbeing¹⁸.

It is well documented that Vilayat returned from a trip to Turkey and spoke with Lewis about the dances of the dervishes he had seen on his trip (although there appears to be little knowledge of the exact year when this exchange took place) (van der Zwan, 2006: 15; Lewis, 1990: 12). Douglas-Klotz writes that Lewis had written a paper on 'spiritual dancing' in 1940, witnessed spiritual dances during trips to Egypt and Pakistan during the 1950s, and claimed to have had a

¹⁸ <http://www.sufiorderuk.org/biographies.php> (Accessed: 12/01/14.)

vision of Allah, who said: “I’ll make you a spiritual dance leader of the hippies” (1986: 49). Around this period, St. Denis also had great influence on Lewis; she taught him a faculty which he describes as “drawing music and dances right out of the cosmos, out of the heart-of-God” (Lewis, 1990: 13). Although these exposures and engagements with spiritual dance are important, Lewis' conversation with Vilayat is thought to have been the actual catalyst which gave birth to the Dances of Universal Peace. Lewis credited Vilayat with the title of the “father of the Dances” and described himself as the “mother” or “the channel that had given birth” to the dances (van der Zwan, 2006: 15). The date when Lewis presented the first dance is not clear, although 1966-1968 is the most likely period¹⁹.

After Lewis' death in 1971, his student, Wali Ali, was appointed leader of the next generation of dance teachers. Only initiates of Sufism and those fully recognised as a Sufi teacher were able to lead the dances, which were, from the beginning, described as 'spiritual practices.' Wali Ali later claimed that Lewis had 'visited him' and granted permission for him to create new dances through inspiration (van der Zwan, 2006: 17).

Amida Harvey was very influential in making Dances of Universal Peace wider known in Europe, Australasia, and North and South America (van der Zwan, 2006: 19). Teachers have now also taken the dances to parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Today there are 1050 registered teachers and there are thought

¹⁹ Private correspondence with Reynolds, director of Dances of Universal Peace (15/01/14)

to be more than 450 dances that are regularly practiced in over 33 countries worldwide²⁰. The Leaders Guild (previously known as the Mentor Teacher Guild) was created in 1982 to monitor the training of the instructors who teach the dances and to advise on matters such as charging money for tuition. The consistent stance of the guild on monetary exchange is that: “Money is an integral part of it all. You are not more spiritual if you don't ask for money for a workshop... value is almost always connected with money, so charging little or nothing undermines the value of the dances” (van der Zwan, 2006: 75).

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan died in 2004. His son, Pir Zia Inayat Khan, is Vilayat's successor and the current president of the Sufi Order International. In addition to the interfaith training he has received from his father, Pir Zia has studied Buddhism under the Dalai Lama, and Sufism in the classical Indian tradition of the Chishti Order²¹. This multi-tradition training is in keeping with the ethos of unity, which his father and grandfather developed.

In these histories of yoga and Sufi dance, key figures who exist within particular cultural systems inform transnational flows. The individuals' engagements with the systems suggest that the person contributes to social structure and is constrained by social structure. Indeed, the socially connected agents and the culture are co-penetrating in these narratives.

²⁰ Private correspondence with Reynolds, director of Dances of Universal Peace (15/01/14)

²¹ <http://www.sufiorderuk.org/biographies.php> (Accessed: 12/01/14)

Interestingly, like the New Age, in the accounts of yoga and Sufi dance presented here, none of the protagonists demand conversion to a collective belief system, but rather allude to spiritual development in potentially universalist terms, even at points diluting religious categories and the use of classifiers such as “yoga” and “Sufi.” In both chronicles, an emphasis on practice is a clear feature, whilst at points, some of the actors champion a 'holistic approach' which considers the individual's emotional as well as spiritual and physical wellbeing. The practices' respective links to ancient and Eastern origins are factors, and monetary exchange is thought to be acceptable. There are numerous groups that continue to form in response to the popularity of these traits; the two field sites are but two examples.

Introducing the Field Sites

Woven within the ethnographical chapters of this thesis are detailed descriptions of various elements of the two field sites and the key informants within them. It is nevertheless useful to offer an introductory overview of the field sites' locations, the nature of the practices taught within them and the key people who generate these situations. Accordingly, these principal features of each New Age centre are noted here to offer the reader some preliminary insights into the contexts from where the key findings derive.

Shanti Yoga Centre

Shanti Yoga Centre opened in September 2010. Current manager and co-owner, Per, created the business when he noticed that one of his private students had a huge 'games room' building in his garden which Per thought would make a wonderful yoga centre. Per and his student quickly joined forces and following minor renovation, Shanti was born. Many informants from Shanti are aware of how the centre came to be, but most assert that the space (which was once a games room) was actually an artist's studio.

Location

Shanti resides in the heart of Kensington - - a notoriously expensive part of London. Specifically, the privately owned site where the centre sits, is on a residential street off High Street Kensington. An implication of the centre's situation is that Shanti is at once in a seemingly non-commercial, 'private' location, separated from the profane world “outside” (Altman and Chemers, 1984; Rapoport, 1982)²² while also being moments away from one of the most well-known shopping streets in the whole country (with all of the transport, refreshment and leisure resources that that inevitably brings).

²² Many writers have considered how the family “dwelling” (Eliade, 1959), where the most sacred and private family activities are separated from the public realm (Saegert, 1985), serve as sanctums in individualistic societies (Tuan, 1978; cf. Collier and Collier, 1986; Jackson, 1953; Levi-Strauss, 1965).

Classes

At the time of fieldwork, Shanti offered a wealth of different types of yoga classes, the majority of which took place during standard working hours, i.e. 9.00 – 17.00, Monday-Friday. Some of these classes (such as *ashtanga*, *hatha*, *vinyasa* flow, gentle and *kundalini*) are permanent fixtures of the timetable and led by resident teachers. Other classes (such as anti-gravity, de-stress, naked, travel recovery, pregnancy and kids yoga) are workshops whereby an external teacher 'hires out' the centre. Some of the regular students of the fixed classes also attend these additional workshops.

Each class was either 60, 75, or 90 minutes in duration. Regardless of the type of yoga being taught, a set format was followed which seems to be typical of modern yoga classes in the West (De Michelis, 2004: 251). Four parts constitute this format. One, the arrival and settling down period, which includes payment (at Shanti, this is £20 per class), changing, unrolling the yoga mat and quietening down in anticipation of the start of the lesson. Two, the actual class, which involves instruction and correction in posture and breath practice. Three, the guided relaxation in *shavasana* (corpse pose), which may include elements of visualisation or meditation before a 'coming back to the room' time at the end. Finally, four, students leave the centre, getting changed and possibly making a purchase in the centre's shop, which in Shanti's case, sells food, clothes, books, CDs and yoga equipment.

Key People²³

The Owners and Managers:

The owners of the residential site within which Shanti is located also own Shanti as a physical space. The proprietors are of Iranian heritage and have two teenage sons. The 'husband/ father' of this family (who used to be Per's student), makes up one half of the partnership that owns and manages Shanti as a business. During my six months of field work, I never met the 'husband/ father' owner nor did I see him at the centre²⁴.

The other half of the business partnership is Per Hoglund, who acts as Managing Director of Shanti and co-owner of the business. Per has practiced yoga since childhood, for which he credits his mother who introduced him to *hatha* yoga. He began a daily practice of *ashtanga* yoga at the age of 24 which he describes as “saving him” after a long period of depression and anxiety. Per obtained his teacher training qualification from Manju Jois (Pattabhi Jois' son), who is a significant figure in the *ashtanga* tradition. After gaining this diploma, Per chose to teach yoga to inmates on 'death row' in the United States. With ten years'

²³ See Methodology section in this Chapter, with regards to the issue of anonymity.

²⁴ The owner's absence is likely to be due to his separation from his wife, Mahtab, just before the time when fieldwork began.

teaching experience, he continues to instruct at numerous yoga centres and gyms around London, including 3 *ashtanga* classes and 1 gentle yoga class per week at Shanti. In the field context, his classes tend to attract more students than any of the other teacher's classes. At the time of fieldwork, Per woke up at 3.30am to practice *ashtanga*, before starting his 8-hour teaching day at 5.00am. Per also teaches private classes in yoga (which he describes as the yoga teacher's "bread and butter" financially). Additionally, he occasionally instructs the Alexander technique and works as a massage therapist. Per is male and appears to be in his mid-30s²⁵. He is married with no children, of white ethnicity and originates from Sweden.

Mahtab is married to Per's business partner and lives in the main property on the site where Shanti resides. She had acted as a full-time receptionist at Shanti before I became involved with the centre, during which time I assisted in these receptionist duties for approximately half of the classes scheduled. Mahtab continued in her receptionist role for the remaining classes. The majority of regular practitioners know Mahtab on a first-name basis. Although she had never undertaken yoga practice before, when her "husband's latest business venture planted a yoga centre in [her] back garden" (Mahtab), she became a regular practitioner. Most typically, she attended the classes of both Per and (*hatha*

²⁵ All ages are estimations.

teacher) Dora with the asserted motive of “feeling more peace and becoming less emotional.”

The Teachers:

In addition to Per, there were three fully employed teachers at Shanti, who had all been present since the centre's opening. There were also newly acquired teachers, occasional cover teachers when one of the permanent teachers was unavailable and temporary teachers when the centre space was hired for a specialist workshop. This section will only consider the three teachers who were fully employed at the centre for the majority of time field work took place and who frequently feature in the ethnographical discussions.

Dora Winter teaches *hatha* yoga twice a week at Shanti. She has a group of four very loyal students who rarely miss her classes, which, when including less frequent practitioners, usually becomes a group of six to eight practitioners in total. Dora originally trained as a ballet dancer, which she describes as “the darkest profession in the world.” She has been teaching yoga since 2005 both privately and for various organisations, including gyms and corporate companies. Dora also runs annual retreats in different locations, which have, thus far, included Marrakesh, Tuscany and numerous parts of the Caribbean. She is white, British,

appears to be in her early 40s and is a mother of two boys, who she lives with in West London.

Laurella Fox-Pitt teaches a *vinyasa* flow class once a week at Shanti in addition to teaching private classes and within some corporate contexts in the City. She also attends some of Per and Dora's lessons as a student. Laurella's main hobbies centre around physical activities, including kickboxing and athletics. She started practicing yoga in 1999, gaining what she describes as a “consistent practice” soon after. Laurella has trained with some very renowned teachers including Sharat Auror at the Himalayan Iyengar centre, Sharon Ganon and David Life at the Jivamukti centre in New York, and Siva Rea with whom she is half way through a '500 hours certification' in California. She is British, 37 years old, single and from a family which is well-known for its prestige in the equestrian sporting world.

Lili Miller taught one class a week at Shanti, which attracted around six loyal students who attended every class. Lili stopped instructing at Shanti half way through fieldwork. She later said that all six of her “committed students” followed her to an alternative centre based in Covent Garden (London). Lili completed her teacher training at Sivananda in New York City in 2001 and began teaching yoga the following month. She continues to undertake training herself. Lili stated that Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad and her “inner guru” are all very important teachers for her, alluding to an eclectic approach to spirituality. She is white, British, appears to be in her early 50s and lives in Kensington with her partner.

The Practitioners:

During the six-month fieldwork period, the average number of people attending a class at Shanti was 9. Many of the practitioners came to one or two classes every week, often buying 'packs' of five or ten classes in advance which works out to be more economical over time than paying for individual lessons. Other students typically attend less frequently and usually pay for one class at a time; teachers call these participants 'drop ins.'

When appropriate, the ethnographic discussions that follow will delineate contextual information about individual students at Shanti. As a collective, the practitioners at the centre have numerous demographic factors in common²⁶. The vast majority of students are female, which resonates with the practice's cultural history in Britain post-1935. Actually, it is not uncommon for there to be no male participants at the centre at all. The highest number of male students during any one class I participated in was three and this was still less than a third of the whole class of students. The ethnicity of the population is white in the majority, but nonetheless very mixed, with people of oriental-Asian and Arab descent regularly attending classes. No people of Indian-Asian or Afro-Caribbean ethnic origin came to the centre whilst I was there. The age of the practitioners at Shanti

²⁶ This information about the demographic factors was sought through participant observation and during interviews, as opposed to statistical data collection.

ranges from a teenager who attends very occasionally when facing exam pressure, to people in their 60s. However, the majority of yoga students are in their 30s, with the second majority being in either their late 20s or early 40s. It is likely that this distribution results in a bell-curve with mid-30s being the 'peak' or greatest quantity. None of the women I spoke with in this context (with two exceptions) are in paid employment, nor have many obtained a university degree. The majority of these women are wives and mothers and their families can afford for them not to work. With most of the informants being locals to the Shanti centre (in the high-priced area of Kensington) it is likely that these yoga students live in properties worth millions of pounds, and are thus not representative of the 'national average' financial situation²⁷.

Comparing the field data with the demographic landscapes of other yoga populations can indicate how representative the Shanti practitioners are of other Western yoga groups. Usefully, there are market research studies on yoga centres in Europe and North America (due to the vast profit that the yoga industry generates in these milieux) which can aid this endeavour. *Yoga Journal's* extensive project claims an average of 72% of yoga practitioners are female, 85% are of white ethnicity, and 71% have a university degree²⁸. At Shanti, a very similar degree of participants are female, if not there being an even larger (than 72%)

²⁷ Chapter 3 explores the socio-economic backgrounds of the Shanti population in greater depth.

²⁸ 'Market Research Study,' *Yoga Journal*:

http://www.yogajournal.com/press/market_research_study (Accessed: 12/03/13.)

female majority at Shanti. The percentage of participants of white descent is less at Shanti than the study's average (of 85%), and clearly, the proportion of people with a university degree is vastly different (from 71%), as almost none of the informants had attended university.

The Sufi Order UK: London

The Sufi Order UK is part of the Sufi Order International. The UK branch is comprised of 20 centres in various locations around England, Scotland and Wales. Fieldwork took place at the London centre, which is the informal headquarters of the whole of the UK Order and the official residence of the head of the UK Order, Nigel 'Wali' Hamilton. Wali purchased the site in 1981 on the instruction of his teacher, Pir Vilayat, to find a suitable base for the Order's UK division.

Location

The London centre functions within a notably beautiful, five-storey Regency building called Beauchamp Lodge. Situated on the bank of the Grand Union Canal at Little Venice, Warwick Avenue, the site is in a prime residential area of the capital city. Wali said that he chose the building mainly due to the energy of the site. One-half of the building overlooks the peaceful and tranquil canal and

the other half of the building overlooks the perpetually busy, major trunk road, the A40. As current international head, Pir Zir, elaborates: “In Sufism, when two different energies meet together as they do in this space, it is auspicious.” The building is also home to the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education (CCPE)- a charitable organisation which Wali founded²⁹.

Classes

The main classes at the centre take place one after the other, between 18.30 - 21.15 on Monday evenings. After paying for entry (£5 or £3 concession), the student removes his or her shoes before entering the ballroom where the classes take place. An hour of Sufi dancing then commences, which a leader from the Dances of Universal Peace or (occasionally) a Sufi Order guide leads. The group attempts three or four dances each week. Some dances are familiar, and others may be being taught for the first time. The standard formation of the movements requires the group to stand in a circle with their leader in the middle, who will usually play music on a guitar. Students are encouraged to sing or chant as they dance. The words and phrases of these expressions typically derive from

²⁹ The CCPE provides training and clinical services to those who require a spiritual perspective in their counselling and psychotherapy <http://www.ccpe.org.uk/about.html> (Accessed: 09/01/14.)

languages other than English, especially 'holy languages' such as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Sanskrit. The referencing of multiple heritages resonates with the 'unity of religious ideals' that is a prominent feature of the Sufi Order's history.

Following the dance, one of the leaders of the Order gives a 'message class.' This form of verbal address tends to have a theme. For instance, the orator may focus on the teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, or cite other religio-spiritual sources, including holy scriptures from the dominant world religions³⁰. The message sometimes also incorporates practices such as meditation, visualisation, breath work or dervish whirling. Following the address, the group then divides into smaller classes. Although all of the sessions are theoretically open to people from all backgrounds and faiths, there is a hierarchical structure at the Order, which is established around initiation levels. The divisions inherent in this hierarchical formation determine the 'post message' groupings. What occurs during these sessions is not disclosable to anyone of a lower level. At the end of the evening, some practitioners will leave, and others will go to the kitchen area to have tea and chat with fellow members.

³⁰ Here the 'dominant world religions' include: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism.

Key People

The Owner and Manager:

Wali (a.k.a. Nigel Hamilton) has been the Director of the London centre since 1980 and head of the Sufi Order UK since 1982. Pir Vilayat initiated Wali into these roles. Wali leads most of the message classes and the vast majority of informants hold him in great esteem. Although he says he 'purchased' the London centre, the exact ownership of the site is unknown. However, Wali states that the CCPE (which he founded) “enabled them to buy the building” and “continues to make a donation to the Order.” Wali is male, appears to be in his late 50s, is of German heritage, white ethnicity and is currently the Director of the CCPE.

The Teachers or “Guides”:

The teachers at the centre have a variety of functions: they instruct groups of students during dance sessions, lecture at message classes, prescribe practices (such as breath work) or undertake a combination of these duties. A single teacher or “guide” is also assigned to each practitioner who wishes to become an initiate. In this capacity, the guide is responsible for directing the student to 'aid his or her spiritual development'. A person should not ask to become a guide as this is

considered indicative of the *na'fs* (or 'ego'). Rather, when a superior guide believes a student is ready to guide others, that student will be told. The Order will then train the individual for this vocation. There is an extensive manual of organisational guidelines which is given to a prospective guide at this point, the contents of which are confidential.

Aziz (a.k.a. Theo Dikeulias) is a trustee of the Sufi Order and guide to numerous practitioners at the London centre. He leads group sessions at this UK base, sometimes instructing the dances and speaking during message classes. Following Nigel, Aziz appears to have the most seniority of all of the teachers. He became involved with the Sufi movement at a similar time to Nigel, in 1983, and has attended annual Sufi retreats since 1985. He does not attend the sessions at the London centre every week. When asked in an interview about his infrequent attendance, he said: “I went to the centre every Monday for 28 years, but the sessions are too short – I couldn't achieve enough... I go when I can and I do sessions from my home as well.” Every month Aziz meets with a small group of 6-10 of the practitioners he guides in his home. They are encouraged to pay £10 for each session. He is of Greek heritage, looks as though he is in his mid-late 40s and is employed as a maths high school teacher.

Shams (a.k.a. Kim Richardson) is a guide at the London Sufi Order and undertakes administrative tasks for the Sufi Order UK such as sending out weekly newsletters. Shams describes this administrative role as an “act of service, not a

job.” He is also a retreat leader for the Order and, as a *semazen* (‘whirling dervish’) in the Mevlevi tradition, leads whirling sessions, in addition to smaller dance classes. Shams first came to the London Sufi Order in 2001 in response to a leaflet about an Easter retreat. He recounts that it was on this retreat that he realised he “needed a spiritual path”. Shams explains that he found this discovery very painful because he did not want a path. Nevertheless he later asked his retreat leader (Aziz) to be his guide for life. Since then, Shams has embraced the Order's 'unity of religious ideals' ideology; he is also a student and guide within the Reiki tradition and gains spiritual purpose through Buddhism and Shinto. He is white, British, appears to be in his late 50s and lives in a suburb of North-West London.

Injil (a.k.a. Alison Dixon) is the primary Dances of Universal Peace teacher at the London centre. She also teaches the dances to a group in Oxfordshire. Injil views the principal function of her role as being “a channel for the dances,” which she says is both “a mystery and a privilege.” She has been practicing the dances since she first encountered them in 1998. In addition to her appreciation for Sufi wisdom (which she says led her to her Sufi guide and acceptance of a Sufi name) she worships as a Quaker and serves as a Quaker prison chaplain. Injil also practices Wild Goose Qigong, a Daoist form of Chinese exercise. She is white, appears to be in her early 40s and lives in Oxfordshire.

At the final stage of the Monday teachings, when the main collective divides into smaller groups, Noorshahab (a.k.a. Ann Marie Terry) leads the discussion for the most junior group. She trained as a shiatsu healing therapist in 1987 and bio sound therapist in 1988. She claims to have joined the Order because of her fascination with the “alchemical process as a means of inner transformation.” She is white, appears to be in her late 40s and works as an integrative counsellor and psychotherapist.

The Practitioners:

During the fieldwork period, there was an average of 37 practitioners attending the Monday evening sessions at the London centre. Typically, approximately two-thirds of this group are regular students who attend most weeks. The other approximate third of the collective constitutes people who attend sporadically.

The dominant demographic factors of this collective are different to the common traits which are noted as 'typical' within the Shanti context. For instance, there is a greater balance between the genders than there is in the Shanti context; there is not notably more of one gender than the other. The Order is also more ethnically diverse, with more people of white ethnicity than any single other ethnicity, but not necessarily constituting a majority in comparison to all other minorities in the other category. There is also not the same notable absence of

particular ethnicities here, as is the case at the yoga centre. The average age of the members is older on the whole, with most of the students being in their late 40s to late 50s. There are a couple of students in their 60s and early 30s and I was the youngest attendee at 26 years old. Unlike at Shanti, the Sufi practitioners I spoke with all work in full-time employment (most frequently in the public sector) and, almost without exception, had attended university³¹. Also, unlike the yoga participants, none of the informants live near the centre. Instead, the students travel to the base in Warwick Avenue (London) from other areas of, not only greater London, but also, the country.

Whereas the lucrative profits of the yoga industry motivates market research, in contrast, Sufi groups appear to have never been the subject of such study. (With a smaller quantitative presence, both in terms of the number of groups as well as prospective financial gain, perhaps the absence of market research should not come as a surprise.) A population comparison between the Sufi Order and other 'Western Sufi collectives' is thus not as straight forward as comparing the Shanti case with other yoga contexts. However, the dominant demographic characteristics of the London Order population still serve to highlight an important point on their own. The contrast between these characteristics and Shanti's population factors clearly show social variegation. The predominant

³¹ Chapter 3 explores the socio-economic backgrounds of the Sufi Order population in greater depth.

gender mixes, average ages, ethnicities present, employment trends, and educational experiences vary between the two groups.

These descriptions show that the two field sites share some common features. For instance, both centres are based in the milieu of London and demand payment in exchange for the teaching of a (New Age) practice. Other elements are distinctive to each site. For example, the type of practices taught at the respective centres are different and the pervasive demographic traits of each population contrast each other. This thesis draws attention to many other points of resemblance or dissimilitude, which accrue to the core claims of this project. The next section attends to the methodological approach that led to these insights.

Methodology

This account details the investigative strategy and the implementation of that strategy. The first part considers preliminary methodological considerations, including the choice of an ethnographic approach, the ways the research locale of London is beneficial and how I established access to the two field sites. The second section analytically describes the data collection methods. The third discusses ethical concerns including positionality, transparency and consent, anonymity, adaptability and giving back to the communities. Finally, the last

section overviews the efficacy of the approach and highlights notable challenges and limitations.

Formulating a Research Strategy

The project's broader disciplinary context influenced the research plan. This context relates to three bodies of literature: 'New (Age) spiritualities,' 'commercialised/ commodified religion and spirituality,' and 'individualism and collectivism.' With acknowledgement of the diversity of the New Age and the scarcity of informant voices in studies of commercial religiosity, an ethnographic approach seemed most appropriate. With regards to 'individualism and collectivism', Triandis et al. (1990) convincingly assert, the most direct way of assessing these factors is through the analysis of self-concepts (cf. Cousins, 1989; Lalljee and Angelova, 1995; and Shweder and Bourne, 1982). This method can evolve into the evaluation of values or motivational goals (Schwartz 1992, 1994), and the personal versus in-group structure of these goals (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995). Fieldwork is a way of prospectively accessing self-concepts and objectives, in addition to being a means of establishing other key themes relating to individualism and collectivism. Indeed, there is sometimes a gulf between self-conception and reality. Self-concepts and personal motivations are important, but

should not necessarily be the central or only focus. The fieldwork approach allows for broad observations of other factors including social structures, hierarchical dependencies and degrees of adherence to collective norms. Observing representations of the New Age, commercial spirituality, individualism and collectivism, and seeking clarification of the meaning/s of these forms from those who inherit and contribute to them, empirically grounds the theoretical reflections.

Research Locale

The city of London (UK) is a valuable place to undertake field research for numerous reasons. Significantly, London has the highest density of New Age commodified practices in the UK, including multiple organisations that offer yoga and Sufi dance respectively³². This wealth of New Age resources may be because London, as a neo-liberal capitalist context, is representative of the “broad social world of urban-industrial Western society” in which New Age groups are thought to flourish (Prince and Riches, 2000: viii). As an open and competitive free enterprise market situation, the opportunities to satisfy individual preferences are

³² <http://www.yell.com/ucs/UcsSearchAction.do?keywords=yoga+&location=London&scrambleSeed=1614323915> (Accessed: 23/07/14); <http://www.yell.com/ucs/UcsSearchAction.do?keywords=sufi+&location=London&scrambleSeed=5470861> (Accessed: 23/07/14)

extensive. Moreover, I knew from my own life experience in London that this context is a very difficult place about which to make generalisations. Consequently, I predicted that the fieldwork data produced in this environment would offer the exceptions and nuances that make for strong ethnography. Logistical considerations of language and access also encouraged the view that London would be an appropriate research locale. The culmination of these points suggested that conducting an in-depth qualitative research project looking at New Agers in London was feasible and had the potential to be lucrative with regards to the depth of data likely to be available.

Access and Gatekeepers

Both centres were initially identified online by searching the internet³³. Before any fieldwork at either site began, I visited both organisations and met with the 'heads' of the respective groups³⁴. During these meetings, I explained my intentions in-person, allowing for a face-to-face conversation that would in turn permit these

³³ At both Shanti and the Order, the majority of informants said they discovered the respective centre via the internet also.

³⁴ Before approaching Shanti, I had already started fieldwork at the London Sivananda centre. Two weeks in to this fieldwork, the board of trustees retracted the permission they had previously granted. When asked why they changed their minds, I was advised not to push for things that are not meant to be because it is against Vedantic philosophy and would damage my health.

'gatekeepers' to discuss any preliminary concerns directly. At this time, the leaders gave permission for me to engage in the same yogic or dance practices as the students themselves. I was also granted consent to request in-depth semi-structured interviews from teachers and practitioners of each group. At Shanti, the manager and I agreed that I would not pay for the classes I attended, but rather that I would work as a receptionist for the sessions in which I participated. This role involved 'signing in' practitioners, collecting payment and working out the wage of the yoga teacher to note on the teacher's invoice sheet. Once fieldwork at the Shanti began, I also handed out leaflets in the local area to help create awareness of the centre³⁵. At the Sufi Order, the UK head and I agreed I would pay the standard concession rate of £3 per session. There were also rare occasions such as the 'Pir Zir seminar weekend' when I did not pay the fee, but rather worked in a position, such as being in charge of making sure Pir Zir had food and water throughout the day. My 'employments' at each site generated an 'insider' status at the organisations and gave me exposure to valuable insights which probably would not have materialised had I not undertaken these roles.

³⁵ The experience of handing out leaflets was actually very insightful. It allowed me to monitor some of the initial questions that might inform a person's decision to participate, such as price, location, timings and type of yoga.

Data Collection Methods

Between October 2011 - April 2012³⁶ I collected qualitative data from Shanti and between May 2012- November 2012³⁷ I gathered qualitative data from the Sufi Order. This amasses to twelve months of field work, with six months spent at each site. This section offers an overview of the project's population and then describes each data collection process in turn. Specifically, the methods it considers are: participant observation, conducting interviews, and taking notes during group conversations.

Population

The two populations are bound by time, i.e. they include the people who attend set classes or taught at those sessions over a set (six month) time period. This non-probability, convenience sampling enabled me to engage with many New Age practitioners through a variety of means, including in-depth narrative interviews (n= 128) and group conversation (n = 9). The table on this page shows how many informants participated in these modes of research from each population.

³⁶ Shanti was closed for 4 weeks over the Christmas period.

³⁷ The Sufi Order was closed for 4 weeks during August.

Table of Informants

Site	No. of Interviews	No. of Observed Group Conversations (a) and No. of Participants in Each Group (b)
Shanti	61	(a) 3 (b) 2, 3, 5
The Sufi Order	67	(a) 6 (b) 7, 5, 4, 3, 3, 2
Total	n=128	n=9

Participant Observation

I undertook participant observation by attending the same classes as the students of each centre and occasionally in distinct but related moments such as during seminars or workshops. Through on-going reflection on what was seen, heard and experienced, I acquired a wider sense of the two field contexts. Furthermore, undertaking participant observation enabled me to grasp specific themes and issues from the viewpoint of the individual, acting within particular cultural configurations.

I found it helpful to carefully record observations in research diaries; however, evaluating this technique highlights a distinction between immediacy and reflection. At times, being both a participant practicing in the field and an observer reflecting on the field was challenging. The encouragement from Yoga and Sufi Dance teachers to be 'in the moment' and concentrate on 'feeling rather than thinking' is a lot harder while simultaneously trying to remember all the things to be written down after the class. There were a few times when I decided to only participate or only take notes 'just' from listening and observing. These occasions of concentrating on one task brought new insights and thus were very valuable. The Sufi Order record and transcribe their meetings, which also gave access to the exact wording of what was said rather than choosing to either rely on memory or taking full notes during every practice.

Participant observation was particularly beneficial in relation to the interview method. My ongoing presence at each site greatly contributed to the networking, trust building and recruitment of interviewee informants. The time taken to develop friendships and professional relationships with these participants gave me extra insights into parts of their daily lives and permitted cumulative impressions of the informant's values and opinions to grow over time. I was able to supplement my understandings about individual interviewees with observations of them in interactions with their teachers, peers and spaces. In conjunction with eliciting information in interviews, participant observation filled in some of the

'gaps' between hearing what people *say* they do, and what they observably do in practice, as well as illuminating tendencies individuals may not consider raising in an interview.

Interviews

I conducted 128 in-depth interviews with informants, who were teachers or students. I approached individuals in person at the centres themselves in order to identify and secure interviewees. The duration of these interviews range from twenty minutes to three hours long, but most lasted around 60-90 minutes. All interviews were conducted solely between the informant involved and myself. The meetings were also all face-to-face with the exception of three, which took place on the telephone.

Due to the varied and sometimes personal nature of many of the issues the interviews were to cover, the conversations were guided with key words, phrases and themes, as opposed to asking a fixed list of questions. These ideas include when and why the informant started attending the centre, if he or she socialises with any fellow participants outside of the centre and if the student favours a particular teacher. This collection of prompts developed throughout the project as I grew to comprehend more clearly the discourses and methods of articulation that many of the participants tended to use. At times, the language of the

questions was directly corrected for me; for instance, when asked about the “biggest benefit of going on retreat,” the start of one answer began: “Biggest *blessing*, 'blessing' is more accurate.” When appropriate, I asked the interviewee for a critical view of what appeared to be some of the emerging research questions. Interviewees were largely responsive to this request and often articulately discerned some of the implications of the concepts I highlighted.

Answers were recorded in note form. This means of recording seemed less formal than using a tape-recorder and may have helped the informants to be 'put at ease'. Speech tendencies such as the use of 'filler' words and phrases, as well as silences, were also recorded and often taken as valid indications of the sentiments behind the participant's expressions. Occasionally practitioners would read these interview notes. After one informant from Shanti read through her interview, she praised the accuracy of the recording but instructed the use of a capital 'M' when quoting her saying the word 'Me' because that was how she wrote it; little insights such as this one are telling and useful.

The interviews with participants often elicited the richest data. Informants rarely tended to talk about abstract notions of individuality and collectivity explicitly but instead used anecdotes and storytelling to place themselves and their views in the context of social structures around them. Awareness of their inscribed and inferred meanings could only be arrived at through intensive modes of communication – that is, by asking a question, listening to the response,

rewording the question, listening to the clarification, and responding to that clarification. The loosely structured verbal interaction of these interviews allowed for such communication and for the impressions of different forms and extents of individualism and collectivism to develop gradually. Many of the participants said after their interviews that they had enjoyed the experience and that the process had triggered interesting thoughts about their participation in yogic or dance practices.

Group Conversations

In addition to participating in and observing numerous discussions during fieldwork, formal notes were taken during 9 group conversations that ranged from between two to seven contributors. Sometimes the discussions would be directly related to the field site e.g. responding to the question 'what are the main functions of the Sufi Order?' and other times the conversations would be about something beyond the organisation, but still able to show glimpses into the practitioners' values and motivations. Although this is a slightly different method to initiating focus groups, observing group discussions offers similar benefits and limitations. Significantly, it allows for multiple voices and ideas to emerge in the same moment; this multiplicity can result in the expression of opinions that might never arise during one-on-one interviews. As Hyams wrote, "that multi-vocality and

members' 'safety in numbers' enable the group to establish its own agenda and not be continually guided or manipulated by the researcher and research agenda” (2004: 106). The group dynamic engenders the moments of contestation, consensus, negotiation and reformulating of opinions that make for new insights. For instance, it was interesting to observe how informants might adapt the manner in which they articulate themselves according to their company. It is not always clear, however, whether practitioners believe they can say what they 'truly' think and feel without fear that others might judge negatively. Group conversations can also lessen the amount of depth a participant is able to go in to. For some people, having to adequately and succinctly formulate and present views to a group of waiting others is uncomfortable or even impossible.

Coding and Analysis

The records obtained during participant observation, interviews, and observing group discussions were manually annotated by underlining, writing notes in the margins and highlighting emergent themes with colour-codes. I also coded documents collected during the time spent at each site, such as materials that Shanti or the Order disperse. Initially, rigid coding categories were not applied to the data, but instead, I wrote monthly field reports that highlighted emerging themes in broad terms. When, at the end of the fieldwork, the identification of

these themes was completed, I then read and coded all of the field notes in chronological order. Starting with the earliest records enabled me to see how the questions during the interview process developed and the analysis that had informally begun during this time. At this detailed level, I could spot deviations from the broader pattern of responses. These 'anomalies' were especially telling and - - in a project that seeks to recognise the diversity of New Agers' experience - - they were important to pay attention to.

Throughout the formal analytical period, it was useful to create diagrams to help illuminate some of the links between issues. Once I had mapped some of these initial connections, I could group factors and relationships into thematic families. Talking to my supervisor and friends about what themes seemed to be arising offered additional perspectives and helped to reveal alternative interpretations of the data. However, it was through the process of writing chapters that analysis really accelerated. With changing structures and changing textual 'reinforcements', the qualitative data have seemed to have different meanings at different times. Although the analysis has continued right up until this thesis was 'finished', this project has outrun my conscious intentions. Perhaps such a definitive 'end point' was always an illusory expectation, given this study's aim of exploring the dynamic, relational nature of commercialised New Age practice.

Ethical Considerations

Many efforts were taken to reduce the ethical risks and disparities that often exist between a researcher and those who are researched. Before fieldwork began, I received a robust training in field research methods which highlighted numerous ethical issues and gave guidance on ethical strategies³⁸. This training, in addition to my previous experiences of fieldwork³⁹ and familiarity with ASA guidelines, armed me with an appreciation of consensual, adaptive and inclusive ethical research procedures. However, it is not naively presumed that these efforts managed wholly to eliminate all ethical concerns. The variety of power-giving and power-taking positions that are often simultaneous in research of this nature make such conclusive elimination highly complex if not unattainable. This section will attend to some of these issues in discussions of positionality, informed consent, anonymity, adaptability and giving back to the field communities.

Positionality

In field contexts, factors such as class, ethnicity, education, and perceived life chances may vary between the person who is undertaking the research and the people who are being researched. In fact in any relationship or interaction there

³⁸ This field research methods course was implemented by the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Oxford University.

³⁹ My previous experience of field work took place in New York City in 2010.

will be differentials (which may equate to differentials in power) between the two parties. Moreover, each party holds the potential to affect and change the other. My position as both an insider and outsider to the two field groups has particular implications in addition to these already complicated considerations. Acknowledgement of this 'inbetweener' (insider *and* outsider) position enables me to highlight some of the influences of these factors on the research process and the participants I interact with⁴⁰.

I am of British heritage, white, female and my first language is English. I grew up in London⁴¹. I believe that I am educationally and economically privileged. However, it was through my contrasting experiences at the two field sites that I realised how relative such assessments of 'privilege' are. I do not consider myself to be religious or notably spiritual. However, there are some 'New Age' ideas, products and practices that I do embrace.

At Shanti, I often felt as though I was in a place in which I 'belong,' in which I was comfortable and in which I was welcome. At this site I 'tick' many of the same demographic 'boxes' as many of the other practitioners there, who are, in the majority (like me) female, white, 25-35 years old, used to living in London, and married. It seems likely that having these factors in common served to contribute

⁴⁰ There will always be differing positionalities in the research relationship, no matter how hard one tries to make these differences benign. Exploring my positionality is certainly useful but it does not necessarily 'solve' the issue of my difference from the research participants.

⁴¹ However, due to London's diversity, there are areas of London where I am more of an 'outsider' than others.

to the type of rapport that emerged between myself and the informants. Also, having practiced yoga for some years, I was relatively relaxed with regards to my expectations of what might occur during a yoga class in an urban Western context. It seems fair to assume the possibility that I communicated some of these shared demographic factors, previous experiences and mental attitudes, such as through my appearance or body language. These modes of communication may have encouraged participants to view me as an 'insider' of the context.

However, some other factors were not so in-sync and rendered me with an 'outsider' status. The lifestyles of the majority of practitioners are far-removed from my own life experiences. The wealth most of the participants had access to led to some references to events, people, venues and brands that I could not instantly understand or adequately respond to. Moreover, the vast majority of the women who I spoke with had different educational experiences to me, and we differed on our view of the value of higher education. Very few informants had attended university or had particularly enjoyed 'academic' pursuits during school. Descriptions of my own undertakings at a university (which in a different context may signify a kind of privilege) were often met with expressions of great sympathy. As Laurella said: "I still have nightmares that I have to do the kind of thing you're doing. You know, the 'revision nightmare' or the 'essay deadline nightmare.' Oh God, no – you poor thing." Such occasions remind that however open and welcoming participants might be to a researcher who can claim some kind of

‘insider’ status, there are ways for informants to establish where on the insider-outsider scale a researcher might be.

At the Sufi Order, being female, white, British and from London was neither remarkable nor particularly representative of this demographically diverse group. While my age was younger than the average age of the participants and my economic background slightly more 'comfortable,' these factors did not (to my knowledge) effect the field work process. The majority of participants were happy to include me in the practices and teachings most of the time. Although the practices were new to me, I made substantial effort to become 'local' and appear natural or at least subtle, rather than an obtrusive outsider with a notebook and pen.

Nevertheless, in comparison to Shanti, my outsider status was far more apparent throughout the research process, primarily due to participants' suspicion of my academic agenda and my 'not-initiated' status. Although my educational background was not dissimilar to those of many of the participants in this context, not everybody felt able to welcome my academic motivations. In addition to declining interview requests (n= 9), on numerous occasions informants explicitly instructed me not to repeat parts of discussions because, as an academic, I would 'probably distort them.' I also sensed some practitioners' suspicion of my approach on the occasions when a member asked me if any of the leaders knew I was conducting my research, and when two of the practitioners called me “the

spy” (albeit in my presence and with a smile). Unlike at Shanti (where merely participating in the yogic practices enabled inclusion) at the Order, my status as a non-initiate probably further distanced me from the full members.

These scales of being an ‘insider’ and/or ‘outsider’ are dynamic. In separate moments, I was aware that I was actively able to affect 'where' on the scale I might appear to be. At times, I realised my accent and language may have adapted to the person I was speaking to. I could answer the same questions in multiple ways, offering different answers with distinct connotations for a particular context, even though all of the answers were 'true.' The clothes and jewellery I wore, whether I reached the interview by bus or taxi, and what visible ‘researcher’ materials I displayed (taking notes or 'just' observing) were also manipulable.

Transparency and Consent

In both field sites, I openly disclosed that the primary reason for my participation was to conduct research. Very quickly, the majority of practitioners at each site were aware of this motivation and many asked questions that enabled me to explain the project in more detail. However, beyond the context of interviews in which I could explicitly state the fundamental nature of the research, it was not always possible to expound in-depth explanations for my presence to *everybody* who

I shared the field space with (e.g. in classes with larger groups). Consequently, it is likely some students falsely assumed I was exclusively of 'insider status.'

Every interviewee and contributor to the group conversations gave informed and withdrawable consent. I talked with each participant to make the purpose of the project clear and to explain what might be done with the information. I stated that the practitioner was free to ask questions and withdraw from the meeting at any stage. No children or people with disabilities participated as informants.

Anonymity

During the introductory conversations with each prospective informant, I explained that the participant could choose to remain anonymous and listed some of the options that informants could opt for to ensure privacy and confidentiality. These options included the removal of identifiers and using a pseudonym or citing 'anonymous' in all data dissemination (including in the field notes). I also explained that the participant could retract statements at any time. In many cases, especially in the Shanti context, informants were either happy or would outwardly request for the project to credit their real name in the presentation of their data. Fewer members of the Sufi group had this preference. Within each population, informants chose a combination of solutions to privacy; some maintaining their

real name, others requesting a pseudonym, and others preferring to have 'anonymous' cited and no identifiers. In all of these instances, the participant chose the approach. This project honours every guarantee of privacy and confidentiality that was made.

Adaptability

I was also careful to engage in processes of reflection throughout my time in the field to ensure ongoing analysis which could help me adapt the data collection techniques to the individual participant, research population and locale. I chose to use broad themes in my conversations with participants and improved the choice of themes I used through seeking feedback from the informants themselves. I also invited the participants to suggest topics and questions since they were the 'experts' in what is significant to them. Within each interview, in-the-moment analysis allowed me to respond and direct the conversation in the ways I thought to be most appropriate. This process was iterative, with each interview shaping the themes that I proposed in subsequent meetings. Informants frequently raised topics of a sensitive and emotional nature but always on their terms. It was the interviewee who would introduce these topics to the conversation and I pursued the issues carefully and gently if the informant appeared open to discussing them.

Giving Back to the Field Communities

At both field sites, I was keen to volunteer to work for free in a capacity that could be of some use to the group. At Shanti, this offer resulted in my role as a receptionist and in handing out promotional leaflets. At the Sufi Order, I assisted during some large seminars. Since the end of the official period of fieldwork, I have continued to visit both centres and maintain relationships. I also offered to send copies of the finished thesis to informants; I find the assumption that the people I am quoting may read this work has brought the exacting precision and sensitivity to a context that is necessary for strong ethnography.

Overview

The paucity of ethnographic descriptions of the New Age Movement and commodified New Age practice in particular denies a substantial assessment of how fieldwork has been conducted in comparable contexts in the past. In this project, utilising a mixture of methods has resulted in a plentiful range of participant narratives. These first-person insights lead the discussion concerning engagements with individualism and collectivism within New Age experience and also deeply inform the decisions regarding which contributing literatures are of chief relevance.

Although this methodology produces many useful findings, there are also limitations and difficulties to address. For instance, I did not directly access retreats, private ('one on one') classes, 'advanced' Sufi teachings, certain styles of yoga (e.g. prenatal yoga or naked yoga), particularly expensive workshops, and online shopping; I did however, approach these matters during interviews. Another issue is that researching two groups in the ways noted here will not generate theories that are generalisable to the New Age at large. However, the approach will allow me to propose theories that I believe to be true for two examples of New Ageism and that may be applicable to contexts and circumstances beyond the two fields. For the most part, the implementation of the research strategy, employment of qualitative data collection methods and concern for ethical considerations enabled me to uncover significant findings at the two sites. The next section describes how this thesis will present those findings.

Plan of the Thesis

Numerous verdicts emerge from the analysis of the field data and the evaluation of the literatures that are of most relevance to those data. At the heart of these findings are modes in which the individual and the collective intersect and ways in which Shanti and the Sufi Order facilitate those interactions. This thesis

seeks to argue that the individual-collective dialectic manifests in particular forms across both sites and that the forms appear with divergent orientations, indicating multiple types of individualisms that are reliant on multiple types of collective forces. In reflecting and contributing to those forms and orientations, each New Age organisation supports a particular type and 'balance' of the 'individual-collective' dialectic that is locally meaningful to the dominant social and personal dispositions of the participants who frequent the centre. The appeal of participation may thus not necessarily centre around the experience of 'individual authority' as much as it centres around the organisation's ability to echo and heighten a balance of individual *and* collective forces in modes that are familiar and attractive to a group of social persons.

The next chapter constitutes a literature review that contextualises this argument. The evaluative account seeks to scrutinise texts that prioritise the New Age, commercialism, individualism, or a combination of the three. In so doing it explores the themes of: the ways in which scholarship on the New Age defines individualism, why the New Age's relationship with commercial activity is said to contribute to or even cause its individualistic character, and why some scholars believe excessive individualism has dire moral and social consequences.

With the literary context in mind, the ethnographic chapters each consider one of the four manifestations of the individual-collective dynamic that happens

within both sites. Each chapter approaches the discussion of the intersection within the context of a particular theme. Chapter 3 takes the students' class backgrounds as its focal point and examines how the practitioners' (c) class cultures and (i) ideologies of self co-produce each other. Chapter 4 concentrates on the capitalist socio-economic context of the organisations and examines how the (c) social traits of the milieu and the (i) agents who represent the centre intersect. In Chapter 5, the emotional landscape of the participant is the central issue; this chapter explores the interchange between (c) mutually held tenets of hope and (i) the person's felt experience. The final ethnographic discussion in Chapter 6 revolves around the theme of the teacher and how (c) communities of students and the (i) set apart teacher co-depend on one another.

The findings and arguments woven throughout these chapters cumulatively build the overarching claims and contributions of this work. The seventh and final chapter recounts the nature of the individual-collective dynamic and the four ways in which it appears at both of the field sites. The chapter then overviews the differences between the modes in which the 'same' four manifestations appear in each context and argues that Shanti and the Sufi Order respectively support distinct orientations of the dialectic. The thesis ends by discussing the implications of these findings and what meaning those judgements have for current bodies of scholarship.

This opening to the project has sought to acquaint the reader with the central themes, issues, terms, contexts and methods of this investigation. These introductory presentations will be built upon in the next chapter, which critically reviews the literature that is of most bearing to the key concerns of the project. These analyses will further qualify the range of the approach and argument that this thesis advocates.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

The Commercial New Age and the Individual: Definitions, Dichotomies and Disputes

As the previous chapter elucidates, this project explores intersections of types of individualism and types of collectivism within two commercial New Age settings. In order to appreciate the weight and implications of the findings that grow from this study, it is necessary to examine what scholars have written about the principal themes of the project thus far. There are three relating but distinct research territories that can contextualise the central concerns of this thesis. One, much of the literature concerning the New Age highlights individualism as a defining feature of the spiritual culture. These discussions typically distinguish the New Age as the exemplary 'religion of individualism' and contrast this type of spirituality with other religious and spiritual collectives by virtue of the New Age's emphasis on individual authority. Two, another pervasive literary category revolves around the claim that the New Age is fundamentally consumeristic and very well suited to consumer capitalism. The links between consumerism, capitalism and individualism furthers the portrayal of the New Age's orientation

towards the self. Three, there is also a body of literature that expounds disparaging assessments of the New Age by virtue of its individualistic and consumeristic tendencies. Authors who produce this type of scholarship tend to endow the focus on the individual (particularly in commercial religio-spiritual contexts) with a negative moral value. These three areas of research present some important claims, which prompt examination and even debate. Indeed, there is a lot at stake in these arenas, not least understanding the nature and moral worth of a rapidly growing spiritual trend.

This chapter will describe the three research themes and will then present three alternative views. This approach seeks to highlight the current place of 'the individual' in texts about the New Age and the commercial New Age in particular. Moreover, the evaluative reviews will also expose the inconsistencies and research niches that inspire this project and which, this investigation helps to rectify.

Three Themes

The Prioritisation and Definition of Individualism in Scholarship on the New Age

The study of religion tends to place great emphasis on social structural factors in explanations of forms of religious life, especially when employing sociological and

anthropological methodologies. Conversely, the scholarship concerning New Ageism typically prioritises the individual and agency, *even* when employing sociological and anthropological methodologies⁴². This difference may partly be because the New Age movement is only a movement in “the loosest sense of the term” (Aldred, 2000: 329) . There is no creed or definite tenets in this 'movement,' nor any requirements for membership. Rather, 'New Age' refers to a wide range of philosophies, products and practices that the individual adherent chooses between.

This section explores the ways in which numerous theorists venerate individualism as a defining trait of New Ageism. These scholarly presentations employ surprisingly similar terms, suggesting a singular conception of what 'the individual' may mean within New Age contexts. An important aspect of the nature of this characterisation is that individualism can at times appear separate to, or even opposing, examples of collectivism, encouraging the perception of an 'individual/ collective' binary. Relating dichotomies such as distinctions between 'internal/ external' and 'spirituality/ religion' also feature in these dominant descriptions of 'New Age individualism,' which further contribute to the appearance of boundaries between the factors.

Heelas' contributions to the emphasis on the individual in studies of new spiritualities have been the most influential and are still the viewpoints that other scholars of New Ageism most commonly draw upon. For Heelas, “unmediated

⁴² These discussions of the New Age individual do not wholly neglect social structures altogether, but rather accentuate the place of the agent.

individualism,” that is the assumption that “authority lies with the Self”, is a definitive characteristic of the New Age (1996: 21). He terms the process of the individual distancing from external authority and collective tradition, and in stead seeking “autonomous self-cultivation” as 'detraditionalisation' (1996: 162). On this topic, he proclaims:

“[T]hose who think in terms of the ideology of the autonomous self, who attach very great value to being themselves, who attach equal value to expressing what they are, who have a 'metaphysical dread' of being encumbered... are much more likely to be attracted to the (relatively) detraditionalised New Age than to other forms of religiosity, namely those which speak the language of externally-informed injunctions” (Heelas, 1996: 161-162).

This is one of the many cases in which Heelas distinguishes the New Age from “other forms of religiosity” (1996: 162) by virtue of the New Age's detraditionalised and individualistic orientation. From this standpoint, “if there is too much external authority... one can conclude that one is no longer with the New Age” (Heelas, 1996: 35). In 2008, Heelas introduced the term 'Inner-Life Spirituality' to highlight that, for this type of new spiritual form, “what matters is delving within oneself” (2008: 5).

Heelas' observations appear to have been met with few reservations by the new spiritualities research community and as such, definitions of individualism in texts about the New Age share an emphasis on internal, individual authority, as opposed to external, institutional authority. For instance, writing at the same time

as Heelas, Hanegraaff asserts: “the New Age recognizes no spiritual authority higher than personal inner experience. Genuine spiritual guides may give help and advice, but will never attempt to impose their views in an authoritative manner” (1996: 201; cf. Hanegraaff, 1999: 152). Sutcliffe accepts that the self is the dominant or 'ultimate' authority in New Ageism (1995); he also writes that New Agers practice of 'multiple seekership' prevents anything beyond “a modicum of institutionalisation” and as such organisational forms do not evolve beyond the most basic (2003: 224). Introigne agrees on the prioritisation of individualism but goes so far as to lament that scholarship on the New Age does not emphasise the individual's authority enough, leading him to write about the category of 'Next Age,' i.e. “New Age's passage from the third to the first person... to centring on the individual self” (2001: 62). Echoing Durkheim's predictions, these texts unanimously depict new spirituality as being “free, private [and] optional... fashioned according to one's own needs and understanding” (Durkheim, in Pickering, 1975: 96).

Some scholars of new spiritualities associate the emphasis on internal authority (rather than external authority) with broader occurrences in contemporary Western societies. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) claim that the individualistic nature of new spiritualities is the outcome of the “subjective turn” in modern culture. The subjectivities of each person (e.g. their feelings and personal experiences) have become the unique “source of meaning, significance and

authority” (2005: 11). This theory shows similarities with Heelas' notion of detraditionalisation (1996), and his earlier works that attend to increasing cultural interest in psychological matters (1982; 1987). Comparably, Luckmann (1967) believes two parallel processes are responsible for the shift from traditional collective authorities to individual authority: secularisation (i.e. the departure from traditional communal 'Church' institutions) and sacralisation (i.e. attributing internal “subjectivisms” with sacred status). In his opinion, it is the combination of secularisation and sacralisation that results in the turn to individualistic spirituality.

