Balance, Yoga, Neoliberalism

Alessandra Rosen, *University of California, Los Angeles*

ABSTRACT

Balance is a socially valorized quality in the United States, and yoga a social practice widely claimed to provide it. In this article, I investigate the semiotic logics of this widespread quality and theorize its relationship to the social practice of yoga and to political projects of neoliberalism and second-wave feminism in the United States. Analyzing ethnographic interviews that I conducted with white female yoga instructors in New York City in the summer of 2016, I show that balance is invoked by speakers as a guide to repurpose chronotopically anchored models of yoga to their contemporary lives. Balance provides speakers a sense that the chronotopic contrasts in these models correspond and are compatible with one another. Identifying three linked semiotic relationships upon which balance's logics rely—*contrast*, *correspondence*, and *compatibility*—I argue that speakers' interpretation of these logics is mediated by their social positioning as middle-class white women within a neoliberal political economy in the United States.

Upon entering a yoga class in the United States, one is likely to find a female yoga teacher instructing a classroom of women on a variety of techniques to create an experience of *balance*. Guiding them through a series of poses to be performed on both sides of the body, she may instruct her students to find a sense of harmony in the symmetry of their physical being. During strenuous postures, she may encourage her students to find a sense of ease to balance their effort and strength. She may also encourage her students to

Contact Alessandra Rosen at Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, Haines Hall, 375 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095 (allyrosen15@g.ucla.edu).

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translate this sense of balance to different domains, such as work and family. When the quality of balance is instantiated in a student's body, it is thought, it may then inhere in their personhood, allowing them to apply these techniques to their daily lives. Yet what balance is and how to attain it through yoga are not straightforward questions. My ethnographic work with white female yoga teachers revealed a central paradox: practicing yoga could lead instead to an experience of *unbalance*.

What are the semiotic logics of balance? What are the political frameworks that mediate the interpretation of these logics? How has balance become linked to the practice of yoga, and how might this shape speakers' social positioning, and relation to balance, in the discursive present? In this essay I combine a semiotic analysis of this socially valorized quality, with a theoretical exploration of the relationship of this sign to the social practice of yoga and to political projects of second-wave feminism and neoliberalism in the United States. Examining how balance was invoked in the context of interviews that I conducted with white female yoga instructors in New York City in 2016, I provide an ethnographic discussion of speakers' personal trajectories to show how their orientation about the social practice they use this sign to evaluate is framed by these political discourses and histories.

In the narratives I analyze, balance is called upon to negotiate contrasting models of yoga and modern life, chronotopically framed as a far-away yogic Other and modern cosmopolitan present. Balance serves as an ideal value through which to "target" models of yoga according to speakers' embodiment in a contemporary context (Silverstein 2005). Through the semiotic logics of balance, speakers position tokens of yoga in parallel with tokens of modern life, bringing the two models into an iconic relationship of correspondence. In turn these contrasting models are transformed into compatible parts of a larger whole. Identifying three linked semiotic relationships upon which balance's logics rely—*contrast*, *correspondence*, and *compatibility*—I make the argument that the interpretation of these semiotic logics is mediated by speakers' racialized, gendered, and classed social positioning as middle-class white women within a neoliberal political economy. In invoking balance as an ideal guide to repurpose models of yoga, speakers indicate that the very technique they initially sought as a source of space from bifurcated domains of work and life has become a lifestyle and form of work in itself and, hence, a source of space-time compression, inhibiting their sense of autonomy and self-control. Balance enables speakers a guide to address this paradox: repositioning yoga as a practice and commodifiable technique to be pursued in correspondence with other practices, skills, and activities of their lives under present-day neoliberalism. In turn, the contrasts between yoga and modern life

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are felt to be compatible with one another and to enhance speakers' lives in the present.

Qualisign, Chronotope, Political Economy

In this essay I consider balance to be a socially valorized qualisign. In a Peircean framework, abstract qualities, like *balance*, are felt to be embodied in particular experiences or things as qualia (Chumley and Harkness 2013). Qualia can be conventionalized signs, or qualisigns, that can be instantiated across modalities and signify something in themselves. In this manner, while the property of balance may be felt and identified in a particular material form, such as in one's body, or in one's life, we also feel that it may be abstracted from that material form and signify something in itself (6). In the excerpts I analyze, the qualisign of balance is discursively invoked with the presupposition that it is a positive value according to which speakers should organize their lives. Balance is used by speakers as a guide to negotiate models of yoga in contrast to models of their contemporary lives. These models, or typifications (Gal 2016, 119), are constituted by clusters of signs: events, person-types, experiences, activities, and time-spaces, each of which form tokens of the larger type they index (Agha 2011). As products of contrast, these models are identified by virtue of their organization along "axes of differentiation" (Gal 2016). Speakers invoke the qualisign of balance, and its opposite, unbalance, to evaluate and compare these contrasting models.