In addition to the prioritisation of individualism and the utilisation of similar terms in the delineation of that individualism, many of these scholars' characterisations of the New Age feature dichotomous descriptions that can encourage the perception of binaries. For instance, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) set “subjective-life spirituality” against religion to aid their definitions of each. Consistent with Heelas' previous prioritisation of the *internal* agency of the person over *external* influences of the group, “subjective-life spirituality” refers to *inner* sources of authority that empower the self. In contrast, what Heelas and Woodhead term “life-as religion” refers to a congregational domain in which an *outer*, transcendent being is the authority. In an earlier work, Woodhead and Heelas (2000) make a similar distinction when they stress that New Age religion highlights the individualistic values of freedom and self-assertion, while traditional types of religion evoke communal structures, a historical body of shared beliefs,

traditions and values of obedience and humility. In this view, the New Age is different because “authority is taken to lie within *rather* than without” (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 11⁴³). Adopting a comparable approach, Sutcliffe and Bowman state that the common features of New Age spiritualities are the “ideals of self-determination and agency *over* constraints of institutional membership and ideological boundary” (2000: 8⁴⁴). More recently, Heelas has written that “New Age spiritualities of life appear to be *opposed* to the restrictive, the regulatory, those impositions of external sources of authority which are served by rules and regulations” (Heelas, 2008: 2-3⁴⁵). All of these descriptions of boundaries between 'individual/ collective', 'spirituality/ religion', 'internal/ external' and 'within/ without' embolden an impression of divisions rather than intersections.

This presentation shows that there are numerous scholarly contributions to the discussion of individualism within the context of new (age) spiritualities. These theories consistently prioritise 'the individual' in definitions of the New Age, and moreover, characterise individualism in exceptionally similar terms that centre around vast extents of internal authority. Many of these arguments employ dichotomous descriptions, which generate an emphasis on the internal, the within and the spiritual, as opposed to the external, the without and the religious. The next section will continue the examination of the alleged association between

⁴³ Italics added.

⁴⁴ Italics added.

⁴⁵ Italics added.

individualism and New Ageism by considering texts that enforce links between consumerism, capitalism and the accentuation of individualism.

Consumerism and Increasing Individualism

There are well established textual traditions that associate consumerism or postmodern consumer capitalism (or both) with growing degrees of individualism. There is also a body of literature that highlights the New Age as the ideological form best suited to consumerism and postmodern consumer capitalism due to the New Age's individualistic disposition and commercial activity. These linkages imply a tripartite relationship between consumerism (or consumer capitalism), increasing individualism, and New Age spiritualities, that feeds the depiction of the spiritual movement's highly individualistic nature.

As Sayer writes, the claim that consumer culture is individualistic, has become a “common criticism”:

“buyers appear as individuals with money, seeking to satisfy their individual preferences, and all that is necessary... is that the buyer can afford what he or she wants. This dimension has been reinforced by the individualist versions of liberalism that have come to dominate theories of economic life” (2003: 354).

Lasch holds the very view Sayer describes. In addition, Lasch also states that consumption leads to a lack of relationships such that people then – in an attempt

at compensation – partake in further purchases to help them feel happier in their isolation. Inevitably though, for Lasch, consumption results in a retreat from the collective, public (political) realm (1979: 4).

Campbell's renowned analysis of the relations between consumerism, romanticism and individualism concludes that the general nature of consumption concerns a change in the individual's identity. Campbell locates part of the cause for this change in the romantic world view with its emphasis on being true to one's inner spirit. The individual imagines that a particular product will result in a transformed and 'more valid' self, before the purchase leads to inevitable disillusion and the desire to consume something else (1987).

Comparably, the argument that progressive industrialisation increasingly erodes community has been widely considered since Marx's work on self-alienation (1980 [1844]) and commodity fetishism (2000 [1869]), and Durkheim's work on anomic (1952 [1897]). However, the chief theorists of postmodernity and consumer capitalism⁴⁶ state that the consumer capitalist context generates whole new extents of this process (Harvey, 2008 [1989]); Jameson 2005 [1991]; Lyotard, 2005 [1979]). These thinkers reach this conclusion by starting with the proposition that the consumer capitalist socio-economic circumstances aggravate a sense of

⁴⁶ The following scholars explicitly and convincingly relate postmodernism to consumer capitalism: Harvey, (2008 [1989]): 39; Huyssen, (1984: 22); Jameson, (2005 [1991]: 89); Lyotard, (2005 [1979]: 28). These thinkers typically describe the shift from modernism to postmodernism as being dependent on changing modes of capitalist political and economic regulation; namely, from 'fordism' (1917-1972) to 'flexible accumulation' (1972 onwards). The authors in the main, characterise the primary traits of 'flexible accumulation' as intensified rates of innovation, turnover, taste inducement, change and dislocation.

fragmentation and uncertainty. Writing about the ambiguity which the situation induces, Harvey states: “the only secure thing about consumer capitalism is its sense of insecurity... (it) can be characterised by a disgust with fixed categories, which forces people to accept a chaotic and fragmented world” (2008 [1989]: 11; 125). In similar terms, Berman notes that this socio-economic climate implicitly threatens to destroy everything we are because “it is, paradoxically, a unity of disunity; an overwhelming sense of fragmentation, ephemerality and chaos” (1983: 15). Lyotard asserts that this “lack of reality” occurs because consumer capitalism “inherently possesses the power to derealise familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality, except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction” (2005 [1979]: 74). The outcome of these circumstances is that postmodern societies suffer a “collapse of collective memory and a crisis of cultural transmission” (Hervieu-Leger, 2000 [1993]: 129; Jameson, 2005 [1991]: 53; Lyotard, 2005 [1979]: 74).

These 'crumbling cage' theses (Heelas and Woodhead, 2001: 48) which assert that the world of late capitalism is awash with uncertainty, claim that in response, there is a surge of individualism because the person has to depend on the self, as opposed to relying on collective structures and communal values. Each scholar phrases their conception of this societal trend in their own way. For instance, Harvey notes that “rampant individualism is a *necessary* outcome” of the condition

of consumer capitalism (2008 [1989]: 171); Lyotard states that the direction of attention shifts from without to within (2005 [1979]: 16); Bauman writes of the change in focus from public issues to private issues (1991: 261); and Beck argues that the primary political concerns no longer detail class and equality, but rather issues which relate to individualisation such as personal development (1986: 155). Berger et al. claim that the “accent of reality” transfers from the objective order of institutions to the realm of subjectivity: “the individual's experience of himself becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective world. Therefore, the individual seeks to find his 'foothold' in reality in himself rather than outside himself” (Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1974: 73-5). Taylor has also written extensively on the features of mainstream society that relate to 'the turn to the self', which he calls “the ethic of self-fulfilment” (1989; 1991). He argues that now, “our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves... The notion of what I want to call self-determining freedom, is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences” (1991: 14; 25-7). Within all of these theories, the emphasis on the individual is clear.

Authors who stress the links between consumerism or postmodern consumer capitalism, an individualistic orientation, and New Ageism, advance the portrayal of the spiritual culture as inevitably individualistic. With particular emphasis on consumerism, Carrette and King use the term “individualist/ consumerist

spiritualities” throughout *Selling Spirituality* (2005) to refer to New Age like groups. This phrase encourages interchangeable and merging conceptions of “individualist” and “consumerist” to describe “spiritualities.” Moore's view is compatible with Carrette and King's characterisation. He also associates New Ageism's leaning towards the individual with commercial activities. In fact he goes so far as to cite the intensity of these processes as reasoning for why the movement has become “the reigning champion of religious salesmanship” (1994: 256). Aldred also contends that the New Age is “primarily a consumerist movement” and fuels individualism by exercising personal preferences. She contends these circumstances probably occur because the majority of those who identify themselves as New Age “participate primarily through the purchase of texts and products” (2000: 330). In these scholars' views, engaging with New Age culture and consuming New Age commodities, reinforces consumerist, individualistic modes of being (Aldred: 2000: 330; Moore, 1994: 256), or, in Carrette and King's words, contributes to “the sins of capitalism” (2005:170).

Discussions of the correspondence between consumer capitalism, individual authority and the New Age, further contribute to the rendering of New Age contexts as individualistic. Respectively, Zizek and Beckford both contend that New Ageism is the ideological form that best aligns with the capitalism of today, because this type of spirituality is a mode for escaping external authority and

collective meta-narratives (Žizek, 2009: 28; Beckford, 1992: 19-20). These theorists are not alone in their view that New Age culture conforms to postmodern capitalist traits. Aldridge affirms that the movement corresponds exceedingly well to the detraditionalised context of 'multiple choice' that appeals to (postmodern) individuals who are used to pursuing personal preferences and selecting from an array of ideas and practices (2000). York asserts, “the freedom inherent in the current religious supermarket” reflects the fragmentation of the postmodern world (1994: 15); and Sutcliffe concludes, the New Age acceptance of “multiple seekership” echoes the “pluralisation of lifeworlds' inherent in postmodernity” (2003: 207-208). The appeal of the New Age may thus lie in the resonance it will have for people socialised in a postmodern context.

In sum, there is a body of scholars, including both the classic and the contemporary, who relate consumerism or capitalism (or both) with a growing focus on the individual. Some areas of literature allude to these links in an attempt to demonstrate that New Age ideology and practice is exceptionally compatible with individualistic consumerism and postmodern consumer capitalism. These descriptions, by referencing individualism, fuel the claim that the New Age is an individualistic spirituality. The next discussion turns to an important implication of endowing New Ageism with an individualistic status.

Attributing Individualism with Negative Moral Values

The first two themes of this literature review have considered the emphases on and dominant understandings of 'individualism' in scholarship about the New Age and texts concerning consumerism or postmodern consumer capitalism. These areas of research allude to the cumulative emphases on individualism in discussions of the New Age and the commercial activity of the New Age. An important theme that relates to these two discussions is the charge that morally, individualism can be detrimental or even dangerous, especially in the context of religio-spiritual involvement with consumerism. This condemnatory assessment sometimes includes the claims that individualistic modes of being discourage engagement with matters of political and ecological significance. The assessments also at times specifically focus on the individualism of commercial religio-spiritual (or specifically 'New Age') situations, which, it is said, damages the purchasers of spiritual commodities, induces isolation, causes victimisation or a combination of adverse outcomes.

For Taylor, increasing individualism should be a primary source of worry for developing societies, because individualism risks despotism; i.e. the public not substantially engaging with political issues (Taylor, 1991: 9). "Individual self-fulfilment should be seen as a self-stultifying travesty" he writes, because focusing on the self "both flattens and narrows lives" (1991: 4, 22). According to this

perspective, life can become restricted because of “the primacy of instrumental reason” i.e. when the criteria for decision-making is a 'cost-benefit' analysis for oneself. Taylor reasons that, with this mindset, the ability to make positive decisions for a greater collective good will be lost (1991: 4). He relates this moral position to the belief that every individual has a right to his or her own views and that one ought not to challenge another person's values (1991: 17). This fear of “the liberalism of neutrality” is comparable to what Bloom identifies as the acceptance of a facile relativism (Bloom, 1987: 132). By not allowing for collective consensus that some moral views are of 'higher' worth than others, a multitude of injustices go unquestioned and social fragmentation persists.

Loy appears to agree with Taylor, but takes particular issue with despotism in relation to the “individualistic outcome of religion in the markets” (1997: 277)⁴⁷. Loy states that the 'individualistic market system' discourages people from involving themselves in political deprivation issues. The system also minimises consideration of and activism against the environmental damage and destruction of irreplaceable ecological systems. Loy adds that left on its own (with its current

⁴⁷ The suspicion of integrations between religio-spirituality and commercial activity is widespread (especially in Western contexts). Tawney's (1990 [1922]) prose for instance, has actually been popularised by those who draw on religion to critique the capitalist agenda. Additionally, numerous ethnographies indicate that there are many indigenous communities that perceive commodity relations to be a domain of destructive supernatural forces (e.g. Taussig, 1980; Ardener, 1970; Gudeman, 1986; Weller, 1994). Interestingly, it appears that scholars who explore the commodification of religion in Asian contexts find less suspicion of the intersection of commercialism and religio-spirituality (e.g. Daniels, 2003 and Reader and Tanabe, 2008 on Japan; Alter, 2004, Parry, 1994 and van der Veer 1988 on India).

practices), consumer capitalism will continue to cause destruction (1997: 277)⁴⁸. For him, religious and spiritual groups have a duty to voice the dangers of individualistic market capitalism and are particularly well suited to, given their ability to offer alternative world-views with collective force (1997: 276). He proposes that the participation of religio-spiritual groups in business pursuits is thus particularly contemptible because the market “corrodes the very community values it needs to restrain its excesses” (1997: 283). Comparable to Loy's argument is Casanova's assertion that religion should offer a 'collective protest' to the extremities of the individualistic capitalist market in order to “help modernity save itself” (1994: 234)⁴⁹.

Carrette and King focus on the selling of spiritual commodities in particular and lament that this activity leads to the losses of community values, compassion and collective identity. They assume the spirituality which the consumers engage with is “a self-styled and custom-built spirituality purchased in the marketplace rather than one generated through the social and historical lines of transmission within communities” (2005: 80). In their distillation of the individual from the collective, these spiritualities diminish the resources of “social conscience and community identity” that religions traditionally provided for humanity (2005: 84).

⁴⁸ Loy is one of many who express this prediction. Wilk's work also affirms that consumption is typically “socially, ecologically and personally destructive” (2001: 246; 1998). For discussions of similar concerns, see: Dobell (1995: 237) and Stern et. al. (1997).

⁴⁹ See also: Berger (1972), Hudson (1987), and Williamson (1986), who reprimand advertising that features religious figures.

Unlike religions, “individualist/ consumerist spiritualities” reflect a Western cultural obsession with the self and “distinct lack of interest in compassion, the disciplining of desire, selfless service to others and questions of social justice” (2005: 114). With these statements, Carrette and King not only reinforce the individual/ collective dichotomy, but associate individualism with spirituality and negative outcomes, and associate collectivity with religion and positive outcomes.

Carrette and King also propose the argument that by purchasing spiritual products, consumers are victimised. This victimisation occurs, Carrette and King reason, because the buyer will inevitably face isolation (2005: 27). The private and individualistic nature of consuming spiritual commodities constructs the purchaser “as a distinct unit – a kind of hermetically sealed and isolated self, as opposed to a relational and interdependent self” (2005: 57). The collective force of the market generates individual isolation.

Other thinkers also claim that the consumer is vulnerable to the effects of commercial religio-spiritual circumstances (Einstein, 2008: 208; Halliday, 2000: 4; McKean, 1996: 265). “The real problem”, writes Miller, “is that it systematically confuses and misdirects well-intentioned people” (2005: 225). Like Miller, Berger describes the consumer as being unaware of the dangers of fervent individualism. Berger writes that the self-absorption of the market entraps the consumer; the market simply being a “meeting-place for deluded consumers and manipulative

producers” (cited in Aldridge, 2007: 90). Some of these thinkers thus appear to understand the commodification and consumerisation of religion as a force that may give the appearance of autonomy and choice, but in reality turns people into passive conformists. In the act of “freeing the mind from the dogma of religion, consumers now instead enter the thought-control of the individualism” of the capitalist system (Carrette and King, 2005: 77).

Some lines of criticism against the New Age echo these arguments. This correspondence is possibly due to New Ageism's seeming prioritisation of the individual and the spiritual culture's engagement with consumerism. Commentators such as Wilson (1966: 86-102) and Bruce (1996: 129-168; 2002: 203-228) cite New Age like spiritualities as evidence of the detrimental effects of an increasing orientation towards the concerns of the self. In fact Bruce claims the “individual autonomy, the freedom to choose, competes with the power of the community. To the extent that the former is stressed, the latter is necessarily weakened.” On these grounds he contests the positive evaluation of the New Age by scholars such as Heelas and attempts to deconstruct its appeal. His suggestion is that partaking in New Age activities has no ethical or moral worth; rather, these are frivolous and self-indulgent pursuits that thrive in social contexts “short on authority and long on consumer rights” (2002: 89; 93). Other comparable deprecatory assessments include: “self-absorption” (Schur, 1976), “hedonism”

(Bell, 1996: 72) and most commonly, “narcissism” (Casanova, 1994: 53; Lasch, 1979, Miller, 2005: 125). In these instances, characterisations of the New Age echo misgivings about individualism and express mistrust of the self pursuing pleasure within the realm of spirituality.

This third presentation has recounted some fears and critiques of individualism (especially individualism relating to commercial religio-spiritual forms). The disparaging assessments at times focus on types of political and ecological disengagement, and consumer isolation. As has been shown, some thinkers' opinions of the New Age draw on comparable scathing evaluations.

With three core literary themes now in mind, the following section will offer three contrasting perspectives. These alternative views serve to deconstruct the three topics considered here and in turn, seek to illuminate some of the debates which are relevant to this project. Specifically, the rest of this chapter will explore: difficulties raised by the depiction of individualism that dominates in scholarship on the New Age, the conclusivity of the relationship between consumerism and a heightened concern with the self, and whether the negative valuations of increasing individualism are justified.

Three Alternative Views

Flaws in the Portrayal of 'New Age Individualism'

As has been described, some prominent scholarship highlights extensive individualism as a defining feature of New Age culture. These literatures consistently describe this 'individualism' as meaning 'individual authority' and often associate it with broader cultural shifts from external authority to internal authority. These characterisations tend to contrast 'individual/ collective,' as well as relating dichotomies such as 'internal/ external' and 'spirituality/ religion.'

There is little evidence to refute the claim that individual authority is an important feature of many people's experience of New Age spirituality. However, it is necessary to call into question the extent, consistency and language of the prominent portrayals of 'New Age individualism.' This section will argue that the proclaimed extent of individualism and the ability of this extent to define and distinguish the New Age, is sometimes misleading. Moreover, the consistency of these portrayals (namely, always equating individualism with individual authority) denies the possibility that individualism may mean different things to different people or even different groups within the New Age. Finally, this evaluation will claim that the frequent employment of dichotomous language discourages clarity about the ways that collective or external factors interact with and even inform the perception and experience of individualism.

Heelas highlights the extent of emphasis on internal authority in New Age contexts as a defining and distinguishing feature of the New Age (1996: 162; 1991: 35) and many other key scholars working in the same field explicitly accept or echo this position. As such, there is a tendency to prioritise individualism as a feature that characterises the New Age as different to “other forms of religiosity” (Heelas, 1996: 162). However, this claim can misguide the reader. The association of new spiritualities with descriptions of broader cultural processes that lead to a change in inclination from external authorities to internal subjectivities can be found in the works of Luckmann (1967), Heelas (1996) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005). Yet an implication of this shift, is that it affects other people outside of the New Age as well. As such, the prioritisation of individualism does not allow for sufficient distinction between those who participate in New Age culture and those who are secular or members of 'traditional' religious institutions.

Sure enough, many scholars whose works focus on other religious and social contexts also emphasise the prominence of the individual. Davie's renowned text, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, (1994), argues that the “religious situation” in Great Britain at the end of the twentieth century, is one in which the sacred persists but not often in traditional, institutional, collective forms. The majority of British people believe in the sacred, without seeing the need to participate in religious institutions, opting for a more personal, individual answer. In a frequently cited passage, Bellah et al. describe 'Sheilaism', which is the name

one of their interviewees (Sheila) gave to her own religion. “It's just my own little voice” Sheila says in an attempt to define her faith, conveying the importance of her internal authority. Bellah et al. reason that “this [approach] suggests the logical possibility of over 220 million American religions, one for each of us.... [it is] radically individualistic religion” (1985: 220-221).

Hammond discusses “a shift in the meaning of the church from that of a collective-expressive agency to that of an individual-expressive agency” (1992: 169). Roof comparably notes: “the religious stance today is more internal than external, more individual than institutional, more private than public” (1996: 153). Bruce writes that while many British Catholics view the Pope as a 'leader', they do not often follow institutional instruction on contraception, abortion or divorce, but instead make individual assessments of these issues (2000: 229). The implication of the change in disposition towards internal authority is that there is evidence of a far-reaching shift towards an individual rather than of a collective experience of the sacred, which dilutes the ability of 'individualism' to distinguish the New Age from other sectors⁵⁰.

Farias and Laljee's study of individualism across New Age, Catholic and atheist/agnostic groups found New Agers score *higher* than the Catholic and non-

⁵⁰ Building upon this observation, is the claim that individualistic 'picking and mixing' (or “multiple seekership” [Sutcliffe, 2003: 224] or “self selection” [York, 1997: 414]) is not only not limited to New Age spirituality, but is also not actually anything new. Many authors claim that people have always inclined towards the 'eclectic' approach, conjoining doctrines, deities, saints, rites and calendar customs (Thomas, 1971; Hempton, 1988, Hutton, 1996).

religious groups on scales of collectivism that regard levels of tolerance and concern for the welfare of others (2008). Thus, depending on how the researcher identifies and defines 'individualism' and 'collectivism', the New Age might actually appear to be *less* individualistic in some ways (than other religious or secular groups).

In addition to the suggestion that the extent of individualism within New Age contexts is so unique that it may largely define and distinguish the spiritual culture is the issue of the consistency of these descriptions. As has been detailed, the chief scholars of the New Age portray their understandings of New Age individualism in extraordinarily similar terms. With the assumption that the source of authority is the most important element of individualism, these authors depict the “inner” (Heelas, 1996; Hanegraff, 1996), the “internal” (Luckmann, 1967), and the “within” (Casanova, 1994; Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000) as the dominant source of governance. In the same rendering, external authority is typically passive, unrecognisable or unacknowledged by the New Ager. However, as the chapters that follow argue, the two New Age groups of Shanti and the Sufi Order experience individualism and authority in different ways. Some New Agers (such as those at Shanti) understand the individual in forms that are comparable and largely reinforce the scholars' notions of autonomy. Others (such as those at the Sufi Order) proclaim a completely different conception of individuality, which requires submission to external authorities and institutional structures in order to

transcend to a realm where authority is no longer of relevance. These disparate findings suggest in the case of the Sufi Order collective, the application of 'New Age individualism' with its focus on individual authority is inappropriate. The contrasts between the two groups' descriptions and experiences of individualism, show individualism is not consistent across the whole of New Age culture.

Just as other scholarly contexts might conceive of individualism as denoting “a variety of definitions, not all of them equivalent” (Walsh, 1999: 630), so New Age scholarship can benefit from discussing different extents, depictions, and experiences of individualism. The conversation requires a conception of individualism that allows for greater nuance and fluidity so that diversities do not get overlooked. The divergences in extents and meanings of self-concepts, motivations or personally felt experiences for example, can be telling and, even indicative of collective differences within the New Age. Similarly, the divergences in extents and experiences of organisational authoritative structures, shared consciousness, hierarchical systems or mutual expressions can allude to the distinct decisions made by some New Age agents in collective contexts.

The dichotomous language, which so many of the scholars employ, discourages consideration of some of the prospective affinities and co-productions between individualism and collectivism as well as co-dependencies between relating factors such as the 'internal- external'. Although it is useful and sometimes necessary to highlight contrasts in order to characterise a form as distinct from other forms, an

outcome of the way this process has often taken place within the canon on new spiritualities is that the collective and external do not receive the credit and attention they are due. In an early work Heelas does explore the prospect that spiritualities that focus on the self develop techniques which in many ways socialise the subjective (1982: 69). Yet his later work on new spiritualities stress that the New Age centres around the authority and freedom of the self (1996: 221). Even if New Agers are actually listening to “internalized renderings” of another (external) authority, the point for Heelas is that a “truly' New Age community” centres around a situation in which “selves are alive, well, and fully operational;” the individual's authority is the prominent trait (Heelas, 1996: 206-207). Prince and Riches' ethnographic study of New Age groups in Glastonbury (2000), 'go against the grain' to argue that the groups sustain a mode of social organisation that show striking resemblance to “original forms of human society,” i.e. human society in its evolutionary basic form (2000: xiii). However, the discussion, which focuses on the social and the communal, raises as much suspicion as the championing of the autonomous individual in other accounts of the New Age. Their interesting argument appears to be a helpful attempt at acknowledging both the individual and the collective in New Age contexts, but, in practice, this account implies the forces of *communitas* and holism compete against the agent. A dichotomous situation is still present, just with the opposite emphasis. Given these tendencies, a clear consideration of the intersections

between individualism and collectivism is likely to reveal new insights such as how individual and collective might inform one another, in what ways and to what effect.

To briefly summarise, this section has sought to deconstruct the prioritisation and definition of individualism that is found within many texts about New Age culture. The evaluation suggests the extent and distinguishing power of individualism requires closer inspection as it could be misleading, and that this field of scholarship would benefit from a more flexible definition of individualism which allows for variation. Finally, it argued that the use of dichotomous language in discussions of the individual and the New Age, discourages an explicit identification of how collective forces and individual forces might intersect. The next evaluation critically considers the legitimacy of associating consumerism and consumer capitalism with increasing individualism.

Exploring the Relationship between Consumerism and Individualism

The literature review notes that many thinkers associate consumerism and postmodern consumeristic society with a surge of individualism. Moreover, numerous scholars distinguish the New Age as the most suitable religio-spiritual form for consumerism and postmodern consumer capitalism – a view which can further the presentation of the New Age as predominantly individualistic.

However, even if these correlations are accepted, the relationships are more complex than some of these writers suggest. For instance, the dynamics of the consumption of material products are different to the dynamics of the consumption of non-material products. Also, consumerism in general may be more relational and communal than much of the cited literature suggests. In fact, the postmodern context might inspire the individual to search for alternative institutional, communal narratives, rather than none at all.

Like much of the general literature on commercialism in general, the vast majority of literature which attends to the commercialisation of religion and spirituality focuses on the commodification of material products, rather than on other types of commercialisation, such as the selling of services, experiences or practices, for instance (e.g. Daniels, 2003, 2009; Moore, 2000⁵¹). The disproportionate emphasis on material commodities (which is perhaps due to Marx's influence) denies a substantial examination of the different circumstances that the commercialisation of non-material products may generate. For instance, Miller uses the example of 'invisible' factory workers in China making Easter bunnies to enforce his argument in *Consuming Religion* that consumerism is isolating and disconnects the consumer from the producer and the process of production (2005: 16). Yet Miller's example is very different in nature to paying for a yoga or

⁵¹ In his text *Selling God*, Moore forefronts a multitude of material merchandise for his main examples: Biblical diet books, rapture T-shirts, as well as bumper stickers and frisbees with inspirational messages. The selling of dolls and amulets are the central examples of Daniels' explorations of Japanese commercial spiritual culture (2003; 2009).

Sufi dance class - two commercial 'services' which are not separate from the labour which creates them. On the contrary, the yoga or Sufi teacher produces an experience which, through imitation, the student consumes in the presence of the producer. In these instances, production and consumption occur simultaneously and socially. There are connections between the producer and the consumer through the sharing of space, verbal interaction, the mirroring of behaviours and some mutually held ideas and values⁵². The nature of these experiences is largely relational; yet anybody familiar with the canon that links 'commercial spirituality' with individualism might presume otherwise.

Even in the cases of commercial activity that are predominantly material and in which the production and consumption of the commodity occur separately, the intrinsically 'individualistic' status of this situation is still questionable. Daniel Miller's *A Theory of Shopping* (1998) convincingly argues that commodification and collectivity are in fact very compatible. Purchasing products often develops the consumer's sociality in Miller's view. This development occurs, he argues, because shopping often involves considering close others and frequently appears as an act of love and individual sacrifice for the benefit of the relationship. From considering what colleagues, friends or relatives will think of an item of clothing bought for oneself, to referencing another's preferences in the process of decision-making in supermarkets, Miller develops a theory that suggests the roots of many

⁵² See Chapter 6.

purchases are in love, devotion and sociality.

Another way in which the relationship between consumerism and individualism is debatable concerns the social and communal potential of brands. Theologian Beaudoin writes that branding “transmits information about ourselves to ourselves and others” and is thus communicative and relational (2003: 5). Moreover, Grant argues brands now play the role of collective traditions and institutions for many individuals because they 'provide people with ideas to live by'. He states, consumer brands are the new shared “meaning for the masses” (Grant, 2000: 15). Muniz and O'Guinn's theory of “Brand Community” describes the potential of consumerism to create “a specialized community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.” Their thesis claims that such a community does not even require interaction between members, but that the individuals nevertheless constitute a collective because they exhibit “shared consciousness” and “shared traditions” and in this way are distinguishable from non-members. (2001: 412, 414).

These three 'alternative' perspectives on the relationship between consumerism and individualism, highlight: different forms of commercialisation and potentials for social connection through consumption, the place of love and relationships in acts of shopping, and links between brands, shared meanings and communality. These claims suggest that the association between consumerism and individualism is complex and that 'community' and 'connection' can appear in unpredictable

modes.

The place of individualism in the narrative of postmodern consumer capitalism and the fragmentation of society also requires re-examination. According to “postmodernist logic” (Harvey, 1989: 22), since there is no single interpretation of anything, in result one will feel more confident to turn to oneself as the authority for his or her own life. Yet although the thinkers who ascribe to this logic suggest, in Berger et al.'s words, “the individual's experience of himself becomes more real to him than his experience of the objective world” (1974: 75), the actual causal processes of this move from contextual fragmentation to self-authority seem rather ambiguous and hazy. In fact, it is difficult to assess to what extent the self-determination the scholars describe is *ever* fully possible. What may be the role of conditioning for example?

The experience of a surge of self-governance at a time of great social fragmentation, seems especially doubtful. If anything, one might wonder if the individual may feel internal fragmentation from the experience of the environmental fragmentation and in turn seek institutional supports to compensate for those feelings of uncertainty. Heelas and Woodhead argue that the “turn to the individual self... has been catered for by those secondary institutions which have proliferated during the past few decades” offering an alternative to “the failures of primary institutions” (2005: 44). Chapter 5 of this thesis offers some reinforcement for this idea by examining some of the (context driven)

anxieties of the informants. Paradoxically, the participants' disenchantments with major institutions and dominant collective meta-narratives appears to inspire these practitioners to seek an alternative institutional, collective support. Interestingly, however, the recounts of suspicion of the government, the banks, the church and 'organised religion,' never imply a distaste for oppressive meta-narratives that stifle a sense of the individual's authority and freedom. Rather, the primary source of dissatisfaction with these public institutions refer to corruption by virtue of the institutions being *too individualistic* while pretending not to be: prioritising the gain of a few 'elite' persons at the expense of caring adequately for an entire community. Such disenchantment and 'societal fragmentation' appears to not discourage participation in all institutional groups that offer meta-narratives, only encourage participation in private (commercial) groups instead.

Some of the nuances within the supposed 'relationships' between consumerism, consumer capitalist cultures and individualism need to be kept in mind in discussions of the New Age's compatibility with commerciality. Even if we embrace the idea that the New Age frequently encourages consumption and generates new markets, thus fuelling the capitalist agenda, the relationship between consumerism, the New Age and individualism is not as conclusive as many texts imply. There still might be the potential for forms of communal connection, shared ideas and the seeking of a type of institutional structure. Following this deconstruction, the final analysis returns to writers who condemn

individualism and instead, considers a less damning assessment.

A Less Condemnatory Portrayal of Individualism

The third theme of the literature review recounts texts that associate individualism with negative moral consequences. Moral neutrality, relativism and the dilution of both social conscience and community identity are just some of the charges that individualistic orientations face. Some thinkers take particular issue with the foci on the individual that derives from the commercial pursuits of religions and spiritualities. Fears for these circumstances include: an indifference for matters of political and ecological import, consumer isolation, self-absorption and delusion. Analyses of the New Age, at times echo parts of these lines of reasoning, which results in the indictment that this spiritual culture is narcissistic and devoid of any genuine moral or ethical standing.

The extent of these allegations is surprising in many ways. The negative rendering of individualism seems to lack any attempt at acknowledgement of more positive perspectives. Moreover, taking the commercial activities of religions and spiritualities as especially heinous is not warranted and in fact suggests the notion that the sacred and the monetary (or 'profane') should not mix. Rather than arguing that the 'individualistic' commercial world is antithetical to the 'collective' religious world, this deconstruction argues that the merging of the two is

pervasive, inevitable and does not necessarily lead to despotism and vulnerability. In the case of the New Age, there is evidence which suggests people who engage with this spiritual culture are very socially and politically active and far from vulnerable victims.

The suggestion that individualism inevitably leads to negative outcomes is questionable. Weber views increasing individualism and even fragmentation as inevitable, but not necessarily detrimental. In fact increasing individualism allows for maximum freedom of movement for Weber, rather than “self-alienated humanity” as Marx believes⁵³. In Weber's view, freedom of movement is 'beyond the cage of bondage' even if individualism cannot break the cage in its entirety (1921: 1402). Weber's more favourable connotations of individualism are identifiable in the opinion of one member at the Sufi Order who spoke during an interview about having the freedom to decide to select a particular New Age resource. To paraphrase this informant: choosing and paying for a practice or product can give leverage. The individual has a right to have expectations about the content and quality of the thing they are choosing and paying for and if those expectations are not met, the person can move on to select and purchase something else (anonymous). This interviewee suggests that the 'individualism' inherent in some commercial New Age situations affords him some personal power and freedom.

⁵³ What Marx calls “division of labour”, Weber terms “value freedom” (Lowith, 1983 [1960]: 85).

Another position that inspires analysis is the claim that the individualistic circumstances of commercial religio-spiritual pursuits are exceptionally lamentable. These thinkers allude to a broader suspicion of the mixing of the monetary and the sacred. For instance, the proposition that the individualistic realm of commerce and capitalism is damaging the *alternative* traditional functions of collective religion is very apparent, as is the complaint that religious and spiritual groups should be expressing disapproval *rather* than participating in capitalist culture. In these discourses “the commodity stands, at least rhetorically, as the symbol of contamination” (Miller, 1995: 145), from which the religio-spiritual should be distinct. As such, the religious world and the business world are at times written about as though they are separate entities, enforcing a type of Durkheimian 'sacred/ profane' dichotomy⁵⁴.

However, describing economic and spiritual ideologies as though they ought to be independent of each other is naïve. In fact, many of the texts on individualism and the commodification of religion appear to be lacking appreciation for arguably the principal gift that Weber's work endows us with: a realisation that fully exploring interwoven systems is a necessity for approaching topics such as the one in-hand, for we cannot understand one system without understanding its

⁵⁴ This dichotomy categorises the spiritual or religious as sacred and the commercial as secular or profane. Durkheim claimed the extremely sacred was understood to be inviolably distinct from the profane: “The sacred... cannot, without losing its nature, be mixed with the profane. Any mixture or even contact, profanes it... destroys its essential attributes” (2001 [1912]: 70).

interaction with the other (1930 [1904])⁵⁵. The suspicion of individualism and the disdain for the merging of religion and commerce (or the sacred and the profane) is unwarranted because the conceptual separation is an artificial one. While perhaps the conceptual distinction is occasionally useful for analytical purposes, a greater acknowledgment of a more dialectical relationship is necessary if the critiques of individualism are to appear legitimate (cf. Daniels, 2003; McDannell, 1995; Reader and Tanabe, 1998; Roberts and Roberts, 2003; van der Veer, 1997).

The degrees of cynicism surrounding religious-commercial interaction (and its individualistic outcomes) is also perplexing for another reason. Financial capitalising on religious resources and religious resources' capitalising on consumerism appears to be both cross-cultural and historically pervasive (McDannell, 1998: 248; Moore, 1994: 255). As Reader and Tanabe write in relation to the business endeavours of some temples and shrines in Japan:

“Since religions do not exist purely as teachings and practices apart from institutions, they survive and develop in ways necessary for the wellbeing of all organisations... one has to recognise that economics, marketing and commercialisation are part of the religious process. No doubt there are tasteful as well as reprehensible ways of doing business, but it is pointless to criticise religious establishments for their economic involvements. These activities are essential to the well-being of the temple or shrine and therefore to the continued practice of the religion itself” (2008: 206, 229-230).

⁵⁵ Nowhere is the argument that ideologies infuse each other made more persuasively than in Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Here Weber tentatively explores how a religious ethos may relate to and influence an economic ideology (1930). Hence, he deals with (in broad terms) two of the same components that constitute the primary concerns of many of the authors noted in this review: religious culture and economic culture.

Reader and Tanabe's refreshing argument offers a type of appeal to those who claim religion should resist and attest involvement in consumerism. Interestingly, Reader and Tanabe suggest having some business awareness is what makes a *group* resilient. The reality is that running many of these collectives costs money and if there was no commercial monetary exchange, there would be no group. This logical notion sheds new light on the idea that such commercial engagements dilute forms of collectivity.

Other problematic discourses centre around the claims that the consumer is victimised or becomes isolated, or a passive conformist. This condemnation resembles Heelas' recollection of how critics reacted forty years ago to the “acid-riddled hippies,” or twenty-five years ago to “the brainwashed participants of fascistic enlightenment seminars” (2008: 6). The suggestion that the purchase of spiritual products indicates peoples' gullibility is ineffective and patronising. It gives scant acknowledgment to the possibility that purchasers of religio-spiritual products could potentially be thoughtful agents participating in self-expression or collective spiritual exploration or both.

Some of the critiques of New Ageism that correlate with critiques of individualism are also at least partially unwarrantable. The fears of despotism, isolation, self-absorption and narcissism are very questionable. In Hollinger and Smith's (2002) study, the researchers survey practitioners from Europe, both

Americas and Israel. They found that many adherents of the New Age participate in political and social issues to a *greater* extent than the rest of the populations. Hedges and Beckford (2000) argue that individualistic and selfless practices coexist in the New Age, and that New Age contexts may foster values of social benevolence and compassion for others. Heelas contends with the argument that New Age practitioners 'consume without giving anything back'. Instead, he claims that much of the ideas and practices of the New Age are rooted in a will towards the ethically 'good' (2008); (cf. Farias and Laljee's study previously cited [2008]). These scholars suggest the fears of disconnection and 'New Age self- obsession' are somewhat uncalled for or at the very least, require closer inspection.

Another difficulty with these types of condemnations of the 'individualistic New Age' is the suggestion that there is an adequate (non-individualistic) alternative available to these spiritual seekers. Scholars such as Carrette and King hail congregational, institutional religion as providing community values, collective identity, social justice, compassion and discipline (2005: 84, 114). However, Hammond writes that even for those active in religious institutions, the meaning of that involvement has changed, with commitment now tending to centre on the extent to which such activity meets (individualistic) personal goals (Hammond, 1992: 26). It may thus be the case that the experience of participating in 'traditional' religious contexts does not necessarily always have the ideal

community-focus that some of these writers assume. Moreover, whether this kind of communal experience was ever the case to the extents that some of the scholars suggest seems unlikely. The accusation that New Age activity is essentially concerned with the individual neglects to note that the motivation behind much 'traditional' religious activity has long been motivated by looking after the spiritual wellbeing of the self (or soul) and as such, can also be fuelled by an individualistic quest.

This final evaluation deconstructs some of the ways writers (such as Bruce, 1996; Carrette and King, 2005; Loy, 1997; Taylor, 1991; Wilson, 1966) associate individualism with negative outcomes. It has sought to argue that individualism is not inherently detrimental and that the nature of disdain for religio-spiritual involvement in commercial activity is neither helpful nor justifiable. The broader application of these critiques of individualism to the New Age that imply New Ageism is a special case, is highly debatable, not least because some research implies New Agers engage with political issues more than the general population (Hollinger and Smith, 2002), show signs of selflessness and ethical consciousness (Hedges and Beckford, 2000; Heelas, 2008; Farias and Laljee, 2008) and many institutional religious groups perpetuate some individualistic motivations as well (Hammond, 1992).

Conclusion

Three specific themes were presented and deconstructed in this literature review: the prioritisation and definition of individualism in 'New Age' scholarship; consumer capitalism's association with increasing individualism and New Age culture; and the attribution of individualism with a negative moral value. The analytical process has shown that there are difficulties with the dominant portrayals of individualism in New Age contexts; consumerism does not necessarily and exclusively increase individualism; and finally, some of the critiques of individualism are illegitimate.

Offering insights into the relevant literatures and the debates that they inspire is necessary in order to appreciate the significance and limits of the findings from the two field sites. At numerous points, the discussion explicitly links the ramifications of particular findings from the field data to the appropriate textual contexts, offering reinforcement or exception to specific areas of scholarship. Before proceeding with ethnographic details however, the review sparks some broader, initiatory questions: how do the themes and implications considered in this chapter inform the approach of this thesis? And: how can the thesis address inconsistencies or research niches?

The scrutinisation of the literature encourages a dialectical approach to the commercial New Age, one which tries to avoid dichotomous terms. Rather than solely 'keeping score' for features of individualism versus features of collectivism, this project seeks to foreground intersections between both individualism and collectivism by highlighting these intersections explicitly. The conscious identification of the two types of forces and the processes they engage in can mark varying manifestations and balances of the 'individual–collective' dynamic without the use of the 'either/ or' tendency.

Striving to identify different forms and orientations of the dialectic across two New Age contexts has the potential to address niches in the current literature. For instance, the examination of interwoven systems allows for broader underpinnings of individualism that incorporate, but also go beyond, internal authority⁵⁶, permitting the possibility of various portrayals of individuality within the New Age. The prospect of a range of characterisations has implications both for the current scholarly definition of individualism in New Age contexts, and the conception of the 'New Age' itself. This study also attends to a gap in the current research on the commercial activities of religious and spiritual groups by undertaking field research in two centres that focus on selling tuition and experiences of practice (rather than focusing on the vending of material commodities). This approach can explore the relatively uncharted field of

⁵⁶ This approach does not prevent individual, 'internal' authority from being an important factor in commercial New Age contexts.

'consuming commercialised spiritual practice' and question the place of the personal and the social in this context.

The next chapter will apply the dialectical approach to the subject of the class backgrounds of the practitioners. At this level of New Age experience, the collective force of class cultures and the individualistic factor of an ideology of the self inter-relate with each other. As the discussion conveys, each organisation echoes and enforces different portrayals and extents of this example of the 'individual-collective' dynamic.

Chapter Three – Class Culture

Class Groups and Ideologies of Self

Identifying the class culture of the two field populations should, theoretically, be straightforward. Indeed, the class demographic of members of 'New Age' groups (like Shanti and the Sufi Order) is very well documented. Although one might presume from the emotional healing potential, which Chapter 5 explores, that the largest demand for these practices will be from those with the greatest level of social vulnerability, or those on the edge of downward mobility, this is not thought to be the case. Rather, prominent scholars of New Age spirituality harmoniously assert that the practitioners of New Age groups, will probably be “middle class” (Heelas, 1996: 137; Lee and Ackerman, 2002: 45; Prince and Riches, 2000: 15; Puttick, 1997).

The demographic data for this study, which derive from Shanti and the Sufi Order, illuminate cases that are inconsistent with this perspective. Problematically, the assumption that New Agers will be 'middle class' overlooks the potential of social variegation and the impact that such diversities can have. For instance, the current viewpoint does not explore the possibility that different class groupings

within the New Age might influence experiences of 'individualism' in different ways and could impact on how social persons engage with New Age phenomena. At Shanti, the majority of New Agers are from an 'upper', 'high wealth' class stratum and understand the individual to be, first and foremost, an autonomous being: these informants experience extensive individual authority. However, the other group of New Agers, those at the Sufi Order, are nearly all from a 'middle', 'average wealth' class stratum and affiliate with a completely different ideology of the individual. These informants assert that the self has two parts: an 'everyday self' who must submit to external authority and negotiate with social limitations, and a 'true self' which is wholly beyond the experience of authority.

This chapter takes the disparate class experiences of the practitioners at Shanti and the Sufi Order as the focus; that is to say, class culture provides the launch for this discussion. Specifically, the chapter will consider collectivistic (c) socio-economic class norms in association with the practitioner's individualistic (i) understandings of 'the self.' Elucidating the (i-c) intersection between these two factors highlights how the (c) class group and (i) ideology of the self relate and may even co-produce each other. The organisational structures and practices of each centre facilitate these social-cognitive interchanges in ways that support and contribute to the 'class culture – ideology of self' affinity. The nature of the factors and the dynamics of the processes at work, occur in different ways in each context, exhibiting greater diversity than the literature currently allows for. Not all New

Agers are 'middle class' and not all New Agers understand 'the individual' in the same way.

Class Culture

Many of the differences between the dominant class background of the Shanti practitioners and the dominant class background of the Sufi Order members are observable; informants from each group make explicit statements about values, concerns and life experiences that indicate that each population holds a distinct socio-economic position. But how might the researcher move from perceiving a difference to characterising, analysing and communicating that difference in a way that is meaningful and appropriate both to an academic community and to the communities that face description and classification? If researchers utilise a class arrangement (e.g. 'middle class'), the circumscription should be clear so the reader can appreciate the category's significance in the context of the literature. At the same time, an objective arrangement of classes seems unlikely to reflect people's understandings of their own situations (Riches, 1985: 97-8). This section considers some classic measures of class and proposes a means of stratification that hopes to allow for accuracy and clarity, as well as some sensitivity and relativity. I will then apply this system to examples of the socio-economic experiences of informants of each group and illuminate the class variegation of these two New Age populations.

Assigning Socio-Economic Categories

Unfortunately, the New Age canon is of little aid to working out how to conceive of class categories. Whilst many of the writers are happy to assert New Agers are 'middle class,' they tend to neglect to note what ascriptions like 'middle class' actually refer to or what the boundaries of this allocation might look like (e.g. Heelas, 1996: 137; Lee and Ackerman, 2002: 45; Prince and Riches, 2000: 15; Puttick, 1997). It is useful therefore, to reference some classic notions of socio-economic groupings in order to grasp what these assignments traditionally refer to.

In Rose's (1997) review of scholarly conceptions of class boundaries, he shows that researchers traditionally privilege the place of work over other indicators such as wealth, sets of ideas, values, or politics. Rose writes that working class work is typically understood as that which entails manual labor with limitations on autonomy in the work process. These jobs generally require conformity to rules and are subject to standardisation, external regulation and the enforcement of authority. Working class jobs are also often routine, repetitive tasks. The employee tends to have very little control over these tasks and typically does not need higher education qualifications in order to obtain the role. There is a much greater reinforcement of the division between members of the working class and 'outsiders' (from other classes) than typically takes place amongst other socio-

economic groups. This difference may be because persons in working class social positions more frequently experience opposition to wants and needs from outside powers that control rewards (Rose, 1997: 476-9; Rubin, 1976; Bernstein, 1971).

Rose describes how, in contrast, characterisations of middle class employment focus on how these roles involve some degree of judgment and require the application of knowledge. These depictions typically propose middle class jobs cannot be reduced to mechanical tasks and often require the mastery of a specialist skill. In many cases, the 'specialist skill' necessitates extensive training and credentialing, such as a higher education qualification. The occupations are usually free from constant close supervision, and permit at least partial self-direction and internal regulation, thus allowing the person some autonomy and flexibility over how he or she accomplishes the task.

Rose notes that theorists somewhat neglect the nature of upper-class work. He does claim, however, that this omission may be because the upper social stratum more commonly gain access to knowledge and power through inheritance of a position rather than through effort or merit. That is to say, the people in this grouping do not usually acquire and maintain occupational positions through the same means as the other two social sectors.

Although Rose's review of socio-economic circumscriptions is thought-provoking, it also exposes a problem. Part of the difficulty with the categories he cites is the new breadth of people who meet the old criteria of what it means to be

'middle class.' This breadth is due to relatively recent changes in lifestyle mobility, new proportions of people in roles which allow for the exercise of autonomy and flexibility, more professional services and a new generation of entrepreneurs (Sulkunen, 1992: 11). Other contributing factors include the changes in mass state education (with increasing numbers of people entering higher education in particular) (Edgell, 1993: 119-120; Wuthnow, 1986: 12), growing numbers of people in management and administrative roles (Gilbert and Kahl, 1982; Bruce-Briggs, 1979), and correspondingly decreasing numbers of people in agriculture and industrial production (Hall, 1996: 89).

The combination of the traditional criteria and the current social climate results in a situation where the 'middle' is applicable to the majority. Troublingly, this approach can neglect the socio-economic diversity internal to the vast 'middle majority' group. As Sulkunen describes, the situation now is 'a class heap with several peaks,' rather than a 'neat' class pyramid that occupations determine (1992: 33). Those multiple peaks are indicative of variety within the 'heap' that gets overlooked when analysts prioritise the place of work over other criteria. These circumstances lead to the so-called 'boundary problem' (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983: 47), which asks: where do we draw the lines now? Or, for our purposes, this question translates as: which measures of class should we consider for the cases of Shanti and the Sufi Order to understand the socio-economic powers and constraints of the practitioners within these two groups?

One approach to exploring the socio-economic backgrounds of the members is by questioning where informants are on a 'wealth scale' and what their social powers might be. Establishing a sense of the practitioner's financial means gives insight in to other indicators of class, such as the influence that this access to wealth seems to have on attitudes towards education and lifestyle choices. Furthermore, since personal finances often relate to types of employment, this discussion will not negate the place of work and thus, the method can still utilise the classic understandings of class that Rose highlights. As such, the focus on wealth enables a more thorough and telling analysis of socio-economic positioning than the consideration of work alone permits.

In addition to detailing financial means, the notion of social power can further our understanding of the participants' class experiences. Bourdieu identifies four “forms of capital” that act as “fundamental social powers”: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (1984)⁵⁷. Recognising the modes of capital that each field group prioritise and attempting to grasp how informants conceive and utilise those forms, is likely to indicate the “social powers” of that collective. Importantly, different types of capital will have different weights in different fields (Wood, 2007: 55-57). (For example, this perspective does not render high economic capital as

⁵⁷ For Bourdieu (1984), 'economic capital' refers to command over economic resources (cash, assets) (114-115). 'Cultural capital' refers to forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society (53-54). 'Social capital' refers to resources based on connections and group membership (114). 'Symbolic capital' refers to the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate (291).

superior to high cultural capital; the significance will be relative depending on the social context and the collective values which are held within that context.) Accordingly the 'forms of capital' approach encourages a relational view of class that is more sensitive to the individual's experience of a social position than a (hierarchical) wealth scale alone facilitates.

Together, the application of the 'wealth scale' and 'forms of capital' arrangements offer means of exploring socio-economic experiences in modes that are suitable for both the researcher and the researched. The next section administers this approach. In doing so, it will present thorough portraits of the respective dominant class culture of each population.

Two New Age Groups, Two Class Cultures

As is so often the case with comparisons between two fields, in these representations of the class type of each group, the occasional member offers an exception to the overall trends. Therefore, we deal here with ideal types that remain representative of a majority's situation (cf. Weber, 1905: 90). These 'majority situations' show internal stratification within the New Age in forms that suggest separate socio-economic groups that each have their own distinct collective class identities.

Shanti Practitioners

Position on Wealth Scale: High

Principal Forms of Capital: Economic and Social

Predominant Cultural Characteristic: Extensive Freedom

In the pursuit of describing where the practitioners from the Shanti context are on the wealth scale, it is important to note from the start, that most of these individuals enjoy access to a level of affluence that is not available to the vast majority of people, globally, nationally, or within London itself. Physical displays of this 'high' positioning on the wealth scale are subtle at the centre and occur by suggestion rather than by explicit statements or obvious material symbols. For instance, most of the informants live walking-distance from the Shanti centre (in the expensive area of Kensington). This finding suggests it is probable these yoga participants live in properties worth millions of pounds.

A discussion that took place between a practitioner⁵⁸ and a yoga teacher can also illustrate how subtle allusions during fieldwork contribute to the 'high' wealth scale assignment. The exchange began with the student saying to yoga teacher Per that she has no interest in material possessions and in fact finds them a burden

⁵⁸ This student and Per know each other. At the time of the exchange, the practitioner has attended two *ashtanga* classes (taught by Per) for the previous year. She is in her 30s and originally from Spain. She now lives in London. The informant is married, has two young daughters and lives walking-distance from the centre. She is not in paid employment and has not attended university.

because belongings bring additional and unnecessary pressure to her life.