In conjuring models of yoga into the present discursive frame, speakers calibrate two time-spaces, or Bakhtinian "chronotopes," into a relation of coevalness and indexical contiguity (Bakhtin 1981; Silverstein 2005; Nakassis 2012). This coeval relation enables speakers a means through which to discursively reflect upon and compare these models of yoga to models of their contemporary lives. Though such discursive processes of reflection and comparison may take different forms, in this analysis, I focus on how speakers attempt to repurpose and reshape models of yoga, "targeting" them to fit a new discursive register that is felt to be balanced (Silverstein 2005; Wirtz 2011). I show that this semiotic process has very much to do with speakers' sense of temporality and historical positioning: the tokens that speakers invoke to index these models are framed in a chronotope that is far away and Other to speakers' contemporary lives. Chronotopically anchored models of yoga are held in spatiotemporal remove from speakers' unmarked modern lives, requiring that they be repurposed in order to be lived in the present. The semiotic logics of balance are harnessed for this purpose in the following ways: balance is invoked to authenticate a model of yoga that is sufficiently targeted to a contemporary context, or it is invoked as a guide through which to repurpose registers of yoga into a new model that follows its logics. As

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my empirical discussion will make clear, balance's logics assimilate contrasting models into a framework of iconicity such that each side of the axis that organizes the models brought under comparison is perceived by speakers as sharing the same relations among their contrastive parts (Gal 2013, 34). Balance is made existentially real when tokens of these chronotopically anchored models—and hence, each side of the axis—are organized into a relationship of correspondence and thereby felt to be compatible with one another.

As a widespread value of the discursive present, balance is interpreted by speakers through a particular framework or perspective (Gal 2013, 34). That is, the salience and seemingly self-evident value of balance, and the necessity for its projection onto these aforementioned social categories, is motivated by cultural knowledge, social positioning, and political projects (Gal 2016, 122). The link between semiosis and political economy is historical in kind (Gal 1989), as shifts in political economy govern conditions of possibility for what gets interpreted as a sign to speakers and, hence, how such signs are deployed by speakers in day-to-day interactions. In this manner, locally meaningful linguistic practice and semiosis enter into a dialectical relationship with conditions of political economy (Inoue 2016 153), as speakers' invocation and interpretation of conventionalized signs, such as balance, both motivate and are motivated by diverse political projects (Graan 2016, 140). This essay attends to this process by considering how speakers' discursive invocation of balance in the present is linked to this sign's relationship to two political projects in the United States, neoliberalism and second-wave feminism. The social category upon which balance gets projected, and also the very social practice around which speakers are organized, yoga, has a particular historical positioning in relation to these projects. How does this organize speakers' gendered, racialized, and classed social positioning in a neoliberal political economy, and what does this tell us about their invocation of balance in the discursive present? To understand this requires an examination of the discursive trajectories of my participants, the political economic context in which they are positioned within, and an explication of the positioning of yoga as a source of relaxation and self-empowerment, accessible to a privileged social domain in the United States.

Neoliberalism, Second-Wave Feminism, Yoga

The excerpts I draw upon in my analysis come from the narratives of Stephanie and Megan, with whom I conducted interviews in the summer of 2016.[1] These

1. All participants in this study are identified by pseudonyms.

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interviews were part of an ethnographic project I undertook with yoga teachers in the New York City area. The majority of my participants in this study were middle-class white women in their early thirties. Indeed, the general make-up of my study reflects the demographics of the yoga industry in the United States since the early 2000s: surveys suggest that of the 16–30 million yoga practitioners, most identify as female, educated, middle-aged, and white (Park et al. 2015).

At the time of my research, I was interested in the unique challenges that yoga instruction posed as a form of work and in how my participants negotiated these challenges through their discursive techniques of instruction. Thus, my questions were framed with the assumption that my participants conceived of themselves solely in terms of their occupational identity as yoga instructors. This would prove not to be the case. Like the majority of my participants, Stephanie and Megan were pursuing yoga teaching alongside other avenues of self-employment: Stephanie was working as a writer and was contributing her work to a start-up textbook company. Teaching yoga once a week at a local yoga studio near her apartment, she considered it a form of part-time employment. Though Megan labeled herself as a full-time instructor, she was also in the process of expanding her own brand as a yoga apparel designer and essential oils marketer. Yoga took a less privileged position in these womens' lives than I had initially thought: whether pursued with the intention of becoming a source of full-time employment, or part-time income, yoga was located within a field of activities, skills, and techniques that these women offered in related industries.