However, upon the student leaving, Per points out the following irony to me:

“I live in Chelsea now but I didn't used to so I am still getting used to comments like that. One thing I've worked out is- it's very easy for the people who can buy anything they want to say they don't care about possessions. Did you notice the watch on her wrist? Patek Philippe. We're talking sometimes tens, but often hundreds, of thousands of pounds worth of watch. And she had a different one on last week. These women don't want Rolex. If Joe Bloggs on the street has heard of it, it's not special enough. And then she says she finds possessions a burden! It's very confusing.”

Per suggests that only items which are expensive enough to render them with exclusivity will appeal to “these women.” Many other belongings that are brought into the centre support Per's belief that his students do not desire material possessions which are available or familiar to a larger proportion of society. The brands of handbags, shoes and coats are not automatically obvious (to me at least), despite the clear appearance of exceptional quality or immaculate tailoring which is apparent in many cases. Upon asking about an item directly, some interviewees lightly alluded to the article's luxe quality and in turn, their high position on the wealth scale. For example, in response to casually asking informant, Emma, “what perfume are you wearing?” she answered: “No name. It's bespoke. You need to contact Azzi Glasser.” A quick glance at this olfactory tailor's website reveals that Azzi Glasser's charges for bespoke perfumes start at £30,000 (not including the bottle). What this information implies is that this participant has access to wealth and this access allows for a certain amount of distinction. There is a mystery

around where these simultaneously subtle yet intriguing possessions come from, or at least there is to people who are not used to engaging with them.

In addition to extremely expensive, 'exclusive' belongings, the physical comforts the yoga students enjoy also illustrate the nature of this population's typically high level of financial security. In conjunction with not being in paid employment, most of the interviewees mention their 'staff,' i.e. cleaners, housekeepers and nannies, who are responsible for the maintenance of the home and the day-to-day care of their children. Milla, who is a mother of 3 year old twins, lives locally to Shanti and attends the class run by *vinyasa* teacher, Dora, most weeks (as well as paying for a private class with Dora once a week). During an interview, she indicates some of the 'comforts' of her lifestyle:

“Is the cleaner happy? Is the nanny still putting in the enthusiasm? Has she got good energy? I mean – I still keep an eye on all this. My husband does long hours and that's the deal. Luckily, it works well most of the time which I suppose is how it's meant to work: we pay to make life a little easier and then I can get on with my day. And, well, most of my days are very full.” [I ask about a 'typical day.'] “Well most of my friends are in different countries, so I travel a lot and that changes things, but when I'm not away – getting a tennis lesson in at Queens⁵⁹, gym, pilates, maybe I'll need to pick-up a birthday present, leaving instructions at home: I'm busy! But I do always make sure I get my nine hours sleep each night. That's a non-negotiable. I'm obsessive about it.”

Statements such as: “I do always make sure I get my nine hours sleep each night” would sound completely alien to many young mothers. Similarly, the idea that in

⁵⁹ The Queen's Club is a private sporting club in West Kensington, London. The club has 28 outdoor tennis courts and eight indoor tennis courts and hosts prestigious annual lawn tennis tournaments.

addition to gym membership, it would be reasonable to also pay for membership at yoga, tennis and pilates clubs at the same time, regardless of if one only attends infrequently due to regular trips abroad visiting friends, is also unusual. Here, Milla illustrates that access to extensive wealth provides a lifestyle that is very class specific: she has both the time and the money to develop many hobbies and sustain many comforts.

An assignment of a high positioning on the wealth scale seems most appropriate for this collective of informants. The majority live locally to the centre in a very expensive part of London, appear in a position to purchase 'exclusive' products with price tags that most people find exuberant, and enjoy an exceptionally comfortable lifestyle.

This type of affluence also enforces specific cultural values and social powers or ('forms of capital') which are understood across the group. The gender values that Shanti informants articulate are particularly striking. For instance, the majority of female members note (probably as an attempt at polite conversation in connection to my study) that neither themselves nor their respective families saw much point in the (female) practitioner going to university. Indeed, the Shanti case offers an exception to Bruce's claim that "the principal denizens of the New Age milieu are graduates" (2000: 231). At the end of one *ashtanga* class, I asked a small group of female practitioners, Laurella, Maria and Alexa, why going to university did not appeal to them. In response, Laurella explained:

“I could have gone [to university] if I'd asked to go. All my brothers went, but I didn't fancy it and besides, it's different for men: they're under more pressure to get a particular type of job. We have more freedom and more options.”

Practitioner Maria agrees:

“No, I didn't want to go, even though I ordered all the brochures and thought about it for quite a long time. All that work and then you usually get a boring job which hardly pays anything. We are very lucky that girls can choose their responsibilities a bit more, even with motherhood.”

These participants appear to view the patriarchal, 'man as provider' culture as privileging women; women are “lucky” (Maria), while men are “under more pressure” (Laurella). They also claim that having the choice of studying or working or mothering or avoiding all of these aspects to greater or lesser extents allows for more “freedom and more options” (Laurella) or more 'choice' (Maria). In many ways these respondents promote a discourse that venerates the importance of 'participatory democracy' (i.e. the freedom for people – or at least women – to choose what they participate in).

However, the class culture is still likely to guide the member on which types of 'participation' are most appropriate and which forms of capital are most worthwhile. Since almost none of the female informants at Shanti venerate 'cultural capital' in the form of academic assets (Bourdieu, 1984: 53-4), it is clear this collective puts little emphasis on the need to accumulate educational social

power. In contrast, “economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1984: 114-115) is very high amidst this group: there is ample evidence of an extensive amount of monetary resources. Informants of this field also hint at their class culture's veneration of “social capital” (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Maintaining a bank of influential contacts is commonly thought to be meaningful and even vital. Frequent references during interviews and casual conversations cite a 'well-connected friend' who is able to put someone in contact with a powerful someone else, or someone who can secure tickets at a highly anticipated event, or even jump to the top of a waiting list for a covetable experience or purchase. As practitioner Arabella explains in reference to her visit to the Badminton Horse Trials⁶⁰:

“I like Badminton, obviously because I love horses – the worst bit of living in London in the week is not being near the horses – but I almost love it more because it gets people together in one place every year. People that you otherwise might get too busy to see regularly. Zara Phillips is obviously very busy, but she is nearly always there. And then you inevitably meet friends-of-friends who are fun and like you and... yes, it's just a good day out. Reliable.”

Referencing Zara Phillips, who is the second-eldest grandchild of Queen Elizabeth II, Arabella highlights here how she may reinforce her relationships with socially prominent people through attending particular events where these people (and 'people like them', or “friends-of-friends”) are likely to be.

⁶⁰ The Badminton Horse Trials is a three-day event, which takes place in April or May each year in the park of Badminton House (the seat of the Duke of Beaufort in Gloucestershire, England).

The conversation between Laurella, Maria and Alexa about university continues in a way that illustrates the groups' combinative prioritisations (of economic capital and social capital) and comparative neglect (of other forms of social power, such as cultural capital):

- Alexa: “Well, yes, we can choose, but if a person does choose study then good for them in a way, I just think you need to know why you are putting in that effort and what you think you are going to get back. I don't know how many people do it because they truly love it. Not many I would think.”
- Laurella: “All of the women I know who are making money, aren't doing well because they have a degree, that's all I'm saying. They're doing well because they have passion for what they do. That's what determines that success.”
- Alexa: “Hmm, yes. That's what I was trying to say.”
- Maria: [Nods in agreement.]
- Laurella: “You don't need to have a piece of paper from somebody else to tell you you've read Homer's *Odyssey*. J. K. Rowling was telling me she did Classics, but then she was totally broke afterwards! It was her passion for telling stories that made her successful, not studying Classics.”
- Maria: “I've met her too. Charity dinner. She was so shy!”
- Laurella: “Not once you get to know her.”

In this exchange the participants consider the unlikelihood that undertaking a degree at university (i.e. accumulating 'cultural capital') will relate to passion and the prospect of making money (or increasing 'economic capital'). Reinforcement for their pessimism comes in the form of an example of 'social capital,' namely, having met J. K. Rowling (i.e. the author of the Harry Potter series, who is now wealthier than the British Queen and is thus not distinct from 'economic capital'⁶¹).

Interestingly, two of the informants utilise the 'social capital' reference as a way to

⁶¹ According to 'The Sunday Times Rich List' (2013), J. K. Rowling, has now amassed a fortune of £280 million - putting her 11 places higher than the Queen overall.

achieve individual distinction within the group. Maria notes she has met J. K. Rowling as well, but Laurella distinguishes herself from Maria by suggesting she has 'gotten to know' the author better than Maria has⁶². These nuances convey how the yoginis emphasise social power in the form of economic and social capital types while nulling the cultural capital type.

Although there may be some collective pressure to retain extensive wealth and one's connections to the 'right' people, the majority of interviewees appear to experience great freedom and autonomy. In fact, the experience of extensive freedom is identifiable as a predominant cultural characteristic of this class group. Vast choice is one manifestation of this characteristic: the member is largely free to choose how to spend time, money and energy. Significantly, the nature of these choices often further the participants' ability to live with minimal restraints and burdens. Put another way, many of these women consciously opt for lifestyles that allow for greater flexibility and lesser responsibility. They are 'housewives' but choose not to do the shopping, cleaning, or cooking in their houses. They are mothers but often decide not to see their children for the majority of the day (or even year in the cases where the children are at boarding school). They have received formal educations but express no desire to pursue 'higher education.' Nor are they keen to trade some of their liberty for the prospect of a career⁶³.

⁶² Given Laurella's claim that she has 'gotten to know' J.K. Rowling, her reference to the writer with her initials, rather than her first name, may be considered rather unusual.

⁶³ However, it is likely that the freedoms and comforts that feature in this socio-economic culture

The Shanti informants' mutual place towards the top of the wealth scale gives the members of this group much in common with each other. The similar lifestyles, values, status pressures, and (capital) social powers that these yoga students share, endows the group with a common socio-economic identity that centres around freedom. As we will now see, the collective class identity of the members of the Sufi Order is very different.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Wealth Scale Position: Middle

Principal Form of Capital: Cultural

Predominant Cultural Characteristic: Partial Autonomy and Partial Limitations

Unlike at Shanti, the vast majority of members of the Order are in full-time paid employment, including those members in their 60s who are at or approaching common retirement ages. The majority of practitioners at the Sufi group belong to the sector of the economy where something other than the profit motive is the primary concern. The most common jobs held (teachers and social workers) are highly valuable jobs to society and are altruistic rather than corporate in nature, often motivating and rewarding employees by the experience of helping others rather than by extensive earnings. These types of jobs often require the analytical

are not wholly independent. Without claiming responsibilities such as paid employment, the liberties probably require access to somebody else's earnings.

skills and ability to work quite (but not wholly) independently that Rose depicts in his description of middle-class work (1997). These roles also frequently result in mid-level salaries (Collinson, 2014), which suggests that most informants from the Sufi Order hold a 'middle' positioning on the wealth scale.

In addition to the nature of the members' jobs, another prominent socio-economic feature of this group is the exceptionally high level of formal education, which most informants share. In every interview with the Sufi informants, the conversation seemed to naturally turn to the interviewee's own university experiences, with the participants typically noting their degree subjects and many also mentioning postgraduate qualifications they had either attained or were pursuing. Additional adult education courses were also often noted, such as counselling training and creative pursuits including art and poetry composition. In this context, there is much reinforcement of Rose's claim that “merit, educational attainment, and certification by experts” is a deep concern of the middle class (1997: 465) - a preoccupation which members of Shanti lack.

Yet despite being in paid employment and holding impressive qualifications, the participants at the Order do not have the same access to comfort that the students at Shanti enjoy. Instead, many informants at the Order express the expectation of amenities such as good education, an acceptable standard of healthcare and adequate shelter (which many people in Britain understand to be universal 'rights' [Mandelstam, 2006: 12]). However, a telling difference between these individuals

and the students at Shanti is that the latter afford the opportunity to achieve a maximal realisation of these 'rights,' whilst those at the Order often do not.

As one conversation in the communal kitchen area of the Sufi Order suggests, for some people dependent on the NHS for an operation, waiting lists can be very lengthy. One participant in this discussion complains he waited 5 months for an initial consultation and is still waiting for a date for his operation. Numerous other listeners empathise with his situation. This conversation contrasts with the experience of a student at Shanti who hurt her ankle skiing but, thanks to private health insurance, managed to have the necessary operation within four days of the accident. In addition to long waiting lists, this conversation at the Order also raises the topic of general experiences of NHS hospitals as a cause for concern. As one female practitioner in her 50s recounts:

“The last time I had to stay in hospital – only about 9 months ago – Oh! Well! If I didn't feel like I was dying before, I certainly did once I'd stayed *there* a day. The bed I got into had a used needle inside it! Luckily I saw it, but that sort of thing puts you on edge, doesn't it? Then there's the food. My father had a heart attack last year and the first meal he was given there was a cheese sandwich with white bread and a packet of salt and vinegar crisps! It's lunacy! I felt like saying: 'are you trying to give him *another* heart attack!?' I don't know. When I was a child, the doctor came to the house. There was actual care. It's all changed now. It's all going backwards in this country.”
(Anonymous.)

This description portrays the practitioner's frustration and disappointment with both her last experience as a patient in a NHS hospital and her experience of being in a NHS hospital while visiting her father. Her lack of satisfaction is

indicative of very different social concerns and 'pressures' than the ones which the students at Shanti typically express.

Another area of worry which many members of this population face is whether one's child or children are receiving education of an acceptable standard. One interviewee said to me:

“He gets more [revision] done at home because the kids in his class are so disruptive and the teachers don't do anything about it. But I guess with that many – what is it now, thirty or so? – [in a class] it must be difficult to control all of them. I try to give him one-on-one time but I don't always have the knowledge for the maths.” (Anonymous.)

This quote describes an educational situation that varies markedly from the schooling of the Shanti practitioners' children. The informants at the yoga centre at times note the boarding schools that their children attend or the private tutors that supplement the teaching of the school day or simply do not mention their children at all. Even this one class indicator of the regard for a child's education shows that the two groups are apprehensive about very different things and have disparate degrees of choice.

Statements of concern also centre around property, either from an inability to get on to 'the property ladder' or from the belief that a property is in an undesirable area or too small. Interviews that took place in an informants' home sometimes sparked these types of comments. One male practitioner who is single,

white, in his 60s and rents a studio flat in Harlesden, Brent (North West London), said the following at the beginning of an interview in his home:

“Sorry to bring you out here. Maybe I should have met you central. Like a coffee shop or something. Nicer area.” [I say that I grew up in North West London and miss it very much.] “Really!?! Well, home's home isn't it, I guess. I don't own this place and I feel... you know... sometimes like I failed in a strange way, never owning my own pad. That's important to my generation, young lady: not like you youths! Happy to stay at home forever! Sometimes I feel a little bit embarrassed inviting people here, but I guess you get the kettle on and it works out alright, doesn't it!?! Only thing: I do want to get you back to the station before it gets dark tonight. I'll walk you, I'll walk you, but I don't like being out around here when it's dark, if that's alright.” (Anonymous.)

This informant alludes to numerous sources of anxiety in relation to his perceptions of his living situation. There is initial angst that perhaps we should have met in a “nicer area.” He also reveals that at times, he feels “embarrassed” inviting people to his home. The participant also recounts his sense of failure for never owning his own property and his fear for being out in the area after dark.

Bruni, also describes her feelings about her living situation during an interview, which took place in her flat in Harlesden, Brent. Bruni is originally from Germany but had been living in the UK for 24 years at the time we met. She works full-time as a teacher in London.

“This area has gone so downhill. It's all immigrants now... I'm not English myself, but even I can see this is a disaster. There's no community here. It's not nice even walking from the tube to my front door. The [communal] gardens need work but the council never comes, I call and call, but they've got too many other problems. If only I could move, I would, I just don't know where to go.”

Bruni's description implies she has a lack of choice about where she lives and that she resents this limitation. Although she is a teacher with multiple higher education qualifications and thus qualifies as 'middle class' both in terms of access to wealth and in terms of Rose's scheme (1997), this 'middle' position is socially ambiguous. Bruni, like many of the practitioners at the Order, has a very respectable professional position but the role does not translate as providing her with a living situation that she finds satisfactory.

The Sufi Order members who are 'middle on the wealth scale', just like the students at Shanti who are 'high on the wealth scale,' aspire for lifestyles that they perceive to be desirable. The disjuncture is that the means to achieve these comforts and freedoms are not equal. As Williams argues, in any society there are specific inequalities in capacity for people to shape and define their own lives (1977, 109).

Difference in access to wealth and the disparate limitations and cultural norms which grow from that disjuncture suggest distinct social powers. Unlike the Shanti population, the majority of practitioners at the Order do not have extensive economic capital or appear to emphasise social capital to any significant degree. Instead, the dominant form of capital for the Sufi collective is cultural. In the context of the Sufi Order, there is evidence of a mutual veneration of this type of social power. A conversation which took place between four people in the kitchen after a whirling class highlights how some of the Order participants perceive

having studied at a 'red brick university':

- A: "I know up there well actually; I was at Durham."
B: "Very nice. That's collegiate isn't it?"
C: "What's collegiate?"
A: "It's like Oxbridge. It has colleges. Yeah, it was... well, I mean, it's the third oldest university in the world, so, or in England I mean, so yeah, I think it was alright! I did ok there."
D: "Doing 'ok' somewhere like that though is probably doing really well compared to one of these new ones. 'Get one [grade] E to get in' type places."
A: "Well, I don't know..."
B: "Yes, it is strange how two people can get a 2:1 but it refers to completely different standards of learning. You can't compare a 2:1 from the Durham, Bristol universities with one from a new one."
A: "I think employers know that though. I'm sure they do. Where did you go?"
B: "Sussex. Not as good as Durham!"
A: "Sussex is good. I bet it was fun to be by the sea too. Wonderful."

The contrast between this extract and the conversation between Laurella, Maria and Alexa that took place at Shanti, presents a divergence between the collective views of what a university degree is worth. Within this exchange at the Order, the participants pay more attention to the details of this form of cultural capital: the informants note different types and ages of universities and different standards of learning. The evaluation of attending Durham is "very good" and there is an assumption that "doing ok" there is the equivalent of "doing really well" at "one of [the] new" ('lesser') academic institutions. At Shanti, the three women who talk about the worth of a degree do not concern themselves with these nuances. Another difference between the two discussions about university that take place in each respective field is that individual distinctions occur by referencing the capital

types that are most relevant to the respective context. Just as Laurella and Maria allude to degrees of social capital in their comparison of who knows J. K. Rowling the best, at the Sufi Order, practitioner 'A' and practitioner 'B' allude to variations in cultural capital in their comparison of universities. Practitioner 'B' jokes that his university is “not as good” as the one at which practitioner 'A' studied, which practitioner 'A' does not contradict. These comparisons reinforce the view that the 'weight' of a type of capital is context dependent (Wood, 2007: 55-57). Cultural social powers are of greater value to those who constitute the Sufi context and of lesser value to those who make up the yoga context.

Together, the 'middle' levels of wealth and the high emphasis on cultural capital contribute to the predominant class characteristics of the Sufi Order population. Individuals of this class group are often free to obtain valuable jobs and notable qualifications. Most members also appear to earn moderate incomes. Yet, at the same time, common experiences of society nevertheless include the requirement to negotiate with consequential limitations. Informants are aware of the caps on their lifestyle choices and the barriers that prevent full access to prospective comforts and the highest quality services. Unlike the Shanti population, there is no sense of complacency or assurance amidst this group that healthcare is adequate and standards of schooling for children are pleasing. Instead, there is open acknowledgement that there are limits and points of dissatisfaction. Similarly, the location and nature of a member's home often fails to align with the homemaker's

preferences. Professional and academic achievement do not necessarily equate with a residence that one can take pride in or simply perceive as 'enough.' In sum, many of the common experiences, values and expectations of this group relate to negotiations between personal power and social constraint. These individuals possess degrees of freedom but are also well aware of restraints and limitations.

This consideration of socio-economic experience illuminates some critical findings. Significantly, the respective populations of Shanti and the Sufi Order represent two distinct class cultures. The members of Shanti have a high placement on the wealth scale and greater economic and social capital due to large quantities of disposable income and powerful social connections. Their common class culture endows the yoga centre members with extensive degrees of freedom and choice. Conversely, the practitioners at the Sufi Order have a middle positioning on the wealth scale and greater cultural capital due to being rich in intellectual and cultural assets. The mutual class culture these Sufi dancers share permits some freedom but also centres around significant social limitations. Since many of these respective class norms are consistent across the majority of each group of practitioners, the members are bound into two collectives by virtue of them sharing common attitudes, behaviours and life experiences. In these ways, class is a collective force that facilitates experiences and is the outcome of those experiences.

The identification of two separate socio-economic collectives is very important because it shows the New Age has internal class variation. Despite the pervasive claim that New Age seekers are nearly always of the same (middle class) background (Heelas, 1996: 137; Lee and Ackerman, 2002: 45; Prince and Riches, 2000: 15; Puttick, 1997⁶⁴), the data from Shanti and the Order highlight that perhaps these literatures overlook the diversity of class factors within the 'New Age' category. By abandoning the notion that New Age adherents are probably of a homogeneous socio-economic group, we can explore how the collective force of distinct class cultures may relate to differences in New Age practitioners' sentiments and behaviours. The following discussion attempts just that. With the focus of socio-economic experience in-hand, the next section shows how class differences and conceptions of the self impact one another.

An Intersection:

(c) Class Culture - (i) Ideology of the Individual

The distinct collective (c) socio-economic forces are not the only significant difference between the two field populations. In addition, the members of each

⁶⁴ It seems possible that the boundaries of the 'middle class' in New Age scholarship might include part of an 'upper-class' group (which is refused entry into a category that traditionally prefers a known aristocratic ancestry) as well as including part of a more 'working class' group (which experienced an upward shift in terms of educational qualifications and occupational professionalism).

New Age group frequently express markedly separate understandings of what it means to be (i) an individual. The majority of Shanti informants communicate one notion of individuality (that centres around independence and autonomy) and the majority of Sufi Order informants disclose an other view (that relies on a dividual notion of self: in part subject to external authority and in part beyond matters relating to authority). Significantly, as this analysis describes, these contrasting conceptions strongly correspond to the socio-economic stratum which is foremost in adopting it. Accordingly, there is evidence for an intersection (or what Weber may call an 'elective affinity' [Herbert, 1978]) between the collective (c) form of socio-economic culture and the individualistic (i) form of notion of self.

Shanti Practitioners

Ideology of the Individual: Autonomous; Free; Independent

Parallel with Class Type: Extensive Freedom

The majority of practitioners at Shanti appear to view people, but especially themselves, as free, powerful, and possessing a predominantly internal locus of control. This conception of the self echoes and furthers the experience of liberty and activism which rises out of the wealth of opportunities the participants' socio-economic situations enable. As such, the ideology is consistent with and supporting of the great choice and flexibility that characterise the class culture of the group.

As one practitioner, Maria, said during an interview:

“I never join these things for the community. I don’t really want more people’s opinions influencing me. I’m lucky that I have a lot of trust in my own ability to make the right decisions and when you belong to a group you can get swayed because everyone starts getting involved in your business.... My life, my rules!”

Maria fervently conveys the view that the decisions she makes and the “rules” she follows are self-chosen. This self-concept is representative of the notion of self held by many interviewees from Shanti. Laura's understanding of 'the individual' serves as a further example. Laura is British, white, in her early 40s and married without children. She lives in Notting Hill and does not work. She attends one *vinayasa* yoga class a week at Shanti, which Dora teaches. In response to the interview question, 'do you ever ask Dora's advice on matters that do not relate to yoga?', Laura said:

“I have all of the answers I need already. I've always known that. We all have the power to do and be and have anything and everything we want. That's the amazingness of, well, life. We don't need to ask for help; we don't need to ask anyone. . . . turn up the volume on that intuition and realise how powerful you are just being yourself.”

Laura's statement illustrates her perception of the individual as autonomous, powerful and free. She believes people do not need to request help from others and each person has the “power to do and be and have anything and everything.” This ideology of self is consistent with the experience of self-governance that Laura is likely to enjoy as a result of her class culture.

Many of the practitioners at Shanti conceive their autonomy as pervasive across all aspects of their being (rather than conflating autonomy with the assertion of the will or conscious intention, for instance [Yeatman, 2007: 55]). On this matter, Annette, who lives walking distance from Shanti and teaches monthly 'naked yoga' workshops at the centre, states:

“Yoga is an invitation to confirm your own freedom and power. You can explore it physically through your own embodiment, choosing to stretch a bit further, hold the balance a second longer. You can confirm it through your mind, deciding in the class you are going to have a more positive energy and outlook and mentally transforming yourself that way. And you can do it through your spirit as well. Yoga helps you to transform your own soul through your energy. You're a kaleidoscope of ability and energy and all of you is powerful and a way of transforming yourself, you just have to decide what you want.”

In this statement, Annette portrays her belief that the individual can experience “freedom and power” in somatic, mental, and spiritual ways. Penny's self-conception offers another example of this understanding of 'pervasive freedom.' Penny is British, white, appears to be in her early 60s and lives in Chelsea with her husband. Penny attends Per's *ashtanga* yoga class twice a week. During a conversation after one of these classes, she said:

“Finally science has caught up with what we all know deep down anyway: that everything is connected. The mind influences the body and vice versa. Then there's the spirit, or the Christians might say 'soul' perhaps... I come out of a [yoga] class and I feel strong again, but in *every* way: my mind is free, my body is free, my heart is free and open. I feel like myself again: I get in touch with myself and remember I am in control and happy and it's good.”

Penny's conceptualisation of her individuality includes the qualities of being “strong” and “free.” These factors pervade the mind, body and spirit (or 'soul' or 'heart'). Moreover, Penny appears to hold a holistic view of the person (“everything is connected” and mutually influencing).

These various comments represent the ideology of the individual that dominates amidst the Shanti population. Key features of this ideology include: autonomy, power, independence, self-governance and a type of freedom that pervades the person's entire being. This characterisation corresponds with the informants' class culture, which, as we know, allows for the experience of extensive freedom. The affinity suggests an intersection between '(i) notion of self – (c) class culture,' in which each factor may relate and co-enforce the other.

The next section attends to other parallels between the Order members' dominant (i) notion of self and (c) class culture. As the discussion will show, the understanding of the individual that prevails amongst the Sufi population is vastly different to the one held by the participants at the yoga centre. Furthermore, there is an alignment between this distinct ideology and the respective socio-economic traits of the Sufi group.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Ideology of the Individual: Individual; Access to True Self requires a Guide

Parallels with Class Type: Partial Autonomy and Partial Social Limitations; External Barriers

Most members of the Sufi Order express a dividual understanding of the individual, which is rather complex⁶⁵. Two parts constitute the individual according to this view: an everyday self and a true self. The everyday self interacts in and adapts to the world and enjoys some autonomy, whilst also facing social restraints and external barriers. This characterisation aligns with the predominant class experiences of the group because the socio-economic circumstances allow for some freedom and choice and also involve limitations. Conversely, the true self refers to an ultimate reality in which notions such as freedom and society have no bearing. However, in between the everyday self and the true self is the outside boundary of the guide who facilitates access to this desirable realm. Just as external constraints deny these participants access to some desirable social resources at the socio-economic level, an outside authority determines access to the true self at the self-conception level. This discussion endeavours to clarify this complicated ideology and its parallels with 'middle' class culture.

Nader's description of the dividual self is a useful starting point for this process of elucidation. At the time of the interview with Nader, he was 31, single and

⁶⁵ Marriott and Inden also describe a concept of a 'dividual' person but use the term 'dividual' to refer to a different ideology of self. These scholars argue the Indian way of thinking about a person depends on a belief in the composite of transferable particles that form his or her personal substance. The transferable particles render the person dividual rather than an individual (1977). In contrast, the Sufi population's dividual view of the individual refers to two parts (the everyday self and the true self).

working as an administrator for a computer firm in South East London. He had been attending weekly sessions at the Order for 18 months when we spoke. In his words:

“Your everyday self is just that: it's who you are in your everyday life, functioning in a society that can mould you into what or who it wants to. It takes a lot of adaptation in order to function well. We know that from evolution: living things have to adapt and we do. We layer our true self up to function in the world. We have to pass exams and get a job and keep that job so we can pay bills and live. That's what you believe you are. But when we turn, we move from identity as something, to identity as nothing. It's about taking the layers away to get to It. No decisions to make, no deadlines to meet, just [pause] beyond... It [the true self] is eternal. It's part of the One.”

Following this statement, I reference a comment Nader previously made about agency and ask if his true self possesses this quality. Upon hearing this question, Nader laughs and states:

“These earthly topics like agency have no relevance whatsoever to that. Why would you need agency? I can't talk about it anymore because words like agency confuse the experience... it's different to the me which requires agency here. They are both me.”

Many other interviewees reinforce Nader's view that agency (and concepts relating to agency including “freedom,” “autonomy” and “independence”) are irrelevant to notions of the true self. While this quality is partially relevant to experiences of the everyday self, the true self part of the individual is beyond questions of constraints and liberties.

The descriptions of the everyday self echo and uphold the class culture with which most participants are familiar: experiences of autonomy occur but there are limits to these experiences. Thus, the members of the Order do not describe this part of the self in ways which recount endless choice and freedom in the manner of which the Shanti collective describe the individual. Rather, the conception of the everyday self is the part of the person that compromises with external authorities; there are restrictions to accept and frequent negotiations to undertake. One practitioner illustrates this view:

“I was quite excited the other day because I actually pulled myself back from identifying first and foremost with my like, my everyday self – like me as a teacher or whatever – and I was quite excited by that. When someone asks you to say a bit about yourself, that's the first instinct isn't it, to talk about yourself in your mundane everyday and to talk about your work and responsibilities and all that. But I didn't want to talk about, y'know, the bit of myself that has been forced into the system in a way... I didn't want to say that 'this is *what* I am.' I wanted almost to say nothing to this chap I'd just met and let him feel my energy, umm, like, to just feel my true self. I really wanted that. I can't explain it, but it felt like a bit of a breakthrough to be honest.” (Anonymous.)

This member of the Order associates his 'everyday self' with his job and having “adapted to the system” and the external dictates of that system. He also distinguishes his 'everyday self' from his 'true self.' Some of the other members in the discussion group expressed approval for this informant's words by smiling and clapping.

Although the aspect of the individual 'beyond earthly concerns' (i.e. the 'true self') is frequently *said* to be beyond autonomy and authority, the means for the transformation from everyday self to true self is still very dependent upon the external authority of the practitioner's guide. Informants openly acknowledge this dependency. As one participant says:

“Your guide gives you a range of techniques to reach that place, to move on. This process may take an entire lifetime to actually fulfil because there’s no point doing a technique you’re not ready for and the guide will know the point when you are ready. It’s for him to decide because he has a greater degree of magnetism and wisdom than you. The point is to trust your guide and to trust his authority – that is what trusting in the entire process involves. That's what I have done for almost two years and I can feel the force of it. It does work, so I have no reason not to do exactly what he [the guide] tells me I need.” (Anonymous.)

This statement serves as an example of how the Sufi Order members tend to attribute access to one’s 'true self' to the *outside* authority of the guide. As is the case for much of the Sufi Order group's experience of health care, education, and housing, an external source or factor is likely to largely determine the nature of that experience. This external barrier is another parallel between notion of the individual and socio-economic experience⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ The escapism from authority which accessing the true self allows for, relates to Weber's view that human beings will want to free themselves when facing bureaucracy. Weber, who viewed bureaucracy as resembling a cage that 'the individual has to fit himself in to', claimed the world of 'ordinances' (i.e. institutions, enterprises and organisations) is “one's opponent to belonging to oneself.” Paradoxically though, “one's opponent is also part of oneself” (1921: 1402; Lowith, 1983 (1960)). Similarly, from this Sufi population's perspective, the everyday self and engagement with external authorities is still a vital element of this ideology of individualism.

As these insights show, the notion of self that dominates within this field context centres on a dividual notion of personhood, plus the requirement for an external guide. This characterisation corresponds with the informants' class culture: there is partial autonomy but there are also outside blocks that enforce limits on one's experience. These parallels indicate an affinity between '(i) notion of self – (c) class culture,' in which the two factors may intersect and even reinforce each other.

The differences between the two populations' respective ideologies of the individual show there are at least two notions of individualism that New Agers propound. The Shanti conception centres around autonomy and individual authority, and as such, this typification is consistent with the scholarly depiction of 'New Age individualism,' which the previous chapter describes. In contrast, the Sufi Order members view the person as partially autonomous, but also very reliant on external authorities. This characterisation challenges the scholarly claim that intrinsic causal powers are paramount in New Agers' ideologies of the self and that external authorities are absent or minimal in these conceptions and experiences. Together, the differences between the two understandings of individualism implies the New Age canon's emphasis on extensive autonomy as a singular and defining trait of 'New Age individualism' is misleadingly simplistic.

The field findings also show there are elements of each depiction of 'the individual' which align with the two respective class types of the groups. These

parallels evidence an elective affinity between the individualistic (i) form of notion of self and the collectivistic (c) form of socio-economic culture, thus suggesting a type of 'individual-collective' co-production. Both factors are present and likely to bolster each other. An example of this prospective co-enforcement includes the (c) class culture's encouragement and reinforcement of the (i) conception of self by virtue of generating particular experiences that relate to degrees of personal freedom or restriction. The (i) ideology can in turn reflect and reproduce a sense of the (c) socio-economic grouping by referencing those degrees of personal freedom or restriction. A practitioner can access a (i) self-concept as part of a group with a particular (c) socio-economic position, and engage with a (c) socio-economic group's cultural values, experiences, norms and expectations, by processing a (i) notion of self.

Both organisations support the respective (c) class traits, the (i) ideology of self and the prospective (i-c) inter-relations between the two. The next section identifies the organisational norms and structures that are likely to fuel these promotions of 'class,' 'ideology' and 'class-ideology' (or a 'collective force,' an 'individual force' and a 'collective-individual' force). Specifically, the discussion will propose a tripartite relationship between class culture, notion of the individual and the workings of the New Age centre.

How the Organisations Facilitate the Factors

In addition to a resonance, or an 'elective affinity,' between the (c) class group norms and the dominant (i) notion of the individual, there is also a correspondence between these two factors and the structures of the organisation. It seems probable that the centres reflect and produce the preferences and concerns of their respective class-based markets and in turn, echo (c) collective traits of the class group, including the relevant (i) understanding of the individual. An outcome of this reflection is the confirmation and reproduction, of the pervasive class culture, dominant notion of self, and some of the mutualities between the two factors. These circumstances encourage the particular version of the 'individual-collective' dialectic that dominates at each site.

Shanti

Organisational Norms: Vast Choice; Tailoring and Flexibility; Encouraging Self-Governance

Parallels with Intersection Type: Emphasis on Freedom, Individual Authority and Independence

Many of Shanti's organisational characteristics reflect the class stratum of its primary market. For instance, the times of the vast majority of yoga classes at this centre are during standard working hours (i.e. 9.00am-5.00pm, Monday-Friday).

These timings reflect the owners' and management's expectation that the customers will not be occupied during these hours but rather that these participants will have flexibility and freedom in deciding how to spend a 'work day.' The prices of £20 for a standard class and between £75 - £260 for a workshop, suggests the centre's understanding of its market's disposable income (or 'economic capital'). Similarly, the nature of the retreats available with luxury 5* hotel accommodation in exotic, 'long haul' destinations like the Caribbean, also reflects the practitioners' financial circumstances. It seems probable that such timings, pricing, and retreat locations cultivate, and are enabled by, a sense of a particular class type.

During interviews, some of the yoga teachers, who are the 'enactors' of many of Shanti's organisational norms, were happy to acknowledge that they consciously adapt to the concerns, views and monetary means of the students' socio-economic group. Per, who is the manager and primary *ashtanga* teacher at Shanti, explains:

“As a teacher you learn what your students like and you become better at guessing what a particular group needs to hear... London is diverse and I'm very area-aware. When I'm asked how much I charge for private lessons, my answer depends on which postcode I'm in at the time I'm asked.... And my teaching will change with different areas too. Maybe it's a bit of a stereotype, but people *are* different and where somebody has chosen to live is a bit of a shortcut for guessing some of those differences... I do think it's important to really put energy into tailoring the teachings to the students I'm working with.”

Per's candid description suggests he deliberately 'tailors' his teaching service and the price of that service to the budgets and tastes of his students. Moreover, he implies that the area or context the students are in will influence his judgement of what the appropriate adaptation should be. Teachers like Per may enforce the practitioners' sense of class through these intentional attempts to adapt to the socio-economic norms of the students.

The modes in which participants access the practices and knowledge available within the Shanti context also corresponds to the class norms of the group. Everybody who pays to be present at a class has full access to the praxis and wisdom available. That is to say, beyond possessing the requisite financial capacity, access is equal. This 'full access' that particular amounts of economic capital affords, resembles the freedom that many informants recount in association with the lifestyle choices which are economically available to them.

Another way Shanti echoes class values is by emphasising gender differentials. As this chapter notes, the class culture of the Shanti population appears to reinforce the traditional dichotomy of men's domain being work and women's domain being the home. Teachers at Shanti emphasise relating gender stereotypes by referencing male 'competitiveness' and 'orientation towards business,' as well as 'female intuition' and 'female emotional intelligence.' As yoga teacher Dora asserted to a class of five female students:

“Women have greater emotional intelligence and are quicker to seek emotional clarity, which yoga offers. We're also more intuitive and more in-touch with nature, whilst men are more competitive and yoga isn't competitive enough for them. That's probably the main reason why men don't do yoga: there isn't a clear winner and loser. Women are less interested in all that... That's why men tend to be better in business: they love competition.”

In addition to these typecasts of women as 'emotionally intelligent' and men as “competitive” and “better in business,” the presence of women teaching but the absence of women leading at Shanti, reinforces the convention of female subordination in the workplace. The manager and owner of Shanti are both male (as is typical of yoga businesses [Philip, 2009: 28]). Women have an important presence at Shanti, but they do not have the final say on any of the big decisions, nor substantially profit financially from their efforts at the company. Such an organisational structure mirrors the practitioners' perceptions of having the choice of pursuing leadership and substantial independently-gained earnings but not actually doing so.

As well as reinforcing a sense of class culture, the organisation also supports the student collective's dominant ideology of the individual; i.e. the understanding that the self is free, independent, and powerful enough to create the life he or she chooses. (As we know, this conception of self correlates with the wealth of options the socio-economic circumstances enforce: these individuals have both the time and the money to experience substantial choice and freedom in their everyday lives.) One of the ways Shanti encourages this ideology is by offering a vast

selection of yoga styles (including the more unusual 'anti-gravity yoga' and 'naked yoga'), which the student is free to choose between. The long list of the types of yoga available at this centre might suggest to the practitioner: there is a yoga for you, you as a unique, autonomous individual capable of choosing exactly what you want. As Shanti practitioner, Sophie reflects: “It was a relief to find a yoga place that goes beyond the generic stuff - somewhere that actually gives you a few options. Maybe what I want isn't what everyone else wants, right!?”

Upon selecting a style of yoga, the ethos of independence that the teachers at the centre affirm spurs on the collective's conception of the autonomous and free individual. One manifestation of this ethos is the suggestion that everybody present is able to achieve exactly what they want to during that class; be it feeling a greater sense of peace, becoming more flexible, having moments of transcendence, gaining sacred wisdom or experiences of healing – the teacher promotes these outcomes as 'yours for the taking.' Although some of these prospects were once the privilege of “saints, hermits, mystics, ascetic monks, tsadiks or dervishes” (Bauman, 1998: 71), groups like Shanti recast the experiences as being within every individual's reach. Just as the interviewees from this site believe all options are available to them, the teachers at Shanti imply one can achieve anything one wants. Furthermore, the teachers reassure the students that they as individuals are to define the content of those wants, rather than an external authority deciding the objective of participation. In the process of

selecting his or her own goal out of seemingly endless worldly and other-worldly options, the practitioner is likely to experience at least some degree of autonomy, freedom and even power.

It is the teacher's task to be a gentle co-ordinator of the student's objective, which probably furthers the student's sense of personal authority. At the beginning of a yoga class teachers ask for the student to take a moment to feel what they need from their practice that day so the instructor can then adapt the teachings accordingly. For instance, when yoga teacher Lili asked her class of five women and one man: "So how are we all feeling today? Is there anything your body is craving? What do you all want to get out of your practice today?", there were six different answers. From the man who said he wants to address his "tight hamstrings" to a woman who complained she is "having trouble feeling centred at the moment" - there was much diversity in this list of goals. Yet, in response, Lili managed to adapt some of the postures during the *asana* series to each person and suggest different mantras or words for each of the students to keep in mind. In this way the preferences of each individual student dictates the form of at least some of the lesson. This causal power reinforces the authority of the participant.

Another way the teacher fuels the practitioner's sense of autonomy is by asking the student to self-verify his or her progress. At Shani, there are no tests and no credentialing by an external authority. Instead, it is for the individuals to assess the accomplishment of their own objectives and whether or not they are content with

their own development. For example, at the end of Lili's lesson (previously described), she asked her six practitioners how they felt and each one gave an affirmative response to indicate at least partial achievement of their respective goals.

Lili's subsequent reply to her students illustrates the teachers' tendency to celebrate the student for (seemingly independently) achieving the goal. This veneration is another means by which teachers can encourage a view of the individual as independent and self-governing. Congratulating the students for their attainments, Lili exclaims:

“Well thank you all so much for using your energy in such a positive way today! You have brought these gifts to yourself. Well done. You have made time for your practice and made great things happen.”

This is one of many comparable examples of a teacher highlighting the yoga student's ability and power. In these instances, there is never any acknowledgement of the instructor's role in the process. The student receives full credit as a self-sufficient, highly capable and competent being. The female informants' experiences of authority and power offers an exception to the claim that women often experience deprivation and domination when participating in spiritual groups (e.g. Lewis, 2003: xi; Wood, 2007: 165).

To recap, many of the observable organisational structures, decisions and teaching styles at Shanti correlate with the class stratum to which the majority of

practitioners belong. Shanti's organisational tendencies also reflect and enforce the dominant understanding of the individual, which relates to the class culture. In both of these circumstances, the organisation enforces vast choice, freedom and self-governance. It is probable that these traits allow for some mutualities and inter-relationships between the class culture and the notion of the individual which the informants self-identify with.

The nature of this tripartite relationship reinforces some of the arguments that the literature review presents. Thinkers including Heelas (1982: 137; 1996: 89, 161-162), Hanegraaff (1996: 201), Introvigne (2001: 62), Sutcliffe and Bowman (2000: 172) and Sutcliffe (1995: 37; 2003: 45, 178, 224) propound that groups like Shanti create the experience of the self as an inwardly autonomous force separable from social authorities and structures. The data from Shanti is able to support this argument. However, the place of the social structure of class requires greater acknowledgement here to make apparent that groups like Shanti may reflect a pre-existing (i) ideology of the individual which *intersects* with a specific (c) socio-economic position. Thus, the New Age group seems to facilitate an individual-collective intersection, rather than simply venerating individual authority on its own. For this reason, it is useful to give more consideration to the nature of the class group, which, in this case, is 'upper' or 'high' on a wealth scale, as opposed to 'middle class.'

The Sufi Order

Organisational Norms: Hierarchy; Expectation of Conformity; External Authoritative Structure

Parallels with Intersection Type: Partial Autonomy; External Barriers

Like the Shanti case, the Sufi Order's organisational workings correlate with its members' dominant class background and conception of the individual. The notion of the self which the Sufi Order perpetuates shows an exception to the scholarly claim that New Age groups generate an experience of a highly autonomous self. In the context of the Sufi Order, autonomy only constitutes a small part of individualism. One can choose to participate or abide by the social structures of the group and adhere to the dictates of the external authority of the guide, but the nature of those structures and authorities limit the individual authority of the New Age practitioner. Furthermore, the teachers' and informants' shared assertion that the true self aspect of the personal being is beyond questions of autonomy, suggests the focus on internal authority (that currently pervades literature about New Age settings) does not resonate with this experience of self.

With regards to the class culture of the participants, many of the organisational decisions at the Order show an adaptation to the needs of the market. For instance, unlike at Shanti, no Sufi Order events occur during standard working hours. Instead, all lessons and meetings happen during evenings and weekends when the participants (the majority of who are in full-time employment) are able

to attend. The pricing of classes is also very different at £5 a session (or £3 concession). The nature of Sufi dance retreats with camping accommodation in locations often (albeit not always) in the UK, cultivate a sense of the socio-economic culture that most of the practitioners are familiar with. The tendency to adapt organisational traits to the norms and expectations of a particular socio-economic group seems to be a conscious process. As administrator and Sufi guide, Shams reasons:

“We do not want to exclude anyone because they can't afford to join-in so we keep this in mind when making decisions about retreats and things and it does seem to work out. If we hear that someone who wants to come to a seminar can't afford to, then we'll suggest they work at the seminar so they can come for free. That's harder to do with retreats because they're more expensive usually, but certainly we are conscious of the prices we choose for these things and are mindful of the people we are serving and what is likely to be affordable for them.”

Shams states explicitly that the organisation is “conscious of the prices” and “mindful” of “what is likely to be affordable” for the people at the centre. This awareness and adaptation illustrates one of the ways in which the Order reflects and reinforces the economic means and expectations of the practitioners.

Another area of correspondence between the organisational workings of the Order and the class culture of the population relates to the hierarchical structuring of the group. Unlike at Shanti, in the Sufi context there are many levels of initiation because there are thought to be many levels of spiritual

evolution. The knowledge and practices differ at each level and are not accessible to those at lower stages (a situation which differs greatly from the full and equal access that practitioners at Shanti enjoy). This structure very much resembles the higher education system that is an important source of cultural capital for the members of the Order. An external, supervising and credentialing authority makes the decision of who may ascend to the next progressive level and who may not; just as the teacher or professor acts as a gatekeeper within the realms of secondary school, college and university.⁶⁷ There are indicators of one's placement within the Sufi Order hierarchy, such as whether someone has a Sufi name and the dress he or she wears for whirling. Like in a graduation ceremony during which the graduate will receive different titles (or 'letters') and will wear a different robe depending on the type and level of qualification, so the Order makes the Sufi student's placement 'publicly' apparent. The authority of visual evidence, such as the whirling robe, alludes to what Jain describes as “the imaging of identity” (2007: 12), and in this case, the imaging of a status. These organisational tendencies are likely to support the 'cultural capital' class norms of the population.

At the Order there is a balance between the practitioner's ability to assert autonomy and the requirement to conform to external dictates. This balance is

⁶⁷ When I asked Sufi Order leader Aziz why members must not share information with fellow practitioners at a lower level, he replied that such powerful knowledge is very dangerous for those who are not ready for it. As Reader and Tanabe suggest, withholding access to something is often a very effective way of increasing the perception of the power of that thing and in turn, the numbers of people wanting to gain access to it (2008).

another echo of the socio-economic norms of the collective, especially in relation to the (partially-supervised) work that most members undertake. A member can express autonomy by choosing to attend the sessions and by opting to participate; however, the member must also submit to the external authority of the guide and undertake the guide's prescriptions because the guide is the authority for which practices and sacred wisdoms the student receives at each stage of development. The dynamic of committed practitioner (or employee) and authoritative guide (or manager) generates a situation where the agent accepts that supervision and a degree of conformity is necessary. In this way, the teaching structures at the Order mirrors prominent socio-economic dynamics of the market in question: participation requires the expression of personal commitment and substantial interaction with external structures.

There are also parallels between the workings of the centre and the dualistic view of the individual. For instance, the practices taught at the Order are said to enable transformation to the 'true self.' The style in which these practices are taught, however, reflects the 'everyday self' who must negotiate with balances of autonomy and external authority.

During an interview, one practitioner offers an insight into how her participation at the centre enforces her individual self-conception:

“I don't want to say who my guide is, but he is very prominent within the Order and I feel very honoured that he was willing to guide me. It is so essential to my journey. Sometimes I don't

understand the reason why he tells me to do one practice rather than another, but I know he will have a reason and besides, it's not for me to question his authority. I am his disciple and it's my privilege to do as he suggests. Ultimately doing what he says leads me to my higher self, I leave my other self, and if that's what's available, why would I not do the practices to the letter!?' That's how it works here. All of that is made clear from the start [of the membership].” (Anonymous)

This interviewee's participation at the Order requires her to choose to submit to her guide's authority, while simultaneously anticipating that in doing so, she will “leave” her everyday self and access her “higher self.” These behavioural and attitudinal expectations of the organisation are “made clear,” and through that communicative process, encourage the concept of a dividual self.

The organisation also reinforces the dual view of the individual by expounding particular literatures. This poem, ‘Devoid of Self,’ by Rumi, is one illustrative example of how readings in message classes reference the dualistic concept of individuality that all informants recount:

Devoid of self I traveled to a place
There, in the absence of I, joy filled my heart.
Without I, his obscured face, like the moon
Came forth and kissed my cheek.
In longing for my love I perished
And from that longing, birth was given to me.
I am eternally drunk, without wine.
My joy is endless, without I.
Do not remember me, ever.
For I am memory itself, without I.
I am ecstatic without myself, so I say
O me, may you always be without I.
All the doors were shut to me, and
All opened when he let me in, without I.
Me, I am the one, free of good and evil,
Free from obedience and corruption, without I...⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ <http://andylal.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/devoid-of-self-i-traveled-to-place.html>

Literatures like this poem promote the paradoxical notion that one is both 'I' or "me" and "the absence of I" and "without I," or the 'everyday self' and the 'true self' respectively.

Although the Order share literatures which reference the dividual notion of the individual, the leaders of the group also urge practitioners not to speak about their experiences of the true self part of their being. The terms 'true self' and 'higher self' feature in conversations, but students do not openly discuss or characterise the nature of this aspect of the individual in any detail. For example, when I ask interviewee, Nikki, how she might describe her 'true self' she objected:

"Well it would be a waste of time to even try to... It can't be put into words and we are told it would be dangerous to even try to do what you're asking. It's forbidden for good reason. It would become so taken out of context to try to discuss it outside of experiencing it."

The organisational norm of encouraging the practice of esotericism (which is taught at the Order and which students like Nikki maintain), is a condensed way of acting out (and thus enforcing) the dualistic philosophy. Keeping the experience of one's true self private offers no chance of discord or disparity with other accounts. If others are able to interpret these personal experiences, the distinct quality of those phenomena would inevitably, through that process, risk intervention and 'contamination' with the everyday part of the individual, blurring the divide. The teaching of esotericism assures the maintenance of the boundary which divides

the individual in to two parts. Thus, this organisational norm further instates the conception of the two types of self.

In these multiple ways, those who run the centre enforce organisational structures and teachings that at least partially parallel the class culture of most members. The centre's workings also affirm the collective's dominant understanding of the individual, which relates to this class stratum. Tendencies such as expecting the participant to accept a particular degree of external authority relate to both the class culture and the notion of the individual and as such, allows for some accordance and reciprocity between the two factors.

By considering the two field cases together, we see that both New Age groups impose traits that correlate with the respective (c) socio-economic cultures of their markets and/or the (i) understanding of the self that relates to those class groups. One cannot assert with certainty which of the three aspects (class group, ideology of self, or organisational structures) is the stimulus/i (or 'cause/s') and which is the reflection/s (or 'effect/s'). The fieldwork findings reinforce Hall's argument that all religio-spiritual groups, as social products, necessarily reflect the society in which they exist and respond to a community's beliefs, tastes, and needs (1996: 11; cf. Van Zandt, 1999). While this claim suggests the cultural factors are the starting point and groups such as Shanti and the Order are reflections of those factors, Baudrillard stresses that patterns of consumption (e.g. regularly paying for a yoga or Sufi dance class) do not merely illustrate pre-existing differences between

groups, but in actuality “induce” the groups themselves (1988 (1968): 16). Similarly, Weber's notion of status groups also suggests that consumption may possess a creative force with regards to class and values which relate to class (1930 [1904]). It seems probable that both processes occur at Shanti and the Sufi Order⁶⁹: the organisations reflect their respective (c) socio-economic markets and the (i) notions of individuality which relate to those markets; simultaneously the centres create a collective experience of (c) common socio-economic values and activate the (i) understanding of what it means to be an individual which associates with those values. Thus, at the two field sites, New Age organisational culture seem to both reflect and induce the '(c) class - (i) ideology' of each population, or, put simply, facilitate the factors in question.