Ilana Gershon and Bonnie Urciuoli have written extensively on the significance of "skills" and "traits" to how workers come to understand themselves within a late capitalist context of neoliberalism (Urciuoli 2008, 2016; Gershon 2011, 2014). Broadly characterized by "deregulation, privatization, and state withdrawal from social provision" (Harvey 2005, 3), the advent of neoliberal political economic policies in the late twentieth century has transformed how individuals in the United States come to view themselves as future workers: people entering the job market are encouraged to develop themselves as a collection of usable skills and traits to be continuously honed and improved (Larner 2000; Urciuoli 2008, 219). That is, rather than formulate the self around a particular occupational identity, one is encouraged to develop diverse facets of one's self to ensure market turnover. Gershon specifies that individuals are ideally to conceive of themselves as their own business, and their relationships to others as potential "business-to-business alliances" (2011, 540). In turn, a neoliberal context shifts how individuals view their labor, and bodies, in time: the body and skill set of the worker under neoliberal logics is an ongoing project to be

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developed through the worker's self-management, according to the employer's demands. What the worker offers to the employer is not only her labor but also her reflexive ability to be an improvable subject (540).

Critics of neoliberalism have theorized this reflexive relationship to the self as "the capacity for self-care" (Brown 2006, 694; Gershon 2011, 539) or the "regulation of the conduct of conduct" (Gordon 1991, 2). This reflexivity is brought upon by a neoliberal logic that figures individuals as rational market actors responsible for their own successes and failures. The regulation of conduct becomes a matter of the individual's desire to govern their own conduct in the spirit of maximizing their own happiness and fulfillment (Rose 1996, 58). In this manner, the very power of neoliberalism can be seen as operating through the practices and calculations through which the individual constructs her unique subjectivity.

Writing in this vein, Miyako Inoue has alerted scholars of language and gender to the subtlety with which neoliberalism is entangled with practices of gender empowerment (2007). She suggests that we consider neoliberal modes of governance as historically emergent modes of agency: taken as a complex ensemble of historical practices, neoliberal modes of governance have been made possible by "diverse social actors, practices and political movements that contributed "practical 'self-help' advice, strategies, practices, warnings, 'information,' and even 'consciousness raising' to the emerging neoliberal public sphere" (85). None reducible to the other, the aforementioned practices, discourses, and movements might be seen as having contributed new "technologies of agency" through which the neoliberal subject comports herself and enacts her individual freedom and autonomy (85). A context of neoliberalism alerts us to the unstable valence of critical empowering practices and rights-based movements, showing how these practices and discourses may have inadvertently participated in the construction of neoliberal frameworks of knowledge.

In the United States, the emancipatory movement of second-wave feminism, with its attendant critical practices and techniques, is widely considered to have converged with neoliberalism's historical emergence (Fraser 2009; McElhinny 2014; Rottenburg 2014; McRobbie 2015). In particular, scholars have highlighted how the political strides accomplished through a second-wave political agenda were harnessed to justify a neoliberal political-economic project at a determinate historical juncture in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Fraser locates the confluence of an emerging second-wave feminist political agenda of "cultural recognition" with a free-market economic agenda that "wanted nothing more than to repress all memory of social egalitarianism" (2009, 109). Not

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uncontroversial, Fraser's argument is that the move of women into the workforce initiated a discourse that emphasized individual achievement in the guise of "the romance of female advancement" (110), thereby obscuring the economic exploitation that made this shift possible. At precisely the moment women were afforded opportunities for personal growth and financial independence, wages and job security were depressed, and the two-earner family was made both the norm and a necessity in a neoliberal economy (110). Others have argued that the movement's professed message of shared female experience had the effect of neglecting the important differences in women's experience of oppression, such that the women primarily addressed in the movement's campaigns for work equality were white and middle class (Frankenburg 1993; Hooks 2000; Wilkes 2015, 28).

The significance of this history for my discussion lies in how the political strides of this critical emancipatory movement, and their convergence with neoliberal political economic policies, "served as the ground for the appearance of neoliberal techniques of the self" (Inoue 2007, 81): my interest is in the ascendancy of balance as a valorized state for middle-class white women in the United States and in the positioning of yoga as a technique of the self through which to attain it. In this manner, the political strides made in workplace gender equality, articulated by a second-wave feminist agenda, might be seen as having set the semiotic grounds for the circulation of an organizing neoliberal discourse of "work-life balance." Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*, for instance, assures women in the United States that balance is possible so long as they manage to climb the corporate latter and excel in their homemaking (2013). In what has been criticized as a hallmark of "neoliberal feminism" (Rottenburg 2014; McRobbie 2015), *Lean In* invokes balance as an imperative toward professionalization: once women overcome the psychological obstacles that prevent them from "leaning in" to their careers, they will be better positioned to attain this highly valued quality between their home and work lives (Rottenburg 2014, 428).

Work-life balance discourses such as Sandberg's have been critiqued for their ideological power to depoliticize persistent gender inequality (Parreñas 2009; Rottenburg 2014; McRobbie 2015; Freeman 2016). In placing the onus of responsibility on the individual woman to strike a balance between purportedly autonomous spheres of "work" and "life" through techniques of self-care and neoliberal principles of meritocracy, these discourses obscure the sociopolitical conditions that create a lack of balance in the first place. The pervasiveness of this discourse might rather be attributed to the convergence of neoliberal economic policies with strides in women's equal representation in the workforce. As a result both of reductions in social welfare programs and in government

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funding and of the inadequate response of men to the increase of women in the labor force, women in the United States share the "double burden" of a greater workload both in and outside the home (Marchand and Runyan 2000; Parreñas 2009, 7). This double burden reproduces a neoliberal political economic structure divided along gendered, racialized, and classed lines: in the absence of paid maternity leave and government subsidized child care, privileged white women increasingly rely upon the labor of migrant women of color to compensate for housework and child care in their pursuit of the professional domain (Stasiulus and Bakan 1997). The help of nannies and caretakers is also critical to the inculcation of a bourgeois female body, enabling the necessary time to invest in leisure, fitness, and recreational pursuits (Freeman 2016).

Yoga plays an important role in this ensemble of activities, as a commoditized "technique of the self" (Godrej 2017) primarily disseminated to an audience of middle-class white women in the United States (Singleton 2010; Biswas 2012; Park et al. 2015). The yoga boom of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s saw the spread of both private and corporate yoga studios the United States, as well as the rise of a myriad of yoga publications and a dizzying array of yoga styles for the consumer to choose from (Jain 2016; Godrej 2017). Yoga's takeoff might also be considered part of the rise of gendered therapeutic services, such as beauty salons, spas, and leisure centers, that stake out the body's appearance and psychological comfort as a profit-making venue (Kang 2010). In contemporary marketing discourses, these services often circulate under the metalinguistic label of "self-care" (Michaeli 2017): directed to consuming subjects with the socioeconomic privilege and time necessary to invest in them, techniques of self-care may be considered an avenue for privileged women to attain work-life balance through relaxation, empowerment and regeneration. As such, yoga offers the practitioner time out from the stress of attending to bifurcated domains of work and life (Kern 2011). An important part of its value is its frame as a haven of solace and relaxation located in remove—and thus in contrast from—the daily stresses of life (De Michelis 2004).

I highlight this political economic context as it frames my participants' personal trajectories and discursive evaluations of yoga—including their invocation of balance—as narrated in our interviews. Organized about this shared social practice, Stephanie and Megan were located within the aforementioned "social domain" acquainted with its dissemination, of middle-class white female practitioners (Agha 2007). There was considerable overlap in these womens' discursive trajectories: as young girls, both were introduced to yoga by their mothers and through their engagement with gendered physical activities of similarity, such as ballet. Stephanie grew up watching her mother, a certified yoga instructor,

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practice and teach yoga. Megan began practicing yoga through her mother's VHS cassettes. Both women moved to New York City to pursue degrees in higher education and credited the stress of its urban environment as a determining factor in their decision to take up yoga as both practice and occupation. Stephanie reflected upon the significance of yoga in providing her a "safe space" during her college years, a period in her life that was both intellectually and physically stressful. Megan similarly recalled her experience of finding solace from the stress of work in the relaxed and inclusive atmosphere of the yoga studio where she practiced. Framed in their narratives as a therapeutic space of remove, yoga afforded both of these women a sense of bodily acceptance and self-empowerment.

The striking parallelism of these womens' trajectories and their recurring discursive evaluations of yoga is evidence of their racialized, gendered, and classed social positioning as it is organized in and through this practice and neoliberal political economy (Agha 2007). In a sense, these women inherited yoga through the particular gendered and classed habitus of their mothers. Their mutual engagement with childhood activities such as dance lessons—particularly ballet—suggests the entrainment of a bourgeois feminine habitus. Such activities require forms of access—differentially distributed along lines of race, class, and gender—that enabled these womens' mobility and approximation of a bourgeois white female body (Skeggs 2004; Agha 2007). Their embodiment was also discursively narrated through the value they attributed to contours of space: both women sought relief from the stress of urban life through a mode of therapeutic consumption and leisure.

As I will show in my analysis, the very technique that these women sought as a relief proved itself to be a source of space compression. That is, when yoga became their primary ethical practice and source of income, it defied its purpose in these womens' lives as a contained space of comfort and remove. Balance provided these women a measure through which to repurpose this practice according to their own values, that is, to make yoga more alike their lives in the present. Specifically, balance afforded a discursive "means-end calculus" (Gershon 2011) through which they could calibrate different domains of their lives as entrepreneurs: work, yoga, and interpersonal relationships. In this sense, I believe, this quality was inextricably bound up with these womens' individual projects of "self-mastery" as both workers and selves (Inoue 2007).