The sites' facilitation of the collectivistic (c) force of class culture and the correlating individualistic (i) force of the notion of self suggests these two New Age groups support an individual-collective (i-c) intersection. There are some significant ramifications of these circumstances which require further exploration. For instance, these centres have the ability to encourage connection to both a group identity and a self-identity. Moreover, the differences in the forms of 'class-ideology' at each site convey distinct balances of 'individualism-collectivism' within each context.

⁶⁹ The act of participation with the New Age may enhance or create some elements more than others. For instance, the Sufi Order's organisational context may promote a particular usage of the term “true self.”

Implications: Collective-Individual Identity and Demographic Diversity

Associations between religio-spiritual affiliation and class membership are at times denied because of individualism's role in UK and US national ideologies; the reasoning for this argument is based on a presumption that people of these nationalities have a cultural predisposition of sufficient autonomy so as to choose religio-spiritual affiliations regardless of class influences (Finke and Stark, 1992; Kosmin and Lachman, 1993). Scholars like Nollman and Strasser go so far as to state that “contemporary societies are so highly individualised, that the class concept has lost its significance” altogether (2007: 81). As this chapter presents, the members of Shanti and the Sufi Order suggest that class factors in fact *gain* significance through the variation in understandings of what it means to be an individual; the distinct self-concepts constitute part of distinct class identities and vice versa, distinct class identities constitute distinct self-concepts. Religio-spiritual participation can both reflect and further affiliation with these factors.

The organisations' forms of promotion and facilitation advance connection to a particular 'class-ideology' position, which can endorse the participants' identification with both a class type and a self-concept type. For instance, following

the discussion with Shanti student Maria about her ability to make her own decisions (previously cited), the participant added:

“Yoga reinforces that confidence: the teachers give permission. They're always telling us -‘you know what feels long enough to stay in a posture’; ‘you know what feels right for your body’ and so on- and I take that with me in my day-to-day life.... It reminds me of who I am and what I'm about.”

In Maria's view, participating at Shanti 'reminds' her of her own ability to make decisions and know what is right for her and 'what she's about,' which in turn, reinforces the experience of independence notable in this student's class position *and* her conception of self. In this case, participation encourages simultaneous connections to the collective (c) norms of the class culture *and* the individual (i) self-concept.

Comparably, during an interview with a Sufi Order member, the informant said:

“It feels like home here. I walk through the door and I just feel myself and I become at ease. Everyone's really friendly and we've all got lots in common and I can relax... I know if I do the practices and follow the instruction I can get there. Doing that, I just feel more in-touch with, well, with myself I guess, and more at one with my life.” (Anonymous.)

This Order student's involvement at the centre requires “follow[ing] instruction,” which may re-produce the experience of the social constraints that inform this interviewee's lifestyle *and* understanding of self. Indeed, following the instruction

aids her experience of feeling “more in touch” with [her] self and “at one with [her] life.”

The reinforcement of both (c) class identity and (i) self-identity, and the elective affinity between the two factors, suggests the two identities are not wholly separate. Instead, the New Age organisations appear to support a 'class-self identity.' This form of identity relates to one's affinities with both a collectivistic socio-economic position and a corresponding individualistic concept of self.

The dynamics of the 'connection' processes occur in different ways in each field context because each organisation reinforces a different 'class-ideological' position. Shanti's organisational norms fuel a 'collective-individual identity' which manifests in a way that is more weighted towards the autonomy of the individual than the mutual obligations of the collective. These norms include offering vast individual choice, tailoring classes to personal preferences and encouraging the individual to self-define and self-assess objectives. In contrast, at the Order, many of the traits support a 'collective-individual identity' that appears in ways which are more weighted towards the joint dependencies of the collective than the freedom of the individual. The vertical hierarchical structure, the differential access to power and knowledge and the requirement to submit to an external authority's instruction, all contribute to this situation. What these differences tell us is that the New Age allows for socio-economic and self-concept variation.

Conclusion

It is clear that the two field collectives hold different socio-economic positions. An exploration of where students are on a wealth scale, implications of that wealth and the distinct sources of social power (or 'forms of capital') that the majorities of these groups hold, constitutes evidence of this class variegation. The scholarly assumption that New Agers are classifiable as 'middle class' neglects this diversity. In turn, the overlooking of socio-economic variance neglects how such differences can relate to the degrees and ways New Age practitioners' are 'individualistic,' as well as their expectations and experiences of New Ageism itself. Conversely, acknowledgment of such differentiation can offer beneficial insights into these issues.

One such insight is the correlation between (c) 'class culture' and (i) 'ideology of the self' at each field site. In both contexts, these two factors relate and co-enforce each other. The two (i) ideologies of the individual are (c) class-inflected: each notion mirrors the respective class collective's socio-economic constraints and aspirations. At the same time, these (i) ideologies of self may further a sense of (c) class identity by encouraging particular shared self-perceptions regarding degrees of freedom and authority. This is an example of a collective-individual intersection.

The distinction between the two groups' respective understandings of 'the individual,' suggests it is inappropriate to describe the New Agers' view of the self in singular terms and imply consistency across all groups. In addition, the conception of the individual at the Sufi Order shows that heralding internal authority as a central characteristic of 'New Age individualism' is very misleading. In the Sufi context, the 'everyday self' must submit to *external* authorities and the 'true self' *surpasses* questions of autonomy. Thus, this case evidences the need for a more flexible definition of individualism in conceptualisations of New Age culture, one which goes beyond autonomy.

The tripartite relationship between the type of (c) class culture, the (i) understanding of the individual propounded, and the workings of the organisation itself, highlights some correlating themes across the three factors. At Shanti, the perception of great autonomy and choice is evident in descriptions of the class traits of the group, in the practitioners' understandings of the individual, and in the workings of Shanti itself, such as the access to knowledge and authority. At the Sufi Order, the perception of greater external authority is visible in the class dynamic of the members, their conception of the individual, and in the Order's norms, such as the hierarchical structure. The correspondence between the organisational traits and the 'class culture – ideology of self' intersection conveys the organisations' abilities to facilitate the factors. In turn, this process can support the students' connection to a collective-individual identity which relates to

a (c) socio-economic group and the relating (i) self conception. The different ways in which the factors and the dynamics manifest in each context, suggests the New Age adapts to include demographic social-personal *diversities*: not every New Ager will be middle class and not every New Ager will conceive of the individual as highly autonomous.

These insights about an individual-collective intersection at the level of the members' socio-economic backgrounds offers much food for thought. The next chapter takes the capitalist context of the organisations as the focal area of experience. This investigation will consider the organisations' relationships with the capitalist milieu and propose how these engagements further another individual-collective intersection between the (i) agent who represents the centre and the (c) force of socio-economic structures.

Chapter Four – Capitalism

Capitalist Agents: Engaging with the Socio-Economic Context

We might expect all religious and spiritual groups that function in capitalist societies to reflect some of the capitalist socio-economic traits of the context, at least to some degree. However, as the Literature Review describes, many scholars distinguish the New Age as the exemplary case. A large body of scholarship argues that the New Age is particularly well suited to a capitalist world because this form of spirituality shares its key principles with the dominant traits of the postmodern social system. In particular, New Ageism's acceptance of 'multiple choice' is said to be very well aligned with the fragmentation inherent in postmodernity, which in turn relates to a distrust of consensus (Beckford, 1992: 19-20; Sutcliffe, 1994: 15; York, 1994: 15; Zizek, 2009: 28).

However, approaching this topic is more complex than some of these scholars acknowledge. An implication of looking at groups of agents in postmodern contexts is that the individuals will inevitably choose to produce, consume and engage with their socio-economic and spiritual surroundings in various ways. These ways include divergent amounts of desire and acceptance of shared

narratives, consensus and overarching authority.

The people who have most influence on the 'New Age' organisational norms at Shanti and the Sufi Order enforce some capitalist traits and encourage unexpected twists on others. These individual representatives of the respective centres communicate thoughts and behaviours that parallel some of the dominant social mores but paradoxically, also express a desire to surpass 'mainstream' traits of the context. The agent engages with the dominant norms of the socio-economic milieu and also engages with signifiers of a subset 'alternative' culture.

Within this cross-field dialectic between individual and culture (which includes both the mainstream and the alternative) there is diversity. At Shanti, the organisation's representatives place great emphasis on the individual's authority and ability to choose between social resources, and as such, this set of informants echo key socio-economic norms to a large degree. In contrast, the leaders and teachers at the Sufi Order encourage some individual authority and personal selection, but do so within narratives that stress the authority of collective organisational structures.

This chapter will make this argument by showing how the individualistic factor of the agent and the collectivistic factor of the socio-economic culture intersect in different ways at each field site. The examination will start by detailing some of the most common social traits of the postmodern context in which both Shanti and the Order function. The next section will describe the interrelations between

the (i) individual representative of the centre and the (c) socio-economic context, showing examples of both continuities with the mainstream culture and engagements with an 'alternative' culture. In this discussion, the different emphases on authority and consensus that occur in each site will become apparent. The final section will show how compatible expressions of the (i-c) exchange culminate into organisational norms which in turn, give collective force to particular versions of the agent-culture dialectic – ones that are either weighted more towards the individual, or weighted more towards the collective.

Consumer Capitalism

Capitalist social forms have long been implicated in English culture⁷⁰. In fact, Weber describes England as “the home of capitalism” (1961: 251) and Marx writes that England, was “the model country” for capitalist formations (1973: 277). This section will attend to some of the most common social norms of capitalism that continue to inform the geographic and temporal context of the two organisations. Although London is a highly cosmopolitan milieu within England, which incorporates many diverse social structures and a seeming contradiction for every norm, highlighting some prominent tendencies of consumer capitalism will

⁷⁰ In *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978), Macfarlane claims property was highly 'capitalised' and 'individualised' by the end of the thirteenth century, if not much earlier; this contrasts Marx's claim of the sixteenth century (1954: 145).

offer a deeper understanding of the socio-economic conventions that pervade much of the context in which the field organisations function. These traits include: heightened emphasis on private ownership, personal profit, self-governance, eclecticism and utility; and, a lack of emphasis on the historical and the natural.

Both Marx and Weber emphasise individualism in their discussions of capitalism in the Western world. Marx claims that capitalism as a system “transforms” community property into “individualistic ownership” (Marx, 1954: 616). This shift in ownership occurs at the levels of both real estate and the person's 'ultimate property': his or her labour power. Marx argues that, in this situation, all becomes alienable because everything is tradable through a monetary exchange: people can buy and sell objects and buy and sell their own and each other's labour. “The circulation of commodities is the starting-point of capital,” Marx writes (1954: 145). The embrace of commerce in turn affects modes of production and the nature of relationships. Machinery replaces human labour and instead of minimal division of labour, there is increasing differentiation.

Whereas Marx concentrates on these infrastructure features but pays less attention to ideological dimensions, Weber focuses on superstructure. For Weber, an attitude is capitalism-oriented if the individual estimates personal profit from a transaction (1924: 267). Weber believed that in capitalist contexts, there is a shared attitude regarding the emotional and ethical appeal of personal profit-seeking. It

is this shared attitude, encapsulating emotions and ethics, that enables capitalism, in Weber's view. In these different ways, Marx and Weber's classical perspectives on capitalism both suggest a move towards more individualistic social norms and moreover, the dynamics of a collective-individual dialectic; (c) capitalism encourages (i) alienation (according to Marx) and more self-serving attitudes (according to Weber), and that (i) alienation and ethos maintains the (c) capitalist system.

However, as the literature review describes, the works of the chief theorists of consumer capitalism and postmodernism⁷¹ propose that in recent decades, the extent of emphasis on the individual has mounted to greater extents than ever before (Bauman, 1991: 261; Beck, 1986: 155; Lyotard, 2005 (1979): 16). This body of scholarship links the 'new' extents of individualism to heightened experiences of fragmentation and uncertainty. According to this logic, rather than searching for consensus, in postmodern times it is “instabilities” which are sought as a “practice of paralogism”. This 'de-realisation' constitutes “the crisis of narrative” which occurs due to postmodernity's “incredulity towards meta-narratives” (Lyotard, xxiii-xxv) (cf. Berger et. al., 1974: 73-5; Berman, 1983: 15; Harvery, 2008 (1989):

⁷¹ As Chapter 2 notes, the relationship between consumer capitalism and postmodernity is characterised by the intensified rates of innovation, change and dislocation, which are typical to flexible accumulation. There are however parallels between consumer capitalism and modernity as well (see: Lasch [1978] whose argument describes a period characterised by competitiveness, complexity, fragmentation, personal isolation and social fluidity). Other theorists claim that the notion of 'postmodernism' is meaningless (Sokal and Brikmont, 1999; Sokal, 2008) and even that, the concept does not add anything to knowledge that is not already known (Chomsky, 1995).

11; 125; Jameson, 2005 (1991): 53). With the diminishing influence of consensus, institutions, and defined social roles, there is now no single accepted interpretation of anything and as such, the individual will feel greater confidence in acting as the autonomous authority for how he or she should live (Harvey, 1989: 22).

In relation to the experience of increasing individual authority, some of these scholars also claim that two other collective norms emerge: an emphasis on eclecticism and an emphasis on utility. With regards to eclecticism, Jameson writes that people are happier to “mix different styles and elements from different sources” (2005 (1991): 64). Beckford also characterises postmodernity as including “a willingness to combine symbols from disparate codes or frameworks of meaning [due to] a willingness to abandon the search for over-arching or triumphalist narratives...” (1992: 27). A primary motivation for the person's selection is the use that the selector predicts the form will have for his or her personal needs (Beckford, 1992: 27). The principal question asked in approaching a factor (be it a material object, discourse, experience or otherwise) is thus now often: 'What use is it?'⁷². Bauman argues this emphasis on utility informs the postmodern championing of “personal development” (1986: 155).

Harvey and Jameson theorise two other mores of consumer capitalist civilisations. Both thinkers correlate the increase in experiences of fragmentation and instability with the loss of a sense of time and history. They respectively claim

⁷² Personal calculations of use relate to Taylor's fears of individual 'cost-benefit' analyses (1991: 4), which the Literature Review in Chapter 2 describes.

that this disconnect with the past occurs because time appears to be more 'transitory and arbitrary' than it did during previous periods (Harvey, 2008 (1989): 11, 284; Jameson, 2005 (1991): 11, 64, 305). This correlation relates to capitalism's "deep and suicidal break" with a past in which "people were more integrated with nature"; thus, with the loss of a sense of the historical, people in postmodern times are understood to have also lost 'connection' with the natural (Jameson, 2005 (1991): 53).

These characterisations of consumer capitalism propose some of the conventions that people in postmodern capitalist contexts must socially reproduce in order for those prominent social mores to remain. To summarise, the dominant features include: an emphasis on individual ownership and personal profit, heightened self-governance, the experience of instabilities (rather than consensus), the acceptance of eclecticism, an increased concern for utility, and a loss of connection with the historical and the natural. In addition, the geographic locale (in this case, Britain, or 'the West') is likely to infuse these contextual formations.

Given the field sites' location in a consumer capitalist, postmodern context, we might expect the individual agents who manage and represent the New Age organisations to engage with some of the prominent features on this list. The next section will consider the ways that (i) individual agents who represent the field centre appear to inherit, reproduce, and negotiate with the (c) cultural norms and structures of postmodern capitalism. This examination will show an affinity which

suggests the (c) dominant cultural traits affect the (i) person and the person can encourage and reformulate those (c) cultural traits. The mutual enforcement between the collectivistic factor of the social mores and the individualistic factor of the agents' decisions indicate another manifestation of the individual-collective dynamic that occurs in the two fields. However, as the examination will show, this dialectic occurs in different ways amidst each population.

An Intersection:

(c) Social Traits - (i) Agents' Expressions

At both Shanti and the Sufi Order, the individual representatives express thoughts and actions that show varying degrees of continuity but also contrast with the broader socio-economic milieu. Some of these expressions (as continuities) mirror the dominant norms, suggesting a rapport between the two factors of (i) expressions and (c) traits. To this end, the affinity suggests the (c) social system influences the (i) person (or 'agent in society,' Harris, 1989: 599-612) and, vice versa, that the (i) person reproduces those (c) factors. The other expressions (as contrasts with the prominent traits of capitalism) contribute to an apparent 'counter culture' that is at once still within the capitalist system and also, presents a seeming 'alternative' to the preeminent traits of the system. These tendencies

suggest the (i) agent can reflect and reproduce the (c) traits of a subset counter culture as well as the dominant traits of the mainstream culture.

The multi-directional (i-c) intersection between the (i) agent's expressions and the (c) social mores occurs at both sites, suggesting a cross-field tendency. However, at times the nature of these expressions indicate some telling variations. The Shanti employees communicate greater veneration of individual authority and greater distrust of meta-narratives; whilst the Sufi Order guides place greater emphasis on submitting to the power of collective structures and seeking consensus.

Shanti Representatives

At Shanti, there are many examples of how the (i) individual representatives of the group echo (c) dominant capitalist conventions in ways that suggest they inherit and reproduce those traits. For instance, many informants venerate individual authority; encourage eclecticism and emphasise a concern with personal utility. In addition to these 'continuities' with the context, there are also many examples of how the individual representatives of the group echo traits which contrast with the dominant mores of the context. For instance, the majority of representatives reference the ancient, the natural, and the Eastern as signifiers of an ideal 'alternative' socio-economic milieu. The combination shows how the (i) agent

inherits, maintains and plays with the (c) cultural norms of the context and in so doing, often emphasises the centrality of the individual.

Continuities with the Capitalist Context

Starting with an example of a continuity with mainstream capitalism, many of the yoga teachers suggest the postmodern emphasis on personal authority influences them and at the same time, that they reinforce this social norm. As Per, the manager, and spokesperson for Shanti, explains:

“I make a point of saying [to the students] ‘if this posture isn't relevant for you today, leave it out or we can find a better alternative. Or I'll give a more challenging version or an easier version. . . It's good for people to feel they can have a preference; to have that freedom.”

Per's decision to enable the student to employ individual authority (to “have a preference,” to which Per will adapt his teaching) simultaneously reflects and reinforces the postmodern capitalist tendency of heightening experiences of autonomy.

Veena, who is a cover teacher at Shanti, also echoes the contextual emphasis on individual governance in modes which suggest an agent-culture affinity. During one of Veena's classes, she told the group to “direct your energy to your heart centre, which may be where your heart is, but if you feel it's somewhere else, direct

your energy there.” After the lesson I asked Veena where else the heart centre may be, to which she replied: “Well, it's up to you. You choose. I think it's for each person to choose where it is. You can't dictate stuff like that to people anymore.” Veena's statement suggests her viewpoint is inflected by the social pressure to not “dictate... to people anymore.” Perhaps in 'response' she encourages the individual's authority (in this instance, urging students to identify the location of the heart centre for themselves). By doing so, the teacher socially sustains the cultural norm of heightened personal authority; she encourages others to think even established concepts such as the location of the heart centre are open for individual appropriation.

Another chief trait of the mainstream culture, which the majority of the yoga teachers echo, is the promotion of eclecticism. Without exception, all of the teachers at Shanti encourage students to adopt a mixture of beliefs and practices that derive from numerous sources. For instance, yoga instructor Lili said to a member of her class who was suffering with a head ache that she “should wear yellow for healing and consider feng shui to alter the energy of her home.” In the same exchange, Lili also notes that “Jupiter's new orbit will mean expansion... [and] different crystals will help you in different ways depending on your astrological sign.” This promotion of a mixture of spiritual resources is an example of how the agent can mirror the postmodern norm of eclecticism; here there is a parallel between individual expression and cultural trait.

Per is another Shanti representative who repeats the cultural inclination towards eclecticism. During one of his *ashtanga* classes, he said:

“Even everyday activities can bring spiritual awakening if you bring the right intention. Eastern cultures have known this for centuries. Watch a Japanese tea ceremony or Arabic calligraphy - these are acts of devotion and growth. Bring the intention to your gardening, riding a bike, photography - - all of them, or whatever you want - - and you can be spiritually present and grow through these things... Not everyone realises the wealth of options that are available to you.”

Per's decision to advocate the inclusion of “whatever you want” into one's personal amalgamations of “acts of devotion and growth” further aggrandises self-governance. He champions the individual's ability to 'pick and mix' an eclectic selection of discourses and practices which have personal resonance and in turn, deepens the link between the agent and a core trait of the agent's socio-economic heritage.

The Shanti employees also promote the significance of utility. This emphasis on use is another example of how the yoga centre's representatives express thought and actions which are often continuous with the norms of the mainstream postmodern context. In these cases, the agent tends to advocate the 'use' of a practice or product or idea by referencing prospective self-development or self-improvement. For instance, during a lesson, Dora said:

“Let go of any feelings that no longer serve you. Let them go with your out-breath. Breathe out people who have hurt you and any anxiety you have been carrying in your body. This is what the practice is for: to emotionally purify; to release the negative energy. You will see all parts of your life get better when you feel happy and centred... Think about it.”

Here Dora explicitly articulates her view that yoga has a use, namely, to emotionally transform the individual. Her emphasis on the 'personal profit' of participating in a yoga class suggests a reflection of and contribution to the cultural norm of a heightened concern with utility. Dora urges the other agents to self-verify the use of yoga for themselves: "think about it," she says. Thus she encourages the students to consciously and deliberately engage with (a manifestation of) the cultural emphasis on use.

These multiple instances of consistencies between the (i) individual representative's decisions and expressions, and (c) primary traits of the mainstream culture indicate a multi-directional (i-c) intersection. The affinities suggest the agent inherits and sustains the traits, or put another way, the traits impact and are reproduced by the agent. The representatives all centralise the individual in these examples: the authority of the individual, the individual's ability to choose and mix elements from numerous heritages and how the individual may find participating in yoga practice useful and beneficial.

Contrasts with the Capitalist Context

In addition to exhibiting continuities with the prominent traits of postmodernity, the representatives of Shanti also present divergencies from these dominant socio-economic structures. These contrasts indicate signifiers of 'the ancient,' 'the

natural,' and 'the Eastern,' which together allude to an alternative, counter-culture. As the examples will illustrate, the promotion of alterity reproduces another form of the socio-economic culture that offers a twist away from the culture's most pervasive norms. In these instances, agent and culture still inform each other, but in modes beyond the most immediately predictable.

For instance, Shanti employees make frequent references to the ancient. Despite Harvey and Jameson's claims that people in consumer capitalist environments will disconnect with history (Harvey, 2008 [1989]: 11, 284; Jameson, 2005 [1991]: 11, 64, 305), the management and yoga instructors at Shanti all promote appreciation of antiquity. Per plays what he describes as “ancient devotional music” during his classes (albeit by paradoxically utilising the latest iPod technology) and teachers frequently state that the practices themselves are thousands of years old. On one occasion, yoga teacher Lili told her group of students that practicing yoga links them to an ancient time:

“Relax into the pose. Gentle face. Effortless effort. You can relax here. Yoga was fine 5000 years ago and it's fine now. What your body is doing today takes you back to the roots of civilisation. It's perfect. It's gentle and gradual, and gazillions of years more evolved than other types of exercise and relaxation that have come about recently. You've chosen well. You can trust this one.”

Lili's decision to refer to a time far removed from the present day encourages the perception of a contrast to the students' current modern context. Her wording sets yoga apart from “other types of exercise and relaxation that have come about

recently” and instead, strives to link the student “to the roots of civilisation.” However, the claim that the *asanas* (postures) taught at Shanti are different to other practices because they are thousands of years old does not allow acknowledgment for the innovation and variation that yoga has faced since its inception. As Singleton describes in great detail in his text, *Yoga Body*, the type of yoga found in classes in Western cities like London today are very different to the ancient yogas that texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads*, and *Yoga Sutras* describe (2010). It is far more likely that Lili's understanding of yoga is a modern one, which she echoes and reproduces through her actions, thoughts, speech and teachings. The culture-agent dynamic is continuous, but Lili appropriates an example of the present-day culture (namely modern yoga) in a way that evokes awareness of an alternative time. This agent maintains a modern 'popular' form and presents it as exotic and different.

Another way in which the management and instructors at Shanti express forms which contrast with the broader socio-economic context is by making extensive references to nature. Whereas scholars of postmodernity like Jameson believe people in postmodern times have lost 'connection' with the natural (Jameson, 2005 (1991): 53), the Shanti representatives emphasise connection with the natural in ways which make a clear distinction with the everyday urban context of capitalist London. Natalie, a *kundalini* teacher, shows an example of this tendency. Natalie plays music during her classes that simulates grand examples of nature ('sounds of

the rainforest' and 'sounds of the waves' are regular choices). In many of Natalie's classes she will instruct the student to “let the music take you away from here” or to “use the sound to transport you to a place away from the city, away from the pollution and traffic and noise.” In these ways, Natalie asserts a division between the social milieu and an alternative, preferable realm to which the music can provide a type of access. On one side of Natalie's instruction is the dominant forms of the urban, industrial and technology-driven socio-economic context and on the other side, is an imagined counter culture “away from” the dominant context. Natalie's expression reaffirms the two: she acknowledges and confirms the industrial context in which she and her students reside and chooses to reference a new, alternative culture (ironically via a CD no doubt created in an industrial context). This agent repeats cultural norms but chooses to do so in ways which evoke a new landscape beyond those norms.

The Shanti representatives' references to 'Eastern culture' further the distinction with the present-day, Western milieu. One of the many examples of the simple and scripted presentations of the East is Per's choice of decorative features at the centre. Every piece of art in this yoga context presents one of two Hindu symbols: the Om sign, or the deity Ganesh. When I asked Per why he did not wish to include other visual indicators of Hinduism, or even symbols from other religions (since, by his own understanding, “yoga is for any and all religious groups and for people who are not religious at all”), he said:

“Religious art which isn't Eastern is unpopular and in the main considered creepy. I need to build the environment that my students want and that seems to be this one: a Hindu one. Although it obviously needs to be a Hindu environment they can recognise as Hindu otherwise there'd be no point.”

Per highlights here the 'alternative culture' paradox. The signifiers of the counter culture must be different to the signifiers of the mainstream culture, but recognisably so. That is to say, the references to an 'alternative' must nevertheless have achieved some level of establishment within the dominant culture in order to be meaningful. If the code is not one the New Ager “can recognise” as alternative “there'd be no point.” In this instance, the extractions of 'Eastern culture' are selected by an agent who is not a Hindu, for a group of practitioners who are not Hindu, but who, the agent assumes, will recognise these two succinct and predictable symbols of Eastern spirituality. Per inherits an awareness of the appeal of the codes within the dominant culture and, after some conscious analysis, takes deliberate action to perpetuate those codes by featuring them within the Shanti space. Through these multiple processes of inheritance, conscious engagement, action and perpetuation, Per reflects and contributes to the capitalist system; he strives to construct an environment that will appeal to a Western market who value an apparent counter-culture.

This small selection shows some of the ways the representatives at Shanti express traits that contrast with the predominantly individualistic, modern, urban,

Western context of the centre. These expressions of the ancient, the natural and the Eastern are 'within' the social milieu, but are also often presented as counters to the social milieu. The expressions do not disrupt the 'agent-culture' dynamic and in fact, are part of the exchange, but occur in forms which enable the agent to explore alternatives to the most preeminent norms of the culture.

Together, the expressions of continuities and contrasts with the socio-economic milieu show how the (i) agents who represent Shanti, reflect, sustain and 'play' with the (c) norms of their society. This is a multi-directional individual-collective correspondence, in which individual and collective appear to co-produce each other. As the next section describes, the ways in which the representatives of the Sufi Order engage with consumer capitalism are similar in some ways and different in others.

The Sufi Order Representatives

At the Sufi Order, the (i) individual employees also echo (c) social traits in ways which indicate a multi-directional exchange between agent and culture. The norms of the socio-economic context influence the person and the person reproduces those norms. Like the Shanti case, the representatives' observable expressions of these processes exhibit both continuities and contrasts with the primary traits of the context, showing engagements with examples of both

'dominant' culture and the 'alternative' subset of that culture. In comparison to the Shanti case, however, many of these expressions reference shared structures and narratives to a greater extent.

Continuities with the Capitalist Context

The majority of the guides at the Order make statements and undertake actions which resonate with some of the core traits of consumer capitalism. Unlike the yoga instructors at Shanti, the teachers at the Order do not observably venerate individual authority in any direct way. The ideology of self that pervades at the Order and the requirement for the adherent to submit to the authority of a more senior guide are far more prevalent features. Furthermore, the veneration of eclecticism (which allows for some individual authority) depends on a unifying, historical tradition; and, the concern with utility more typically references how the individual can 'improve' so they will be of use to the collective. Accordingly, there are examples of 'continuities' within the agent-culture exchange at the Order, but these continuities emphasise the individual to a lesser degree than the 'continuities' within the agent-culture exchange in the yoga centre.

In accordance with the collective's dualistic understanding of the individual, the leaders and other teachers at the Order describe individual authority as context dependent: in the context of the everyday self, there is some individual

authority and some submission to authority, and in the context of the true self, authority is no longer a contending factor of the individual's experience. The leaders and less senior guides at the centre frequently allude to this notion of authority. For instance, during a message class, one leader said:

“Trust the practices chosen for you by your guide when he feels you are ready... There are no limitations there. It's up to you. You just have to say yes and bring an open heart....We all have a guide.” (Anonymous.)

This leader appears to reproduce the postmodern veneration of the individual by celebrating the individual's prospective ability to freely choose to try to access the 'true self'; he says to his listeners “it's up to you.” The individual can choose to “say yes,” or not. However, this echo of a consumer capitalist trait is not conclusive. The speaker believes every member of the group must follow the (collective) organisational protocol if they wish to truly experience beyond the everyday self. The protocol of consciously accepting a hierarchical structure and entering into a relationship with another individual (who will be the authority on this personal process) is the core expectation. The agent has the choice to participate but by making that choice, must submit to the collective ethos if true participation and progress is to occur.

With regards to the cultural inclination towards eclecticism, many representatives of the Order publicly convey their acceptance of a 'pick and mix' approach towards spiritual resources. However, parts of these agents' descriptions of 'eclecticism' often include the stipulation that the spiritual selections must be consistent with the Sufi Order ethos. This form of cultural acceptance endows the individual with some personal authority, as is typical of postmodern capitalist culture, but also offers a collective structure from which the individual can take their cue and learn how to interpret the meaning and purpose of those selections. For example, Shams, who teaches message classes at the Order and leads Sufi retreats, personally adopts a diverse approach to spiritual sustenance; in addition to being a guide, he is also a Reiki healer and an adherent of Shintoism. During an interview he states:

“As humans, naturally, different packaged spirituality will resonate with us all in different ways, but different coloured screwdrivers all do the same job. It's ok to mix it up because there's only one truth, but the processes here will guide what's right.”

This statement indicates an agent-trait affinity; the individual's assertion echoes and enforces the trait of eclecticism by promoting the freedom to “mix it up” and select the outer form (or 'packaging') of spirituality that is of most personal resonance. Simultaneously however, the representative asserts there is “only one truth” and the “processes” at the Order “will guide what's right.” Shams does not

view this approach as contradictory. Rather, Shams' wording hints at a complete acceptance of the eclectic (packaging) approach: it is 'natural' for different 'packaging' to attract different human beings.

Injil, who is the dance leader at the Sufi Order, also reflects and maintains the social norm of eclecticism in ways which signify the agent-culture interconnection. Like Shams, she alludes to the need for the individual's selections to be compatible with the Order's collective belief system. For instance, during a dance class, Injil said: "At the Order, we are all free to draw on all traditions and even practices. Providing there is no contradiction with the one truth, there is no problem." In this instance, Injil engages with a notion that is very consistent with the postmodern propensity towards making selections from a multitude of heritages. However, the agent also includes the caveat that the selections cannot contradict the "one truth." A communal narrative of a unifying, singular truth or source still persists. In a comparable way to Shams, Injil asserts this approach to eclecticism as if it is an indisputable fact.

The individual guides at the Order also frequently voice assertions which correlate with the postmodern concern for utility. These instances typically show how the guide stresses the 'use' of a practice or concept by referencing prospective advantages and benefits for the individual, so they are able to benefit the collective. For example, one guide stressed the use of the Sufi practices for the person who will then, in turn, be of greater use to the rest of his or her 'company, family and

society.' He said:

“We need drive and ambition and the instinct of self-preservation- it keeps us alive in a world where there's a lot of competition. The advice of your guide will help you so much in this pursuit... just follow the practices and they will get you where you need to be. Do not think you are being selfish by focusing and cultivating your own talents and abilities at work. By being the best person you can be, you can be of service to the rest of your company, to your family and to society. It's normal. “ (anonymous)

The individualistic pursuit of striving for personal improvement and cultivating one's “abilities at work” corresponds with dominant values of postmodern consumer capitalism: it stresses use, self-development and the individual's labour power. In these ways, the agent's references to utility hint at the culture's influence on the person and how the person can socially further that influence by talking to others. However, this teacher also claims it is useful for the student to follow the practices and the guide's instruction in order to develop and in turn, help others as part of a collective. The 'continuity' with 'individualistic postmodernity' is tempered here. The speaker assures the listener his approach is “normal,” discouraging further inspection of his engagement with cultural norms.

These examples of continuities between the (i) agent's expressions and three of the (c) dominant norms of the socio-economic context evince an individual-collective intersection. It seems the (c) collective culture inflects the (i) individual agent's expressions and those (i) individual expressions reproduce the (c) collective culture. In comparison to how this two-way process occurs at Shanti, the

representatives of the Sufi context place less emphasis on the authority of the individual, the veneration of the eclectic approach often includes reference to a unifying collective belief and utility is linked to both person and the collectives the person can contribute to. Thus, this set of guides allude to a more collectivistic orientation in their expressions of the milieu. The next section will expose further disparities in the two groups' engagements with postmodern consumer capitalism by discussing how the guides at the Sufi Order express contrasts to the preeminent norms of the consumer capitalist milieu.

Contrasts with the Capitalist Context

The representatives of the Sufi Order engage with signifiers of alternative culture. These signifiers represent some of the same 'themes of alterity' we find in the yoga context: 'the ancient,' 'the natural,' and 'the Eastern.' However, the Sufi Order teachers also present 'the ideal group' as a contrast to the 'outside social world.' The individual's interactions with the apparent counters to the milieu are still part of the agent-culture interchange but allow the agent to replicate forms that seemingly surpass the mainstream. The modes in which the individuals communicate these 'contrasts' at times stress the Order's collective structures, which may, in turn, give a sense of authentication to the expressions of counter-culture.

Starting with the agent's references to 'the ideal group' shows how the leaders of the Order often explicitly stress the value of the Sufi collective in ways which divide the communal experience at the Order away from the 'individualistic' experience of 'everyday life.' One example of this propensity occurs when a guide says to a class of students:

“I hope you all feel your valued place in this community - no, not this community, this *family*. A family of likeminded people, setting out on a journey together. The mindset and intention is the same and that's special. Your place here is treasured. *You* are treasured. Being so independent out there has only got you so far in life. The idea that you are self-sufficient is *shirk*, it's blasphemy, it's of the outside world. All of our teachers tell us this. Feel your place. You're safe here. Here with others like you.” (anonymous)

Comparing the group of practitioners at the Order to what is likely to be the most intimate and uncorrupted of all groups, i.e. the family, the speaker here engages with a very appealing, idealistic notion of 'the group.' He highlights the disjuncture between the group at the Order and the larger society, or the “out there” by describing the outside world as the place where the practitioner has had to be independent (and adding, that it has only got the practitioner so far). This process still maintains the agent-culture interrelationship, but shows how the agent-in-society can present signifiers of alterity within that interrelationship. He offers enforcement for the division he presents by noting the external authority of the group's “teachers;” thus the agent utilises a reference to an authoritative structure in his presentation of a signifier of alterity.

The representatives of the Sufi Order also convey contrasts with present-day capitalist contexts by frequently asserting the ancient origin of the wisdom and practices taught at the centre. One example of this trend is when a leader said:

“These messages are not new, they have been given throughout the ages. 'You do not belong to yourself' -this was known since man first arrived on earth. It is thousands and thousands and thousands of years old. There is no need to question it; at the Order we have always known this... The practices themselves have been refined over centuries of transition going back to prophetic times. They are from a different time. We know they work. Vilayat brought us back to these ways⁷³.” (anonymous)

In this statement, the guide presents the organisation's spiritual aids as deriving from a historical context that differs from the practitioner's usual daily environment; he states “they are from a different time.” Although the teachings exist within the contemporary culture, the agent presents them as distinct from that culture. He assumes neither he nor the listener “need to question” this form of alterity because the collective of the Sufi Order has “always known” the messages and “know [the practices] work;” here the teacher alludes to a consensus about the efficacy of the forms. This articulation serves as an exception to Lyon's view that within “the New Age quest... the voice of ancient tradition or of divine revelation is muted or ignored altogether, but the inner voice is taken to be thoroughly authoritative” (2000: 94). On the contrary, the speaker pays no attention to the 'authority of the inner voice' in this instance, but rather accepts

⁷³ As the Cultural History of the Sufi Order recounts, Vilayat brought a new emphasis on the ancient Sufi mystics and poets; see: Chapter 1.

that his 'quest' will be reliant on customs and beliefs from the distant past that survive within the collective structure of the Sufi Order tradition.

Many teachers at the Order also herald nature in a manner which draws a distinction between an 'other' context and the postmodern capitalist context in which they live. For example, during a breathing practice that references the four natural elements, Shams taught that the 'water breath' "washes away mental soot which accumulates everyday in the city." This teacher claims, by doing the practice, "you will feel how in love with nature you really are. You are nature but you may forget that from time to time when you are in your car or in front of a computer. But you can remember it now." In this example, Shams suggests the signifier of alterity (nature, which the 'water breath' evokes) can positively contrast and even discount some of the negative outcomes of "everyday" living in an industrial, technologised, capitalist city, even though the practice is being undertaken *within* that industrial, technologised, capitalist city. The practice does not halt the agent-culture exchange, but offers a variation on its most prominent forms.

The agents who instruct at the centre also observably engage with signifiers of Eastern culture. All of the guides adopt (Eastern) Sufi names (such as Noorshahab, Aziz, Wali, Injil, and Shams), despite these guides all being white with other, traditionally Anglo-European legal names. During classes, some of these individuals also present referents of the East by playing devotional music from

Eastern contexts, or saying mantras or poems in various Eastern languages (most commonly Persian and Arabic). Intriguingly, the teachers at times portray the East as a place that evades capitalist social structures. The agent's depictions of a romantic alternative to the everyday Western context typically neglects to note that Eastern cultures can also be individualistic, world economies, or even dynamic, ever-changing cultures. As one said:

“Listening to Persian poetry is so soothing, isn't it!? Such an exquisite language. Such an exquisite *culture*, I should say. The so-called 'first-world' can be so patronising to these other cultures, because they haven't taken to a rat-race, profit hungry lifestyle like a lot of America and Britain have. But I think we all have these moments when we stop and think 'well, haven't they got more right than we have in many ways?' That's part of our message... Okay, they're not so materialistic and if that's what floats your boat, okay, fine, but spiritually, they are so much more in-tune and in-touch than people here.” (anonymous)

This informant argues that cultures outside of the (Western, Anglo-American) “first-world” have not “taken to a rat-race, profit hungry lifestyle” and are “not so materialistic,” while Eastern cultures like Iran “are spiritually... so much more in-tune and in-touch.” These essentialised portrayals of 'the material West' and 'the spiritual East' champion an orientalist tendency (Said, 1978: 300-1); the teacher abstracts 'the other' in ways which convey a dichotomy between Western culture and Eastern culture. She presents an alternative to her culture from her own culturally-informed perspective. She believes the 'superiority' of the East to the West (“they got more right than we have in many ways”) is “part of our [shared]

message” at the Sufi collective, which indicates the perception of the Sufi group's agreement and consensus about this issue.

These examples show how the individuals who represent the Order at times express signifiers which contrast with the preeminent norms of the milieu. These references are a part of the 'agent-culture' intersection but often manifest in forms that indicate an alternative to the mainstream. In a similar way to the agents' expressions that are continuous with the predominant cultural traits, the agents often reference shared structures and narratives as a part of their descriptions of the 'alternative.'

Comparing the ways in which the 'agent-culture' dynamic occurs in both field contexts show some similarities. In both cases, the representatives of the site express ideas and forms that (broadly speaking) correlate with the chief norms of the culture; the social inclination towards acknowledging individual authority, allowing for eclecticism and assessing utility are inflected in the words and actions of the agent. Also, in both cases, the representatives of the centre refer to forms which contrast with the dominant traits of the culture; 'the ancient', 'the natural' and 'the Eastern' are also identifiable in the communications of the agent. These findings indicate an affinity between the individualistic (i) factor of the agent and the collectivistic (c) factor of the culture (which includes the subset 'counter culture'); this affinity implies that an individual-collective intersection occurs at the level of the socio-economic context.

The comparison between the two sets of agents also conveys some disparities. Firstly, the individual's replication of the 'individual authority' norm occurs to great extents within the Shanti context and only very minimal extents within the Sufi context. The acceptance of the eclectic approach also shows some divergences. At Shanti, the approach allows for freedom and flexibility; at the Sufi Order, the approach allows for only some autonomy because the guide's descriptions of this theme often include the caveats that the choices must not contradict the Order's collective ethos and the superior guide will 'assist' in the process of selection. Another divergence between the two sets of representatives is how they express the cultural concern with utility; the yoga instructors typically stress personal development and individual benefit, and the Sufi teachers champion how the individual can advance and in turn be of use to the collective. Distinctions between how each set of agents engage with themes of alterity include a different amount of emphasis on 'the group.' Some employees at the Order refer to the Sufi collective as an ideal group which is set apart from the rest of society; this tendency is not observable in the yoga context. Furthermore, the guides from the Sufi centre often cite shared narratives, consensus and collective structures as a part of their descriptions of the 'counters' to the dominant culture. Cumulatively, these differences suggest that whilst the 'individual (agent) – collective (culture)' intersection happens in both field sites, there is particularity in the 'direction' of the intersection that is specific to the field context. The yoga

teachers' express the dialectic in more individualistic forms and the Sufi teachers' express the dialectic in more collectivistic forms.

The following section will propose how the field sites themselves relate to the two factors of agent and culture and the differences we see between the two populations. It will argue that when numerous representatives' (i) expressions of the (c) culture are compatible with each other, they culminate to the organisational norms of the centre. Those organisational norms, in turn, can inform and give collective force to some of the (i) individual's expressions of the (c) socio-economic culture, reinforcing both the agent's behaviour and the social features.

How the Organisations Facilitate the Factors

At both Shanti and the Sufi Order, many of the organisational tendencies parallel the common expressions of the agent-culture intersection. The affinities between the organisational norm, the (c) cultural trait and the (i) representative's expression of the trait suggests a tripartite relationship between the organisation and the two factors in the (i-c) intersection. It seems likely that when the multiple (i) agents engage with (c) social structures and express those engagements in compatible ways, those multiple compatible expressions become pervasive themes within the organisation. That is to say, the organisational culture is influenced by the (i)

individuals who lead and teach at the centre and the (c) socio-economic milieu with which those individuals engage. The organisational traits strengthen the agent-culture dynamics that occur in consistent, congenial ways. In turn, those organisational norms support and encourage the versions of the agent-culture dynamic that resonate with the organisational norms. The New Age centre as a place with its own (organisational) culture influences the (i) individual employee to engage with the particular (c) traits of the broader social context that correlate with the norms of the organisation. This relationship of separate but co-penetrating components suggests, at both Shanti and the Sufi Order, the 'organisation' contributes to the individual-collective intersections between agent and culture which the last section describes.

Shanti

The areas of compatibility between the organisational culture of the yoga centre, the (i) modes in which the agents who represent the culture communicate, and (c) traits of the social milieu occur across each of the 'continuities' and 'contrasts.' The tripartite affinity is evident in relation to individual authority, eclecticism and utility, and also in relation to 'the ancient', 'the natural' and 'the Eastern'. This discussion will focus on examples of two of these 'themes' in order to illustrate the tripartite correlations. Focusing on some of the ways in which the organisation

champions individual authority and emphasises signifiers of nature will enable a proposal for how some of Shanti's chief organisational traits are reproductions of, but also contributions to, the intersection between (i) representative and (c) social milieu.

With regards to the factor of 'individual authority,' as the last chapter details, many of Shanti's organisational workings reflect and reinforce the view that the individual is independent and powerful enough to make personal decisions. Some of the ways the yoga company achieves this institutional norm is by offering vast choice, encouraging self-governance and tailoring the practice to the wants and needs of each individual practitioner. Per alludes to the central place the individual's command has to the centre's ethos and approach when he says:

“There's only one company motto and that's: 'adjust yoga to the person, not the person to the yoga.' That's what we're [Shanti is] about. It's very important that the teachers here understand our [pause] what to call it? Our approach, I guess. I think most people who 'find' yoga get it though. It's not something I worry about too much. You've got to let them feel relaxed and like they can say what they want and people who end up working here have that level of intelligence already. I'm very lucky with who's here.”

An institution's motto, as a phrase chosen to encapsulate a group's beliefs and ideals, is often symbolic of the culture that the collective strives for. Thus, the nature of Shanti's motto is likely to be indicative of the type of culture the founders of Shanti are hoping to achieve. This motto emphasises individual authority; the person governs the practice, not the other way around. Sure

enough, the sentiment of the motto is inflected in ways in which the yoga teachers sometimes think, speak and act at the centre; these expressions are consistent with the organisational “approach” that Per describes. For instance, during interviews, some of the instructors recall how the adaptive teaching approach encourages the individual student to be their “own spiritual master” (Annette) and “their own judge” (Veena), and enable “the student to choose” (Per) what is significant and beneficial. In these instructors' views, the individual's command is of central importance.

The compatibility between the repeated expressions of multiple employees maintains the company ethos. The (i) individuals' comparable reproductions of the (c) postmodern emphasis on personal authority (by 'adapting yoga to the person' and verbally encouraging self-governance, for instance) sustains and builds upon the 'authority' norm at the centre. Simultaneously, the organisational environment supports that intersection (by propounding company mottos that centre on personal power, for instance); as such, the company encourages the (i) representative to engage with the (c) individual authority trait via their involvement with the centre. However, Per suggests the level of 'encouragement' is not necessarily extensive; he assumes the individual teachers at Shanti have already 'got' the point so he can let them be free to “say what they want.” The individual teacher is given the individual authority to communicate 'individual authority' as they see fit.

Some similar processes occur in relation to 'contrasts' with the socio-economic milieu as well. For instance, referents of nature are very apparent in the Shanti space. Much of the marketing of the products sold at this centre takes the natural environment as a core branding strategy. Shanti highlights that the food sold at the centre is organic and vegan and packaged in 'environmentally conscious' materials. Posters on the wall advertise that the yoga mats are made from “eco-friendly” fabrics and that the clothes sold are made from “hand finished and hand printed organic cotton.” The organisational signifiers of nature also include 'atmosphere aids' as well. Per buys the CDs of 'the music of nature' for the teachers “to use if they want” (Per). Moreover, most teachers favour candlelight over artificial lighting. As Per reasons, candlelight is a “softer alternative, even though it becomes more expensive. It's more natural and [it] helps people switch off and makes Shanti a special place, a different place, where people can relax and come into themselves.” These examples contribute to the appearance of distinction between the collective environment at Shanti and the dominant forms of the wider, urban, industrial and technology-driven socio-economic context. Indeed, Per suggests this is part of a conscious intention; he strives to “make Shanti... a different place.” However, the 'contrasts' to the milieu are still a part of the capitalist system: the food, yoga mats, clothes, CDs and candles are bought, sold and consumed. Thus, the representatives' engagements with the forms still constitutes an agent exchange with a capitalist social system.

When the multiple (i) Shanti electives engage with the (c) social milieu in comparable ways by choosing to play the CDs, deciding to light the candles or encouraging the purchase of the products, these are moments in which the agent-culture dynamics reproduce the organisational trait of referencing 'the natural'. Simultaneously, the fact that the management of the centre brings these referents of nature in to the space facilitates the agent-culture dynamic; the referents are there for the (i) person to perceive and potentially act upon, which in turn, reflects and reproduces the (c) social culture. The ways in which the management of the centre presents the CDs and candles, as being available for the representatives to use if they wish, 'facilitates' the teacher's engagements with these forms, whilst still giving the individual the space to choose how to do so.

These two examples which focus on 'individual authority' and 'nature' show some of the resonances between Shanti's organisational norms, the (i) individual employee's communications and the (c) socio-economic milieu. These affinities suggest the organisational culture is a reflection of and reliant on individuals engaging with the socio-economic culture in consistent ways. The affinities also suggest that as an organisation, Shanti gives force to a particular version of the agent-culture co-dependency, spurring on the 'individualistic' leaning of the 'agent-culture' exchanges evident amongst its population of yoga teachers.

The Sufi Order

In the Sufi Order context, there are also observable organisational tendencies that align with the (i) representatives' common expressions of the (c) social milieu. These institutional traits mirror both the 'continuities' (some individual authority, eclecticism with caveats, and use for the person-in-the-group) and also the 'contrasts' ('the ideal group', 'the ancient', 'the natural' and 'the Eastern'). Taking an example of a continuity (namely, the veneration of eclecticism) and an example of a contrast (namely, the extensive references to 'Eastern culture') can exemplify these parallels. Furthermore, the exploration of the two themes will allow for a proposal of the relationships between the Order's organisational norms and the interchange between (i) employee and (c) milieu.

The eclectic approach to spirituality forms a core part of the Sufi Order's ethos. The high degree to which this collective aggrandises eclecticism probably relates to the well established Sufi Order value of 'the unity of religious ideals.' As the Cultural History of Sufi dance (in the Introduction) describes, this tenet stresses the validity of numerous pathways towards the sacred. According to the 'unity' principle, there is not one religion or spirituality that has exclusive claim to the ultimate, unifying truth. Rather, resources from multiple traditions can aid the seeker. The practices exemplify this tradition. For instance, the movements within the dances themselves often signify multiple religious heritages. Injil, who is the

dance leader, instructs physical positions that mirror religious symbols or characteristics; the movements range from positioning one's arms “to form the Islamic crescent” (Injil) to “walking with the regality of [the Hindu deity] Rama” (Injil). During these dances, the students also often sing or chant words or phrases that derive from multiple 'holy languages' such as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Sanskrit. Injil requires the permission of the head of the Order to teach these parts of the proceedings. Beyond the dances, some of the other practices also adopt an eclectic approach, which at times result in examples of pastiche. An “energy practice,” which one guide teaches, wills the students to imagine “pranic Holy Spirit energy” moving up the energy channels to one's “third eye” whilst saying an Islamic chant. This guide describes this practice as a long held “treasure” of the Order's “lineage” (anonymous).

These examples show how the practices at the Order are continuous with the agent-culture dynamic that centres around eclecticism. The hybridity apparent in both the dances and the energy technique show how two (i) representatives of the Order express an affinity with the (c) postmodern emphasis on eclecticism in compatible ways; they both communicate practices which mix forms from different heritages. These consistent (i-c) intersections maintain and contribute to the Order's organisational norm of celebrating diverse approaches to the sacred. Also, vice versa, the organisational norm impacts the intersections; the history of the collective culture has long celebrated the eclectic approach, the hierarchical

structure of the group authenticates the eclectic dances and the lineage of the Order's tradition validates the energy practice. These collective structures encourage the engagement between (i) employee and (c) social trait through participation at the centre.

Parts of the Order's organisational culture also resonate with the examples of the agent-culture dynamic that relate to presentations of 'the East'. Creating a recognisably Eastern environment has been a consistent approach of Dances of Universal Peace since one of the founders, St Denis, gave her first official performance. Thomas describes how this pioneer of the dances made references to the East a part of her act:

“Having genuine Hindus inside the foyer of the theatre and having the air heavy with the scent of incense... she wore a gauze skirt trimmed with gilt, her midriff was bare and her bodice covered in jewels. She had jewels on her head, bangles on her arms and bells on her ankles. To complete the picture, she stained her skin brown. However there was no attempt to make authentic ethnic dance movements” (1995: 73).

The Order still maintains the tradition of representing Eastern culture, making 'the East' another observable part of the Order's organisational environment. The physical space at the Order displays distinctively Eastern artwork on the walls, such as examples of Islamic calligraphy and photographs of the Himalayas); the numerous Persian rugs and incense sticks also contribute to the impression of being in an environment that venerates the East. Moreover, the institution

provides organisational resources for the guides which help sustain the centre's association with 'the other.' Books of mantras and poems in Eastern languages are given to each representative to learn and CDs of music from Eastern contexts are purchased by the administrator for the guides to use at particular points in their teachings. The Order also expects the teacher to adopt an (Eastern) Sufi name, describing this referent as a “necessary requirement to symbolise the change in their identity” (anonymous).

These descriptions of signifiers of the East within the Sufi Order context display a resonance between an organisational tendency and the (i) employees' reflections and reinforcements of a theme of (c) alternative culture. In this account, the representatives' engagements with the counter culture are consonant. From St Denis' appearance during her performance, to the administrator's purchase of CDs, the expressions of appreciation for Eastern culture are harmonious. These multiple agent-culture exchanges encourage the prominence of 'the East' within the Order's organisational identity. That is to say, the force and coherence of the organisational theme of 'the East' rely on some consistency across the (i) individuals' expressions of that (c) cultural theme. Vice versa, the conspicuousness of 'the East' within the organisation facilitates the version of the agent-culture dynamic; the organisation's history, décor, resources and established ways of displaying “identity”, encourage the (i) individual to physically and mentally engage with and reflect the (c) counter culture theme.

At both sites then there are organisational tendencies which correlate with the two factors of the (i) agent's communications and the (c) forms of the socio-economic milieu. The instatement of those organisational norms also hint at corresponding degrees of the respectively more individualistic or collectivistic manifestation of the dialectic. For instance, at Shanti, the teacher is given more freedom and choice about how he or she engages with the forms that reference the natural (e.g. they can choose whether or not to play the CDs or light the candles); whereas at the Order, the organisational structures can at times enforce more pressure on the teachers to reproduce some of the signifiers of the East in defined ways (e.g. the guide is required to adopt a name of Eastern heritage).

The correlations between the organisation and the individual-society dynamic suggest that consonant expressions of the agent-culture dialectic can inform the norms of the centre. The correlations also indicate that the chief norms of the centre encourage expressions of agent-culture intersections to occur in modes that are consistent with those organisational traits. In these instances the organisation is able to support and give force to some of the agent's expressions and the correlating cultural theme. Thus, both Shanti and the Sufi Order facilitate the individual-collective interrelationship between person and milieu.

The insights into the agent-culture co-production and how the organisations relate to that co-production raise questions which require further investigation. For instance, what are the ramifications of the finding that (in both groups) the

tripartite affinity can manifest both in forms that are consistent with the postmodern world *and* in forms that relate to an alternative subsection of the social order? What might this at once continuous and contrasting orientation tell us about the appeal of New Age spiritual forms like the ones evident in the two fields? Furthermore, what do the particularities both within and between each field population tell us about the individual's liberty when working within these New Age groups? This chapter will now strive to answer these questions.

Implications: The Best of Both Worlds and the Individual's Liberty

As we now know, at both Shanti and the Sufi Order, some of the agents' expressions and some of the organisational norms are continuous with the preeminent traits of postmodern consumer capitalism, albeit to varying degrees. In addition to employees' expressions and organisational norms which correlate with core traits of postmodern consumer capitalism, there are also traits which show an association with an alternative culture. 'The ancient', 'the natural', 'the Eastern'⁷⁴, and (at the Order) 'the ideal group', are pervasive themes which can

⁷⁴ Although not evident at Shanti or the Sufi Order, 'New Age' examples of exoticism such as African and Indian American references may achieve a similar sense of 'the alternative' to the effects of signifiers of the East which this chapter notes, even though they are referencing places which are not 'Eastern' (See: Aldred, 2000).

signify the 'counter' of the prominent modern, urban, Western, individualistic norms of society. This finding supports the many authors who argue that New Ageism inherently offers an alternative to the mainstream (Bowman, 1993; Brown, 1992; Hanegraaf, 1996; Lau, 2000; York, 1995; Prince and Riches, 2000; Sutcliffe, 1997: 102, 105; Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000).

The New Age appreciation of the counter, the different, the removed and the exotic, implies Benjamin may be correct in his assertion that 'exoticism' can increase appeal in certain contexts (1969: 222; Hall, 1991: 33). The agents at Shanti and the Order “contrive asymmetry” (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992: 18), in ways that we might assume appeal to the many students who are happy to pay to participate in the group. It seems likely that these forms must be *recognisably* alternative and easily accessible in order for the communications to be meaningful and attractive to a collective. As Baudrillard describes, a 'real' experience of 'the other' tends to be time consuming and less engaging than intensified, scripted representations of that reality (2001). The teachers' and organisations' expressions of 'scripted representations' enable experiences of shared recognition and appreciation in a quick and easy way.

The evidence that the simultaneously 'consistent and counter' orientation manifests within both field sites under consideration suggests this paradoxical trend may also be pervasive across New Age contexts beyond Shanti and the Sufi Order. Indeed, Heelas argues that the New Age is both “an alternative counter-

cultural movement and a spirituality of our times” (1996). Engaging with the mainstream and the alternative and 'getting the best of both worlds' is likely to inform the appeal of the New Age. Participation can offer access to an imagined other civilisation, without that access requiring disconnection with one's own societal values. By engaging with products (including practices) which appear to possess an essence of a counter culture, New Agers are permitted to indulge in an 'alternative' experience without that experience necessarily unsettling their usual way of life.

Although the co-presence of the 'continuities' and the 'contrasts' is a trend across both field sites, and possibly the New Age more broadly, there are also particularities to consider. The forms of dominant and alternative culture manifest in different ways both within and between Shanti and the Order. These particularities tell us that individuals who work in New Age groups are 'free' to express cultural traits in different ways but this 'freedom' is evident to different extents. For example, within Shanti, Lili decides to express eclecticism by focusing on established spiritual forms such as feng shui and astrology, whilst Per chooses to communicate eclecticism by focusing on more traditionally secular pursuits that include gardening and photography. In these instances, the two agents both affiliate with the postmodern norm of fragmentation and multiple choice, but are free to do so in their own ways, referencing the forms which they find personally meaningful. Within the Order, Injil engages with eclecticism by

repeating dances that amalgamate a diverse range of religious symbols, whilst the other teacher communicates with eclecticism by repeating an “energy practice” that fuses different religious concepts. Each Sufi guide expresses eclecticism in distinct ways, but in both cases, those ways draw on forms of eclecticism that derive from a collective bank of traditions that has received communal approval. Thus, each of the New Age teachers communicate 'eclecticism' in particular ways. However, one set of New Age representatives, at Shanti, shows great autonomy. The other set of New Age representatives, at the Sufi Order, shows less independence and more accommodation to the collective narratives of the organisation.

Different manifestations of the tripartite (agent-culture-organisation) dialectic suggest that New Age forms can differ depending on the preferences of the individual actors who make up each circumstance. The compatibility of each set of representatives' communications, preferences and dispositions (in this case, either more towards free, individual expression or more towards external guidance and consensus) culminate to, and are enforced by, the collective norms of the distinct organisations. When two groups of New Age teachers reflect and reproduce social mores in different (but internally compatible) ways, the social configurations of the New Age group will be various.

Conclusion

The affinities between the expressions and traits of the social culture are indicative of an individual-collective intersection that is evident across both fields. The New Age (i) representative communicates thoughts and behaviours that resonate with traits of their (c) social world. Some of these expressions parallel the preeminent traits of postmodern consumer capitalism and others signify a subset 'alternative' culture, which is within the capitalist social system but is also indicative of a counter to that system as well. These findings suggest that the social milieu impacts and influences the thinking and actions of the person and that the person reflects, reproduces and negotiates with the traits of the socio-economic environment in which they live.

Within this cross-field dialectic between the individual teacher and the collective culture there are some telling differences. At Shanti, the representatives communicate in ways that emphasise the individualistic traits of postmodern consumer capitalism to a large degree (for instance, the teachers champion the authority of the person, stress that the individual is free to pick and mix from a range of resources, describe the use of yoga with reference to personal development) and appear 'free' to express the 'contrasts' to the milieu in ways of their choosing. The individual is the central concern. In contrast, at the Sufi

Order, the guides' expressions align with the individualistic norms of the social milieu to a lesser degree because, often, a part of those expressions paradoxically reference shared structures or sources of consensus. (For example, the teachers describe individual authority within the contexts of the Order's core shared notion of self and hierarchical system, they explore eclecticism but within the constraint of the Order's shared narratives and protocol, and they relate the use of participation to the individual who can in turn benefit the group.) Similarly, these agents' expressions of counter-culture often accentuate the Order's collective structures and include a presentation of 'the ideal group' to make a distinction with the mainstream. In these ways, the agent-culture intersections which are evident in the Sufi context exhibits a greater leaning towards the collective. Overall, considering the expressions of the two sets of teachers evidences how the agent-culture dialectic can manifest in different ways; the yoga instructors' expressions typically show more individualistic forms and the Sufi teachers' expressions typically show more collectivistic forms.

The affinities between the two populations' agent-culture intersections and the respective organisational tendencies at each site suggest the likelihood of a tripartite relationship between the three factors of the (c) cultural trait, the (i) representative's expression of the trait and the organisational norm. When multiple 'representative-milieu' co-productions occur in coherent ways at the centre, those compatible expressions inform the collective norms of the company.

Hence, the traits of the organisational culture are reliant on the decisions of an assemblage of agents who respond to social conventions in similar ways. In turn, the pervasive traits of the company encourage and give weight to the versions of the agent-culture dialectic that is most consistent with those organisational norms. The collective force of the organisation can support and reinforce particular (i) expressions of the (c) culture, and their either 'more individualistic' or 'more collectivistic' orientation. Thus, at both Shanti and the Sufi Order, the 'organisation' contributes to the individual-collective intersections between agent and culture and the directions those intersections take.

These findings offer some support for the claim that the New Age is capitalism-conforming (Beckford, 1992: 19-20; Sutcliffe, 1994: 15; York, 1994: 15; Zizek, 2009: 28). There is evidence of the New Age propensity towards the individual and the eclectic at both sites. However, this chapter adds that the degrees of alignment are various. The Shanti case is better aligned to the dominant norms of the milieu, is more individualistic and as such can offer stronger support to this body of scholarship. The Sufi case only partially aligns to the core traits of the social context, relies more on consensus and the norms of the group, and thus can only reinforce the scholarship to some degree. In sum, it seems different 'New Age' teachers will experience capitalism and the New Age group in different ways. In all of these instances, an individualistic force (the agent) and a collectivistic force (the culture) are present and inform each other.

Following this investigation about how the New Age teacher and the capitalist social structure inform one another, the next chapter will focus on the practitioner's experiences of emotion. This discussion will investigate how the (i) personal feelings of the individual and the (c) shared tenets of the group co-produce each other. It will argue that the co-penetrating dynamics of these two factors constitute another key individual-collective exchange that is evident in both fields.

Chapter Five – Emotion

Emotional Exchange: Shared Tenets and Personal Feelings

Of all the motivations and benefits of participating at Shanti or the Sufi Order, the practitioners' pursuit of emotional wellbeing is probably the most significant. This significance is both quantitative (participants cite issues relating to emotional health more than any other objective or benefit) and qualitative (this type of wellbeing is readily understood as important for every area of a human being's life [Strauss, 2005: 13, 31]). In fact, emotional welfare – at least in the two field contexts – is perceived as a type of power: personal (individual) power, which relates to self-conceptions and self-esteem; but also social (collective) power, which concerns relationships and public status.

Such breadth suggests emotion relates to both internal states and external social life. Yet, many scholars understand emotion to be rooted in *either* the individual *or* the collective. In Lindholm's view, the reason why so few anthropologists and sociologists have studied feelings and sentiments is because the West typically views

emotion as a compulsive force arising in the inner core of the individual. “It falls in the realm of the study of the individual personality, not within social science, the study of relationships” (Lindholm, 2001: 269). Riis and Woodhead reinforce Lindholm's observation in their discussion of the “widespread popular as well as scientific tendency to reduce emotions to something private, personal and subjective – to inner states accessible only by introspection” (2010: 4). Yet scholars such as Basu (1998: 117); Abu- Lughod and Lutz (1990); Abu-Lughod (1986); and Lutz (1986, 1988) stress that social discourses constitute emotions situationally. As Hildred Geertz wrote, “culture presents not only a set of suggested answers on how to behave... but also clues on how to feel about the actions” (1959: 237). Lynch outlines these two major trends in Western scholarly understandings of feelings and sentiments, contrasting the theories which present emotions as private phenomena with those which locate emotions in 'social constructivism.' He concludes that emotions are only intelligible when one views them as part of cultural and social meaning systems (1992).

Perhaps these divergent prioritisations of the individual (and internal and private), or the collective (and external and public) are due to the complex nature of emotion itself. Evans Pritchard claims *any* discussion of emotion leads to chaos because of the inevitable variability, not only within cultures, traditions and collectives but also within a single individual (1965: 44; Asad, 1997). Similarly,

Durkheim and Mauss also both caution that emotions are difficult to identify and describe with any sense of certainty (Rorty, 1980: 104). Sure enough, one cannot always recognise psychosomatic tendencies within oneself, so how might one confidently claim such dispositions exist within an informant and occur due to definite individual factors, collective factors, or both?

Beyond the challenge of the complex nature of feelings and psychological states is the issue that, traditionally, researchers of religion often bypass the topic of emotionality. As Riis and Woodhead acknowledge, it is easier to study intellectual and ritualistic aspects of religion (rather than emotional ones) because “the tools of the academy are honed for the task” (2010: 13). Yet with the relatively recent assertion that throughout the world, it is the forms of religion that focus on feelings (as distinct from intellectual pursuits) that are attracting the most converts (Micklethwait and Woolridge, 2009; Champion and Hervieu-Leger, 1990), research on emotion in religio-spiritual contexts is especially timely and necessary. Although one or two examples of this type of research are slowly starting to appear (e.g. Riis and Woodhead, 2010; Weaver et al., 2003), these studies generally do not consider New Age contexts. Moreover, the description of moving from one state to another (such as from sadness to happiness, or from purchase to satisfaction [e.g. Howard, 1989]) is not as illuminating as approaching the topic

with a consideration of intervening processes. What themes or techniques facilitate an emotional transformation? What happens during a practice that shifts a person from an initial feeling to a desired one or, if not the desired state, the resultant state which is nonetheless different from the beginning one?

This chapter seeks to embrace some of the complexities of studying feeling in religio-spiritual contexts. It will do so by focusing on the emotional landscapes of the yoga and Sufi dance practitioners and by noting the themes of heightened distress, residual anxiety, and enhancing mood via participation with the group. The discussion will then present evidence of an intersection between collectivistic (c) shared principles and individualistic (i) personal feelings. Elucidating the associations between the two factors will suggest how the (c) principles and (i) feelings appear to co-produce each other. The organisation contributes to this situation by promoting an ethos, discourses, practices and environments that encourage the mutual enforcement of the two factors. Although it is only possible to assess expressions of emotion (as opposed to privately felt sensations), these expressions suggest the balances of 'individual' forces and 'collective' forces that are inherent within the centres' therapeutic functions have a profound effect on the practitioner's emotionality.

Emotion

In both field contexts, the informants' descriptions of their experiences of emotion show some commonalities. For instance, many practitioners recall periods of intense upset which appear to prompt or propel attendance at the centre. Another pervasive theme is the sense of residual, constant stress which many interviewees recall. This type of emotion is different to the moments of 'heightened' feeling that inspire or accelerate participation, but nevertheless constitute a telling part of many respondents' impressions and sentiments. This examination of the New Ager's experiences of emotionality will consider both the 'heightened' and 'residual' levels of intensity in turn and then present evidence for the more positive, favourable emotions which coincide with their involvement with the respective New Age group.

Heightened Distress: Triggers of Participation

During the fieldwork period I began nearly every interview with an attempt to establish a narrative for each informant's involvement with the respective organisation. I hoped the interviewee's own emphases within their chronicles

might reveal the elements of experience that were of most importance from the informant's point of view. Sure enough, most respondents did include and prioritise some components more than others. What was unexpected, however, was the common theme of emotional turmoil at the point of entry into the group. The descriptions suggest feelings of extreme anxiety and despair can move and motivate individuals to begin participating at the centre. Moreover, comparable feelings which arise after the point of entry can spur more regular or increased participation. As we will see, many of these examples are reactions or responses to experiences that occur as part of social, personal or temporal rhythms.

Shanti Practitioners

The yoga participants did not necessarily use words such as 'distress' or 'turmoil' within their own recollections. However, the often acute portrayals of the time they began attending classes at Shanti do commonly indicate these forms of suffering. The experiences of affliction often occur in association with particular adversities, such as a bereavement, divorce, or a period of sickness. For example, Micha describes the turbulent feelings which followed her father's death:

“After my father died, my relationship with my existence changed. I started looking for new understanding. I had to... I had to change my assumption that 'nothing too bad will happen to me.' It changed my understanding of myself as a person. It changed everything.. That's when I started to give it [yoga at Shanti] a go. I had to do something. Oh God, I had to do something.”

This practitioner makes connections between her father's death, the thoughts and feelings she experienced in response to that event, and her decision to participate at Shanti. In this way, she suggests an emotional reaction provoked her first attendance at the yoga centre. Five other interviewees also note a painful time of bereavement in conjunction with their early involvement at the centre.

Other informants recount the anguish and sadness from a divorce or other relationship breakdown in connection with the start of their participation at Shanti. During an interview with Audrey she alludes to the distressing circumstances surrounding the dissolution of her marriage:

“I wasn't in the best place when I first came here. Ummm... [pause]... I'd had a bit of a shock... I'd had a difficult year and there was a lot going on at that time. I'd had to spend most the year in America and my husband's, my *ex*-husband's job meant he had to be here and I guess he was lonely and needed company. We *both* felt like that. Anyway, he met someone else and we're not together now. He's still... [sigh]. It was a shock. I was desperate for some peace and I started to do funny things like stare at candles and count in my head just to distract myself. Yoga seemed like a healthier alternative and this is the nearest centre to my house, so - that's why I'm here.”

Audrey sought out yoga at Shanti as a 'healthy' means of distraction for the “shock” and pain surrounding a shift in her marital relationship. Four other practitioners spoke about divorce or a 'break up' in association with why they began attending yoga classes. Other common triggers include the anxiety caused

by a sick parent (which two students note) and the practitioner having a serious illness or near death experience (which three informants describe).

Many interviewees identify the emotional stimulants that increased participation at the yoga group as being of a lesser intensity than the ones at the time of initial involvement. Ironically, the notion that a person would make time to do yoga when they are at their busiest or “most hectic” (Maria) is not uncommon. As one yoga practitioner explains:

“I do yoga more when I'm more busy, I guess because I'm more anxious then....Like, I crave it when I come back from holiday but not while I'm on holiday because I'm so relaxed, I don't need it.” (Anonymous)

Comparably, Jean spoke about how he organises a private class with Lili if he anticipates a busy and stressful day at work. He adds:

“When I have to work with a colleague who I find difficult, I'll get up earlier and go to yoga to cope with the day ahead. The number of times I go depends on what else is happening in my life; how worried I am.”

These yoga students suggest that a more mundane type of 'anxiety' or 'stress' can boost the desire and will to practice yoga. The allusion here is that yoga can help one to “cope” (Jean) with such emotions and experiences.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Many participants at the Order also reference times of emotional suffering in their descriptions of first becoming acquainted with the centre, indicating similar patterns between unwanted feeling and the inclination to attend. Like much of the Shanti population, many informants from the Sufi group cite forms of adversity in their descriptions, such as a bereavement, separation, illness, or losing a valued job.

Six Sufi Order members note redundancy as the primary explanation for their anxiety and low mood at the time of entering the Sufi group. Fahad, who is 31 and single, had been employed by HSBC in the City. He depicts how losing his job during the recession impacted his emotions:

“I felt lost in all the aspiration and chasing of the City. Then I got made redundant and realised I wasn't lost before. That aspiration and chasing and my job- that was my identity. *Now* I was lost. That was my spiral going to the bottom. No job. No money. Failure... I knew I had to learn from it to survive it and I started to go to the Order. All of my questions were answered there.”

Fahad clearly states how his sense of crisis coincides with joining the Sufi Order. Another example of this tendency to associate a time of distress with joining the group occurs during a conversation with Mark. This practitioner is 44, single and works as an administrator. During a discussion in the communal kitchen after a message class, he said to me:

“It's a year this week since I first started coming to this group. I know that because a couple of weeks ago it was the anniversary of the day my wife, well, since my separation and umm, yeah, so I know I started with this lot three weeks after. That stuff gives you a jolt, you know. Pain makes you question what it's all about. You can't just keep moseying along all the time.”

Mark makes an explicit link between the “pain” of his separation and the “jolt” it gave him to seek out a greater sense of meaning (or “question what it's all about”), which we might assume he is attempting at the centre (where he “started...three weeks after”). The other emotions which informants note in the chronicles of their attendance at the Order, include the anxiety caused by severe sickness (which four participants cite) and the sorrow of bereavement (which three interviewees speak about).

The majority of the population are regular attendees at the site, who take part in most of the sessions which the centre offers, however some of the other members suggest they only attend, or at least attend more often, during particular periods of angst or tension. Isabel is one example of this type of 'part time' practitioner:

“You can get a bit hooked to this place- the energy, the people, the depth. I'm a single mum of three kids who [pause] need dinner and help with homework and picking up from their friend's house and all that weekday madness, so I can't be here every time, as much as I'd love to be. I tend to come here when everything's starting to get a bit too much. I come here as my treat, as my moment to breathe.”

Isabel believes her participation at the centre increases “when everything's starting to get a bit too much.” These types of feelings and experiences that spark a rise in her motivation to go to the centre are different from the more discrete reactions to an unwanted change (for instance in connection to a redundancy or a separation). Isabel's statement relates to comparable feelings but ones that probably arise within the context of 'day-to-day tribulations' rather than from periods of trauma or misfortune.

Rhythms and Participation

The fieldwork findings suggest the triggers of heightened emotion which inspire participation may occur randomly, or as part of larger patterns, such as socio-economic shifts or age-related life seasons. For instance, the experience of redundancy which Fahad endured relates to a shift in the economy, i.e. the recession. Although no yoga practitioners spoke about redundancy or a decline in economic growth, Per reports “the recession has been fantastic for business,” suggesting the potential of a paradoxical, inverse relationship between profit and the economic patterns of the society. Within this relationship, worry and the desire for personal exploration and transformation may be possible intervening factors. Shanti's owner also notes that the week following the London riots in 2011 also

saw a sudden increase in customers. A state of national or regional anxiety of these types may encourage people to take part in yoga practices. This hypothesis parallels Starrett's study of religious goods in Cairo, which found an increase in sales after occasions of terrorism (1995: 54).

Other examples of emotional triggers relate to the rhythms of life seasons. Levinson's theory of adult development claims distressing experiences (such as the loss of a parent, or the rupture of a meaningful relationship) are more likely to occur within particular 'seasons' of adulthood. These types of crises can result in significant changes to life structure and inspire the person to re-evaluate their present life. During these emotional and transformative stages one might ask oneself: 'what is important to me now?' and 'what do I really want my life to be like?' (1978). The data from both field sites suggest some practitioners' experiences surrounding the time of entry into the group might relate to such patterns of development.

Rhythms in the form of “cyclical notions of time” (Daniels, 2003: 628; cf. Hausner, 2007: 144) also appear to affect participation. At both sites the management said more people attend on Mondays than any other day of the week and in January, more than any other month of the year. As Daniels' study highlights, during the New Year, feelings of “transition, transformation and overcoming obstacles” are more prominent than usual (2003: 621, 625; Reader and Tanabe, 1998: 216). One interviewee spoke to me about these temporal

structures. Gill from the Sufi Order said:

“A group of us were talking about it in the kitchen after last week's sesh [session]: it's good to be here on Monday and get yourself in the right frame of mind for the week. I think a lot of us get that from being there.”

Here Gill implies others may share her view about the appeal of attending classes on a Monday.

Perhaps, therefore, the feelings of despair that seem to motivate initial participation or even the feelings of a lesser type of stress that can increase attendance, sometimes occur as part of a pattern; a socio-economic pattern, a life-season pattern, or a temporal pattern. Furthermore, it is possible, multiple patterns might bear a cumulative effect upon the prospective participant; for instance, if one is experiencing a transitional stage of crisis, during the recession, in January. Within these rhythms, the person may experience feelings of sadness, but also feelings of transformation and motivation – the two types of emotions could be two sides of the one coin in these moments.

In addition to periods of heightened anxiety or affliction, at both Shanti and the Sufi Order, some informants also spoke about another mode of feeling: a sense of *residual* anxiety. This almost constant impression differs to the moments of more extreme distress which relate to entry in the centre or increases in participation.

Yet, the feeling still forms an important part of the practitioner's experience of emotion and indeed, one that may, at least partially, influence engagement with a New Age group.

Residual Anxiety and Postmodern Fragmentation

A type of pervasive, constant stress impacts many participants. Interestingly, the descriptions of these sentiments echo scholarly theories of the uncertainty of postmodern culture (which chapters 2 and 4 describe). This parallel suggests a type of 'internal' fragmentation may manifest alongside the 'external' fragmentation of the context. The experience of 'internal fragmentation' does not appear to be a primary stimulant for engagement with the New Age centre (in the way of heightened emotion). However, the experiences may still play some smaller, contributory role in inspiring involvement with the New Age group. If this prediction is correct, the literatures which assert that 'societal fragmentation' discourages participation in institutional groups are too simplistic. Rather, these societal circumstances may conversely encourage participation in at least *some* institutional groups. This hypothesis reinforces Heelas and Woodhead's argument that "secondary institutions" (resembling Shanti and the Sufi Order) can cater to people in postmodern societies by offering alternative structures to "the failures of primary institutions" (2005: 44; Berger et. al., 1974).

Shanti Practitioners

Four interviewees from the yoga population allude to the types of doubts and ambiguities one might expect to flourish in contexts that discourage meta-narratives. As Maria notes: “We are so bombarded now. The constant information. You're constantly thinking, what should I be doing now, what should I be reaching for? It feels chaotic.” Another yoga practitioner, Sarah, describes a similar sense of bombardment and confusion:

“One magazine says: 'Eat more salmon, it's good for your brain,' then the next article in the *same* magazine will say: 'Don't eat salmon – there's mercury in the water! You're gonna get cancer!' God, it's endless contradiction. Just trying to do simple things like eat healthy gives me a headache and puts me in a bad mood! Coming to Shanti though, it gives my mind a break from all that and gets me back in-touch, back in-touch with a simpler way. All I have to do is listen to my body and suddenly the mercury doesn't matter any more.”

Sarah's statement suggests a link between her experience of a confusing and fragmentary day-to-day environment and her experience of herself as confused and fragmentary also. The impact of these experiences have emotional consequences for Sarah. Like Maria, who does not know what she should be “reaching for,” Sarah describes feelings of uncertainty: being unsure about what she should be “eating.” Just as Maria states that being “bombarded” by information feels “chaotic,” for Sarah contradictory information can at times give

her a “headache” and put her “in a bad mood.” Sarah also implies she seeks institutional support at Shanti to compensate for such an experience of uncertainty, or to get “back in-touch with a simpler way.” Her words, “all I have to do is listen to my body,” echoes a common Shanti prescription and thus, functions as a type of collective narrative that Sarah can hold on to and from which she can take sustenance.

Another informant, Tania, hints at similar tendencies, albeit in different terms. Tania who is a mother of two daughters and has been attending Shanti infrequently for over a year at the time we met, said:

“I don't know how other people can function without this kind of injection of peace into their week. Maybe they do something else; meditate or hike or something.”

Following Tania's list of ideas about what other people may do in order to negotiate with a chaotic, stressful environment, I suggest “... what about going to a church or another place of worship?” to which she quickly replies:

“Oh no, I don't think so. Well not for me, anyway. Religion is very personal and I'm Spanish, I was born Catholic, so I'm not judging anyone else. But why on earth would I want to take myself and my daughters into this system which is very much about male power and money? I mean these systems aren't transparent. I was in Rome last weekend and watched the priest with his gold thread robe and beautiful shoes tell a homeless man to get off the steps of his church! I mean, come on! I felt like saying to him: 'Wow, Jesus would be so proud!' And then off he went back into this stunning church filled with art that's worth more than most nations. I'm not naïve about it, I pay to come to Shanti but it's upfront. They're not shady in their agenda here.”

Tania's suspicion of attending the “primary institution” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) of the Church as a means of gaining emotional support illuminates her perception that Christianity is not as egalitarian or community-focused as she would like it to be. Tania takes issue with two types of elitism within her evaluation: one relating to gender (“male power and money”) and another relating to economic capital (the wealthy church versus the homeless man). This insight implies the root of Tania's distrust of “this system” is its prioritisation of the concerns of some people in the community over the needs of others. Significantly, she contrasts her distaste of this situation with her perception of the “secondary institution” (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) of Shanti, which she thinks is less “shady” in agenda. Thus, Tania is not unwilling to engage in *every* institution. Rather, she makes a conscious choice to engage with one type of 'secondary' spiritual institution over another type of 'primary' religious institution.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

A participant at the Sufi Order offers a comparable description of the experience of residual stress and reluctance to utilise 'traditional' religious supports. In a conversation about how stressful he finds the society he lives in, he says:

“I used to get up at 5.30am, throw coffee down my throat and didn't stop working until 10pm. I didn't have much time to see my friends or work out what maybe I could do differently. This is London – there's endless choices but the choices are kind of limitations as well. My heart wants to be known. I wanted to feel less lost.... Perhaps if I was in my parents' time or my grandparents' [time], I might have gone to Mosque, but [pause] my experience of them is they focus on the views of the most conservative members. I'd rather put my energy into a place that's going to look after every person. [The Sufi Order] is different. It has a decent balance. And they're not sexist either.”

Like Maria and Tania from Shanti, Amir conveys frustration and dissatisfaction with a fragmented society where “there's endless choices” but such choices can make a person feel “lost” or 'unknown.' Amir also expresses disenchantment with a major Islamic institution and the dominant collective meta-narratives he associates with that institution. Resembling Tania's expectations of 'the Church,' Amir suspects 'the Mosque' will not focus on the needs of the entire community and alludes to a lack of gender equality. Yet, he implies his experience of the 'secondary institution' of the Sufi Order “is different,” “it has a decent balance” and is “not sexist.”

These informants understand the respective New Age group as a preferable source of emotional support to the prospective resources available at primary religious institutions. This perception of the New Age context is reminiscent of Riis and Woodhead's description of “a space rich with emotional possibilities in which [people] can develop new sets of emotional standards when other social domains are found to be emotionally meaningless” (2010: 214). Here societal fragmentation encourages people to seek *alternative* institutional structures, rather

than none at all.

There is less evidence for the notion that 'residual anxiety' or 'internal fragmentation' inspires activity at the centre, than the notion that 'heightened distress' sparks the motivation to take part. However, these few anecdotes do imply, at least for some members, a more constant state of confusion may contribute to the will to participate at a New Age (secondary) institution. It appears that through participation, some practitioners experience forms of solace and sustenance that they believe other (primary) institutions do not provide. The next section will detail some of the more positive emotional experiences that respondents associate with partaking in the New Age practices.

A Change in Feeling: Participation and Favourable Emotions

The majority of informants describe a shift in emotional experience, for which they credit their involvement at the respective centre. Many of the portrayals of the new, welcomed feelings and mental states exude enthusiasm and even a sense of wonder at the efficacy of taking part in the lessons. Even in cases when a practitioner is returning to the centre after a long absence, there is typically an expectation that the change in mood and self-perception will surely occur again. Thus, many perceive the relationship between participation and favourable

emotional outcomes to be a very reliable one. This perception can inspire regular participation, which can function as a kind of peace-maintenance and misfortune-management.

Shanti Practitioners

Oscar, who attends two classes a week at Shanti, is married, in his forties and manages a hedge fund. He lives on the same street where Shanti is situated. During an interview with Oscar, he asserts that partaking in yoga classes transforms his emotional state, his 'relationship with himself' and how he feels about the major components of his life.

“My wife told me to start coming here after my brother died and to be frank, I was pretty sceptical. Beards, sandals, this idea I had of incense and chanting... I was like: 'give me a break! The last thing I need is to join some yoga commune!' [Laughs.] But what can I say!? It's not like that.... and this stuff does seem to work. I don't know how it works, but I know that I'm in my forties and suddenly I have a different relationship with myself. Just imagine that for a minute. I'm almost middle aged and suddenly I have a different relationship with my mind and how I feel about myself, my work, my wife- all of it feels a lot more positive, a lot easier.”

Even though Oscar cannot say why attending lessons at Shanti improves how he feels, yoga at the centre “does seem to work” to this end. Despite some initial 'scepticism' and having preconceptions that made him dubious about the centre, Oscar recalls a beneficial emotional response. His relationship with his mind is “different” in a constructive sense and his feelings about the core aspects of his life

are “a lot more positive.”

Many other yoga participant insights offer comparable examples of emotional renewal. Arabella, like Oscar, had some doubts about yoga before attending any lessons at Shanti, but now considers the practice to be her “secret antidepressant.”

“A lot of my friends are quite obsessive about yoga and I suppose I thought of it as, well, a bit annoying if I'm honest; a bit of a cliché. I find people can get a bit preachy about it. So I stuck with my horse riding, which I still do and I still adore. But then, I don't know, I guess I was feeling a bit down for a while. And I couldn't seem to shake it off. Ummm. I actually went to the doctor at one point and he said I could go on these antidepressants, or whatever, which I was a bit dubious about because my mother was never able to get off them again when she started taking them. And I guess, I just thought I'd try this. Why not. See what all the fuss is about. And [pause] I have to say [pause] it is quite extraordinary the difference that it can make. Even that first class, I felt like I was floating. All of the heavy sadness, the second guessing yourself, the fears – all of that just lifts. It was such [pause] exquisite relief. *But*, that feeling doesn't stay. And they don't tell you that bit You've got to keep coming back to have that feeling all the time. But it's time well spent. This is my secret antidepressant. [Smiles.] And it does work every time, so I'm happy. I come once a week now.”

Arabella's description of her emotional state before participating at Shanti is quite vague at first; she “was feeling a bit down for a while” and “couldn't seem to shake it off.” Yet she hints at the severity of her condition when she notes her doctor suggested antidepressants. Her wording at the end of the extract (“all of the heavy sadness, the second guessing yourself, the fears”) also builds our impression of her psychological state before joining the group. Her view that Shanti helps her feel better is explicit. Arabella thinks “it is quite extraordinary the difference it can make” and believes yoga can provide “exquisite relief.” The pauses in her speech

which happen as she is making a link to the change in her feelings and her participation at Shanti might be indicative of the importance she attributes to the mood-altering experiences. Finally, Arabella presents a belief in the reliability of the process: if one “keep[s] coming back,” one can “have that [positive] feeling all the time.” According to this practitioner, “it does work every time.” This participant's weekly attendance at Shanti may help sustain “that feeling.”

The emotional developments which Oscar and Arabella describe have points of concordance with many other informant accounts. Each participant might employ distinct words and phraseologies, but the notion of a welcomed shift in feeling is a common denominator in all of these descriptors. For instance, terms like, 'happier,' 'more peace,' 'lifted' and 'better,' all indicate a sense of a positive emotional change. As the next section shows, the association between participation and improvements in mood is prevalent amidst the Sufi Order population as well.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Caroline is a counsellor who has attended classes at the Sufi Order for almost 3 years. During an interview which lasted for 3 hours, Caroline spoke about depression from the place of an insider who has experienced depression herself and from the place of a professional observing other people who she believes share some common symptoms. She believes a lot of people “starting on [the Sufi]

path” share debilitating feelings, but emotionally transform because “the teaching [at the centre] is therapy.”

“People think the opposite of depression is happiness, but it's not. A lot of people aren't happy, but they're not depressed. It's vitality. Vitality is the opposite. It seeps out of depressed people. Drains away. When I was going through it, I just wanted to sleep all the time and everything, I mean *everything*, was too much effort; replying to a text message, making a cup of tea. It was all like climbing a mountain. A lot of people here felt like that before starting on this path. They might not say it of course, but you can see if there's no light behind someone's eyes, or they laugh at everything anyone says because they're so uncomfortable and so desperate to get through an interaction without anybody knowing. It's a genuine battle. It's beautiful to see all of that drift away over the weeks though. It takes a little while but then there's this turning point and people start having a bit of a spring in their step and their tone of voice changes; it's like a rebirth. The teaching here is therapy. It's more than that as well, but, at least from my professional understanding – and I know because I was here when I was in a bad place – this is, I mean, it can be a lifeline; no exaggeration.”

Caroline's articulate depiction of depression draws on her experience of being “in a bad place” and on her “professional understanding.” The interviewee concludes the Sufi Order teaching “is therapy” and “can be a lifeline.” In reaching this assessment, Caroline cites some of the psychosomatic changes she perceives in people who attend the centre; they gain “a spring in their step” and a change in “their tone of voice.”

Caroline asserts the change in feeling she identifies in other attendees “takes a little while.” However, some other informants imply the change can occur quite automatically, or even that once the change happens the first time, partaking in lessons at the centre will bring about the same shift in emotions again. Even if a

person has not visited the centre for some years, there is often an expectation that participation will affect the same feelings as the time before. As one Sufi Order attendee said:

“I haven't been here [to the Order] for a few years but it's the anniversary of my mother's death today and I had to get away from my house and the TV and the phone ringing and just be in [this] place.... This place always helps me climb out of my head and helps me feel present and ok again.”
(Anonymous)

This attendee's renewed participation with the Sufi Order coincides with a time when she experiences the 'trigger' of the anniversary of a family bereavement. She recounts the reliability of the experience at the Sufi Order when she notes the centre “*always*” helps her “climb out of [her] head and ... feel present and ok again.” It seems likely the anticipation of these positive emotional outcomes inspires her attendance on this occasion. That is to say, the primary reason she came to practice dancing is to experience this change in feeling.

A lot of other members of this population also allude to a perception of the relationship between participation and emotional benefits. Some of the terms which arose in statements of this kind, include: 'calmer,' 'more upbeat,' 'happier,' and 'more optimistic.' Thus, like a large proportion of the Shanti attendees, many Sufi informants utilise words and phrases that indicate advantageous new emotional experiences which align with entering the centre and engaging with the ideas and practices of the group.

Unlike some of the other key themes or 'areas of experience' that this thesis considers, at the level of 'emotion,' the two sets of New Agers appear to have much in common with each other. In both groups, many of the informants similarly recall feelings of heightened emotion at the times of entry and increased participation with the centre. Furthermore, these descriptions commonly relate to social, personal or temporal rhythms. In each population, some informants also allude to a shared state of residual stress. The descriptions of residual stress, while fewer in number, suggest that a type of 'internal fragmentation' may contribute to participating with the group, specifically, the group as a (secondary) institution (rather than a primary institution). Together, the references to moments of 'high' emotions and the references to 'residual' emotions, typically hint at an (internal) sensation in response to (external) happenings, such as socio-economic norms, changes in relationship dynamics or shifting social structures. Hence, for both field populations, the experience of emotion is relatable to the internal *and* the external: an individual, felt reaction to relational, social and contextual occurrences.

It seems likely or at least possible that these simultaneously internal and external circumstances inspire the participant to explore, or even attempt to transform, his or her own felt experience. In this way, negative feelings might motivate participation at the group. Just as the individual's response to external structures and relations has led to unwanted emotions, so the individual seeks external structures and relations to change the emotions 'back,' or generate new,

more preferable thoughts and sensations. Sure enough, in both populations many respondents credit participation with the New Age group for welcomed changes in mood and thought patterns.

These observations lead to some crucial questions. What sources of solace might the practitioners grasp by partaking in yoga at Shanti or Sufi dance at the Order? How might those sources affect the person's feelings in positive ways and how might the person's positive feelings affect the sources? The findings from the two sites suggest significant parts of the answers to these questions relate to an intersection between (c) shared narratives and (i) personally felt experience. The next section will show how the interrelations between the two factors seem to inform a more positive emotional experience.

An Intersection:

(c) Shared Tenets and (i) Felt Experiences

Within both populations, the practitioners' descriptions of favourable emotions often reference collective notions of 'positivity,' 'energy' or (the combinative) 'positive energy.' Although the nature of these three concepts allow some room for individual appropriation, for the most part, the members of both groups mutually hold the main components of the concepts in common. That is to say, the

characterisations of the 'positivity,' 'energy,' and 'positive energy' principles are shared and largely consistent, both amidst the respective sets of informants and across the two groups.

With regards to the tenet of 'positivity,' many of the yoga participants and the dance practitioners commonly reference a 'positive ethos' almost like a theodicy: as a means of making sense of suffering. One part of the shared ethos is the view that suffering is a useful opportunity or “blessing” from the universe to help the person develop. The other part of the ethos implies suffering is not inherently negative, but 'merely' the outcome of the individual projecting negativity on to an inherently positive situation from which the person can learn and flourish.

According to the 'energy' tenet, 'energy' exists in absolutely everything. One can employ the term to convey the atmosphere of a place, the level of animation, an extent of compatibility or the feeling a space, object or person 'gives-off' to the individual (i.e. degrees of resonance, appeal, or repulsion)⁷⁵. Since energy is the common feature of the wider system of the cosmos, some informants from each site suggest people can harness energy to achieve higher states of being or greater environmental good⁷⁶. Perhaps the most common phrase regarding the nature of

⁷⁵ Definitions of energy from the fieldwork are tentatively comparable with Freud's libido theory (1929), psychic (attentional) energy theory (Rochenberg-Halton, 1984) living-systems theory (Miller, 1978) and transformative mind-body psychotechnologies (Roberts, 1989) but not closely enough to prioritise any of these theories.

⁷⁶ Pomroy also writes, that New Agers in Glastonbury believe they can harness energy (1998). The claim that people feel psychophysical sensations of energy and that these feelings can be directed to achieve higher states of being aligns with some Hindu and Buddhist traditions (Eliade, 1973 [1954]; Gould, 1991a; Gould, 1991b; Lakoff, 1987).

energy (which some informants say as if it is an indisputable, scientific fact that everyone should know) is: 'like attracts like.' This notion proposes that the quality of one's own energy (i.e. positive or negative) will attract the same quality of energy from the external world. A positive outlook will attract positive outcomes and a negative outlook will attract negative outcomes. Similarly, the quality of external energy can affect one's own energy. For example, if a space or other person has 'positive energy' the individual's own energy is also likely to become more positive in response. Thus, energy has an almost 'infectious' quality according to this view.

Together, the mutual conceptualisations of positivity and energy conjunctively relate to a third tenet: 'positive energy.' This principle is indicative of a cosmological system of attraction in which the positive energy of the person will create a positive life for that person and contribute to the positive energy of the universe. An outcome of this mutual understanding is the claim that for the good of the individual, the group and indeed, the world, people should strive to generate, identify and 'give off' positive energy. Some participant insights imply this conception can result in a subtle collective expectation about how the individual should understand and express emotions. Positive emotions (such as joy and serenity) are indicative of positive energy and are thus welcome at the centres; negative emotions (such as rage and grief) are indicative of negative energy and are thus not welcome at the centres. In both fields, different emotions have

different social, public statuses in addition to being an individual, embodied experience (see: Appadurai, 1990: 92).

The ways in which informants speak about the three collectively held tenets in association with their changing feelings, suggests the shared concepts and personal feelings may relate to each other. This discussion will explore this prospect and argue that the (c) collective principles positively impact the (i) individual's feelings by generating a common ethos in which the person can find solace, meaning and guidance. In turn, those (i) favourable feelings inform the interpretations and reproductions of the (c) shared tenets because the person cites the shifts in mood as 'evidence' for the efficacy of the principles. These multi-directional intersections of (i) personal feelings and (c) mutual discourses suggest each factor contributes to the other.

Since the internal feelings of the person constitute a predominantly (i) individualistic factor and the mutual tenets constitute a predominantly (c) collectivistic factor, the relations between 'sentiments' and 'tenets' refer to an example of an 'individual-collective' intersection. A form of individualism and a form of collectivism meet in these circumstances and appear to co-enforce each other. This finding shows that experiences of emotion within the New Age contexts relate to both the individual and the collective.

Shanti Practitioners

Many participants at Shanti reference 'positivity,' 'energy,' and 'positive energy' in ways which suggest common understandings of the principles. For example, during a conversation between yoga practitioners Matt and Milla, we see how two participants can cite, share and mutually confirm the 'positivity' ethos which centres around the view that 'suffering is a gift' and 'nothing is really inherently negative.' On the issue of Matt's impending divorce, Milla said: “a broken heart is good, it shows you've tried for something. A wound like this is an aperture: it shows the inside so you can know yourself better; it is the best teacher.” Matt agreed, adding: “You don't grow much when things are good. Sometimes it's not that bad things happen *to* you, it's that bad things happen *for* you. I guess those 'for God's sake, why me!?' times aren't really so bad afterall if you keep the positive mindset and the right attitude.” Milla shook her head in agreement and smiled, saying: “One hundred percent. That's what it's about.”

In this exchange, the two participants discuss and confirm the perspective that the pain of “a broken heart” is utilisable: it gives the opportunity for one to know oneself better (Milla) and even the chance for personal 'growth' (Matt). According to this standpoint, emotional distress is an opportunity for development (i.e. there is a greater end for which pain is the means); it is something that happens “for you” not “to you” (Matt). By conceiving experiences that rouse despair, crisis or

even mild annoyance as utilisable for accelerating growth, the seemingly awful is not inherently “so bad afterall.” In fact, the dichotomies of 'good and bad' and 'success and failure' are no longer exclusive. Pain, disappointment, and failure are not disastrous in entirety, but rather potential tools to aid self-advancement.

This (c) perspective which many of the Shanti participants share, frequently has a beneficial influence upon the (i) individual's feelings. As Matt explains, if one holds on to (c) “the positive mindset and the right attitude,” the (i) painful moments “aren't really so bad.” Another informant, Aya, offers a similar insight into how the (c) tenet can influence (i) how she feels: “When you look for the positive and try to find the lesson in the sadness, the sadness stops.” Putting the (c) principle into practice generates new (i) feelings according to Aya; it halts and transforms sensations of sorrow.

Interestingly, Aya also cites the change in (i) feelings in her validation of the (c) tenet. In her words:

“The pain actually stops. That's how you know it works. That's your proof. You have to keep that discipline. Keep spreading the word and telling others who are stressed: 'actually, you are where you're meant to be.' 'You can learn from this.' 'It's *not* a disaster.' Keep spreading the positivity and the wisdom and we can all move forward. Hopefully they'll do it for you when you need to hear it too. That's the karma.”

Aya's (i) felt experience and personal knowledge that “the pain actually stops” inspires Aya to socially perpetuate the (c) tenet. She 'spreads the word' and 'tells

others' that they “can learn” from painful afflictions and such occurrences are “not a disaster.” Thus there is evidence for each factor informing the other: the (c) common principle can inspire shifts in the (i) individual's feelings and the shifts in the (i) individual's feelings can encourage the social maintenance of the (c) principle.

Numerous informants at Shanti also recount common notions of the 'energy tenet,' such as the theory that energy is a universal force that functions as part of a system of attraction. The similarities in the ways many yoga students speak about 'energy' suggests a shared knowledge of major elements of the concept. Asking the interviewees directly, 'what do you mean by 'energy'?' when they use the term allowed for exploration of these areas of commonality. For instance, I sought clarification of what 39 year old practitioner, Michelle, might mean by 'energy' in response to her saying “I've become more aware of my energy as I've got older.”

She elaborates:

“Well it's literally the energy you feel. When you're happy and you're buzzing at a high vibration... you have energy, like a *good* energy, a *strong* energy, and you start manifesting good things. Good things start happening. Like attracts like; it's quite simple. You can tell when other people have that 'good energy' because you can feel it and you become more 'up' being around them. Same with a house or anything really. I was house hunting in the South of France last month and my main criteria was 'somewhere with a good energy.' It's the feeling. Once you understand how it works, you can create a happier life because you can seek it out. Once you see how only looking for the good energy can keep you up, you keep thinking about it and looking for it all the time. ”

Michelle's explanation of 'energy' recounts numerous characteristics of the depiction of 'energy' that dominates amidst the yoga collective. For instance: energy is thought to exist within oneself, within others and within physical spaces (such as houses). One can identify the force and harness 'good energy' by 'seeking it out.' Also, personal energy affects the external world and external energy affects the personal world; one's "good energy" manifests "good things" and when one is in the presence of "good energy," one's feels "more up."

Michelle suggests the (c) common tenet impacts upon (i) her own emotional senses. Her 'understanding of how the (c) system works, enables her to "create a [i] happier life." Furthermore, abiding by the (c) notion and 'looking for the good energy' can keep her (i) feeling "up." Other informants also recount this relationship between tenet and feeling. For instance, Ulrika cites the (c) collective understanding of the infectious quality of "good energy," stating the shared phrase "like attracts like" in her reasoning for why participation at the site makes her own (i) emotions "get better, more positive and [she] just feels so much nicer for it." Thus, Ulrika employs the (c) collective language of the group to explain the (i) individually felt sentiments.

The (i) individual's feelings also enforce and inform the (c) collective tenet. As Michelle declares, once people (i) feel the benefits of the precept (or realise "how only looking for the good energy can keep you up"), people will enforce the tenet by "thinking about it and looking for it all the time." The (i) internal feeling

inspires the perpetuation of the (c) notions surrounding 'energy.' According to these and the comparable views of some fellow Shanti members, the shared concept of energy informs the person's emotions, and the person's emotions enforces the shared concept of energy. The relationship is multi-directional.

The pervasive notions of 'positivity' and 'energy' are very compatible and together can encourage a collective opinion concerning the importance of 'positive energy.' This perspective implies the individual should exude 'positive energy' (or 'good energy'), and in so doing, will 'attract' positive occurrences to oneself and contribute to the positive energy of the people and spaces one encounters. It is apparent that the participant's adherence to this (c) collective ethos can affect (i) individual feelings and those (i) feelings can in turn contribute to the (c) ethos.

The (c) collective requirement to outwardly exude more positive emotions as a sign of 'positive energy' can encourage the individual participant to (i) 'feel better.' *Ashtanga* student, Eleanor, provides an example of this type of merger between the 'public' expression of the (c) ethos and the (i) inner feeling of the participant:

“I arrived at Shanti... after an annoying morning and it was: 'right, get your happy face on now'... I think it's good manners to not walk into a yoga class in a big strop and bring everyone else down with me. You know that's not the deal. But it's funny, I actually think being chirpy for others at yoga can help you feel happier for yourself too. By the end of the class I'd pretty much forgotten why I was annoyed. Give positive energy out and you get it back. You reap what you sow. That's how positive energy works.”

Eleanor suggests her knowledge of the collective pressures to outwardly express feeling in ways that are consistent with the (c) group ethos impact her own (i) personal feelings. Despite “an annoying morning,” choosing to present herself in a more positive way “for others” helps Eleanor “feel happier” herself. In fact, by the time the lesson ends she almost cannot remember why she was annoyed.