Analysis: Balance, Yoga, Life

Balance was invoked in a particular interactive context in which my questions as interviewer shaped the narratives that were elicited. In foregrounding their work as yoga teachers, my questions to Stephanie and Megan engendered reflexive

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commentary regarding their sense of legitimacy as both teachers and practitioners of yoga. My questions thus provoked a discursive reckoning with their ideals of what yoga was—how it should be practiced, taught, and lived—and an evaluation of the extent to which they were honoring these ideals in their own lives. In this manner, participants conjured models of yoga—or "typifications"—into the discursive frame and reflected upon their associated social positioning (Silverstein 2005; Gal 2016). At this discursive nexus that saw the meeting point of their contemporary lives with their ideas of a yoga lifestyle, participants invoked the qualisign of balance.

I begin my analysis with an examination of excerpts from Stephanie's narrative. At this point in our interview, Stephanie was discussing specific yoga teachers whom she admired. She suggested that the best yoga teachers seemed to "live and breathe yoga in their lives." Confessing that she felt she did not live up to her own ideal, she admitted that yoga remained isolated "in a compartment" within her life:

Excerpt 1

1	=yeah. It's? [[yoga]] in? a compartment?
2	It's like a su?-
3	I feel in some ways that it supplements my life. um. and
4	I have these other priorities. You know?
5	Like writing is really my main priority? And then
6	I have a job, which is also writing based. And then
7	I have my home life, And my?- ya know.
8	Immediate relationships,
9	All of these things are fed and supported by my yoga practice.
10	You know, even when I've been fully submerged,
11	Like doing these yoga trainings where. Ya know.
12	One month of yoga all day or whatever?
13	It doesn't feel like my full path.
14	Like I do feel like there's something?
15	I'm not like a hundred percent yogi.
16	((laughter)) um.
17	But I do think there's a version in which it takes up more.
18	You know it's more of my life. And I'm trying?-
19	I'm still trying to find the perfect balance.

In this excerpt, Stephanie narrates two contrasting models of yoga—metalinguistically labeled as "versions" in line 17—conjuring them into an envelope of comparison in the narrating present. These two versions are spatiotemporally anchored in the discursive present (lines 1–9), and the discursive past (lines 10–19). Both models are experientially conceived of through contrasting metaphors of time and space: in version 1, Stephanie confesses that yoga remains isolated within a "compartment" in her life. To illustrate this, she structures her

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life in terms of separate activities, relationships, and roles. These categories of experience presuppose specific space-time anchorings, and are configured within a hierarchical indexical structure of value. At the top of this hierarchy is the activity of writing, then Stephanie's job, her home life, and her personal relationships. Yoga is positioned at the bottom of this hierarchical structure as a "support" and "supplement" to these separate activities.

In lines 10–15, Stephanie invokes a contrasting experience as a point of comparison, recalling her participation in yoga teacher trainings. The contrasts between the two events center upon the spatiotemporal anchoring of yoga in relation to Stephanie's self and life: where in the prior event yoga is metaphorically contained within a "compartment," in the second event yoga exceeds this spatiotemporal container, entailing a sense of being "fully submerged." The deictics in lines 12–13 clarify this spatiotemporal contrast: in this experience yoga lasts "all day," preventing Stephanie from following her "full path." In line 15, Stephanie invokes the figure of a "yogi" to distance herself from the first model of yoga. As a "figure of personhood" (Agha 2005), the "yogi" carries spiritual and religious undertones. Conjuring images of Hindu religiosity into the discursive present, this figure entails a chronotopic contrast between a modern present and religious Other. In the final lines of the excerpt Stephanie reflects upon both models of contrast, shifting to the discursive present in her invocation of a third "version," where yoga takes up "more" space-time in her life. Here the qualisign of balance is invoked as an ideal point of orientation for Stephanie in her discursive reckoning with two chronotopically anchored registers of yoga, serving as a guide through which to target the two models into a third "version" that is felt to have "perfect balance."

Stephanie also applied the qualisign of balance *within* this axis, using it as a logical route through which to authenticate a model of yoga chronotopically anchored within the modern present. That is, balance was used here to authenticate a version of yoga that was sufficiently targeted according to a contemporary context. Here iconic and indexical logics of similarity and contiguity work to discursively align "Version 1" and "Version 2" with the metaphorical labels of yoga as a "path," and yoga as an "end."

Excerpt 2

30	The thing I love about yoga?
31	Is that it's a way. Ya know?
32	It's like, it's?- it's not?
33	It doesn't seem like an end?
34	In and of itself.
35	It's not a religion. Ya know?