However, during the same discussion with Eleanor, she shows that, while the collective pressures can influence her personal feelings, the individual can also refuse to conform to collective expectations as well. In her description of hurting herself during a class, she said:

“I’ve only hurt myself once doing yoga. It wasn’t with [my teacher] Per of course. It was during a class when a cover teacher was here when Per was on holiday and on reflection I should never have bothered going. But anyway, I did, and I hurt my shoulder doing a posture I’d never done before and it ruined the whole class for me. I couldn’t snap out of it. Even when it no longer hurt, I just sat upright on my mat and let everyone else carry on. I think that annoyed people because I was making a bit of a stand and shifting the energy of the class when I wasn’t in pain anymore, but I was really annoyed. I didn’t care.”

Eleanor reminds us that we should never discount the individual’s agency. Even when people are expected to perform “emotional management” (Hochschild, 1983: ix-x) in order to ensure feelings conform to a community’s emotional forecast, a person can present deviant performances (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Ehrenreich, 2007; Lupton, 1998; Riis and Woodhead, 2010). During participant observation at Shanti, there were four additional instances in which students

conveyed emotions that we might presume to be outside of the 'positive energy' convention; two participants cried during the *sivasana* (final 'corpse pose') stage of the practice; one participant told a supply teacher that the lesson was "a bit annoying and pointless" because it was "not fast enough;" and another student abruptly left half way through a class, muttering "I can't be bothered with this today." These displays of a 'tilt' towards the agent suggests human beings can move beyond the 'wholly public and situational' conventions of emotional experience (cf. Nuckolls, 1996).

When the person's feelings *do* conform to the 'scripts' however, those (i) feelings can enforce and contribute to those (c) scripts. In fact, the (c) collectivity of the principle is dependent on (i) individuals understanding emotion in compatible ways. Eleanor suggests she adapts, putting on her 'happy face,' because she 'knows the deal' and 'it's good manners' to not subvert those norms. Presenting one's (i) mood and sentiments in this way, aligning expression with expectation, encourages the (c) collective's conventional conceptions of what the agreeable and disagreeable expressions of emotion are.

According to these and the comparable views of some fellow Shanti members, the collectivistic factor of shared tenets (of positivity, energy and positive energy) can inform the individualistic factor of the person's emotions. Also, vice versa, the individualistic factor of the person's emotions can enforce the collectivistic factor of the shared concepts. At other times, the agent can alter this mutually enforcing

relationship, offering exceptions to the dynamic. For the most part, however, the shared precepts encourage favourable shifts in feeling and those beneficial emotions support the perpetuation of the mutual tenets.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

In similar ways to many of the Shanti informants, the students at the Sufi Order also recount common discourses concerning positivity, energy and positive energy. Also, like the Shanti practitioners, the Sufi members imply the shared tenets relate to welcomed changes in feelings. These areas of correspondence between the two populations suggest the possibility that this intersection might be prominent across New Age groups more broadly, or even beyond New Age groups.

For instance, the multiple students who reference the group's positivity principal suggest a collective understanding that 'suffering is a utilisable gift' and thus 'no suffering is wholly negative.' As one Sufi Order member recounts in relation to a conversation about his autism:

“My sheikh told me my supposed liabilities – I speak before thinking and I cry in public a lot – are actually my biggest gifts; they have a purpose... When I am with my brothers and sisters at the Order, I feel [pause] when you self-loathe and think 'I hate my disorder and I don't like my weight and my job' actually there's nothing wrong with you ever... Everything is *always* perfect. You just have to catch up with it. Stop expelling your own negativity [points to head] when actually all is good. This is the message: stay on track and stay positive and it's easier said than done sometimes but at the end of the day, I do feel more at ease in my own skin, so I bring myself back to my sheikh's words.” (Anonymous)

This informant's view is consistent with the shared understanding that suffering and apparent weaknesses (or “supposed liabilities”) are actually useful (they are “gifts” and “have a purpose”). The interviewee's statement also implies painful circumstances are due to negative projections, rather than an inherently negative situation. In reality, “everything is always perfect” and “all is good” even if one's perception of events is not. The respondent alludes to the collective, social nature of these principal characteristics when he credits his “sheikh” (or 'teacher' at the centre), the support of his “brothers and sisters” (or 'fellow members' of the Order) and “the message” (or 'tenet') to “stay positive.”

The student suggests his adherence to the (c) group's positivity tenet impacts his (i) personal emotions and perceptions in constructive ways. Although (c) the necessity “to stay on track and stay positive” is “easier said than done,” ultimately, this practitioner does (i) “feel more at ease in [his] own skin” doing so. Hence, the student perceives a causal relationship between collective tenet and individual feeling. Other Sufi informants also associate the shared notions about positivity with emotional transitions. For instance, Matthew, who is white, 50 years old and an infrequent attendee, spoke about “the techniques for positivity [he's] got from being at the Order,” saying:

“It's like a new perspective. I understand now that I am not my pain. That isn't me. If I'm having a bad week – someone said something hurtful or whatever – and I can feel the dip coming, I make time to go [to the centre]... and usually that's all it takes to get me back... feeling alright again. ”

Matthew associates the (c) shared “techniques” with (i) his “new perspective” that he is separate from his pain,' reinforcing the claim that the principle can impact the feeling. However, Matthew also suggests, vice versa, the value of those (i) new feelings inspires him to “make time to go” to the place where he accesses the (c) shared ideas about positivity. The claim that the (i) gratifying perspective encourages engagement with the (c) precept aligns with the other Sufi Order member's statement, when he says: “I do feel more at ease in my own skin for it, so I bring myself back to my sheikh's words.” In both cases, the (i) personal emotions enforce the maintenance of the (c) tenet.

A similar co-constitution occurs in relation to the ideology surrounding 'energy.' For instance, during a conversation between two Sufi participants after a message class we see how some core traits of the (c) pervasive 'energy' tenet can (i) brighten mood and how the (i) boost in feeling spur the (c) social upkeep of these shared traits.

A: “He [my manager] just has the most awful energy; literally, he walks into the room and I shrink; my shoulders hunch and I just-”

B: “I had the *exact* same experience with my boss! It's like a physical reaction! You have to switch it though; you have to use *your* energy to start an upward spiral for him too, otherwise you'll both be miserable and it can't go anywhere. It can't move forward. That's what worked for me. I was so much happier and more productive. Kill him

with kindness; kill his negative energy with positive energy.”
A: “Hmm [nods]. That does usually work. Yeah. Thank you. I'm going to do it.”

In this exchange about the 'energy' of their managers, participant 'A' and participant 'B' reference the energy system; they cite the beliefs that qualities of energy exist within people and these qualities are identifiable, 'infectious,' and manipulatable. The notions seem familiar and meaningful to each informant, which enables points of empathy, agreement and for each contribution to build upon the last without enquiry or dispute.

The (c) shared notion that one can harness energy (or “switch it... to start an upward spiral”) works for participant 'B' who (i) “was so much happier” for doing so. That is to say, the informant believes abiding by the (c) tenet results in (i) favourable feelings. This successful (i) personal experience of engaging with the tenet gives 'B' license to recommend the (c) 'tenet' to 'A.' The message is: I was happier by pursuing this concept of energy, so you should do the same. In these ways, the social exchange evidences the experience of a co-dependency: (i) some desirable personal feelings rely on the (c) collective, shared tenet and the (c) collective, shared tenet relies on (i) some desirable personal feelings.

The two students also reference “positive energy.” They suggest one's own positive energy can influence other people's positive energy (in this case, a manager's). Many more members of the Order also speak of the positive energy

concept. The similarities between the students' elucidations indicate a shared knowledge of the tenet and a mutual awareness of the expectation to pursue and present one's own emotions in order to contribute to the “energy” of the space and people one encounters.

As one member of the Order recounts, in the Sufi context, there can be penalties for non-compliance:

“I was told off by [another member] for bringing negative energy into Aziz's class because I bickered a bit with the person next to me. I guess he saw my feelings as a threat to the energy of the room and the breath work we were doing, which is probably fair. Aziz didn't agree with [the other member] but Aziz didn't disagree either and that's when I knew I should try a bit harder. And I did. I made a conscious effort that week to be as positive as possible and I felt better for it.”
(Anonymous)

This informant illustrates how people can recognise, learn and adapt to the culturally approved behavioural norms of the group. After making “a conscious effort” to modify his feelings in accordance with the (c) principle, this informant's (i) emotions shift in response; “he felt better for it.” In this case, the (c) collective ethos impacts (i) personal sentiments, in similar ways to how Eleanor recalls a change in feeling following her self-adjustment to the 'positive energy' norm at the yoga centre.

However, whereas at Shanti, the co-constitution between tenet and feeling only occurs some of the time (because some yoga students show signs of subversion), at the Sufi Order, I did not witness any 'alternative' displays during the classes.

Students might *recount* times when they felt sadness or frustration or another unwanted emotion (which might be read as indicative of 'negative energy' by fellow members), but within the present moment at the centre, I did not note a single case in which displays were anything other than 'positive' or at the very least, 'neutral.' The participants' words, actions and body language never went 'against' the approved emotional climate, in my view. Although one informant recounts a time when he fears he may have 'threatened the energy of the room and the practice,' his prompt re-alignment with the group's expectations shows how a student in the Sufi context can identify and rectify behaviours which are anomalous to the cultural standards.

The consistency between the individuals' descriptions and presentations of (i) personal feelings maintains the (c) collective force of the tenet. Students like the Order informant who decide to “try a bit harder” and make “a conscious effort... to be as positive as possible” add to the communal ethos. Thus, the (i) performance of emotion can support and contribute to the (c) 'positive energy' principle.

Considering the Shanti students' accounts and the Order members' descriptions together sparks some thought-provoking implications. For instance, the nature of the collective tenets are very comparable across both populations. Moreover the shared principles (or a combination of the principles) inform valuable emotional experiences; a lot of informants report improvements in

feeling in response to thinking about or pursuing the shared tenet. At the same time, those advances in attitudes and sentiments maintain and support the tenet and as such, 'tenet' and 'feeling' hold the potential to function as both 'input' *and* 'response'.

However, the extent of correspondence between 'tenet-feeling' varies at each site. At Shanti, some participants' unapologetically refuse to give the emotional performance which the tenets encourage. These occasions show how the agent is able to block the intersection between group ethos and personal state, halting and preventing the co-enforcement of the two components. Conversely, it is challenging to identify comparable instances in the Sufi Order context. Whereas in the yoga context, collective and individual inform each other, but the power of the individual sometimes surpasses the power of the collective norms, at the Sufi Order, collective and individual also inform each other, but the power of the individual rarely surpasses the power of the collective norms. This disparity between the two groups indicates different degrees of social conformity to public sensibility norms. One population shows less conformity and a more individualistic orientation (namely Shanti) and the other population shows greater conformity and a more collectivistic orientation (namely the Sufi Order). In turn, this trend aligns with the differences in socio-economic class backgrounds, conceptions of self, and organisational workings (which Chapter 3 describes).

These findings support the argument that emotional responses can be learned and adapted according to cultural inputs (Tomkins, 1982). However, it also adds that the agent can ignore cultural inputs and offer an alternative emotional response. The likelihood of the agent doing so may relate to other factors such as the situational context and how norms (such as dominant ideologies of self) impact those circumstances.

The following section will offer evidence for how the field sites contribute to the two factors and the interrelations between them. As we will see, each field organisation implements discourses and practices that encourage the student's awareness of the three collective tenets and encourage the favourable feelings which are associated with those tenets. Interestingly however, it is an intervening third factor, the organisations' emphases on felt experience, that seems vital to how the interrelations between tenet and feeling occur.

How the Organisations Facilitate the Factors

Shanti and the Sufi Order facilitate the 'tenet-feeling' exchange in two ways. One way is how each site propounds the (c) shared notions of 'positivity,' 'energy,' and 'positive energy' in modes that encourage the individual to place hope in systems of social and even cosmological significance. The ways in which the centres

encourage hope in the systems is likely to relate to the (i) welcomed emotions which informants describe in conjunction with the (c) tenets. The other way the organisations contribute to the (i-c) intersection is by emphasising sensual and somatic felt experience. This intervening factor appears to inform a shift in the participant's usual cognitive processes, resulting in a change in focus which is beneficial for mood and mental health more generally. These changes in emotion are then discussed with reference to the tenets, boosting the links between (c) principle and (i) favourable feeling. Thus, the combination of the two 'transformation tools' at the organisations, which encourage hope and heighten sensual experience, are seminal to the way the (c) tenets and (i) feelings interchange takes place.

Communal Tenets of Hope

Both the organisations champion hope in the collective principles. These tenets of hope are different to 'the secularism of a Durkheimian hope in the power of society' or 'a Marxist hope in the dynamics of history' or even 'a general hope in humanity' (Watts Miller, 2008: 278). Rather, they are wholly encompassing and beyond the sensually perceivable world, whilst – by incorporating the this-worldly – not exclusively concerned with the transcendental. Together, these non-theistic tenets enable faith in something greater than oneself which nevertheless includes

oneself; they contribute to a system which is at once sacred and familiar. The account of existence which the system presents provides a sense of meaning, reassurance and hope which benefits the adherent emotionally.

Shanti

The teachers at Shanti encourage hope in the tenets in various ways. With regards to the positivity principle, some of the instructors explicitly declare that one can have hope in the belief that suffering is utilisable for development and no circumstances are ever wholly terrible. Sometimes the teachers make this claim in the context of describing their own experiences of crisis, becoming an exemplary example of the human ability to utilise distress and maintain a particular interpretation of existence. As yoga instructor Per recounts:

“I know from my own life that the harder you hit rock bottom, the higher you bounce back up spiritually. I began yoga as a form of emotional release. I was riddled with anxiety and insomnia, ricocheting between angst about the past and worry about the future. I was 6ft 2” and 50kg; such a mess. I could hardly look at people... But I am good now, not in spite of that time in my life but *because* of that time in my life. Don't be scared of that pain. It's only a facade for something more beautiful and necessary. The butterfly leaving the cocoon might think it's a painful experience but it's only because he doesn't know the purpose. He doesn't realise it's the birth of his freedom.”

Per encourages the collective of his students to place hope in the prospect that suffering empowers the person to develop (or 'bounce up') spiritually; the pain is “only a facade for something” positive and thus is not bad in entirety.

Readings, quotes and 'mantras,' which the yoga organisation promotes also encourage faith in the precept that nothing is inherently and entirely negative. For instance, in classes taught by Lili or Natalie, at the end of *svasana* (final corpse pose), the group sometimes says: “the darkness will become the light and the stillness, the dancing” (T. S. Eliot) and “grief is the out-breath of beauty” (Hill, 2001). Both statements are consistent with the positive ethos and the group repetition promotes shared hope in the sentiment.

The teachers and resources of the centre also support shared awareness of the energy and positive energy tenets. All of the instructors at times describe the practices as a way of surrounding oneself with positive energy, which will in turn 'attract' good things. This happens in descriptions of breath regulation practices (*pranayama*) more than the posture practices (*asana*), which may relate to the belief that *prana* is a universal energy that flows in currents in and around the body.

Physical referents similarly champion the all encompassing system of energy, and positive energy in particular, to the student collective. Teachers of *kundalini* yoga, Natalie and Malcolm, both explain the white turbans they wear as a means to “keep negative energies out.” Comparably, literatures encourage hope in the universal system of attraction. On the reception desk a mass of leaflets promoting 'Urban Retreat Yoga' state: “A day of yoga, meditation and dance to create energy so you can protect against negative energy and attract the positive things in life.” Many of the books for sale that are on display also increase shared consciousness

of 'positive energy,' including Orloff's text, *Positive Energy: 10 Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress and Fear into Vibrance, Strength and Love* (2006).

These tendencies present positivity, energy and positive energy as part of a cosmological system, which the person can have hope in; here is a system that one can hope to harness to advantageous ends. The universe never makes the individual endure an inherently negative situation; there are always meaningful lessons and beneficial growth to grasp from the experience. Adopting this positive mindset and cultivating the right energy can build one's bank of positive energy and thus attract more favourable circumstances from the cosmos. Hope in this meaning system might in turn, assure, calm and encourage a sense of empowerment: there are discourses and techniques for the person to adopt in order to transform an unwanted emotional perspective.

The Sufi Order

Organisational tendencies at the Sufi Order also advocate hope in the three tenets. For instance, with regards to positivity, guides console the group that adversity is a “blessing” from the universe (or “the Beloved”) to spur spiritual evolution and thus should not be thought of as advantageous rather than disastrous. As leader Aziz rhetorically asks his class:

“How can you become harmonious if nobody steps on your toes and gives you the opportunity to be harmonious? It's like when a parent feels a child is mature enough to love them without toys... you can become bitter with life or you can say 'let me love you even when things are hard, even without the toys'....You should feel honoured by the trust the Beloved's showing in you, and have the knowledge that you are gaining these gifts so you can grow.”

Aziz asserts that 'hard times' are occasions when one “should feel honoured” rather than “bitter” because these experiences are actually “gifts so you can grow.” This prescription of the positivity precept suggests the dichotomies of 'bad times and good times' are not exclusive because the bad times are “opportunities” for harmony and advancement.

The courses at the Order are another means of inspiring group appreciation of and hope in the positivity approach. The paradoxically titled “The Power of Vulnerability” seminars suggest vulnerability is not innately bad but useful. Literary extracts also generate shared awareness of this tenet. As Shams read during a message class: “Nothing can be undertaken until a pain – a yearning and love for a thing – is awakened inside him. Without pain one's endeavour will not be easy, no matter whether it be this-worldly, other-worldly, commercial, regal, scholarly, astrological or anything else” (Rumi, Discourse 5; cited in Arberry, 1995). According to this statement, pain can aid one's endeavours – whatever the nature of those endeavours may be.

In addition to the claim that nothing is innately negative is the claim that everything is positive, and suffering is the outcome of the individual associating

negativity with an inherently positive situation. According to this logic, the positive is the natural state. For instance, in relation to physical health, the Sufi Order UK leader, Wali, clarifies on numerous occasions, “by 'health' I mean the natural condition”⁷⁷. If these guides encourage the view that the universe is always a positive place and the positive, healthy state is the natural, neutral 'way things should be,' perceptions of suffering become anomalies.

The teacher's exemplary incessantly positive attitude encourages hope that these perceptions are accurate and can be 'lived out.' As one new member of the Order describes, “the guide can take the same landscape, the same situation I see, but see the beauty in it and make music from it. This is the miracle, and I guess it makes me scared to be away for too long when I'm feeling low. Hopefully I can learn how to see the beauty too” (anonymous).

In addition to the discourses surrounding positivity, teachers at the Order also promote conceptions of energy and positive energy as part of the universal system in which one can have hope. Leaders of the message class at times suggest the dividual quality of energy and how this constitution renders it a force for attraction. As one teacher said: “if you turn up after a tiring day and everyone else is upbeat, that will shift your energy and instantly boost you” (anonymous). Guides also interpret textual sources in modes which enforce the infectious quality of

⁷⁷ Wali's advocacy reinforces Coward's claim that in virtually all alternative therapies there is a strong belief in the body's “natural” will towards health and its “natural capacity” to be well (1990: 23).

energy. For example, one guide quotes: “Didn't I say, don't sit with sad companions? Don't sit with anyone but those whose hearts are glad. Since you are in the garden, do not cosy up to the thorns. Sit amidst the roses, janquils and jasmine” (Anonymous; quote is: Rumi, in Helminski, 2008). A speaker then deduces, “Rumi wants us all to surround ourselves with positive energy and be wary of the people who drain us.” Guides also speak of consciously harnessing or “attuning” with positive energy in relation to the physical practices. Teachers say praxis such as the group dances themselves, and saying the creed on the breath (*fikkr*), shifts the energy (or “magnetism”) of the practitioner.

These organisational tendencies support hope in the positivity, energy and positive energy precepts. The compatibility of the three tenets allows for faith in a type of system in which suffering is meaningful and energy is cultivatable for one's own benefit. Hope in this system has the potential to console the disheartened practitioner that all is well, and if it really seems that all is not, there are methods available that can empower a desired shift to more prosperous circumstances.

Comparing the two sites together we see that the teachers at each centre cite different texts, prescribe distinct practices and employ numerous phraseologies, but in both contexts the conceptions of positivity, energy, and positive energy are very similar. The commonalities across both sites spark the question: is it a coincidence that the two field contexts promote hope in the same principles or are these tendencies pervasive beyond the two field sites, either across 'New Age

culture' or across 'mainstream culture' more broadly?

The most probable answer to this question is: parts of the tenets are pervasive in mainstream culture (and as such, many people are already familiar with these elements thanks to previous exposure) but in addition, some New Age contexts (including Shanti and the Sufi Order) hypercognitise the concepts (i.e. present the concepts to extents that heightens others' cognitive awareness of them) which contributes to the 'tenet-feeling' intersection. To elaborate, the present climate prompts awareness of 'the virtues of positivity' and the 'indisputable existence of energy.' As Baudrillard observes, “the modern citizen, cannot evade the constraint of happiness and positivity” (1988: 48). From lessons for 11 year olds in state schools about how to stay positive (Elliott, 2007; Harris, 2006), to the bestselling book, *The Secret*, which explains 'the necessity of positive thinking' (Byrne, 2006)⁷⁸ - positivity is a prominent cultural concern. Simultaneously, there are prominent mainstream discourses about energy, many of which adopt a logic taken to be characteristic of 'popular science.' As one supply teacher at Shanti reasons:

“Scientists know there are all these energetic forces around us. Everything is charged with a current⁷⁹ and vibration. Water is a conductor of energy and our bodies are 70% water. Rub a balloon on your hair; acupuncture – it's all easy proof of your energy. That's how you know 'like attracts like' – science proves it; everyone knows it⁸⁰.”

⁷⁸ Byrne's *The Secret* (2006) was at the top of the bestseller list for 146 consecutive weeks. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(book)) (Accessed: 28/08/14).

⁷⁹ Luhrmann describes similar currents in her study of contemporary witchcraft (1986: 115-6).

⁸⁰ Science is both a source of legitimation and criticism, since this informant also speaks disparagingly about the limitations of (biological) medicine (see also: Wallis' findings within the context of Scientology; 1976).

Since the Western pursuit for knowledge tends to be through scientific methods (Locke, 2004: 119), popular discourses which reference scientific 'evidence' (or what Lakoff might describe as “folk understanding of physics” (1987: 391)) is likely to be seductive for many people. Commonplace notions about energy appear as irrefutable scientific fact⁸¹.

These types of previous exposures to some of the terms and phraseologies of the tenets endows the principles with the weight and comfort of familiarity. Such familiarity may in turn encourage acceptance or at least, minimal resistance of the tenets that Shanti and the Order promote. Thus, while Prince and Riches claim the New Age use of the word 'energy' marks a clear contrast with the mainstream (2000: 114), this chapter argues the potency of 'energy' (and positivity) semantically is precisely the opposite: it is because parts of the principles are so very mainstream that they are easy concepts to have hope in.

⁸¹ Another reason why energy is so pervasive in popular parlance is because it allows for a lot of flexibility. As yoga practitioner, Mira, convincingly points out, “whether one believes in the Big Bang, Allah's omnipresence, the Holy Spirit, the power of Kabbalah, *chi*, *ki* or *prana*, they can meet at Energy.” The word – a lowest common denominator in some senses – is very adaptable and inoffensive. Through energy life was created, be it in 6 days or 13.75 billion years. It is the labels of energy that are laden; whilst just saying 'energy' enables the masses to embrace and relate to the concept in whatever ways fit the individuals' respective schemas. Malleability is highly useful within the New Age that is known to welcome eclecticism (Sutcliffe, 2003: 224).

While Shanti and the Sufi Order (and comparable New Age outlets⁸²) are unlikely to 'create' the seeds of the shared discourses, they do elaborate on the discourses in ways which provide further definition. For example, Shanti and the Order's presentation of 'positive energy' elaborates on commonplace ideas about 'positivity' and 'energy' to evoke a conception of a type of currency: the more positive emotions you have and exude, the more positive energy will be 'attracted' your way. This form of substantiation guides the practitioner on how to identify some emotions as useful and others as unhelpful or even dangerous. It also provides the anchorage of shared reference points that help the individual practitioners adopt a specific shared approach towards hope, suffering and, indeed, existence.

Another significant implication of the the nature of the feld groups' elaborations of the concepts is their resonance with classic conceptions of the sacred. The depictions of 'positive energy' for instance, encompass kratophany (i.e.

⁸² It seems many New Age outlets substantiate the tenets to greater degrees than other (secular or religious) contexts. In fact, a disproportionately high emphasis on positivity has been present within some 'New Age' contexts for a long time. Philosopher and psychologist William James studied the personal accounts of practitioners of New Thought in his study, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. James' writes, New Thought offers practitioners "a deliberately more optimistic scheme of life, with both a speculative and a practical side... and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry and all nervously precautionary states of mind... (which) must now be reckoned with a genuine religious power" (1902: 92-3). Other scholars note that discourses centring around 'energy' are well-established amidst New Age groups (Williamson, 2010: 59; Heelas, 1996: 82; Albanese, 1992; Prince and Riches, 2000: 114-115). However, with none of these scholars attempting to undertake substantial definition or analysis, it is difficult to tell whether the modes of elaboration occur in similar or distinct ways across different New Age contexts. The lack of details may be for reasons resembling Gould's contention that investigating energy by employing objective academic research frameworks is to "distort this subjective, self-perceived phenomenon" (1991: 195).

the sacred's eliciting of both approach and avoidance tendencies [Durkheim, 1975]); contamination (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 2011: 6) and hierophany (i.e., “that something sacred shows itself to us” [Eliade, 1958: 7]). Thus, Shanti and the Order (and potentially other groups like them) take mainstream, secular and even scientific notions and layer up the meanings of those notions to formulate a communal system with sacred status.

The combination of familiarity and sacrality is likely to be a major source of the appeal of the tenets. For many people, hope in positivity, energy, and positive energy will probably be easy because it will not require much of a cognitive leap; the terms and some of the characteristics of the principles may well be pre-established and even pre-accepted within the participant's mind due to previous exposure. At the same time, the elaboration, which the spiritual group provides, links the individual to a shared cosmological system in which the universe is both personified and operates responsively. The tenets offer an approach to hope in something greater than oneself in terms which are familiar to oneself: an attractive combination.

The fusion of the familiar and the sacred are also likely to inform the power of the tenets to influence emotionality in desirable ways. As Jung said, “mythological motifs frequently appear, but clothed in modern dress” (1966: 152). The tenets, as mythological motifs, provide the practitioners with Jungian “synchronicity,” i.e. that which allows the experience of existence to be meaningful, by offering a

shared account of that experience. Jung claims such secular seeming myths have the potential to duplicate the past psychological feats of religion and in this way, are emotionally beneficial (cited in Segal, 2000: 77). Thus, according to this Jungian theory, the tenets might encourage the favourable feelings so many informants describe.

Another way the at once mainstream and mythological tenets might spark pleasing shifts in sentiments and mood is by creating an easily accessible script that encourages the individual to interpret and express emotions in ways that are compatible with the collective ethos. As we know, the individual can conform to these norms, which at times generates a merger between outward performance and internal feelings. Since the norms demand the appearance of positive energy and thus positive emotion, the emotional state the tenets promote is a positive one.

Shanti and the Order's respective contributions to the collective tenets, which relate to favourable feelings, mean the organisations contribute to the 'tenet-feeling' intersection. Although some of the components of the tenets are likely to exist outside of the field contexts, the centres' elaborations of the tenets which are often emotionally beneficial, mean the organisations facilitate the collectivistic (c) factor of the principles, the individualistic (i) factor of the person's feelings and for some of the (i-c) mutualities between the two. However, the two organisations may also contribute to this intersection in another way as well. As the next section shows, the organisations' emphasis on felt experience may function as an

intervening factor in the 'tenet-feeling' relationship.

Encouraging Felt Experience

The organisations' emphases of praxis, heightened sensual awareness and discourses relating to 'heart over head' or 'true self' over everyday self' are ways in which the centres prioritise felt experience. These traits appear to stimulate a different kind of thinking, which has emotional advantages. The individual often interprets the inner experience of feeling happier as evidence for the tenets. In this way, the accentuation of felt experience may function as an intervening factor in between 'tenet-feeling'.

Shanti

The yoga teachers at Shanti enforce cumulative emphases on felt experience that encourage practitioners to think less and feel more. The prioritisation of the experiential on the level of praxis for instance, renders involvement with the group to be very participatory. There are no intellectual requirements at all. One need not read voluminous books, learn doctrine, or even declare hope in positivity and energy. The only expectation is engagement with the yoga practice. As *ashtanga*

teacher Per says to one group of his students: “Yoga is a practice. It's about calming mental activity, not increasing it.” To another group he expounds a similar message:

“Ashtanga was developed to keep young Brahmins' minds off girls, that's why it's so strong... Don't be too cerebral about it. Feel it. Come into the moment and come into your body. And let the movement knock you out of your thought processes. Let your mind have a rest now.”

By instructing the practitioner to not “be too cerebral,” to “let your mind have a rest,” to try to “feel it,” and to “come into your body” enforces the 'think less, feel more' disposition. As Per suggests in his command to “let the movement knock you out of your thought processes,” it is possible (and to my mind, likely) that it is harder to pursue a chain of thought during such active practices because one is at least partially concentrating on moving and balancing. In consequence, the participant may inevitably 'think less,' or, if not less, at least in a different way.

In addition to the prioritisation of praxis, the multi-sensory stimulants that Shanti present are also likely to prosper a focus on feeling over thinking. Bauman suggests that those living during postmodernity are more eager “sensation-gatherers” than have ever existed before because this era can overwhelm the mind, which, in turn, makes the senses call for attention (1998: 70-2). There are various ways in which the yoga centre heightens sensual experience and possibly realigns

focus away from an (overwhelmed) mind. The Shanti space features scented candles and some yoga teachers also use scented chakra balm, which similarly engages the sense of smell. Stimulants for the eyes include the potentially 'exotic' seeming aesthetics of the teachers⁸³, as well as the statues of Hindu deities and saffron coloured walls. The yoga teacher heightens the sense of touch, by making physical contact with the student when altering a posture or during a short massage in *sivasana* (corpse pose). In addition to the hushed hypnotic tones which teachers adopt during classes, the mantras and the gong that rouse people from *sivasana* (corpse pose), music is another central component to the audio experience. At Shanti, music tends to be either evoke nature (e.g. simulated sounds of the rainforest) or 'the East' (e.g. Indian devotional songs). The attendees' degrees of appreciation of the music at Shanti, exhibits a slight gender divide, with men tending to be more critical of the music choices at the time of entry to the group. As Matt describes:

“At first it was a put-off. I walked in and heard that music; y'know the type of music that shouldn't be played anywhere other than a windchime shop? Tinkle tinkle 'save the whales' music? But now, I'd be gutted if they didn't play it. [laughs] It's kind of vital for shifting my energy and my thinking.”

⁸³ The “set apart” notable appearances of the teachers are explored in Chapter 6. Some of the unusual aesthetic characteristics of the teachers at Shanti, include: only ever wearing white muslin, turbans and tattoo images of Hindu goddesses.

Matt claims to now welcome music as a significant aspect of the sensual experience created by the centre and even notes explicitly that the music is “vital for shifting [his] energy and [his] thinking.”

The organisation also encourages the participant to feel more and think less by verbally espousing a distinction. On one side, is a superior, experiential truth linked to “the heart” and on the other side, is the fallible mental knowledge of “the head.” This dichotomy of 'heart and head' suggests an attempt at dividing the felt and the mental. For instance, at the very start of a lesson, yoga teacher, Dora said to her class of 9 practitioners:

“Come into your body now. Leave your head at the door. Focus on your heart centre: the centre of the universe, the centre of all love and wisdom. This practice is going to bring you into the moment. To be present. Centred. To feel. Let go of everything you were thinking about before this lesson. Let go of what you're expecting to happen later on today. Just breathe in this moment. Just be.”

Using a similar kind of communication to other teachers at Shanti, Dora distinguishes the head from the heart. She encourages her students to dissociate with the mental, with everything that the practitioner was “thinking about before this lesson” and to instead, focus on the heart and “to feel.”

The Sufi Order

The teachers at the Order also emphasise felt experience in modes which urge students to think less and feel more. Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that the leader of the Sufi Order International, Pir Zir, reasons the population of the Order was at its largest in the 1970s because, he believes, it was a vital time of pursuing felt experience. Like Shanti, the Sufi Order promotes 'more feeling and less thinking' by implementing praxis, sensual stimulants and particular discourses that discourage identification with the mind.

The classes of the Sufi Order are two thirds praxis (eclectic spiritual dance in the beginning, followed by whirling or breath practice as part of 'the message') and one third discussion (which sometimes also includes some form of practice, such as visualisation). Some of the guides explicitly reinforce the prospect of 'quietening the mind' through praxis. For instance, during a class, one teacher says: "the mind is a wild horse and we must use our bodies like reins to train it, to still it" (anonymous). Students at the Order also describe how the mind 'stills' during the physical practices and some also allude to the emotional benefits of this change in thinking. One informant started to cry whilst recounting his experience:

"When you're turning, you have to concentrate really hard... and maybe that helps to make the mind go quiet. The first time I did it, the silence was so loud. The bastard in my head – 'you lost all your money,' 'nobody will ever love you' – all that negative stuff went quiet. Finally." (Anonymous)

This student's response supports the idea that normal thinking patterns alter when participating in a physical practice like turning [/whirling]. The experience appears to help “the mind go quiet” in this man's view. Furthermore, the experience is a beneficial one for him personally, because it silences negative and unhelpful thought patterns. Thus, praxis, in this example, quells thoughts that may generate unwelcome emotions.

The Order also supports 'feeling over thinking' by heightening the senses. The guides stimulate smell by using scented candles and lighting incense sticks on ceremonial occasions. The context stimulates sight by presenting the unusual aesthetics of the teachers⁸⁴ and the Persian rugs and Asian art, which may potentially seem 'exotic' to many of the Western students. The Sufi teacher generates tactility by encouraging the collective to hold hands during the dance practice and by making physical contact with the student during this dance tuition. Teachers at the Order also enforce audio experience by playing recordings of music, but more typically opt for live music, using guitar, the grand piano that is on site or accordion. (In both centres) music may be one of the more active elements within the multi-sensory experiences which increase feeling and decrease habitual thinking patterns. As Burch Brown convincingly argues, music is typically

⁸⁴ The “set apart” notable appearances of the teachers are explored in Chapter 6. At the Sufi Order, notable features of the guides (who are all of white ethnicity and cultural heritage) include Persian robes, Islamic prayer beads and Islamic caps.

regarded as the most “directly emotional of the arts and the art most intimately involved with religious and spiritual life”. He writes that music seems to explore levels of feeling that elude words and the mind — “it can move one to tears or give unspeakable joy” (2008, 200; cf. Begbie, 2000). The 'mentally overwhelmed' “sensation-gatherers” (Bauman, 1998: 70-2) might stop thinking in quite the same way, while immersing in such a sensually rich environment.

The Sufi Order's distinction between 'everyday self' and 'true self' also advises the participant to feel more and think less. According to this ideology of the individual, the everyday self equates with fallible and limited mental knowledge. In contrast, the superior true self equates with the universal and innate truth, which surpasses the cognitive. Guides explain to the students that the participant can access the 'beyond the mental' experience towards the true self by focusing on the sensual and somatic techniques which the Order prescribe. Thus, the Order expounds philosophies which venerate the role of physically felt experience as absolutely necessary for their spiritual purposes and diminish the role of thought as error-prone and finite⁸⁵.

At times, informants express suspicion of the flawed capacity of thought and even lament that my academic, 'everyday,' 'of the head' approach to

⁸⁵ This perspective contrasts with some other religio-spiritual perspectives that link the spiritual to mental qualities, rather than the bodily (Van der Veer, 1989: 458) or depict the physical as base. However, it supports the commentators who note the salience of the body in New Age spiritualities. Hess states that New Agers view the body as 'inherently natural' and having 'an innate wisdom of its own' (1993: 116). Roth comments that the body is the 'elementary site of spiritual exploration' in the context of New Ageism (1990: 49).

understanding was in conflict, or even contradictory, to the very nature of the true self and the felt experiences of reaching it. For instance, Lucy said: “Turning is beyond the mind and philosophy and words... Nobody can put the true self into words. I won't be describing any of this to you. I can't.”

As has been shown, both field centres strive to help participants focus on felt experience by accentuating praxis, multi-sensory stimulation and discourses which divide 'head and heart' or 'everyday self and true self.' These tendencies might support the student in associating more with feeling and less with thinking, or at least encourage the student to think in a different way. The relationship between thought and emotion has been, and continues to be, thoroughly explored. A dominant claim amongst many cognitive scientists and psychoanalysts is that emotion is often inherently joined to thought, with thought typically preceding the emotion. In extension, many of these thinkers state that techniques to dissociate with usual thought patterns and to 'calm the mind' can be very advantageous for mental health, especially for people who are distressed or depressed (Beck, Rush, Shaw and Emery, 1979; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Jacobson and Dobson, 1996; Williams and Garland, 2002).

Recent studies of meditation reinforce the notion that disconnecting with particular thought patterns can lead to greater happiness. Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard is said to have the largest capacity for happiness ever recorded by brain scans and has since been dubbed the “happiest person in the world” by

media sources (Bates, 2012). Ricard co-authored a study about the brain functioning of long-term meditators, including himself, which argues that meditation allows for 'mind transformation' by focusing on something basic beyond emotive thoughts. According to the authors, concentrating on something simple (such as the breath, a mantra, or a mental image) which maintains attention, makes the mind become a 'tool for cultivating inner peace and inner strength' (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, Davidson, 2004)⁸⁶.

The prioritisation of felt experience at Shanti and the Sufi Order might turn the practitioner's attention away from his or her habitual thought processes in comparable ways to what is said to occur during meditation and mindfulness practices. This new kind of thinking seems like a probable contributor to the improvements in emotional experience which the informants recount. As such, by encouraging dissociation with some cognitive patterns, the organisations are likely to contribute to the favourable feelings which intersect with the tenets. In this way, the accentuation of felt experience may function as an intervening factor between

⁸⁶ The study found that long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice. Behind every thought is a type of consciousness, explains the authors. The basic nature of this consciousness means that every time our mind remembers a negative thought, all the associated negative memories can come flooding back as if all these multiple events were happening again in that moment. Meditation shifts this pattern (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, Davidson, 2004). Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) also supports the suggestion that shifts in thinking patterns can be very beneficial for happiness levels. This type of therapy uses meditation and other techniques, including breathing and yoga-based exercises to help people 'quiet the mind' and enhance acceptance. "MBCT has been clinically proven to be at least as effective as drugs for depression and it is recommended by the UK's National Institute of Clinical Excellence." It is also thought to be extremely effective for people who are not depressed but "who are struggling to keep up with the constant demands of the modern world" (Segal, Williams and Teasdale, 2011: 278).

tenet-feeling.

To summarise, Shanti and the Order support the 'tenet-feeling' intersection in at least two identifiable ways. First, the organisations' encouragement of (c) shared hope in the tenets provides a collectively held framework which has (i) emotional benefits for the individual. Second, the centre's prioritisation of felt experience probably accelerates those (i) emotional shifts, which are typically 'explained' by employing the (c) hierophanous framework of the tenets. Informing both the tenets and the personal feelings, these two field centres enable the (i-c) merging of the two factors.

The organisations' contributions to the '(collective) principles – (individual) feelings' interchange shows how the two fields can facilitate the meeting of a form of the collective and a form of the individual at the level of emotion. The particular manifestations of the 'collective-individual' in these instances appear highly effective for healing; as the majority of student informants declare, participation informs a greater sense of wellbeing. However, there are a couple of implications of these centres' therapeutic functions which require further scrutiny. One implication is why the 'collective-individual' forms of healing might hold such appeal in the context of present-day Britain. The other regards the necessity for teachers to receive a form of training that attends to confronting mental health issues appropriately.

Implications: Collective-Individual Healing and the Need for Further Teacher Training

Contemporary philosopher Alain de Botton argues: “the burden of vulnerability has been recast as an individual problem” for which there is “minimal social support.” Whereas in the past, traditional religious institutions could provide “collective consolation mechanisms”, now, with more and more people feeling reluctant to affiliate with religious institutions, vulnerability has become “a bit of an embarrassment for the individual to deal with”. The answer to this “individual problem” is typically presented as a medical solution (in the form of drugs and therapies) rather than a communal solution (in the form of collective support systems) (2013; see also: Riis and Woodhead, 2010: 211).

Shanti and the Sufi Order offer attractive exceptions to the trend de Botton describes. These two groups do not present vulnerability as an individual problem requiring an individual medical solution. Instead, the two New Age organisations approach managing the human condition in a way comparable to how religious groups did so in the past, without requiring the practitioner to affiliate with a religious group or abide by religious rules.

An important way in which Shanti and the Sufi Order achieve this paradoxical situation is by encouraging “worldview without dogma” (Barker, 2015⁸⁷). The individual can take solace in a shared conception of the general order of existence without being obliged to uphold authoritatively imposed tenets. Like a religious worldview, the conceptions regarding positivity and energy can inspire “a fundamental orientation... [and] a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic construction of reality” (Sire, 2009: 15). Yet, unlike religious dogma, the conceptions are wavering and flexible, promoting personal differences in interpretation and degrees of adherence. Shared beliefs and personal preferences come together here. The vulnerable person can engage with the shared resources of the worldview but can do so as he or she wishes. Inclusion does not require conversion, exclusivity or a prolonged commitment.

This type of 'collective-individual' solution to the otherwise 'individual problem' of vulnerability encourages the person to find collectively held meaning in individually felt suffering. In a cultural context where the majority of people no longer affiliate with religious institutions, but probably still crave the solace that comes with a shared support system, the 'collective-individual' balance that Shanti and the Order provide is likely to be appealing.

⁸⁷ Private Correspondence with Barker (09/02/2015).

There is however, a very important implication of the appeal of alternative therapies (such as those the field organisations provide), which is not receiving attention. It is not clear that the administrators of the discourses and practices receive any training that would help them to identify the circumstances in which they should refer a participant to general practitioners or psychological professionals. None of the yoga teachers and only some of the Sufi guides had received any guidance of this kind. Yoga workshop teacher, Joanna explains some of the potential dangers of this gap in teacher training:

“Mainly I work with people with issues, even if you don't realise that for a while, and sometimes you take people on who maybe you shouldn't. If someone has PTSD they can have flashbacks during yoga and we're not trained to deal with it. I've seen it. Saying 'go into child's pose' ain't gonna cut it this time, you know? You need a psychologist. I'm not a psychologist and it's just not something yoga teachers really talk about or know about.”

PTSD may be one of the more extreme cases, which is not representative of the issues faced by the majority of students I encountered at the field sites. However, yoga teacher Per suggests many other students also face serious challenges, which simply they simply chose not to disclose during interviews with me:

“I've had a lot of personal things said to me which I'm not really qualified to discuss and it wouldn't be said to me if I was teaching another type of exercise. Anorexia and depression are particularly common. I'm not a GP but there is still that expectation that I'm somehow qualified to heal them.”

Whilst there seems to be a beneficial emotional outcome of participation at Shanti or the Sufi Order, these and similar organisations could benefit from greater training in relation to the prospective extents and limits of the psychological functions they perform. In 2005, half the population of the UK had reportedly visited an “alternative practitioner” (Murcott, 2005: 36). In 2007 it was said that Britons spent £1.4 billion annually on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) (Heelas, 2008: 67-8). The growing popularity of these forms of support and healing require forms of regulation that safeguard the 'patients' to the greatest degree possible.

Conclusion

At Shanti and the Sufi Order, the practitioners' descriptions of their emotional worlds allude to a complex and rich area of experience. In both populations, many informants recount enduring periods of intense, undesirable feelings at the time of joining the New Age group and at times of increased involvement with the centre. Some participants also recall a more constant sense of residual stress, which seems to be a response to contextual fragmentation. Intriguingly, informants from both sites also describe emotional transformations for which they credit the

respective New Age organisation. Nobody can claim with certainty that the exact same emotional transformation would or would not have happened had the informant never attended classes at the centre or indeed, had adopted an alternative approach altogether. When discussing the complexity and variability of the emotional contexts of a collective of individuals, there is no control group for those individuals and their precise emotional circumstances that can offer comparative findings. However, the vast majority of informants are convinced that the gratifying shifts in their sentiments and perceptions are due to their participation at the centre.

A reason why participation may lead to improvements in mood is the intersection between tenets and feelings that takes place within both New Age contexts. Some key (c) principles, of which the students share a common understanding, inform (i) improvements in feelings for the individuals. We know this because informants report positive emotional experiences in response to thinking about or acting upon the common discourses. The (i) advances in feeling also, vice versa, support the (c) tenets. For instance, many informants employ their change in outlook and sentiment as a means of reinforcing the principles; they cite their feelings as evidence for the principles' efficacy and reasoning for why one should maintain and perpetuate the precepts. Thus the emotional reaction to the tenets can also function as an input to the principles which grow stronger in response. An implication of these multi-directional relations between tenet and

feeling is the collective expectation about how one should portray one's emotions. The individuals' adherences to these expectations can at once enforce the (c) collective force of the tenets and encourage their (i) own positive feelings.

These intersections of (c) common discourses and (i) personal feelings suggest each factor contributes to the other. This is an example of how a predominantly (i) individualistic factor and a predominantly (c) collectivistic factor meet and co-produce each other. However the processes of individual-collective co-enforcement do not occur in the same ways and extents on every occasion. Some informants at Shanti show instances when the agent can interject in the processes at work. In this context, some yoga students engage with the collective tenets and are aware of the group's expectations but do not experience or express the corresponding (upbeat) personal feelings to indicate positive energy. Instead, the agent blocks the prospective mutualities between the two components by presenting a contrasting emotion. Conversely, comparable examples in the Sufi Order context are few and far between. The students in the Sufi context show greater levels of conformity to the group's sensibility norms. Thus, the 'tenet-feeling' interactions occur in both fields, offering an illustration of how collective and individual inform each other at the level of emotion. But, at Shanti, there are more instances of an individualistic orientation, where the agent refuses to adhere to the group's ethos and at the Sufi Order, there are fewer instances of these types and greater displays of social conformity. This disparity between the two sets of

participants corresponds with the respective 'individualistic' leanings (Shanti) and collectivistic leanings (Sufi Order) that occur in relation to the other areas of experience this thesis explores.

Beyond the exceptions at Shanti, the organisations frequently manage to facilitate the tenet-feeling intersection. One way this facilitation occurs is by encouraging hope in the (c) collective principles, which, upon the individual's acceptance, can have (i) personal emotional benefits. As such, the organisations contribute to both factors and thus play a significant role in the interactions between them. Another way the organisations support the inter-relationship is by emphasising felt experience which accelerates the (i) favourable emotional shifts that the students explain with reference to the (c) shared precepts.

These findings speak back to one of the issues that the literature review in Chapter 2 describes. Whereas some scholars characterise participation with the New Age as trivial and indulgent, the concerns and perceptions of the informants from Shanti and the Order suggest the contrary. According to the majority of these New Agers, partaking in the activities of the group is a means of addressing some very serious issues. Grief, despair, persistent stress and confusion are just some of the challenges these students faced before finding (what they describe to be) forms of solace and relief at Shanti or the Order. Thus engagements with the New Age seems to relate to far more consequential pursuits than the depictions of frivolity allow for.

Following this exploration of the informants' emotional experiences, the next chapter takes the New Age teacher as the focal theme. This investigation will show how students perceive and engage with the instructor and some of the implications of those perceptions and engagements. As we will see, another type of individual-collective interchange occurs in this thematic context, namely, between the (i) set-apart instructor and the (c) student community.

Chapter Six – The Teacher

The Set Apart Instructor and the Community of Students

Practitioners' engagements with teachers and leaders are important parts of New Age experience. In fact, Prince and Riches argue it is the “specialist exclusive skills [of the teacher] that facilitate ordinary people's personal and spiritual quests” (2000: 98). At Shanti and the Sufi Order, the informants' descriptions express great recognition and appreciation of the instructor's 'specialist skills' and 'exclusive qualities.' However, these descriptions also suggest something else as well, something which is, arguably, more intriguing. While many participants perceive the instructor as special and in possession of unique traits, they also experience the teacher as being (what the academic might describe as) charismatic.

Endeavouring to understand the students' experiences of distinct, charismatic individuals however, is far from easy. Just like the “X” in the popular television programme X-Factor evokes, qualities like charisma may be instantly recognisable to the perceiver, but nevertheless extremely difficult to describe and define. The very word 'charisma' suggests something “irreducible” (Potts, 2010: 3) and as such,

perhaps all characterisations of the phenomenon will bring complexities. Even Weber's classic understanding of charisma is notoriously considered highly ambiguous and continues to inspire a wealth of debate about how charisma might be understood, if at all. As Lindholm recounts, many scholars 'give up' all together and lament 'charisma' is “a meaningless concept” and not at all helpful for analysis (1990: 5). Lee and Ackerman go so far as to declare “charisma is probably one of the most misunderstood words in the analysis of religious actions and movements” (2002: 19).

Despite such critique and concern, definitions and discussions of charisma continue to materialise. Moreover, Weber's classic formulation typically influences these considerations (e.g. Potts, 2010; Theobald, 1980; Wilson, 1975). However (possibly due to the Weberian conception's emphasis on charisma as an individualistic trait or “a certain quality of an individual personality” [Weber, 1924: 328]) the communal influences and outcomes that might relate to charisma do not tend to receive substantial attention. For instance, the studies that focus on the relationships between many devotees of a charismatic teacher are minor in comparison to the number which explore the relationship between the single devotee and the single charismatic. Actually there are very few works that ask what shape the links between the multiple students of a teacher might take and how these bonds may equate with forms of communality.

This chapter's investigation of the prospective interrelations between the individual and collective in relation to the charismatic teacher will address these challenges. The discussion will start by presenting 'the teacher' as an area of New Age experience. It will argue that the majority of students at each field site conceive the instructor as a set apart, ideal individual and that in many ways, this conception resembles scholarly notions of charisma. The next section will explore the intersection between the (i) set apart, individual teacher and the (c) group or 'community' of recognisers of the teacher's distinct status. The final part shows how both organisations impose particular institutional conventions, which facilitate the (i-c) interrelations between the two factors.

The Teacher

There are numerous traits regarding the students' experiences of 'the teacher' which apply to both field sites. For instance, neither Shanti nor the Sufi Order function around a single charismatic leader. Instead, there are various teachers within each centre and separate groups of regular students who associate with a particular teacher who runs a set lesson. A lot of loyalty is apparent in these circumstances. Even though the teachers within the organisation might share similar qualities, the regular students typically perceive their *own* teacher as a

special case. The vast majority of members only attend the sessions which their teacher leads and upon a teacher leaving the centre, the regular students of that person tend to leave too. Furthermore, in interviews, the prominent reason informants give as to why they attend a particular class at that organisation (instead of an alternative lesson either at the centre or elsewhere) relates to the qualities of the instructor with whom they affiliate themselves. These cross-contextual occurrences imply many students of each population experience the teacher as a distinct and valuable individual and as a person who has traits that others cannot easily replicate or replace.

There are many more examples from individual informants within each field site that can further our understanding of practitioner encounters with the teacher. Some of the cases highlight signs of appreciation and devotion, the perception of the teacher's ideal individuality, or the appearance of distinction. These sentiments and their implications contribute to the proposal that in both collectives, many members experience the instructor as a charismatic being.

Signs of Appreciation and Devotion

Almost *all* informants at Shanti or the Sufi Order offer descriptions or exhibit behaviours (or both) that suggest the teacher is held in very high esteem. These

types of comments and actions are indicators of reverence; they allude to combinations of affection, respect and dedication. As we will see, many of these signs draw on perceptions of the instructor's exceptional, exemplary qualities.

Shanti Practitioners

The majority of informants from the yoga context made declarations of zealous appreciation for their respective teachers. One example is Laurella's portrayal of her yoga instructor, Dora. In Laurella's words:

“I want to sit in her energy and just 'be' with her. I feel amazing when I'm with her in a way I haven't had before; that's probably why I want to be near her all the time... Even when she's sick, she's there being perfect and focusing on bettering me. There is no one else like her. I wish I could be more like her, but that's definitely a long way off... who knows, it may never happen... [Sigh] I just love her.”

Laurella's description of Dora as “perfect” and as the type of person who “no one else” is like, distinguishes her teacher from other people. This informant's prediction that, despite her hope, she may never be able to resemble Dora implies she perceives Dora as someone who embodies rare extents of appealing characteristics. Another source of Laurella's acclaim concerns how Dora makes Laurella feel about herself. The student notes she feels “amazing” when she is with her teacher, in a way, she never has before, once again promoting Dora's extraordinary nature.

In addition to verbal exaltations, there are also multiple practical, or 'acted-out' signs of high regard and even devotion towards the yoga teacher. One example is a student paying for his teacher (Per) to come on his honeymoon with him. In response to my surprise at this occurrence, Per assured me it is not such an unusual case⁸⁸. Whilst Per was abroad on the trip, the behaviours of some of his other students' presented additional examples of dedication towards an instructor. For instance, nearly none of Per's usual group of regular students came to classes at the centre during his absence. Some practitioners, who were unaware he was away, would arrive at the centre dressed for yoga but leave upon the discovery that a cover teacher was instructing the lesson instead. Other behavioural examples of commitment include travelling a long way in order to attend a particular teacher's class. Twice a week, yoga practitioner Sue travels from Birmingham for Dora's lessons at Shanti. As fellow student Soo Ying said about this participant: "It takes Sue over two hours to get to the class. That speaks volumes about Dora's teaching." These are just a selection of the numerous examples of the student's commitment to the yoga instructor.

⁸⁸ As Per explains, his "clients do not like practicing with other teachers, even for a couple of weeks, which is why some ask me to travel with them." The cost of this option suggests these incidences are unlikely to occur across multiple spiritual groups and rather may serve to indicate the distinct socio-economic demographic of many of Shanti's customers.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Many Sufi Order informants also express appreciation and devotion for their teachers. The statements and activities occur in modes that suggest a comparable experience of the guide as a special individual. Order member Florence offers one such example. She is white, British, 62 years old and works full-time as a counsellor. At the time of our meeting, Florence had known her guide, Wali, for 4 years. Despite their established relationship, Florence struggles to put her feelings for him into words:

“Nothing is enough to really explain it – to explain the meaning this profoundly evolved person has brought into my life. He is the most evolved being I have ever encountered. Just to be in his presence feels like... I don't even know... love, bliss, the ultimate... none of these words are enough... It's this visceral thing; it's bigger than my vocabulary.”

Florence distinguishes Wali as remarkable through her attempt to explain her appreciation for him and perhaps ironically, more so, through her *struggle* to explain her appreciation for him. The fact Florence believes “nothing is enough to really explain” the level of her reverence alludes to the extent of the reverence she feels. Florence employs superlatives to further 'set apart' Wali from all others, venerating him as “the most evolved person [she has] ever encountered.”

Practitioners' enactments of adoration and allegiance supplement verbal assertions of attachment. One behavioural type of dedication is the student undergoing financial self-sacrifice predominantly due to a teacher's

recommendation. During an interview, one member of the Sufi Order admits she cannot afford to go to a seminar with the international head Pir Zir but is buying a ticket anyway because it is important to her guide who has asked her to attend (anonymous). Four other Order members also suggest additional purchases impact their financial situations. This sign of deference illustrates a difference between the two field sites. No students at Shanti imply economic sacrifices in relation to the instructor (possibly because most members of the yoga centre seem to have greater disposable income).

Another context-specific indicator of the guide's influence at the Order is that interviewees from this centre frequently wish for anonymity, often due to a fear that the guide could interpret their (invariably complimentary) depictions as displeasing. (In contrast, most Shanti informants prefer the use of their real name.) Furthermore, whereas some Shanti attendees think the instances of long travel are impressive and symbolic, Sufi Order interviewees accept extensive commutes as the norm. No informants live near the centre and many spend at least an hour journeying to the site in order to engage with the guide.

Although these examples are only a small selection of the practitioners' experiences of the teachers, they are representative of the sentiments of many more students of each field site. In both contexts, informants seem to perceive the teacher as possessing excellent qualities and these perceptions inspire appraisals

and acts of devotion. However, there are also differences between how these feelings and behaviours manifest within each group; there are more members of the Sufi Order population who are willing to face financial sacrifice, who take measures to protect against losing favour with the teacher and who accept extensive travel as a part of their commitment. More points of similarity and difference between the populations are observable in relation to the students' perceptions of the teacher's ideal individuality.

Perceptions of Ideal Individuality

As this thesis describes, the members of each field group have different understandings of 'the individual.' Many participants' views of their teacher frequently echo the (respective) conception of the self and utilise terms that evoke the characterisation's most definitive, ideal form. In fact, in many instances, the teacher functions as a model of the practitioner's understanding of individuality. These circumstances serve to further distinguish the instructor as an extraordinary, special person, and furthermore, can encourage an aspirational, parent-child like relationship.

Shanti Practitioners

At Shanti, all of the informants' understandings of the self centre around independence, autonomy and freedom. The members' descriptions of the yoga teacher suggest many view the instructor as representing the maximal version of this type of individuality. Thus, these students perceive the qualities of self as available in different extents and identify the teacher as possessing a great (or the greatest) amount of the qualities. The teacher is 'superior' in these areas and this recognition of superiority supports and perpetuates the teacher's status.

As the Introduction notes, Lukes highlights autonomy as the very essence of individualism and cites liberty and equality as vital for autonomy (2006 [1973]).

Although practitioners at Shanti indicate that notions of autonomy and liberty are fundamental parts of their own self-conception, the members' descriptions of the yoga instructor as one who embodies greater extents of this type of individuality, suggests “equality” is not evident in the way Lukes' description implies it might be.

During a discussion with yoga practitioner Maria, she spoke about her teacher Dora in modes that signify her recognition of Dora's superior qualities of individuality.

“Her power is almost palpable. Her energy is so strong that the room feels different when she walks in. She is so present; so in control. You know she doesn't need anything or anyone to radiate like that. That's what's incredible. It's not the face cream she uses or because she's getting lots of male attention or anything like that. She's not worried about anything or distracted. It's on a different level to anyone else I've ever met.”

Maria, who describes her independence as being a dominant feature of her own personality (see Chapter 3), distinguishes Dora by virtue of the *extent* of her independence. The informant depicts the special outcomes of this freedom, endowing Dora with a radiance and a kind of power, which is unlike that of anybody else she has ever known. In this way, Maria's reference to Dora's ability to represent the qualities of personhood to a paramount extent differentiates her teacher as exceptional.

Joelle's description of her yoga teacher, Per, similarly applies the notion of the individual in its ultimate form. After noting she has attended Per's classes for 3 years, Joelle states:

“Per's free. That's why he's so beautiful: he's *truly* free. We all think we're free, but we're not always. He's earned his freedom in a way that we haven't, so it's only right. He goes on all these silent retreats and he fasts and he goes to India and he, well, he puts in the work, you know? He's not living from compliment to compliment or even for his friends and family like most people are.”

Joelle, like Maria, employs idealistic terms to describe the independence and freedom her teacher exhibits. Per is “truly free” in Joelle's view, unlike just thinking he is free which is what Joelle believes is more commonly the case. Joelle also thinks Per is independent: existing without reliance on the relational supports of “friends and family” and positive reinforcement from external sources. At no point did Joelle temper or counter these judgements. Rather she appears to

sincerely believe Per is free in definitive terms, thus painting a picture of Per's character that distinguishes him from “most people” in Joelle's experience.

Even though the participants at Shanti mostly self-identify as very independent and as reluctant to submit to external authority, the idealistic and conclusive nature of the teacher's individualism often encourages aspiration, imitation and some degree of personal transformation. In fact, the perception of the teacher's disproportionate individuality can inspire a parent-child like dynamic between teacher and student which enforces the disproportionate amounts of power. The practitioner conceives the teacher as embodying a greater amount or quality of desirable traits and in turn, aspires to imitate and resemble the teacher, just as a child may try to imitate and resemble the more developed traits of the parent. An insight into this type of dynamic derives from the same interview with Joelle. During the conversation about Per's qualities of independence and freedom, Joelle adds:

“His whole being is existing on this other plane where there's no neediness and I want to learn that from him. I want to be like that. He's kind of my guru in that way. I ask him about fasting and where I could go on a silent retreat and I try my best with all that because it's going to make me feel good and well, hopefully be a better person. It sounds cheesy, but that is what I'm trying to do and if I meet someone like Per who I think can help me, I'm going to celebrate him and tap into it.”

Joelle's understanding of Per's ideal individualism inspires her to want to emulate him. She states she wants to learn from him and be like him and even fasts and

goes on retreats to attempt imitation⁸⁹. This description suggests Joelle wishes to achieve more of the seemingly greater qualities she sees in the model of Per and thus enters into an aspirational relationship with him.

The Sufi Order Practitioners

Unlike the Shanti collective, most students at the Sufi Order cite a *dividual* conception of self. This notion of individuality constitutes two parts: the everyday self (which negotiates between having some autonomy, and submitting to external authorities) and the true self (which is accessible by following the guide's instructions). When talking about perceptions and experiences of 'the guide,' many Sufi students recount this very particular idea of personhood in conclusive terms. The idealistic nature of these characterisations of the teacher suggests a common perception amidst the group that one's guide is a set apart and exceptional model of this type of individuality.

As one practitioner said about her guide, Shams:

“Shams is perfect and he's generous with his perfection. He's 'head in the clouds and feet on the ground’⁹⁰; he can empathise with the people and their troubles in the world. He's been there. He

⁸⁹ Later in the discussion, Joelle clarifies she does practice fasting and has gone on the silent retreats Per recommends.

⁹⁰ Other members of the Order, including the guides, say the expression 'head in the clouds and feet on the ground.' This phrase is indicative of the dualistic ideology of the self. Students and teachers may reinforce the ideology by repeating the phrase.

knows. But he knows the beyond as well. He knows the Beloved deeply. It's so beautiful. He has more access to his true self than others. He tells me how I can get there and I like that; I trust him.” (Anonymous)

This Sufi Order member describes her appreciation for her “perfect” guide and references his exceptional ability to relate to his everyday self and his true self. The extent of this ability distinguishes Shams in the informant's view (“he has *more* access to his true self *than* others”). The perception that the teacher embodies superior degrees of (the dividual) traits of individuality appears to inspire adherence; the practitioner follows Shams' guidance in order to “get there” herself. This submission may in turn confirm Shams' 'higher' status.

Numerous other Sufi Order attendees comparably note 'ideal individual' qualities when speaking about their teachers. For instance, one participant who has been attending the Order for 16 months when we met, describes his relationship with his guide using these words:

“I can say anything to him. *Anything...* He has this everyday knowledge of life that's incredibly deep and he understands. Equally, I know he is as advanced in his true self as you can be in this lifetime. I know I am in good hands on that front too. So yeah, it's a pretty big deal. My connection with him is a big deal to me.” (Anonymous)

This informant implies he perceives his guide as being an outstanding example of an individual. The participant feels he “can say anything” to him because “he has this everyday knowledge of life that's incredibly deep.” At the same time, the

practitioner views his guide's 'true self' as being “as advanced... as [it] can be in this lifetime.” The extreme extent of both the guide's everyday knowledge and true self distinguishes him from the norm.

There are numerous instances which suggest the experience of the guide's ideal individuality resembles a parent-child type of relationship. Nader, who is a student at the Order, offers an example. In the process of explaining why he tries to be more like his guide, he reasons:

“If you find someone you trust who has more practice and wisdom than you, you can improve a lot faster from their example. You can reach your true self a lot quicker. Yes, the guide has authority but it is not abused. I follow my guide's instructions because I have everything to gain from doing that. He's already there. It would be an honour to be more like him and to experience what he is able to experience in both [aspects of the self]. A complete honour... I really want to impress him and make him proud.”

Echoing the ideal nature of a parent, Nader believes “the guide has authority but it is not abused.” There is “trust” in this relationship and the wish to gain the teacher's approval and “make him proud”. The nature of the asymmetry in “practice and wisdom” inspires Nader to learn by “example,” to “follow [his] guide's instruction,” and aspire to “be more like [the guide] and to experience” his level of personhood. In this way, Nader is happy to focus on the model of his teacher for his own self-development and through this process, confirms and contributes to the teacher's status as an exemplary being.

Placed in contrast, the informant quotes from each field group show how a teacher can signify a model of the group's relevant ideology of the individual. The accolades from the Shanti informants reference ideal levels of freedom and autonomy, and the veneration from members of the Order reference an ideal of the individual self. The difference in content in these expressions of veneration suggest the value of the teacher's traits is collective-specific. Factors that appear impressive and indicative of superiority to members of the Sufi Order probably may not appear impressive and indicative of superiority to the regular practitioners of Shanti (and vice versa). If teachers from each group were swapped and put in the other context, the same qualities would not necessarily appear as distinct and inspirational as they do in their 'original' New Age environments.

However, in both contexts, the teacher-student dynamic does have similarities. One common feature is the student's perception and perpetuation of an imbalance: the practitioner views the teacher as possessing 'more' of, or a 'superior type' of, the traits of the individual than they believe they possess themselves. The recognition and acceptance of the exemplary nature of the teacher's individualism further serves to distinguish the teacher as set apart and special. Be it because a teacher's independence appears to be “on a different level to anyone else [the practitioner has] ever met” (Maria), or a teacher is not dependent on others “like most people” (Joelle), or a teacher “has more access to his true self than others” (anonymous), or is even as “advanced in his true self as one can be in this lifetime”

(anonymous), the student's perceptions portray a teacher who is positively different from the vast majority of people, including the student. Such asymmetry inspires an aspirational relationship in which a practitioner may imitate the instructor in the hope of developing his or her own personhood.

The student's view of the teacher as an ideal individual supports and contributes to the teacher's exemplary status. Another contributor to the perception of this 'beyond the ordinary' quality is the teacher's appearance of alterity. As the next analysis shows, these signs of otherness serve to further distinguish the teacher as a person who is different to many others.

Appearance of Distinction

As Chapter 4 investigates, representations of alterity (specifically 'the ancient,' 'the natural,' 'the Eastern' and at the Order, 'the group') seem to function as contrasts to a more 'mainstream' culture. The teacher portrays and perpetuates some of these signs of difference. Thus, in a comparable way, the features may add to the appearance of the instructor's distinction from the mainstream, or to employ Benjamin's term, give the teacher “an aura of particularity” (1969: 222).

Shanti

At Shanti, all of the teachers are of Western heritage and white ethnicity. However, they also all reference Eastern culture. Dora has a tattoo of the Hindu goddess, Lakshmi, which takes up the whole of her right arm and spreads on to her back. Laurella has a tattoo in between her shoulder blades of sanskrit script, written in the shape of a lotus flower (in the way Arabic calligraphy sometimes makes shapes from the arrangement of letters and words). Laurella also wears clothes with notably ethnic prints. Per often wears T-shirts that feature the Om sign and I only ever saw kundalini teachers, Malcolm and Natalie, in clothes made of white muslin. Natalie also wears rudraksha 'beads,' which is a type of rosary that some Hindus use for repetitive prayer (*japa*). Lili often wears baggy trousers which she explicitly describes as “Indian yoga pants.” (Upon noting to Lili that her trousers are similar to those many fishermen wear in Thailand, she said: “well, it's all Asian and that's my thing. If they're from India or Thailand, I don't mind.”) Both Lili and naked yoga teacher Annette also wear jewellery which signifies Eastern traditions. Lili wears Indian bangles which she takes off, placing aside her yoga mat at the start of the class, and Annette wears a tiny gold Om sign on a chain around her neck. These visual signifiers suggest the wearer's affiliation with a civilisation beyond the Western city in which Shanti functions.

The unusual verbal communication of the yoga teachers also contributes to this appearance of alterity. For example, the mantras the teachers instruct are usually Sanskrit mantras. Furthermore, at times the teachers explicitly self-affiliate with an alternative time by drawing on the 'wisdom of the ancients.' Yoga teachers including Lili and Natalie, sometimes read a short quote from an important person in history at the beginning or end of their classes. Lili, for instance, said: "As the Buddha taught us all those centuries ago: 'The price of freedom is simply choosing to be; freedom is in the mind.' As true then as it is now. I carry this truth in my heart." Lili's self-identification with a truth which was first spoken "all those centuries ago" links her to a different time.

The teacher's lineage combines signifiers of both the East and the ancient. The instructor's attendance at particular 'teacher training' courses usually generates affiliation with this type of lineage. After becoming well-versed in a particular yoga method that is associated with a specific (Eastern) individual and the (historic) chain of teachers 'connected' to that individual, the lineage can be added to the instructor's personal brand. As Per explains: "It's about authenticity... [and] having received good training from the most primary source you can." The instructors' affinities with these traditions are made apparent on the teacher's profiles which feature on the Shanti website. Also, the teachers at times express gratitude to their

'ancestors' at the end of a lesson; thus making their own Eastern and ancient heritage clear to all of the students present. During interviews, numerous informants cite the teacher's training background showing recognition of this heritage. Even if the identity of the teacher's teacher is unknown, the idea that their teacher is affiliated with an Eastern and ancient tradition ("set apart" from today's London) seems to legitimise the teacher. In Caroline's words:

"It's hard to find people in London who care enough about yoga to go get the proper training and really immerse themselves in the real yoga; the yoga that actually didn't come from six stone white girls in Hollywood; the yoga that came from India a long old time ago... If you're going to come to a centre regularly, like I do here [Shanti], you might as well get a teacher who is the real thing."

This acknowledgement of the teacher's Eastern and ancient training heritage as "the proper training" distinguishes the teacher from most other instructors in London and the typical yoga of 'popular culture' or "Hollywood." Like the visual and audio signifiers of alterity, the teacher's 'lineage' associates him or her with a contrast to the mainstream. These differences are likely to contribute to the instructor's status as a 'set apart' person.

The Sufi Order

Just like within the Shanti context, at the Sufi Order, all of the teachers self-affiliate with Eastern cultures despite being of Western heritage and white

ethnicity. Put another way, these teachers at least partially self-identify with a culture alternative to their own. A particularly telling and symbolic way in which this process of self-identification occurs is the adoption of a Sufi name. (The title of the most prominent guides include: 'Wali,' 'Aziz,' 'Shams,' 'Ingil,' and 'Noorshahab.')

Wearing notable styles of dress or jewellery is another way in which some of the teachers show signs of association with Eastern cultures. Injil wears Arabic shoes which are pointy at the toes. This female dance guide also wears an Islamic prayer cap (or *kufi* hat), which some Muslim men wear. In these ways, some of the guides present visual signifiers which communicate an alternative civilisation and sometimes, an alternative religion, to their own.

The guides also teach songs and readings that are of Eastern origins, ancient origins, or both, which is another means of presenting their engagement with alternative culture. The oral presentations of these resources can encourage an association between the orator and the exotic, 'set apart' content of the material. For instance, following Shams' reading of "a poem from an ancient Persian mystic", a student reflected on the experience of listening to Shams:

"The piece Shams said was beautiful, wasn't it? I still have that lovely feeling from it. It's nice that he said it in Persian as well as English. You can get that feeling more, I'd say. But then Shams will know that. He's very clued-up like that. Very at one with those places, you know, Arab places, and he knows what will work more than I would or probably most other people would." (Anonymous)

This informant explicitly distinguishes Shams as a person who is “very at one” with 'other' cultures or “Arab places,” which she assumes endows him with a degree of ability (to 'know what will work') that she and “probably most other people” lack. This guide's apparent link with alternative culture sets him apart from “most other people” in this student's estimation.

The lineage of the Sufi Order guides also binds each teacher to an 'other' time and place. The incorporation of each guide into the Eastern and ancient lineage of the Sufi Order tradition occurs automatically at this centre because each guide receives training within the Order itself and thus becomes a part of the Order's chain of transmission (*sisila*). The participants at the Order are often very aware of their guide's link to these 'authentic' sources. In a discussion about why his guide is so special and unique, Matthew proudly informs me, the lineage of his guide “goes back to Rumi and Ali and, therefore, prophet Mohammad.” This informant said he could “sense the thousands of years of magnetism accumulated in (his) leader's message.” Here Matthew illustrates the irony that a person can seem to be a 'set apart' *individual* due to an affiliation with a *collective* line of others. The group endows the individual with the 'set apart' status.

In these ways, at both field sites, the teachers' associations with alterity can contribute to the experience of the instructor's 'otherness.' Particular types of clothing, jewellery, mantras, songs, readings and lineage references can all add to the appearance of the teacher's distinction. Although the manifestations of these

symbols may occur in different ways in each site or even between each teacher (e.g. a t-shirt with an Om sign on it is not the same as an Islamic prayer cap), the ability to present an affiliation with an alternative culture to the present day West is consistent.

The signs of reverence, the perception of the teacher's 'ideal individuality,' and these appearances of 'distinction' all suggest, at Shanti and the Sufi Order, there are many New Agers who experience the teacher as a distinct, special and even exceptional individual. But to what extent do these characterisations and experiences align with scholarly concepts of charisma? Do those data imply that the influence of the teacher functions in modes that resemble charismatic influence or not? How might such a force be measurable or even identifiable? In order to answer these questions, the next section will introduce two seminal characterisations of charisma.

Characterisations of Charisma

This evaluation will focus on the traditional interpretation of charisma which Weber proposes, and a description of charisma that contemporary scholar, Charles Lindholm, wrote in 1990. The analysis of how the students' perceptions align with these two scholarly portrayals of charisma will further our

understanding of the informants' experiences of the New Age teacher. As this discussion demonstrates, the comparison suggests that in some important ways the students do experience the teacher as a type of charismatic individual.

Starting with Weber's classic definition of charisma is appropriate for many reasons. Although many scholars consider this characterisation vague and open to numerous interpretations, (as is so often the case) none of these critics have managed to develop a superior alternative. Therefore, however challenging, Weber's definition of personality charisma is still an excellent 'first step' to comprehending this complex phenomenon:

“Charisma is a certain quality of an *individual* personality by virtue of which he is *set apart* from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, *superhuman*, or at least specifically *exceptional* powers or qualities. These are such as are *not accessible* to the *ordinary* person, but are regarded as of *divine origin* or as *exemplary*, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a *leader*⁹¹.” (1924: 328)

In conjunction with this definition, it is useful to also consider Weber's description of charismatic authority which he describes as “...resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (1921: 215).

There are two primary links (or similarities) between Weber's notion and the field findings. First, the descriptions of the yoga and Sufi teachers correspond

⁹¹ Italics added.

with the idea of a person who is “exceptional” and “set apart.” The practitioners frequently recognise the teachers as special and distinct and with traits which differ from those of others. The second point of similarity relates to the devotion shown towards someone who has charismatic authority. In addition to verbal declarations of appreciation and commitment, the informants also exhibit devotion in the form of self-sacrifice, which is “the cardinal virtue of the charismatic follower for Weber” (Lindholm, 1990: 25). The examples of paying for a teacher to come on one's honeymoon, travelling a long way to class and making purchases based predominantly on the teacher's recommendation are indicative of this type of devotion; the examples illustrate the sacrifice of one's time and energy and money. Furthermore, the influence of the teacher – be it encouraging the student to go on a silent retreat, or alter his or her own individuality – is indicative of devotion to the “exceptional sanctity” or “exemplary character” of the teacher “and of the normative patterns or order revealed” by that teacher.

A point from the fieldwork which Weber's understanding does not account for is the possibility that the recognisers contribute to charisma. The next section will explore this point in more detail. In brief though, there are times when students serve to “set apart” and 'individualise' the teachers to even greater extents. Rather than being of “divine origin” or “not accessible to the ordinary person,” this construction of distinction is initiated and maintained *by* the “ordinary person” (i.e. the recognisers of charisma themselves).

Lindholm's (1990) more recent examination of charisma is built around a comparison between charisma and romantic love. The crux of Lindholm's argument is the claim people are drawn to charismatic groups because of the primal impulses towards merger and self loss which the distinct charismatic figure is able to arouse. This experience, for Lindholm, is functionally identical to the experience of romantic love: leader and follower mutually experience this love and feel sensations of self-dissolution.

Lindholm's assertions about self-loss are so difficult to observe and identify, it is challenging to find definite points of resonance between his characterisation and the experiences of the teachers of the field groups. However, the notion of love (more broadly) as a central component to charisma is very helpful. Interviewees' from both field contexts frequently include the word "love" in descriptions of their affections for their respective teachers. Of course 'love' is a word that gets used a lot and to mean many different things, but sure enough there are signs that many informants experience a kind of love for an irreplaceable other. The examples of self-sacrifice for example, suggest the participant's wish to be near the teacher and are eager to please, even at one's own expense. A source of these sentiments may be the teacher's ability to provide feelings of nurture, intimacy and development. With the teacher's efforts, the student can "improve a lot faster" (Nader) and "feel better" (Joelle); the 'focus is on bettering the student' (Laurella). As Nikki, a member of the Sufi order said about her guide, Shams: "He wants the best for me

and genuinely cares for me.”

In addition to the actual tuition, the medium of touch is another way in which the teachers may encourage a more intimate sensation of nurture and care. Beyond a handshake, it is rare to have intentional physical contact with someone in London who is not classifiable as a relative, lover, or friend. So (as I experienced during my own participation in yoga classes and Sufi dance sessions), when a yoga teacher physically alters the posture, or a guide makes contact to initiate a dance, the proximity feels unusual at first and yet there seems to be a remarkably quick acceptance of this closeness. The circumstances seem safe and like the contact is happening for a positive reason and, therefore, the connection indicates intimacy rather than intrusion⁹².

The central point of dissonance between the informants' portrayals of the teachers in comparison with Lindholm's argument is the type of love Lindholm describes. It is possible there is a desire for merger in the way that is said to occur in contexts of *romantic* love on a *subconscious* level. However the data from the field sites suggest considering *parental* love creates far greater parallels. For instance, romantic love in the United Kingdom, the country of the fieldwork, is (at least meant to be) equalising, and following this very point, Lindholm argues the leader

⁹² The benefits of tactile experience include the inducement of feelings of comfort and nurture. Montagu argues many Western cultures neglect tactile forms of nurture but treats the middle and upper class English (i.e. the demographic groups to which the respective Shanti and Sufi informants belong) as a special case because these demographics are the most deprived of physical contact (1986).

and the follower mutually feel the love that exists between them (1990: 213). The informants in the fields however, treat the teacher as exemplary and superior, which indicates asymmetry. Even with the example of touch that creates feelings of intimacy, in both sites it is always the teacher who initiates the contact: an unspoken rule which implies hierarchy. The very essence of the dynamic is one-sided aspiration. The teacher has an enhanced quality which he or she will help the students to cultivate within themselves, just as a parent is responsible for aiding the self-development of the children to gain the adult qualities of the parent. As the teacher has superiority, imitation and seeking approval (also resembling child-parent dynamics) occurs. In conjunction with the prospect of successful reproduction is the expectation of gaining approval. As Nader of the Sufi Order said in relation to his guide, “I really want to impress him and make him proud.” Curiously, Lindholm also renders Western romantic love as unconditional, wholly implicating and providing a permanent friend (2009: 183), which sadly does not seem to equate with many experiences of romance in present day Britain. “Abiding relationships are much less the norm than they were” (Wilson, 1987: 44; Kohut, 1977). Surely experiences of unconditional, permanent love are more likely in the realm of parental love or at least we might expect them to be. Parents are often distinct for being the only or at least rare source of this type of love in a person's life. The ideal, “set apart” teacher offers a representation of this special quality.

It seems therefore, there are different points of resonance and dissonance between the practitioners' experiences and academic notions of charisma. With a note to Weber's definition, the teacher's set-apart quality and ability to inspire devotion and self-sacrifice resonates with many practitioners' allusions of the teacher's exemplary qualities and expressions of reverence. The field data also reinforce Lindholm's understanding of charisma as comparable to the experience of love but in terms that relate to parental love, rather than romantic love. In sum there are many ways in which the students do appear to experience the New Age teacher as a charismatic individual.

Together, the signs of appreciation and devotion, the perception of the teacher's ideal individuality, the appearance of distinction, and these insights into the instructor's charismatic potential inform our understanding of the New Ager's experience of the teacher. Specifically, the analysis of these traits shows that many informants perceive and respond to the teacher in ways that suggest the appearance of a particular type of individual. In the eyes of these students, the teacher is exceptional, ideal, distinct and (largely) charismatic⁹³.

The next section considers the interrelations between the individualistic factor (i) of the set apart, 'ideal individual' teacher and the collectivistic factor (c) of the

⁹³ While references to the divine gifting of *charism* may not be made in the way other contexts describe (e.g. in the Sufi cults Werbner and Basu discuss [1998]), it appears claims to charisma still rely on the appearance of something mysterious or 'removed'. Embodiments of the unattainably idealistic extents of individualism, exotic East and far-away ancient seem similarly 'other' for the majority of the students. It is this perception of difference that appears to encourage enchantment and aspiration.

group of students who recognise the status of that teacher. The evaluation will indicate how each component depends on the other. In turn, it will illustrate how an individual–collective (i-c) intersection occurs at the experiential level of the teacher.

An Intersection:

(c) Community of Students - i) Set Apart Teacher

In both field contexts, there are signs of (c) community amidst the regular students of each (i) set apart teacher. Muniz and O'Guinn's theory of “Brand Community” is extremely useful in identifying these forms of communality. As the Literature Review in Chapter 2 references, Muniz and O'Guinn describe a 'brand community' as “a specialized community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.” Their thesis claims this type of collective does not require consistent or in fact any interaction between members. The individuals nevertheless constitute a community because they exhibit “shared consciousness” and “shared traditions” and in this way, they are delineated from nonmembers⁹⁴. (2001: 412, 414). At both sites, the two qualifiers of shared

⁹⁴ Day similarly contends that the common views of her respondents allow them to claim a distinct (collective) identity and to nurture or contribute to their own sense of belonging to a group. She argues that a primary function of belief is “to draw the boundaries of belonging” in affiliation with particular communities. (2011).

consciousness and shared traditions are very apparent among the regular students of each teacher. Furthermore, interestingly, the prominent examples of common ideas and customs relate to the instructor's distinct individuality.

This section will explore how the (i) signifiers of the teacher's individuality form the basis of the (c) shared consciousness and traditions of the community of students. The discussion will also show how the (c) student collective's shared ideas and mutual traditions can sustain, reproduce and even add to the appearance of the (i) 'set apart' features of the teacher.

Shanti

At Shanti, there is very little verbal interaction amongst student groups beyond what one might assume to be necessary in order to participate in the class. The majority of informants do not know the names of the other students in the lesson and do not enter into conversations of any substantial length (with the exception of the occasional group conversations, many of which I initiated). The yoga practitioners also do not socialise outside of the class. However, there are nevertheless numerous mutualities between the students of each teacher in the forms of a common consciousness of that teacher and common customs that match some of the teacher's behavioural traits.

Per's ashtanga group can offer many examples of mutual consciousness. For instance, most of these students share knowledge of Per's *ashtanga* lineage. As one of his student's Sophie, who has been practicing *ashtanga* yoga for 11 years in Paris and 2 months at Shanti in London, said:

“I'm serious about *ashtanga*, and I was pleased to hear Per say today, he has been trained properly in the right place, by the right people. He went to Mysore and trained at the Pattabhi Jois institute - I was pleased to hear that. It's like loving your connection with someone in an interview and then hoping the qualifications on the CV back it up. Per's qualifications can back it up.”

Sophie's statement shows awareness of Per's teacher training, which associates him with a distinct, Eastern and ancient tradition. Per's training heritage has positive connotations for Sophie; she “was pleased to hear” about it. Sophie also suggests she has this knowledge because Per explicitly spoke about his time in Mysore during a lesson at which Sophie was present. Another student, Aya, who attends the same classes as Sophie, holds a very similar perception of Per's 'lineage.' In Aya's words:

“I've only been coming for 6 months but I'm a bit obsessed with Per! Don't tell him! [Laughs.] It was cool to hear that he'd been trained by the Pattabi Jois lot. How cool is that!? You know he's taking his craft seriously if he's going to the masters of it, and I can't help but respect that.”

Aya here, like Sophie, engages with the notion of Per's training in *ashtanga* yoga and also like Sophie, attributes this finding with positive associations that are favourable for Per; Aya thinks Per's background is “cool” and she “can't help but

respect” it.

The mutual understandings and positive impressions of Per's distinction links Sophie and Aya to each other. A common recognition and valuation binds the two women even if they do not know each other beyond each other's physical appearance. During interviews with more of Per's *ashtanga* students, it became apparent that many other practitioners share this same apprehension and appreciation of Per's link to the Pattabi Jois family. At this level, Per's distinct heritage sparks ties between a multitude of participants who unite around shared consciousness.

It is likely Per's regular *ashtanga* students possess a common knowledge of Per's training heritage because Per spoke about it to the group. It is therefore straightforward to imagine how the consciousness of this factor becomes shared: if everyone present perceives the stimulant, the mutuality is understandable. A more subtle form of the practitioners' shared consciousness however is when the students have connections to each other in ways of which they are wholly unaware. For example, Yulia, a student of yoga teacher Lili, told me Lili understands her struggle with anxiety and in response prescribes a particular Sanskrit mantra for Yulia to focus on in order to placate her worries. Yulia says this mantra is just for her and her specific situation and therefore she will not tell anybody else what the mantra is. During a separate interview with Lili however, the teacher assures the mantra she told Yulia is not special or specific to Yulia's

situation at all. Rather, Lili prescribes this same mantra to students “all the time” because it “applies to any type of healing, which most people will need in some way on any given day.” Thus it is likely many of Lili's students undertake the alike practice of concentrating on the same mantra, even though they may not realise it. These additional threads join these students together via Lili, in ways which the students themselves are probably oblivious.

Another significant expression of shared consciousness amidst the student collectives is 'shared traditions'⁹⁵. Non-discursive patterns of behaviours vary between members of the same centre who are committed to the classes of a particular teacher. At Shanti, something as simple as the way practitioners bow to the teacher's lineage whilst sitting at the end of a yoga session offers an example of group tradition. Dora's participants, imitating Dora, bow with their hands together (as if in prayer) in front of the heart. In Lili's classes, the group of frequent students, like Lili, extend their bow to touch their heads to the floor. Per's regular practitioners simply dip their head and close their eyes at this stage of the lesson, mirroring Per's movements. These differences in 'techniques of the body' (Mauss, 1973) distinguish sub-groups of 'teacher communities' from the broader Shanti collective. In these instances, the teacher's example inspires a common behavioural custom which unites the actors.

⁹⁵ It seems unhelpful to treat the two qualifiers of 'shared consciousness' and 'shared traditions' as separate as Muniz and O'Guinn appear to think is necessary.

In these modes, the teacher generates mutual thinking and practices that ground student communality. Hence, the individual instructor (i) informs the nature of the community of students (c). However, this process works both ways. The community of students (c) also support, strengthen and inform the features of the 'set apart' teacher (i).

Collectively creating and perpetuating myths about the teacher is one way the group maintains the instructor's 'set apart' status. These stories about the teacher are not factually true, but the practitioners nevertheless appear to believe their accuracy. For instance, numerous regular attendees of Dora's lessons claim Dora is a vegan, even though she is not. As Maria said:

“Dora's got that ridiculous body because she lives such a clean life... The vegan diet is so pure and there's a lot of fresh veggies and you can see all that by looking at Dora; you can see that veganism works.”

During an interview with Laurella, Dora's vegan diet similarly comes up in conversation:

“I'm a bit nervous about [the dinner party] tonight because everything's raw and vegan. Hopefully my friends won't absolutely despise me! They might a bit. Especially the guys. [pause] Screw it. I'm doing it. Dora's vegan, right? And it works for her.”

Maria and Laurella share the (erroneous) belief in Dora's veganism. Other

fallacious convictions among the lesson groups include 'Per used to be an organic farmer' and 'Lili grew up in India.' Hence, in content, the myths often serve to separate the teacher further from the mainstream. Even though these articulations are not 'true' in a literal, factual sense, they nevertheless function as another form of “shared consciousness” of the exceptional teacher. In fact, this mode of shared belief not only expresses the commonly held notion of the instructor's distinct status but maintains and produces the status as well. This type of creation might be a manifestation of devotion because there seems to be a desire to perpetuate the idea of the teacher as a 'set-apart,' exceptional being.

The group's mutual imitations of the teacher's behavioural tendencies also maintain the instructor's prestige. The group has to value the teacher as being one who is worthy of impersonation and once this assessment is made, the collective reproductions of the teacher's customs confirms the imbalance in status. The teacher acts and the student copies. The former has more influence than the latter. The group's adherence to this structure supports the parent-child (or 'children') love dynamic and evidences Weber's description of charismatic authority being based on the devotion of the “normative patterns” revealed by the leader (1921: 215). In these circumstances, the group permits and encourages the teacher's rank as the exemplary individual.

These co-supporting mutualities between (i) distinct teacher and (c) band of students indicate an interaction between the two factors. A form of individualism

and a form of collectivism enforce each other in these processes. The following analysis attends to the comparable dynamics which occur at the Sufi Order.

The Sufi Order

Although verbal interaction takes place on occasion within the Shanti context, at the Sufi Order, verbal interaction between practitioners is extensive. Each informant knows the name of at least some of the fellow members and observably engages in conversations with others about the Order and topics beyond the Order, such as each other's interests and concerns. Understanding the mutualities between the adherents of each guide is more challenging than observing interactions between the whole group because much of the guidance work undertaken is 'private' to that sub-collective and it is forbidden to share any details of this work with a non-initiate like myself. Despite the challenges that esoteric conditions bring, there are numerous examples of communality amongst the students of each teacher, especially in the forms of shared consciousness and shared traditions which reference that teacher.

One example of communal consciousness is how Shams' students similarly associate Shams with multiple Eastern and ancient lineages. During discussions with Lucy, and two other (anonymous) interviewees, each one made references to their guide's special ability as an exceptional teacher within numerous traditions.

Lucy said:

“To be able to get where he is on this path is mind-blowing to me. Literally. It makes me explode inside. And then I remember he told us in a practice class he is a Reiki leader and I think he's a Buddhist and Shinto leader as well. I mean – that's like... [pause] His heart, his brain, I mean, who is this man!? How does anyone get that far? I want to study him.”

Comparably, another one of Shams' students spoke about how his guide “is so refined and at that level, the truth is the truth. He can teach this [Sufism], he can teach Shinto, Reiki, he can teach it all, because he's there” (anonymous). A separate informant said: “Not many people here know about Shams outside of the centre because he's not their guide; they don't know he's actually a very advanced Buddhist and senior guide of Reiki and Shintoism” (anonymous). In contrast, no other interviewees spoke about Shams' multiple leaderships, including Shams himself. Shams told me about his *adherence* to parts of Buddhist and Shinto teachings and how he guides Reiki practice but he did not self-identify as a leader in any of these traditions. This discrepancy between his students' views and his own description may be because his students are exaggerating his abilities, thus serving to contribute to his distinction. Alternatively, some people may perceive Shams as a leader but he does not classify himself this way, perhaps due to teachings that warn about the ego. Either way, the three quotes show a common belief about Shams' multiple spiritual affinities and also the practitioners' respect and veneration of his advancements within the different traditions. This shared

knowledge and common appreciation of their guides' exceptionality connects these individuals to each other; they have a cognitive awareness of the 'set apart' teacher in common.

The mutually held traditions and customs of the guide's students also serve to unite the group of participants via the teacher. A telling illustration of this tendency occurred during a discussion I had with another two of Shams' practitioners. During this conversation the two students tell me it is easy to see I have never attended one of Shams' retreats because when I do the *zikkr*⁹⁶ practice, my posture is completely wrong by Shams' standards (anonymous). In this instance, these adherents distinguish themselves and their fellow practitioners who Shams teaches *zikkr* practice from those who Shams does not teach *zikkr* practice. They and their community share a common behavioural custom which Shams inspires, and others (like myself) do not share in that custom. However, when I ask the two informants to show me the correct posture, both decline. One adds “you will have to do a retreat with Shams otherwise it wouldn't be fair to the others” (anonymous). Such a refusal sparks the question of whether the sharing of knowledge and traditions beyond the sub-collective is desirable for the members themselves. In this instance, the students act as gatekeepers for who can join the community of people who connect via common knowledge and behaviours of the

⁹⁶ *Zikkr* is a form of devotion within Sufism, in which the student rhythmically repeats the name of God.

teacher. Hence, the agent can refuse to distribute these types of consciousness and traditions and thus can effect the community's growth.

These examples show ways in which the guide brings about mutually held thoughts and practices among students. In these and many comparable instances, the (i) set apart teacher impacts the (c) communality of the practitioners. However, the (c) student collective also contributes to and even generates features of (i) the distinct teacher, thus illustrating a co-enforcing dynamic between (i) teacher and (c) student community.

Student groups at the Sufi Order initiate and maintain myths about the exceptional guide in modes comparable to how groups within the Shanti context construct and sustain fallacious stories about the extraordinary yoga instructor. In both field contexts the myths are not literal 'fact' but nevertheless contribute to the group's bank of shared consciousness. An example of this kind of statement that circulates amidst a group of Sufi Order students is the claim 'Aziz is a communist.' Three of Aziz's students made this assertion during the field work period. One of the practitioners said:

“Aziz was part of the communist party in Germany and he's involved in all that here too, but I don't know with what group exactly. I'm not in to politics myself so I don't really follow it or know all the groups and all that. I don't think there are many communists in London though.”
(Anonymous)

This Order member believes Aziz has ties to communist parties and he perceives these affiliations as unusual, assuming there are not “many communists in London.” Thus, this student suggests Aziz's distinct political affiliations contributes to Aziz's 'set apart' quality. Another informant similarly asserts:

“I heard Aziz is a communist which made me laugh when I first heard it but it makes sense actually. He's his own person and far more sensitive to equality and social justice than most people. I think of myself as very liberal but I don't have Aziz's heart and sensitivity.” (Anonymous)

In this statement, the interviewee recounts how he “heard” about Aziz's communist alliance and that he felt it “makes sense” because Aziz is a special case: he is “far more sensitive to equality and social justice than most people.” Another one of Aziz's student's comparably said: “he's a communist I think; that's what [another member] said.” These cases illustrate how the myth of the guide's distinct (political) associations become shared amongst the group and serve to both support and further the teacher's status as a remarkable person who is different to the masses.

The traditions of the group is another way the student collective confirms and informs the teacher's set apart (higher) rank. The numerous students who mutually follow and mirror the guide's behaviours and customs show collective submission, contributing to the parent-child (or 'children') like dynamic and the veneration of

the teacher's special “normative patterns” (Weber, 1921: 215). For instance, the students who reference Shams' standards in order to highlight my 'erroneous' posture fuel Shams' ascendancy. The pair base their valuation on Shams' norms and in doing so, ratify the teacher's authority. It seems therefore, in this field context, the guide inspires the group's traditions, and the group's repetitive enactments of those traditions sustains and adds to the teacher's social placement as an exemplary person, separate from the group.

These interrelations between (i) set apart guide and (c) community of students illustrate how each factor co-produces the other in the Sufi Order context. In both New Age environments, participant collectives form around shared consciousness⁹⁷ and common traditions, which suggests practitioners connect to each other both cognitively and behaviourally. Interestingly, this type of community resembles a religious community, even though the original formulation (of Muniz and O'Guinn's 'brand community') derives from research about marketing. At Shanti and the Sufi Order, collectives formulate around shared ideas and customs, just as religious groups are bound by common notions and traditions.

⁹⁷ The data suggest shared consciousness of the teacher formulates in various ways. There is shared knowledge that the teacher and the students are aware of because everybody is present during the presentation of the source of that knowledge. Also, the students can mutually possess consciousness of the charismatic teacher in the form of a myth of which the teacher is (probably) unaware. Additionally, there is a type of consciousness which the students and the teacher share but the individual practitioner does not realise other students hold the same consciousness. If this community requires having ideas in common, it is possible to be a member without knowing you share the ideas, and it is possible to be a member via the teacher even when the teacher does not possess the same knowledge.

Intriguingly, the data suggest not only that the 'teacher-community' intersection occurs at both sites, but also that the two New Age organisations encourage this co-dependency. The institutional contexts promote particular (i) features of 'ideal individuality' and distinction which the teacher embodies and the (c) students mutually appreciate and add to. The following examination will discuss these processes.

How the Organisations Facilitate the Factors

Shanti and the Sufi Order often instigate the appearance of ideal personal traits and the signifiers of otherness (such as an association with 'the East' and 'the ancient'). The implication of this situation is that many of the factors that inspire communal thoughts and behaviours depend on the organisational context encouraging particular characteristics. Moreover, the organisations as two distinct physical spaces promote the communal sharing of these signs of exceptionality (albeit to varying degrees). As such, the cultures of the centres play an important role in the interactions between 'teacher-community' (or 'individual-collective').

Shanti

There are subtle ways in which the management and organisational setting of Shanti promote a presentation of the teacher's 'ideal individualism.' One example of this tendency is how Shanti, and even the yoga industry more broadly, encourages the presentation of traits such as ultimate autonomy. As we know, the students of Dora or Per conceptualise their respective teacher as being the epitome of the autonomous, free and in-control person. Yet during interviews and less formal conversations with Dora or Per, it became clear that neither instructor self-identifies with these portrayals of exemplary personhood. As Dora explains:

“During my interview at Shanti, the topic came up about how teachers should be positive people. We talked about how important it is for teachers not to complain and be negative or seem sloppy and not in control because it throws off the practice for everyone. I really agree of course and I've heard it before during my teacher training, but it was odd having it said back to me during an interview. Maybe people are more awake during interviews – I don't know! Anyway, I make a point not to talk about my relationships or [pause] like today, I'm expecting to hear whether my son has been accepted in to the school I want him to go to; am I nervous? Hell yes. But it's selfish to make this class about easing *my* anxiety. I'm the teacher. I'm here to assist them and teach them calm and control. It's hard to teach control if you're openly not feeling it yourself! Sometimes honesty is *not* the best policy.”

Here Dora reveals her interviewer at Shanti encouraged a form of discretion which Dora consciously maintains; Dora chooses not to disclose certain emotions and scenarios to her students at Shanti. In result, this teacher appears to be an

authority on “calm and control.” If Dora became more 'open' to her practitioners at the times she has concerns, it seems unlikely these participants would continue to view her as the ideal version of individuality.

Similarly Per offers numerous insights which counter the “truly free” and independent conception of an individual which Joelle previously describes. In fact, at one point he confides, the only reason he does yoga is to give him a feeling of control and “to have a daily ritual which cuts through the despair.” Rather than existing independently from relational supports and external encouragements, as Joelle assumes, Per notes that:

“Sometimes it's good to try to meet up with other teachers to get that empathy. You can admit outside of the centre if you're feeling a bit stressed and tired and they probably will be too. Yoga teachers don't have colleagues remember, so it can be a bit lonely. We thought about trying to get all the teachers together once a month at Shanti to create a kind of network and support and a chance to share ideas and contacts but actually we prefer it if all that went on outside the centre. Keeps it separate. Keeps it professional and positive. Keeps it in the moment when they are here to teach.”

Per's description conveys he finds teaching yoga lonely at times and that he wants the “empathy” from yoga teachers who can relate to the stress and fatigue that can occur as part of the role. The quote gives very different insights into Per's character and experiences than Joelle's description allows for. Per also suggests he only admits these feelings “outside of the centre.” His managerial preference is to separate the teachers' support network from inside of Shanti to keep the teacher's

“positive” within the centre. This anecdote reinforces the notion that the organisational norms and standards of professionalism could impact how the teachers present themselves at Shanti.

Institutional imperatives and emphases also support the teacher's appearance of distinction or 'otherness.' As Per said to me:

“Yoga isn't Indian or Hindu, it's for everyone from everywhere. That being said though, when I sat down with [the owner of Shanti] and we discussed what type of yoga business we wanted to be, we both agreed the heritage of yoga should be represented. People like it and we both like it. So when I interview someone and I see they trained in India or they are wearing jewellery that looks Indian or something like that, probably on some level, even subconsciously maybe, I think: 'this one will fit in.'”

In this extract, Per implies the management of Shanti consciously boosts the references to 'the East' (and India and Hinduism specifically). Prospective teachers are more likely to be considered a good 'cultural fit' if they trained in India or are wearing something that looks Indian, or both, in comparison to those applicants who do not present links to India. In addition to the managerial preference to hire people who are Indian taught, Shanti will strictly only employ *ashtanga* yoga teachers who are certified by a member of the Pattabi Jois family (or 'lineage'). The organisation advertises the training heritage of each teacher in various ways. On the centre's website, teacher biographies list the “great masters” under which they have studied and at the beginning and end of some classes, prominent gurus are “saluted.” In these ways, Shanti assures the lineages of the teachers are not

only distinguished, but also receive recognition from the teacher's student group.

Another way Shanti contributes to the likelihood that a teacher will 'publicly' appear distinct from the (Western) mainstream is by suggesting to teachers that they read Sanskrit mantras and offering CDs of Indian music to play during classes. In Per's words:

“I can't dictate how the lessons are taught and I don't want to, but I do encourage Sanskrit mantras and I leave the CDs of Indian music around because that is the vibe that just seems to work for us.”

These prompts from the manager encourage the teacher to employ the signifiers of alterity, which in turn, increase the chances of the group sharing consciousness of this 'distinction.'

Just like the appearance of particular traits of individuality, some of the references to alterity are context specific. For example, many yoga teachers consciously adopt a different type of language when teaching in environments outside of Shanti. Dora claims, when she is instructing yoga in a gym or corporate context, she tends to replace references to Hinduism and spirituality with terms about competition and fitness. Laurella (who is both a student and teacher at Shanti) said she wears “less eccentric clothes” if she is teaching in the City, opting for “plain black” rather than the 'ethnic prints' she enjoys wearing when teaching the same practices at the Shanti centre. Dora also implies, she

chooses not to correct particular stereotypes and assumptions about her dietary choices to her yoga students at the centre. During an interview at a coffee shop, I ask Dora if she would like soya milk or almond milk with her “white tea.” In response she laughed and said:

“Everyone thinks I don't have any animal products because I'm a yoga teacher. It's too funny. I had steak for dinner last night. Rare steak. A good vet would have had it back on its feet. Yoga students don't want to hear that though. I hate to kill the dream, but – just between you and me – [covers eyes in mock embarrassment] I'll have normal milk, thanks.”

Dora's statement confirms she is not vegan but also alludes to an awareness that her “students don't want to hear” it. The term “just between you and me” implies she consciously chooses not to disclose her dietary choices to all of her students. If this is correct, Dora may maintain the myth of veganism which the practitioner community creates, whilst in the presence of that community. The implication of the contextual adaptations (from language to clothing to food intake) is that what appear as indicators of an inherently exceptional and 'set apart' person are dependent on the situational context in which that person happens to be.

The organisational context also facilitates the intersection by providing the physical space of the centre, in which the individual teacher and the collective of students are bound together. The embodied space of the room where the classes take place is large enough for all of the students to witness and mirror the teacher's actions and hear the teacher's words together as one seeing, hearing and

moving collective. The adjoining space where some practitioners change their clothes (before and after the class) provides opportunities for brief verbal interaction amongst the students and accordingly, for the prospective sharing of details regarding the teacher. As such, the architectural features of the centre and the organisation's decisions regarding the use of those spatial features, encourage the processes of shared sensual perception and communal social maintenance that are vital for the interchange between distinct teacher and student community.

These examples suggest, at Shanti, the organisational conventions (which include managerial imperatives, professional standards, the teachers' awareness of the norms of the industry, and the spatial context) play an important role in facilitating the factors; the conventions inspire the teacher to embody indicators of a (i) 'set apart' status and enable the (c) practitioner community to mutually perceive and sustain the notions of exceptionality. By virtue of informing both factors, this yoga institution supports the (i-c) intersection between the two elements.