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Excerpt 2 (*Continued*)

36 It's a path that you can follow that?
37 Ya know. Supports your?— Who you are.
38 Um. and so the idea? That you just kind of,
39 Be- ya know. dedicate yourself to it?
40 As though you are,
41 A monk? Or something. I don't know.
42 That's not how i?- I've had moments. As I say.
43 From my trainings? Or whatever,
44 Where I've really given myself over to it all the way.
45 And? I've taken a lot out of that?
46 But I have felt unbalanced.

In this excerpt, the qualisign of balance is presupposed through the invocation of its qualic opposite, "unbalance." These qualitative metaphors are used to differentiate between two registers of yoga: yoga as a "path," and yoga as an "end." The differing value attributed to these qualitative contrasts works to legitimize one register over the other. That is, when balance is assigned within the axis, its widespread positive valorization works to authenticate one register and reject the other. Lines 30–37 lead us through this chain of authentication: speaking through the inclusive pronominal *you*, Stephanie stakes definitive claims as to what yoga is and what yoga is not. These claims to authenticity are experientially conceived of through metaphors of space: yoga is "a way"; yoga is not "an end." Indexical entailment links these contrastive spatial metaphors to differing registers of conduct: yoga as "a way" is yoga as "a path," which the self can choose to follow and be "supported" by. Yoga as an "end" is yoga as a "religion," which requires the "dedication" of the self. Stephanie rejects the latter: because yoga is *not* a religion, but is rather a "path" that supports who the self is, the need to dedicate oneself to yoga is preposterous. The contrast between these models of yoga inheres in the differential attribution of agency to the self, or yoga, respectively. On one side, yoga supports who the self "is"; on the other side, the self surrenders to yoga. The chronotopic metaphor in line 41 does further discursive work to make this contrast existentially real: the figure of a "monk" is metaphorically applied to both make sense of and to revoke the side of the axis that requires self-devotion. Note that this chronotope iconically aligns with the figure of the "yogi," indexically linked to version 2 in the prior excerpt.

In lines 42–44, Stephanie recalls a biographical event experientially conceived of through metaphors of space-time: in these "moments" of surrender, Stephanie gave her self to yoga "all the way." Lines 45–46 lead us through a chain of cause and effect: while Stephanie purportedly "took a lot out of" this experience,

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it registered a feeling of "unbalance." Presupposing indexicality conjures the qualisign of balance into this discursive event: consistent with the contrastive iconic logics of the narrated axis of differentiation, we can infer that the qualisign of balance is felt when the self conceives of yoga as a "path." That is, parallel semiotic logics on each side of the axis entail the attribution of the iconic opposite of unbalance as a causal outcome of the opposing experience of yoga. As shown in the prior excerpt, when yoga is a "path," it can be lived alongside practices of Stephanie's modern life. Balance authenticates a model of Stephanie's life that positions tokens of yoga as an "end" and tokens of her modern life in correspondence with one another.

The following excerpts from Megan's narrative show a similar semiotic pattern: two models are brought under comparison, formulating chronotopes of a modern present and yogic Other. Here the qualisign of balance is applied to this axis as a normative ideal through which to interpret and evaluate these contrasts. Through its logics, a model of yoga is targeted into a new model that incorporates tokens of this type, in parallel positioning, with tokens of the modern present. Where Stephanie delineates her life in terms of "versions," Megan differentiates between a "yoga lifestyle" and a "New Yorker lifestyle," conjuring her experiences of the two into an atemporal envelope of comparison in the narrating present:

Excerpt 3

Living?-I mean? Living a yoga lifestyle.
  Like a pure? Yogic lifestyle?
Is much different than a New Yorker lifestyle.
Definitely different.
Cuz yoga lifestyle is like
Wake up at sunrise,
  Meditate,
Do your pranayama,
Do your practice,
  Eat light,
Ya know. Dedi?-like?
Full on? all day?
You're like? Studying scriptures?
And? Ya know. You teach.
And you go ta bed at a decent hour-ya know.
You meditate before bed.
And then you go to bed at a decent hour?
And. Ya know.
Some will be like?-eat a vegan?-like?-
Meal? ya know. Always be vegan?
And like. Everything's fresh? And organic?
And it's? like?

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In this excerpt, two models are brought under an atemporal envelope of comparison: the yoga lifestyle, and the New Yorker lifestyle. A "pure" yoga lifestyle is differentiated from a New Yorker lifestyle through the assignment of specific practices (meditation, pranayama, and yoga practice), activities (waking up, eating, studying scriptures, teaching, and sleep), and qualities (lightness, purity, freshness, organic[ness], and veganism). The poetic parallelism of deictics across the excerpt anchors these practices in specific times and locations: waking up occurs at Sunrise, followed by pranayama, yoga practice, and eating; meditation occurs before sleep, which occurs at a "decent hour." These practices coalesce into an organizational temporal arrangement of a "day." Their routinized structure creates a distinct chronotopic contrast: the yoga lifestyle takes place in an isolated frame of space-time from the New Yorker lifestyle. This chronotope is made discursively real through the activities invoked, "meditation," "pranayama," and "studying scriptures," which carry spiritual and religious associations. We can note a similarity in the spatiotemporal anchoring of this transcript to Stephanie's narration of "version 2" of her experience of yoga: in both excerpts, yoga lasts "all day."

The final line of the excerpt shifts to the narrating present, prompting a moment of reflexivity:[2]

23	Uh, I did that for?
24	I?-I did that the best that I could.
25	Ta my ability.
26	For? Like a year and a half? Maybe?
27	When I was in D's five hundred I was like very?-
28	Cuz it was part of the requirements.
29	And I was like.
30	And I mean? For me?
31	It was? awesome? Like?
32	My body never? Like felt?-
33	my body felt amazing? And all this stuff. But?
34	At the same time?
35	I remember? Ya know,
36	Friends being like.
37	Hey! We're going out ta eat!
38	Like come join us!
39	And I'd be like?
40	I can't! it's past eight o'clock.
41	([laughter])
42	Ya know? And I was like.

2. For concerns of privacy, I have shortened the name that Megan references in her transcript to its first initial. The original transcript contains the full name of the yoga instructor who runs the 500 Hour Yoga Teacher Training program that Megan attended.

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43 Doing things like that all the time!
44 Being like? I can't! becuz?
45 Like i?-I'd rather go-like i?-
46 I really got sucked in! Ta this thing.
47 I was like? No I'd much rather meditate?
48 And chant all night? Then? go out.
49 Becuz going out is very toxic. And—
50 And I was just like?
51 In this? whole? Bubble?
52 And like?
53 Sure? Some of that's true!
54 But I think with a lotta things?
55 It's like you have ta find balance!

In lines 23–28 Megan locates herself in the yoga lifestyle, evaluating the extent to which she successfully lived it in her experience of a 500 Hour Yoga Teacher Training program. Lines 30–40 show a complex indexical chain of causation: the "yoga lifestyle" is framed as a causal effect of the yoga teacher training program—attributed as "one of the requirements." While it registers "amazing" effects on Megan's body, it entails negative effects on her social life. Through iconic logics of similarity, two voices are inscribed as emblems of the two contrasting lifestyles and positioned in confrontation with one another: Megan's "friends," who urge her to go out to eat, and Megan herself, who refuses the invitation because it is "past eight o'clock" (her "decent" bedtime, a requirement of the yoga lifestyle). The quoted speech in lines 44–45 achieves a Bakhtinian "double-voicing" (1981), at once locating Megan within the pure yoga lifestyle through the preferences she invokes, as it ironically feigns these very preferences through exaggeration.

Note the emergent spatiotemporal contrast between the two lifestyles here: where the New Yorker lifestyle is unscheduled, spontaneous, and social—illustrated here through the spatial metaphor of "going out"—the yoga lifestyle is socially isolated, regimented according to temporally anchored practices that require self-discipline to adhere to. Note as well the chronotopic anchoring of the clashing lifestyles in lines 46–51: here Megan invokes the spatiotemporal metaphor of feeling "sucked in to this thing," specified in line 51 as a "bubble," to describe the experience of the yoga lifestyle. Within this "bubble" are the authenticated practices of the yoga lifestyle, "meditation" and "chanting," that are situated in isolation from the activities and qualities of the modern New Yorker lifestyle: "going out" and "toxicity." It is only through the contrast between lifestyles—their differing practices, activities, and qualities—that a sense of entrapment within one lifestyle becomes existentially perceivable. The final lines of the excerpt invoke the qualisign of balance as a point of navigation away

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from the qualitative experience of the yoga lifestyle. Here balance is applied to this axis of differentiation as an ideal guide through which to target the yoga lifestyle to a contemporary context, by positioning tokens of this type in parallel with tokens of the New Yorker lifestyle. With the progression of her narrative, Megan illustrated this semiotic logic:

Excerpt 4

75 It's almost like you're separating yourself,
76 From all these other people.
77 And- and then as a teacher,
78 Especially a teacher in New York,
79 How can you really relate to people.
80 Like? If you don't even have contact with them,
81 How can you relate ta them?
82 So now it's like.
83 I'll go out with my friends?
84 I love going out dancing?
85 And it's like? For me? I just like find like.
86 It's like? Even I said today!
87 It's like I went out last night with my friends?
88 We just went dancing? Had a great time?
89 But ya know it's a Sunday night?
90 I had to teach at six thirty,
91 Did a yoga nidra when I got home,
92 ((laughter)) thi(h)s i(h)s li(h)ke? I guess how I find?
93 It's really balance at extremes.
94 And I'm not saying this is the way to live. At all.
95 Uh? but ya know?
96 Did a yoga nidra.
97 Still did my essential oils foot rubs before I went ta bed?