The Sufi Order

The Sufi Order's organisational dispositions also commission the appearance of the teacher's special attributes and encourage the communal bonds amongst the

practitioners. Although the hierarchical structure of the Order results in some secrecy surrounding who knows and does what, it seems the leaders of the organisation instruct all of the guides in ways that enforce the appearance of exemplary (dividual) personhood⁹⁸. As one guide states:

“Everyone who guides is told there needs to be a certain level of empathy and interest for these people's lives. It's not about escaping to go float off somewhere. People can get addicted to transcendence. People get addicted to retreats all the time and as their guide you have to tell them to go get a job because they need grounding in their everyday [self]. So there's this aspect and then of course, accessing the higher levels is the other part of the guidance. It's a balancing between the two. But guides are taught as well. It's monitored and gradual so we know how they're going to balance teaching the two parts and make sure that everyone who becomes a guide is at the level they need to be before taking on such a great responsibility.” (Anonymous.)

This guide's description of how “guides are taught” and “monitored” alludes to how the organisation influences the ways teachers present the dividual self. An implication of this influence is that the supposedly exemplary nature of the dividual self is not necessarily internally and eternally inherent to the individual guide. Rather an external institution schools these ideologies of self to the instructor and helps teach the guide how to present the ideologies to others.

Another Order leader also explains the influence of the organisation on how he communicates dual individuality. As this guide describes, he does not tend to convey the 'dividual self' in environments outside of the centre:

⁹⁸ It thus seems likely the instruction either occurs at all levels or at an elementary level which all guides ascend through.

“When I’m [doing my day job] or with family, I’m not telling people about the true self: it’s not appropriate to. It is not part of our path to sell to people. It’s a disrespect. You are saying – ‘my truth is bigger and better than your truth, follow me.’ If you start to go down that road, you may as well be religious because you’ve lost all of the subtlety. You’ve lost the whole point. No. I have my insight and if other people agree with me and want me to help them, then that is my duty and my calling and I will. But it wouldn’t occur to me to tell people about it who are outside of the family at the Order. I think that is a very foolish path.” (Anonymous)

This guide indicates that his environment influences the extent of references he makes to concepts of dual individuality. He does not talk about the notion of the ‘true self’ “outside of the family at the Order.” The difference in his communications regarding personhood may in turn impact upon whether those around the guide attribute him with a definitive dividual nature or not. Whereas people outside of the centre who are not familiar with the notion of a dividual self are unlikely to associate this individual with an ‘everyday self’ and ‘true self’ formulation, his students at the centre who hear him engage with these ideas, are probably more inclined to make some sort of link between the idea and the orator. Thus the context of the organisation and the teacher’s awareness of it might impact how a collective of students perceive this guide’s individuality.

The Sufi Order also promotes associations between the guide and signifiers of alterity. One way the centre assures the recognition of the teacher’s links with the East is by enforcing organisational imperatives that dictate the guide takes a Sufi name and wears Persian robes on ceremonial occasions. The Order also prescribes

Eastern mantras during classes. One guide spoke on this issue during an interview. The teacher states:

“Eastern languages have a different energy to Western languages. The words awaken the *chakras*⁹⁹ and the soul in a different way. It's very powerful. Perhaps some people would prefer these little English prayers and so on and that's ok. There's a place for those too, some are very soothing, but they are not really done so much at this Order. They're welcome though. But those who are taking the message class here or who are offering private guidance are a lot more likely, because of how they themselves have been guided I guess, to stick with the Persian or Arabic or even Sanskrit, knowing the energy and beauty of those languages.” (Anonymous)

Although what occurs during guidance is usually 'private', this guide alludes here to how the Order trains the teachers to use mantras and say readings in Eastern languages rather than Western languages. In this way, the Sufi Order as an organisation, coaxes the teachers to verbally reference the East. Accordingly this example of alterity and difference at least partially derives from the institution.

The Sufi Order also assures the teacher's association with an 'ancient and Eastern' lineage because the leaders teach prospective instructors internally. As such, the guides are automatically bound to the tradition. The teachers openly acknowledge and celebrate this lineage in front of the student collectives. The anniversaries of the births and deaths of prominent Sufi masters within this chain of transmission are formal ceremonial occasions, where the guide recounts teachings of the late master and simultaneously, the practitioners' knowledge of

⁹⁹ Many Hindu traditions describe chakras as energy points within the subtle body through which life force flows.

the guide's association with the lineage is renewed. During these occasions, it is the leadership of the organisation that initiates the opportunity for the teacher to express gratitude for the ancient and Eastern teachings.

Just as some of the yoga instructors adapt their language or clothing or references to the Shanti setting, so many of the teachers at the Order imply some of the references to alterity are context-specific. As this guide explains:

“We go into prisons and teach the dances. It is a bit different to teaching the dances [at the Order] though. When we go to the prisons, we don't use our Sufi names [and]... We don't wear Persian robes either.” (Anonymous)

Just as the previously mentioned guide tends to not employ references to the individual self when at his 'day job' and when he is with his family, this guide and his colleagues do not make the same references to the East when teaching in prisons. In these ways, the guides become more 'mainstream' and less distinctive in contexts outside of the centre. This finding is indicative of the influence the organisational context has on the teacher's presentation of and association with alterity.

In these multiple modes, the Sufi Order's organisation inform the teacher's appearance of exceptionality. By promoting the communication of a type of individualism and cultural distinction the Sufi Order contributes to the students' mutual ideas and behaviours that rely on these forms. Since these ideas and

behaviours are fundamental to the (i) teacher's set apart status and the (c) community of students who reinforce and are reinforced by the status, the institution facilitates the 'teacher – community' interrelations.

Another way in which the Sufi Order encourages this intersection between the individual and the collective is by providing the physical space in which the features of individual exceptionality are exposed, mutually perceived and socially maintained. The large ballroom, in which the Sufi dance and message classes take place, encloses the students and guide together within a single arena. Within the boundary of the room, the students sit or stand in positions that help everyone see and hear the teacher clearly. In this way, the physical scale of the ballroom and the practitioners' behaviours within the space, accommodate mutual perception. The space enables all of the students present to sensually perceive the guide in the same moment and within the same locale.

Following the end of the lessons, the leaders encourage all students to move to another space within the centre, namely, the kitchen. This room, which is within the basement of the building, not only has coffee and tea making facilities but also tables and chairs where students are able to stop and rest and talk together. As Low argues, architecture, design, and furniture play important roles in the “transformation of space into place (meaning)” (2009: 21). The organisational decisions regarding the use of the basement space and the facilities and furniture

that feature within it, encourage the attributed meaning of the kitchen as a place that caters for communal interaction¹⁰⁰. After every lesson, an average of two thirds of the entire collective at the centre retire to the kitchen to consume refreshments and converse together. During the conversations that unfold within this comfortable and relaxed environment, features of the teacher's set apart status are sustained and even born through the processes of discussion. In this way, the organisational space and the leaders' decisions regarding the functions of that space, aid the co-constitution between the predominantly individualistic factor (of the teacher's distinction) and the predominantly collectivistic factor (of the community of students).

Within both New Age centres, therefore, organisational tendencies play their part in formulating the meeting points between the two factors. Since the teacher's status and the community of recognisers of that status depend on the characteristics that the institution encourages, the New Age organisation is an important 'third factor' of the relationship, in addition to 'teacher' and 'student community.'

¹⁰⁰ This ethnographic consideration of space suggests that the different degrees of verbal interaction within the respective Sufi and yoga populations (as described in the previous section) may be at least partially due to the different spaces available. The Order has a kitchen where the group can congregate and socialise at their leisure, whilst Shanti has only changing facilities where people stay and talk momentarily, if at all. The distinct spaces facilitate distinct degrees of 'traditional' interacting community.

Implications: Social Charisma, Commercial Community and Demographic Diversity

The examinations of the 'teacher-community' intersection and how the organisations strengthen that intersection implicate our understanding of 'the teacher' as an element of New Age experience. For instance, the nature of the set apart, charismatic-like teacher must now be thought of as relational as well as individualistic. Furthermore, the communality of the practitioners is evidence of community formulating in response to the dictates of commercial organisations. Also, the differences between how the intersections manifest in each site are indicative of demographic diversities. Each of these ramifications requires separate scrutinisation.

Social Charisma

Starting with the features of the teacher - although many New Agers experience the instructor as a discrete, charismatic individual, the data show the teacher is not separate or charismatic in the wholly individualistic way the informants suggest. Rather, the collective (in the forms of the participants themselves and the organisational context) socially fuel these characteristics. That is to say, the process

of social interaction constructs and contributes to the appearance of the 'individualistic', charismatic traits. Therefore, the nature of the 'set apart teacher' in these instances, is less the inherent traits of a person and more a part of a relationship (Wilson, 1975: 7).

This claim supports Wallis' view that traits like charisma are “not a once and for always thing... they must be constantly reinforced and reaffirmed or they no longer exist. The charismatic leader, and those about him, must find means constantly to secure the reaffirmation required” (1982: 35). At the field sites, the student's role in this “reaffirmation” requires the recognition, acceptance and attribution of 'superiority', or what Wilson describes as “the social endowment of power” (1973: 499). Social tendencies like imitation and 'myth creation' are ways in which the 'inferiors' enforce and further the power of the teacher. The organisations' function in the “reaffirmation” process includes encouraging the students' associations between the instructor and some exemplary, distinct features. In requiring the teacher to present these features 'publicly' to the students, the institutions (possibly unknowingly) inspire the practitioner to apprehend a link between teacher and distinction. As Barker argues, individuals may be “taught by others to recognise charisma” (1993: 198).

The fact that two separate populations and organisations socially sustain features of particularity that are broadly comparable (e.g. links to 'the East', 'the

ancient' and a version of ideal individualism) leads to the question of whether these circumstances are actually a product of 'New Age' market preferences and expectations. Practitioner predilections, organisational norms and the (apparently) 'set apart' teacher may socially inform each other in this situation. For instance, the processes within this tripartite relationship might include: the New Age organisation informing and reinforcing expectations of the New Age teacher by presenting particular qualities both to the customer and to the employed instructor; the customer expresses preferences which supports and updates the organisation's and teacher's predictions; and the teacher embodies these dictates and assumptions, simultaneously strengthening and contributing to them.

In these circumstances, the distinct special quality of the teacher is not “opposed to all institutional routines” (Weber, 1946: 52) nor “outside of meaning and culture” (Lindholm, 2002: 361¹⁰¹). Rather, in these two contexts, charisma-like traits can derive from commercial, collective, 'institutional routines' and moreover, can nevertheless be very efficacious (cf. Aldridge, 2007: 89; Wilson, 1975: 116-19). Although Weber assumes “the routinised economic cosmos” would lead to charisma fading (1946: 355), the two commercial field organisations and the customers at those organisations on the contrary, offer examples of perpetuation.

¹⁰¹ Lindholm describes the view of charisma being “outside of meaning and culture” as distinct from propounding this view himself.

Commercial Community

In addition to the surprise of the appearance of the 'set apart, charismatic individual' within commercial settings, is the other (possibly even greater) surprise of the appearance of community within commercial settings. As the literature review describes, commercialism, capitalism and the New Age's association with these forms, are frequently charged with having responsibility for the dissolution of community. Yet, in the two commercial, capitalist, New Age contexts of Shanti and the Order, forms of community not only exist, but are born. Put another way, at the two fieldwork centres, communal connectivity manifests in the type of context that is said to obliterate it.

Moreover, degrees of monetary exchange can relate to degrees of communality. The more one pays for contact with the teacher and the group, the more shared consciousness and shared traditions one is likely to obtain, which, in turn, increases one's common links with the regular practitioners. For instance, when students pay to attend occasions where the teacher is present (such as classes, seminars, workshops or retreats), the extent of exposure and adoption of notions and 'normative patterns' (Weber, 1921: 215) is likely to increase as well. But since these events are never free, the levels of awareness of the teacher is, in these cases, dependent on the practitioner's financial means.

These findings have ramifications for the extensive canon which relates the commercial with the destruction of the communal. The field data show that such arguments (be it the argument Lasch recounts that consumption results in a lack of relationships [1979: 4], or Carrette and King's claim that "individualist/consumerist spiritualities" lead to the loss of community [2005: 80]) require greater nuance. The enforcement of individualism is not necessarily the whole story. Commercial field institutions (like Shanti and the Order) can enforce signifiers (*including* types of individualism) which generate collective consciousness and shared practice. These collective factors connect the 'consumer' to fellow 'consumers,' thus generating a type of communality.

Although this conclusion supports the scholarship which argues for the prospective sociality of commercialism, there are slight differences here. For example, whereas writers like Miller (1998) claim consumption is relational by virtue of the consumer considering others at the point of purchase, the field situations show how it is *through* the consumption of the purchase (e.g. taking part in the class) that consideration of others takes place. Paying to participate is often how the connection with others (the teacher and the fellow students) ensues.

However, this type of community is not always dependent on monetary exchange. Thanks to the internet's blogs, facebook pages, forums, twitter accounts and so on, the process of sharing is at a whole new level¹⁰² - and payment is rarely

¹⁰² As with the practitioners' myths, the content does not have to be accurate, to be shared.

a prerequisite. As the head of PR for the Dalai Lama said to me: “online communities are real; they are a single wall of virtual mortar around discrete human bricks¹⁰³.” People can connect into (“a single wall”) via knowledge of the teacher that is sought online, even if they never meet each other, nor the teacher, in-person. Although no informants from the field sites allude to involvement in this (online) form of community, the prospect of a 'community-teacher' intersection that does not require the member's money is possible.

Demographic Diversity

The modes in which the 'teacher-community' factors and intersections occur in each field context show some subtle differences. In relation to the experience of appreciation and devotion, the Sufi Order students typically exhibit greater signs of self-sacrifice than the participants at Shanti. Whereas many of the Order members give up substantial time and energy to travel to and from the centre, the vast majority of the Shanti students live walking-distance from the site. Comparably, the additional purchases which are made upon the teacher's suggestion appear to impact numerous Order practitioners in ways that no informants at Shanti mention. These disparities in the forfeit of time, energy and (affordable) money, suggest a divergence in the amounts of 'self-sacrifice' that are

¹⁰³ Personal correspondence, 22nd June 2011.

common within each group. The Shanti informants show lesser sacrifice, a greater inclination towards the self and fewer social constraints. In contrast, the Sufi Order informants show greater sacrifice, a lesser inclination towards the self and greater social constraints.

The appearance of 'ideal individuality' that the teacher represents illustrates another difference between how the two populations experience the teacher. The version of individualism which the Shanti teachers epitomise is more weighted towards the autonomy and freedom of the individual than the person's obligations towards social structures. Conversely, the model of individualism which the guides at the Order embody is less weighted towards the autonomy and freedom of the individual and more inclusive of sociality.

The forms of community at each centre also vary. Although there are examples of shared ideas and common traditions amidst the teaching groups of each site, there is a disparity in the amount of verbal communication between fellow members. At Shanti, student conversation is very minimal, whilst at the Sufi Order, practitioners frequently talk amongst themselves about topics which relate to the Order and about other topics, such as work, family, holidays and so on. Another difference is how much informants know about fellow members. At Shanti only a couple of informants can recall the name of any other students at the site. At the Order, nearly all of the informants know details about other students, including names but also, some personal information such as their

current interests and concerns. As such, there is greater evidence of more 'traditional' forms of interacting community at the Sufi Order than Shanti.

These divergences between the two collectives corresponds with the Shanti population's more individualistic disposition and the Sufi Order population's more collectivistic disposition. Both 'individual' and 'collective' are present and interrelating in all of these circumstances, but the forms and 'weights' of each factor varies depending on the population under consideration. As we know, these different 'weights' (i.e. Shanti – more individualistic; the Order – more collectivistic) align with socio-economic variations between the two groups, which the current canon of New Age literature fails to adequately account for.

This consideration of some of the ramifications of the intersection brings this chapter to a close. The relational 'charisma' of the teacher speaks to the literatures which assume these traits are inherent characteristics of the individual. The evidence of communities formulating in response to the dictates of commercial organisations offer an alternative perspective to the scholarship that equates commercialism with the end of communality. Finally, the various ways and extents the 'teacher-community' intersection manifests in each context confirms the New Age canon must allow for greater diversity within the discussion of how New Agers experience individualism.

Conclusion

At Shanti and the Sufi Order, it is clear the teacher plays a seminal role in the participants' New Age experience. Respondents from both settings vehemently appraise their respective teacher and openly recount acts which are indicative of great loyalty and devotion. The nature of the informants' cherished experiences often relate to the perception of the teacher as an ideal individual and as a person who is separate from the mainstream. Together, these experiences are, in many ways, relatable to academic conceptions of charismatic individuals: the New Age attendees believe the instructor is a set apart and exceptional person who inspires feelings of love and willing adherence.

The (i) teacher's exceptionality inspires collective consciousness and traditions which inform (c) communality amidst the student collectives; that is to say, the shared ideas and behaviours about the instructor bind individual practitioners together. The (c) group of participants also, vice versa, impact the (i) instructor's distinction, by sustaining and contributing to the mutual notions and customs that relate to the teacher's appearance of particularity. In these cyclical ways, (i) 'teacher' and (c) 'community' co-enforce each other and function as part of an (i-c) individual–collective intersection. The organisation plays an important role in facilitating this (i-c) inter-relationship; each field context encourages institutional

norms that the teacher adapts to and the student collective perceive. As such, the two New Age organisations support the common links between the two factors.

The intersection and the institution's involvement in that intersection supports a type of charisma that depends on social exchange and enforces a type of community which occurs in commercial contexts. The differences in how the 'teacher-community' dialectic appear amidst each group of informants corresponds with demographic diversities. At Shanti and the Sufi Order, both a predominantly individualistic factor (the teacher) and a predominantly collectivistic factor (the community) feature and relate to each other, but the modes in which this occurs suggests different degrees of either a more individualistic orientation (i.e. at Shanti) or a more collectivistic orientation (i.e. at the Sufi Order).

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

One Dynamic, Four Manifestations, Two Orientations

Is individualism the definitive feature of New Age spiritual culture? Does individualism in New Age contexts manifest in forms that emphasise the inner authority of the agent? Does the New Age practitioner shun the 'constraints' of hierarchical structures and ideological consensus? The course of this thesis has sought to consider some of these questions by exploring examples of the individual and the collective in two contemporary New Age contexts. The discussion began by demonstrating the central place of 'inner authority' within the canon of scholarship on New Age spirituality. This evaluative account strove to describe how the self-governing individual is so often noted as a core characteristic of New Age culture. The literature review also considered texts that propose socio-economic reasons and moral implications of this link between the New Age and the individual. The ethnographic chapters took the investigation to two contemporary New Age contexts. Each discussion concentrated on a core theme (class, capitalism, emotion, or the teacher) and in doing so, identified a

predominantly 'individualistic' form, a predominantly 'collectivistic' form, and considered how the two intersect in each field context.

The approach illuminated some thought-provoking findings. At both of the sites and across all four of the themes, the individual and the collective are clearly apparent. Moreover, they are mutually dependent; the individual factor informs the collective factor and vice versa. However, this 'universal' tendency occurs with two types of particularity. One particularity relates to how the dynamic manifests: the individual-collective dialectic appears in multiple, specific ways. The consideration of each of the four themes shows a separate version of the exchange and the components that constitute it. Two, the other type of particularity relates to how those four manifestations of the dynamic appear with varying orientations at each site. At Shanti, the individual-collective exchanges direct more towards the person than they do at the Sufi Order where the comparable exchanges lean more towards the group. Both the personal and the social are present in all of the four manifestations and in the two orientations, but there is a propensity for either greater 'individualism' or greater 'collectivism' in each distinct New Age environment.

This final chapter will review and expand upon these findings. It will describe the overarching perspective that individual and collective co-relate to each other in the two New Age contexts under consideration. It will then recount and analyse the four specific forms of the intersection that the ethnographic accounts

scrutinise. Next, it will show differences between how the co-productions exist at each site to illustrate the divergent orientations of each population. Finally, it will detail some of the implications of these claims and how those implications relate to the literary themes raised in Chapter 2.

One Dynamic:

Individual-Collective Co-Production

Shanti and the Sufi Order, as two examples of New Age phenomena, are made up of a multitude of elements and forces. Some of these components principally relate to the individual and the personal (for instance, the individual's self-conception, agency, inner feelings and 'charisma'). Other components mainly concern the collective and the social (for example, class culture, the socio-economic milieu, shared principles and community). The individual and the collective are both vital to the 'shape' Shanti and the Sufi Order take.

However, the mutual presence of the individual and the collective is, of course, not the end of the story. These 'separate' factors intersect; each one supports and informs the other. When the individual senses and becomes aware of the 'outside' collective, that perception renders the collective an 'inside' part of the self. This engagement, in turn sustains the collective. The individual's later self-conceptions,

eclectic preferences, decisions, emotions, speech and actions are a part of the self but also reflect and reproduce the collective form as well. In the words of Hausner, “beliefs both come from outside the individual mind and are situated within and emerge from it” (2013b: 172). This is a cyclical process. The collective informs the individual and the individual informs the collective.

Shanti and the Sufi Order, as organisations, are culminations of and contributors to these interactive, reciprocal processes. In both the yoga centre and the Sufi centre there are institutional imperatives and organisational norms which echo the primary components and exchanges under consideration. This affinity between organisational structure, the individual, and the collective, suggests these two New Age circumstances support and promote the meeting of the personal and the social. When multiple persons who make up the centre engage in a type of individual-collective exchange in consistent ways, the factors in that exchange inform the organisational culture. That culture in turn, through reflection and reproduction, encourages the body of individuals to perceive the elements of the exchange, thus fuelling the intersection and the nature of the components it depends on.

An implication of the dynamic that Shanti and the Sufi Order reflect and contribute to is that at these sites, the binds between the factors prevent one element dominating in isolation of the other. By participating at the centre, the person engages with an individual form and its co-dependent collective form. It is

difficult to access one element without accessing its 'partner.' As such, these two New Age contexts do not fuel individualistic concerns in seclusion of the collective; indeed, it is difficult to imagine how they could.

This overarching dynamic of the individual-collective dialectic, that is apparent at both Shanti and the Sufi Order, is an example of a commonality between the two sites. In broad terms, the workings of the processes occur in comparable ways in both fields. The analysis now considers another cross-field tendency whilst simultaneously describing particularity within the workings of the dynamic. It will show how the dialectic manifests in four shared but particular ways.

Four Manifestations:

An Overview of the Primary Intersections

The ethnographic chapters explore how individuals within each field engage with class, capitalism, emotion or the teacher. Through the process of investigating each theme and the subject matters they raise, four respective intersections became apparent. It is useful to review the notable characteristics of these four individual-collective correlations and co-productions. In doing so, this account will display how, in both fields, the dialectic evinces in at least these four ways¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁴ It seems fair to assume there will be many other individual-collective 'meeting points' of these kinds.

(C) Class Culture - (I) Ideology of the Self

The first ethnographic chapter took the class background of the practitioner as its focus. It explored indicators of class (including wealth and social power) and examples of ideologies of self. These portrayals led the chapter to argue for an elective affinity between each population's (collectivistic) socio-economic background and the dominant (individualistic) conception of the individual. This affinity is indicative of one of the ways in which the individual-collective intersection appears.

The general nature of this intersection is evident in both field contexts; we know this because resonances between class and self-concept are present at both Shanti and the Sufi Order. It seems likely that in both cases, preeminent socio-economic experiences, which enable varying degrees of autonomy, freedom, and choice, support particular notions of the self; and vice versa, those understandings of individuality can inform a sense of the collective socio-economic grouping. For instance, if a person's social circumstances enforce moderate degrees of restriction and require the individual to negotiate with external limitations on a daily basis, the agent's awareness of those experiences can encourage a relating self-concept that is consistent with those experiences. The individual internalises the encounters with the society and draws on that experiential evidence to construct a

particular self-perception. The ideology will in turn reflect and reproduce a sense of the socio-economic grouping by referencing the consistent degrees of social restriction.

The New Age organisations reflect and enforce this 'class - ideology' interaction, which facilitates the interrelations between the collective force of class culture and the individualistic force of self-concept. The correspondence between the structures of the organisation and the factors of the interchange suggests the centres reflect the socio-economically informed preferences and expectations of their class-based markets. This reflection in turn, echoes and enforces the traits of the class group, including the relevant understanding of the individual. Organisational tendencies such as encouraging the experience of freedom to choose between a lot of options, or conversely, expecting the student to submit to the guidelines of an external authority, can bolster both the according class culture and the reciprocal notion of the individual. Many who participate at the centre will become aware of these tendencies, internalise their forms and reflect and add to those forms.

(C) Socio-Economic Norms – (I) Agents' Expressions

The following chapter centred on the capitalist social system in which those who teach at the organisation function. It investigated this theme by considering the

representatives' communications within the centre and how those expressions resonate with traits of the social world. This pursuit showed how the agents recognise, echo, reinforce and negotiate with characteristics of the culture. The correlations between the (individualistic) factor of the person's decisions, speech and actions and the (collectivistic) factor of the cultural mores illustrate another type of individual-collective intersection, which is different to the class-ideology affinity but nevertheless shares in the overall processes of the dynamic at work.

At both Shanti and the Sufi Order, at least some of the representatives' expressions correlate with the dominant norms of the culture. For instance, the words and behaviours of the teachers often exhibit the society's inclination towards pursuing individual authority, accepting an eclectic approach and promoting utility. Also, in both cases, the individuals reference forms which signify an alternative culture, but are still 'within' the socio-economic culture as a whole. These findings advocate that the agent can sensually grasp traits of the culture (which includes both the mainstream and a subset 'counter culture') and enforce and perpetuate those traits through modes of assertion. These types of communication (such as verbally discussing ideas, making decisions, having preferences and acting in ways that are consistent with the cultural characteristics) reproduces forms of the milieu, sustaining and contributing to the dominant mores of the society and some some less dominant 'alternative' cultural features.

Some of the representatives' compatible engagements with the social context

culminate into organisational characteristics. These characteristics in turn encourage the correlating versions of the culture-agent interaction. For instance, when a body of representatives agree that decorative features which signify Eastern culture are attractive and appealing, those shared opinions can result in a change to the physical space of the centre; statues of Hindu deities or artwork of Islamic calligraphy can become features. In turn, those physical materialisations of the collective consciousness will be sensually perceived by the individuals who enter the centre. This form of stimulation can then support and encourage the appeal and attraction of those signifiers of alterity. In these ways, the organisation can give collective force to particular versions of the agent-culture exchange. That is to say, the organisation contributes to this manifestation of the individual-collective co-dependency.

(C) Shared Tenets – (I) Personal Feelings

The emotional landscape of the practitioner formed the focal point of the next chapter. This discussion showed ways in which the person's felt experience relates to the mutually held tenets of the group. The meeting of the predominantly individualistic experience of one's emotions and the predominantly collectivistic experience of the jointly held principles shows another way in which the personal and the social can come together and co-produce each other at the two field sites.

In both New Age contexts, a lot of informants report improvements in mood in association with thinking about the shared tenet. This conjunction suggests the principles and the person's feelings relate to each other. The nature of the individual's emotion is the focus here, yet personal transformation seems to occur through participation with a collective organisation and engagement with the tenet-informed cosmologies, phraseologies, rituals and interpretations which the group encourages. Those advances in attitudes and sentiments maintain and inform the tenet when the students use those favourable feelings as reasoning for their interpretations and reproductions of the tenets. For instance, the experience of feeling happier can motivate the individual to continue thinking about the principles, talking about the principles or even acting in ways which the principles inspire. These 'personal' engagements with the 'group' concept can function as an input to the tenets which in turn grow stronger.

The organisations commission these multi-directional relations. These centres provide a space for a group of individuals to gather and listen to teachers who verbally encourage the student to have a common hope in the efficacy of the shared tenets. Upon the individual's recognition and acceptance of this suggestion, the positive feelings that often emerge in response are utilised as means of perpetuation for the tenets. Another way the organisations support the inter-relationship is by emphasising felt experience. The emphases on praxis, heightened sensual awareness and discourses relating to 'heart over head' or 'true

self over everyday self' appear to stimulate a different kind of thinking, which has emotional benefits. The individual often interprets the shift in feeling as evidence for the tenets and in this way, this organisational tendency may be an intervening factor between tenet-feeling. Together, these tendencies can lead to a collective organisational ethos about how to express emotions. The individuals' adherences to these expectations can at once add to the collective force of the principles and encourage their own positive feelings.

(C) Community of Students – (I) Ideal Individual Teacher

The final ethnographic chapter took the teachers of each site as its central focus. It argued for a reciprocal relationship between the (collective) communities of student 'recognisers' and the appearance of an (individual) set apart teacher. These two factors and the ways they depend on each other demonstrate a fourth manifestation of the individual-collective dialectic.

At Shanti and the Sufi Order, the signifiers of the teacher's special status are mirrored in much of the collective consciousness and common behaviours that bind individual practitioners together. This affinity suggests that the teacher inspires many of the links between the people who make up the group and also, vice versa, that those links between the group maintain and generate the appearance of the teacher's exceptionality. When a body of individuals observe and assess the teacher in compatible ways, the teacher's influence on the body of

individuals inspires common physical and verbal repetition; the students mutually act and speak in ways that mirror the teacher (and in turn, each other). These commonalities bind the participants to one another via the set apart instructor. These shared acts of repetition also reinforce the teacher's status. The process of one party imitating the other is indicative of an imbalance of power and that power depends on other people recognising the disparity in authority. Sometimes students actively further the asymmetry between the group and the teacher by socially disseminating myths.

The New Age organisations maintain these interchanges between 'community - teacher' by promoting institutional norms that the teachers adapt to and the students value in common ways. For example, both Shanti and the Order promote particular features of the teacher's 'ideal individuality' and distinction, which the teacher is obliged to portray and the students mutually recognise as positive attributes. The management's encouragement or active monitoring of whether the instructors are presenting themselves in ways which are consistent with the organisation's association with the East, for instance, can boost both the signifiers of the teacher's distinction and the reciprocal communality of the students. The employee perceives the organisational culture, acts in ways which reflect and enforce that culture and the students in turn perceive, reflect and encourage the traits of the teacher and the organisation. The centre, the teacher and the student community are co-penetrating factors.

The four manifestations of the dynamic evidence how the individual-collective dialectic occurs in different ways. In each instance, a collectivistic force encourages a factor in which the individual is the focus and that individualistic force supports the factor in which the collective is the focus. In these instances, we cannot meaningfully comprehend one of the components without acknowledging the other.

These particular examples of the dialectic are apparent in both field contexts. However, the manifestations also differ between the two populations with regards to their orientation. Although the 'same' four intersections appear within both centres, these intersections lean more towards the person in one context and more towards the group in another. The chapter will now consider this other type of particularity within the universal individual-collective dynamic.

Two Orientations:

Differences Between the Fields

The comparative ethnographic accounts which considered how the forms of the intersections appear in each field site also described some disparities between the two contexts. In comparison to the Sufi Order, at Shanti, the components of each interchange display a more individualistic orientation. In comparison to Shanti, at

the Order, the (thematically the same) factors lean more towards the collective. Thus, the two case studies show that the individual-collective co-productions can have distinct orientations in two different New Age fields. Each organisation's compatible traits, which reflect and further the intersections and their particular orientation, suggests Shanti and the Sufi Order account for diversity. These two New Age organisations perpetuate the meeting of the individual and the collective in modes that are locally meaningful to their student bodies' separate contextual circumstances and self-conceptions.

Shanti

The majority of participants at the yoga centre belong to a class group and propound ideologies of self that have an individualistic orientation. Most of this population have access to extents of wealth and types of social powers that afford the experience of substantial personal freedom and choice. For instance, many of these informants believe they can choose whether or not to work or go to university. Furthermore, many allude to having a mass of options with regards to what material possessions they purchase and the social resources they and their families utilise (be it private health care, boarding school, cleaners or nannies). Most of the individuals I spoke with made decisions that maximised their individual freedom and minimised their collective responsibilities. They chose to

not participate in the work force or pursue higher education. Many sent their children to boarding school and hired 'help' to oversee the running of the family home. In short, core characteristics of the class culture of this population include the experience of self-governance and the freedom to pursue personal preferences. These individualistic manifestations (of 'collectivistic' class culture) resonate with the individualistic conceptualisation of self that the majority of participants describe. The notions that all people, especially the informant, possess autonomy, independence and freedom is a frequent theme within the data solicited from this site. The nature of this affinity between class and ideology depends on the individual-oriented experiences of liberty, power and possessing a predominantly internal locus of control. The conception of the self reflects and furthers the experience of liberty and activism prominent within the class culture and the class culture reflects and furthers the traits of liberty and activism prominent within the understanding of self; themes that relate to the individual are the common link.

The dialectic between the individual representative and the collective culture also exhibits a leaning towards the individual in this yoga context. The management and instructors at the yoga site communicate in ways that resonate with the individualistic traits of postmodern consumer capitalism to a great extent. For instance, the teachers verbally and behaviourally champion the authority of the person. They do this by adapting the yoga practice to each of the students and by encouraging the student to appropriate established concepts. The teachers at

the centre also reflect and socially sustain the cultural norm of eclecticism. In many of the classes the instructor will urge the participant to pick and mix from a range of resources; the message here is that the individual is free to action a preference. Another example of the individualistic direction relates to the representatives' references to utility. When the teachers at this centre mention the use of yoga or the use of a product, they typically do so with reference to personal development. In these multiple examples of consistencies between the individual employee's decisions and expressions, and the primary traits of the mainstream culture, the individual is the central concern. Just as the common threads that appear throughout the class-ideology intersection tilt towards an experience of the individual as an independent and self-ruling entity, so the links between the dominant norms of the milieu and the teacher's expressions reference the authority, freedom and development of the self.

The identification of a co-dependency between the shared tenets and the person's emotions also highlights the place of the individual within this yoga culture. For the most part, the shared principles encourage favourable shifts in feeling and those beneficial emotions support the mutual tenets; however, on occasion, the agent offers an exception to the 'tenet-feeling' relationship. Four informants at Shanti show instances when the agent can interject the processes by refusing to adapt to the group's ethos. In some of these instances, the student is fully aware of the collective expectation to express (upbeat) feelings to indicate

positive energy; they have perceived the concept and the social expectations it raises. Yet they consciously present a contrasting emotion and accordingly block the prospective mutualities between the two factors. This occasional tendency tells us that, whilst individuals at Shanti can perceive the collective tenet, the individual does not necessarily *always* adhere to it on *every* occasion. In this context, some agents sometimes employ the will to subvert the public pressures of Shanti's culture.

The modes in which the 'teacher-community' factors and intersections occur at Shanti also exhibits a leaning towards the individual. For instance, the 'ideal individuality' that the yoga teacher represents and the students mutually perceive is the model materialisation of the autonomous and free notion of self that dominates in this context. In comparison to the Sufi Order centre, the informants from this site typically show fewer instances of sacrifice (most do not travel long distances in order to reach the instructor, nor do the additional purchases which are made upon the teacher's suggestion appear to impact the practitioner to any notable degree). The form of the student community at Shanti is also different to the student community at the Order. There are multiple examples of shared consciousness and common traditions that bind the yoga students of each teacher together, but there is very minimal verbal communication between this collective. Furthermore, the individuals who make up the collective do not have much

knowledge of the fellow members of the student community. Only a few participants at this centre can recall the name of other attendees, for instance. These traits of the 'teacher' and 'community' factors show a leaning towards the individual. The students view the teacher's individualism as highly autonomous and the collectivity of the students (whilst still a type of community) is not the outcome of personal sacrifice, obligations towards social structures or substantial communicative interaction.

The centre's ethos and imperatives echo and facilitate the individualistic orientation of the four 'individual-collective' intersections. This alignment thus corresponds with the student body's (more individualistic) class culture and self-conception. For instance, Shanti's organisational norms often reflect and enhance experiences of personal power. These norms include offering vast individual choice, tailoring classes to personal preferences and encouraging the individual to self-define and self-assess objectives. The teachers at this site champion undertaking personal selection and focus on self-development. They also overlook the times when individual students do not present a 'socially consistent' emotional performance, and they encourage the teachers to appear very autonomous and distinct. These tendencies foster a more individualistic environment. Although individual and collective forces are present and co-dependent at Shanti, the aggregate content of the intersections and the ways that the organisation supports

them, are more often oriented towards individualism than collectivism. In turn the nature of the 'individual-collective balance' (which is weighted more towards the individual) correlates and is appropriate for the group of social agents who tend to frequent the centre.

This analysis will now show how, comparatively, the 'same' intersections within the Sufi Order milieu show a greater leaning towards the collective. The Order, as a New Age context, enforces norms that correspond with this more collectivistic orientation. Thus, it seems that, like Shanti, the Sufi context reflects and perpetuates the social and conceptual dispositions of the majority of students who attend the classes.

The Sufi Order

In contrast to the Shanti case, most of the members of the Order are part of a class culture and express an understanding of the self that emphasises social constraints to a greater degree. The socio-economic class culture allows for some personal freedom, but also enforces the experience of social limitation and dependency on the collective. For instance, the members of this class group are 'free' to participate in higher education and obtain valuable (often public sector) jobs. Most of these informants also appear to earn moderate incomes which allows for some financial freedom. However, at the same time, many of the

students face social restrictions. There is open acknowledgement that there are points of dissatisfaction with social services, such as the health and education systems. Yet, the person is often reliant on these resources that the state provides and cannot simply choose to participate in the private sector instead. Similarly, the area in which one lives and the type of residence one lives in does not necessarily equate with personal preferences. Informants are often aware of their dependencies and how their social position places caps on their abilities to 'live out' their preferences. The collectivistic direction of these traits resonate with the collectivistic direction of the notion of self that most of the members assert. In contrast to the shared ideology of the individual held by Shanti informants, members of the Sufi Order do not think of the person as a being who determines the world around them. Rather, all of the informants from the Order are very aware of interrelations and interdependencies between people. The everyday self must negotiate with external limitations and, to reach the true self, one must abide by the guidance of an external authority. Just as the person will face external boundaries in their attempts to access some of the social resources they desire, an outside authority and hierarchical spiritual system stands between them and their immediate access to the true self. The collectivistic forms of obedience and reliance on the social group are the common traits across both the informants' socio-economic situations and the correlating notion of self which they describe. The 'class' and 'ideology' factors are collective-oriented in this New Age context.

The intersection between the individual guide and the socio-economic culture also leans towards the collective in this field. In contrast to the Shanti context, at the Order, the guides' expressions align with the individualistic norms of the social milieu to a lesser degree because those expressions typically include explicit descriptions of a larger social system or source of consensus. For example, the Sufi teacher might communicate individual authority within the context of the Order's shared hierarchical system. The agents encourage an eclectic approach but within the boundaries of the Order's communal guidelines and historical narratives. The guide communicates the significance of utility and the prospect of self-development but within the ethos that the individual can benefit the group. The modes in which the individuals engage with signifiers of alterity also tends to accentuate collective structures. Frequent expressions of a 'counter to the mainstream' include a presentation of the ideal 'group' (a tendency which is not observable in the yoga context). Moreover, many of the guides cite shared chronicles and organisational imperatives within their descriptions of the 'counters' to the dominant culture. In these multiple ways, the agent-culture intersections that are evident in the Sufi context exhibit a greater collectivistic orientation than the 'same' intersection within the yoga context. The Sufi teachers' expressions of the social mores of their socio-economic culture place great emphasis on group agreement, shared knowledge and common structures.

A collective orientation is also evident in the ways the tenets-feelings intersection appears at this site. The Order promotes principles and a type of expectation that stimulate the individual to give a contextually consistent outward presentation of their feelings. Whereas at Shanti, some students' consciously refuse to give the emotional performance that the tenets encourage, at the Order, there is no evidence of comparable instances of individual 'rebellion'. Instead, the dance practitioners express themselves in ways that consistently conform to the collective's sensibility norms. Some informants might discuss previous occasions that recount a type of unhappiness or 'negative energy,' but during participant observation at the site, at no point did the members' statements or body language become notably unaligned from the group's shared 'positive energy' ethos. This finding suggests it is less common for students at the Order to dissent from the collective's 'positive energy' standards (at least whilst they are within the bounds of the centre) than it is for the yoga students. This insight may in turn be indicative of the Order members' greater inclination towards social conformity and greater ability to accept and adapt to collective pressures.

The leaning towards the social and the group is similarly apparent in how the teacher-community interchange takes place within the Sufi milieu. The guides in this context do not embody the perfect example of the independent and free agent like the yoga instructors do. Rather, the model of individualism which the Sufi

teachers exemplify is more inclusive of social structures; this model includes the everyday self which negotiates with cultural constraints. The influence of the ideal individual teacher upon the student body (which in turn inspires imitation and sources of community) also directs towards the social. Most of the participants are happy to undertake self-sacrifice for the good of their relationship with the teacher. These students give up substantial time and energy to travel to and from the centre. Moreover, the purchases they make in response to the teacher's encouragement appears to sometimes detrimentally impact the Order's finances. In comparison to the yoga participants, this population exhibit greater sacrifice, a lesser inclination towards the individual and more consistent social adaptation. The form of community that flourishes in this centre is also different to the Shanti case. Although, like Shanti, there are ample examples of shared ideas and common traditions, in the Sufi context, practitioners also frequently talk amongst themselves about a range of topics, including but also surpassing the teacher. The majority of informants from this site also know at least some personal information about fellow members. Thus, there is greater evidence of forms of verbal interaction between this community. The ways in which collectivity infuses the factor of the teacher, the factor of the student group and the processes of inspiration and imitation in between them, illustrates the collectivistic orientation of the teacher-community intersection at this site.

The Order's organisational culture reflects and contributes to the four interchanges that manifest in this context. In so doing, the organisation also reflects and contributes to the interchanges' collectivistic forms. The implication of this correspondence between the norms of the centre and the nature and direction of the intersections is that the Order facilitates a type of experience which aligns with the dominant class traits and self-concept of the population who participate there. For instance, many of the Order's institutional tendencies often mirror and maintain experiences of extrinsic sources of control and the need to adapt and conform. The vertical collectivism of the organisation's hierarchical structure results in differential access to power and knowledge. This system demands that the practitioner submit to an external authority's instruction if they wish to participate. The Order also enforces boundaries within which the individual can explore personal choice and suggests self-development is useful so it can benefit the group. The promotion of 'positive energy' results in conformity and the institution's imperatives ensure the 'ideal individual' teacher appears to possess a model everyday self who can empathise with the adaptations to society the person must undergo. These organisational patterns are likely to support circumstances in which the individual-collective are still active and mutually enforcing, but orient towards the group and the social. By echoing and reproducing experiences and concepts of interrelationships and dependencies on external structures, this Sufi

organisation sustains an environment that is likely to resonate with the social agents who make up the population of attendees.

This discussion of some of the differences between the two field contexts tells us that not only does the individual-collective dialectic occur in both New Age milieus and manifest in four particular ways, but also that the dynamic can appear with relative orientations. At Shanti, the principal intersections and the means by which the centre's culture relates to those intersections is more 'weighted' towards the individual than the (thematically the same) manifestations in the Sufi Order context, which are more 'weighted' towards the collective. The differences between the fields show that two separate New Age sites can sustain different 'balances' of the dynamic. The balances require both the individual and the collective, but the way the forces actualise can be either more individualistic or more collectivistic in orientation.

The differences between the orientations also indicate how the groups reinforce and reproduce intersections in ways that are compatible with the respective sets of students' world-views, social positions and self-conceptions. By echoing and enhancing the student's local level social positions and interrelating attitudes towards authority and freedom, the organisations present the individual-collective in ways that are relevant to a particular set of social persons. In turn, the concordance between the character of the interchanges and the participants' local level norms is likely to inspire the personal feelings of resonance that are vital for

continued participation. Hence, Sufi Order interviewees may imply they want more freedom and personal authority, but the experience of structure and consensus that is available at the Order may paradoxically appeal more than other, more individualistic and flexible New Age contexts due to the comfort of familiarity and recognisability.

The different orientations of the two populations and the respective centres that appeal to them encourages a hypothesis regarding why one group is more individualistic than the other. It seems likely that the 'economic capital' that many of the Shanti informants possess enables the experiences of independence, choice and power that the contrasting, Sufi Order members simply do not (and in many ways cannot) share. Most of the Sufi Order members have substantial experience of higher education and it is imaginable that a benefit of many university and college courses is the encouragement of independent thought (the ways in which many such institutions teach and grade inspires the individual to question 'the world around them' and attempt to cultivate an individual point of view). However, in this project, the ability of education to enhance individualism does not compete with the force of economic means.

These evaluations of the one individual-collective dynamic, its four manifestations, and their two orientations, evoke some implications for the body of scholarship Chapter 2 describes. The next section will explore these implications and show how this project's contributions reinforce some of the key arguments

that dominate in this literature. It will also offer exceptions and new insights to some other pervasive themes. Some of the issues it considers include the claim that understanding the two New Age field groups requires a dialectical approach; the role of the collective in the field sites is not adequately accounted for in the canon concerning the New Age; and that, whilst individualism is still an important factor, it appears in more than one form.

Implications and Contributions:

How the Findings Relate to the Literature

Unlike Heelas, who considers the definitive feature of New Ageism to be the experience of “unmediated individualism,” (1996: 21) this study suggests the significance and appeal of individualism at the two field sites is that it *is* mediated. Mediation from class culture, socio-economic norms, shared tenets and types of community inform the experience of individualism in important ways. Similarly, unlike Bruce's belief that the “individual autonomy, the freedom to choose, competes with the power of the community[,] to the extent that the former is stressed, the latter is necessarily weakened” (2002: 93; Bruce, 1998: 23), in the two field contexts, these examples of individualism are dependent on and inform 'the power of community'. Although, in any intersection, one factor may be more

heavily weighted than another, even in cases where the individualistic or internal dominate, they do not appear to do so in isolation and as such, there is always a balance of some kind. Individual authority, internal subjectivities and personal selection are evident and significant (and as will be shown, this evidence reinforces some major claims of scholars of New Ageism) but typical collective structures are an integral part of those features. To adequately understand the two New Age field sites that are focal points of this project, it is necessary to adopt a dialectical approach that allows for the individual, the collective and the interchanges between them.

The role of standard collective structures within the intersections suggests the collective and the external or 'without' are not given the credit they are due in the current canon concerning the New Age. At both field sites, organisational structures and supports are in place, collective cultural norms impact and various forms of community occur. Groups formulate around shared ideas and customs that mark them as discrete from those who do not engage with these forms. There are thus examples in each field site that counter the suggestions that New Age sites will inevitably enforce scenarios in which the practitioner's experience is first and foremost linked to inner authority. Rather, lots of the data from Shanti and the Sufi Order allude to more comprehensive, relational experiences. In these cases, the New Age context sensually and cognitively encourages the individual to feel connected to the self, the group in the lesson and even at times, beyond the

immediate group, such as to the class collective, the society, or other global, historical or even cosmological realms.

One indicator of the practitioners' attraction towards this 'self-group-beyond' orientation is the fact that no interviewees from either site practice yoga or whirling as a solitary pursuit. This preference for training at the respective organisation suggests that the informants' desire a more balanced experience, which includes the collective as well as the individual. The appeal of sensations of incorporation, communion and collective support challenge the discourses that suggest spiritual, commercial contexts like Shanti and the Sufi Order will leave the 'consumer' victimised (e.g. Einstein, 2008: 208; Halliday, 2000: 4; McKean, 1996: 265; Miller, 2005: 225), isolated (Carrette and King, 2005: 57), disconnected (Lasch, 1979) or with heightened experiences of fragmentation (cf. Wilson, 1966: 86-102; Bruce, 1996: 129-168; 2002: 203-228). Rather than solely “what matters [being] delving within oneself” (Heelas, 2008: 5), involvement at these centres encourages delving within oneself *and* engaging with and imagining others. As such, external and communal supports are available which can decrease “the psychic costs of individualism” (Goffman, 1971:194).

With reference to the Sufi Order in particular, the clear hierarchical structure and external authorities within this context show an exception to Heelas' claim that New Age groups will be “opposed to the restrictive, the regulatory, those impositions of external sources of authority which are served by rules and

regulations” (2008: 2-3). The Sufi site situation also deviates from Hanegraaf's assertion that “spiritual guides may give help and advice, but will never attempt to impose their views in an authoritative manner” (1996: 201; cf. Hanegraaf, 1999: 152). The Order case also does not accord with Bruce's argument that, within the New Age, “there is no authority higher than the individual self” (2000: 227). The findings from the Sufi Order convey that hierarchy and external authority *are* important parts of the participants' experiences.

Although, at least for the cases of Shanti and the Sufi Order, many literatures exaggerate the absence of collective forces to an inappropriate extent, at both sites, the individual is still important: the organisations address 'inner' feelings and allow for self selections of spiritual resources. Furthermore, many of the practitioners at Shanti understand the individual in ways that are similar and largely reinforce the scholars' understanding of individualism. The veneration of autonomy and inner authority that occurs in the yoga context support this depiction.

The greater leaning towards individualism of the 'high on the wealth scale' Shanti practitioners (in comparison with the 'middle on the wealth scale' Sufi Order students) supports the argument that Sayer recounts. Greater levels of consumption (which we might assume occurs for people with more disposable income) can lead to higher levels of individualism (Sayer, 2003: 35). However, Lasch's claim that consumption leads to a lack of relationships and a retreat from

the collective (1979: 4) is not supported. With shared consciousness, mutual traditions, commonly held principles, terms, cosmologies and, at the Order, substantial communicative interaction, the yoga and Sufi participants are informed by and contribute to social life through participation. Anomie does not occur in these circumstances because the individual engages with collective forces. This finding offers support to scholars who argue for the prospect of communality in commercial settings (e.g. Beaudoin, 2003; Grant, 2000; Miller, 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and scholars who advocate a dialectical relationship between commercialism and religio-spiritual contexts (e.g. Daniels, 2003 McDannell:1995; Reader and Tanabe, 1998; van der Veer, 1997).

Although the Shanti population reinforces the claim that New Agers experience extensive autonomy, an entirely different conception of individuality features at the Sufi Order, one that involves submission to external authorities and adaptation to institutional structures. The contrast shows that championing a singular conception of individualism for applicability to all New Age contexts is imprecise. The way individualism is understood and experienced is not consistent across the whole of New Age culture and these differences are important because they impact on other levels of experience, such as one's understanding of their socio-economic position, the perpetuation of capitalist mores, emotional performances, and the appeal of the teacher.

It is ironic that a multiplicity is typically considered a chief feature of New Ageism (Aldridge, 2000; Sutcliffe, 2003: 207-208; York, 1994: 15), but not when it comes to the feature that is so often said to be the defining trait of the culture. Denying internal diversity by prioritising one idea of the individual, which is often linked to one 'middle class' socio-economic group and assuming these agents are likely to eschew authority in one way, exaggerates the consistency of the situations. By being more explicit about the intersections of individual forces and collective forces across different levels of New Age experience, we see that there are divergent understandings of the individual, disparate socio-economic influences and a range of experiences of power.

It is now clear that this work's findings reinforce some scholarly arguments and highlight anomalies of, and implications for, some other literary themes and approaches. For instance, both field cases support the view that the individual is an important factor in New Age contexts; data from Shanti strengthen the claim that the experience of individualism relates to autonomy; and this yoga population's extensive wealth (and assumably extensive consumption) boosts the notion that consumerism can heighten individualistic experiences. The findings also imply that the individual must be understood in conjunction with an understanding of the collective; that some of the scholarship on the New Age overlooks the function of collectivity; that hierarchy and external authority *can* be significant factors

within a New Age context; and that conceptualisations of 'the individual' can be various.

This consideration of how the findings of this project relate to some recurring literary themes draws this study to a close. Hopefully this research has shown that both the individual and the collective are clearly apparent within the two New Age fields under examination. The study has explored four manifestations of how the individual and the collective correlate with each other and proposed how processes of co-production occur. The investigation has also detailed how those four manifestations of the dynamic show particular orientations at each site; there can be a leaning towards either the individual or the collective, even when both factors are mutually present.

I would like to end with one final thought. Yoga and Sufi dance are 'balancing acts' (Strauss, 2005) in the literal sense: to undertake these physical practices, distributions of weight enable the practitioner to stay steady. However, at the field sites, engagement with these practices involves balancing acts of other kinds as well. Both contexts promote balances of the 'individual-collective' that reveal themselves in numerous ways. Whereas many argue that individualism takes centre stage in the story of the New Age, this study shows two cases that call for a rebalancing of the conversation.

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