In this excerpt, the yoga lifestyle is framed as inhibiting a distinctly interpersonal and social sort of value. In lines 77–78, this value is predicated as a necessary attribute for a distinct occupational class: yoga teachers, "especially" those who live in New York City. Speaking through the inclusive pronominal *you*, Megan poses the question, "if you don't have contact with [people], how can you relate to them"? Note here the poetic repetition of lines 79 and 81; this has the effect of emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relations for yoga teachers. Presupposing indexicality renders the deictics "people" and "them" as Megan's potential yoga students—and thus, her potential clients. We can infer two logical outcomes of exclusively following the yoga lifestyle: in inhibiting one from having contact with other people, the yoga lifestyle inhibits one from forming relationships with potential students, and/or inhibits one from developing one's interpersonal skills, which translates to one's yoga teaching. We can further infer that both scenarios potentially inhibit one from garnering more students.

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The narrated event in lines 82–97 provides a solution to this conundrum, targeting the yoga lifestyle through the semiotics of balance, such that it can be lived alongside tokens of the new Yorker lifestyle. This event can be separated according to three spatiotemporal locations: night time, or "Sunday night," when Megan "goes out dancing" with her friends; home, when she does "essential oil foot rubs" and a "yoga nidra" and sleeps; and the morning—specifically, 6:30 a.m.—when Megan teaches a yoga class. Each of these activities produce specific states of value that are felt in different domains of Megan's life and self: dancing entails "a great time" in her social life, while a "yoga nidra" and "essential oil foot rubs" register positive effects on her body. Recall that both of these domains were indexically linked to the contrasting registers in the prior excerpt: when Megan lived a "pure yoga lifestyle," her body felt "amazing," at the expense of the interpersonal relations she established in her New Yorker lifestyle. On the other hand, the New Yorker lifestyle was felt to produce "toxicity" in the body. Balance becomes existentially real in this event through the implementation of activities from each contrasting lifestyle, along with the qualities and states these activities produce. These activities are evenly interspersed within a spatiotemporal frame of a day: night, early dawn, and morning. This contrastive spatiotemporal equilibrium, and the causal effects it registers on her body and self, enables Megan to interpret the qualitative experience of this model as a sign of balance—and then to interpret the qualisign itself as being in a state of "extremes." It seems that as long as a state of equilibrium is achieved between the two contrasting lifestyles, all within a specific spatiotemporal parameter, the relative intensity of the activities is trivial. The "toxicity" of the New Yorker lifestyle can be balanced with the "purity" and "amazing" effects that the yoga lifestyle registers on Megan's body. The isolation and regimentation of the yoga lifestyle can be balanced with the spontaneity and sociality of the New Yorker lifestyle. What is required is that the Yoga lifestyle be brought into an iconic relation of correspondence with the New Yorker lifestyle, by implementing tokens of each into a single model.

Semiotic Logics of Balance: Contrast, Correspondence, Compatibility

In these excerpts two contrasting models are delineated. Chronotopically framed as a modern present and far-away yogic Other, these models are metadiscursively specified by speakers as "version 1" (or yoga as a "path") and "version 2" (or yoga as an "end"), and the "New Yorker lifestyle" and "yoga lifestyle," respectively. These contrasting models formulate axes of differentiation. Each side of the axes is assigned different practices, places, and roles, linked by indexicality. Parallel indexicalities create the perception that each side shares the same relations

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among their parts, thereby transforming these indexical relations to iconic relations of similarity (Gal 2013, 34). The qualisign of balance gets applied to these axes at different scales: in some instances, it is used to authenticate the model that it is assigned to. In these cases, balance appears both the cause and effect of a model that is sufficiently targeted according to a contemporary context. In other instances, balance is invoked as a discursive ideal through which to target chronotopically anchored registers of yoga into the discursive present.

At either scale, balance is felt when speakers implement diverse elements of their lives into a single model. In Stephanie's narrative, "version 1," or yoga as "a path," is authenticated and assimilated into the framework of balance because it incorporates elements of her yoga practice with other facets of her life—her writing, home life, relationships, and work. In Megan's narrative, balance entails the creation of a third model that implements discrete activities and qualities of the yoga lifestyle alongside activities of the New Yorker lifestyle. in this sense, elements of each side of the axis, perceived to be in an iconic position of correspondence, are dialectically incorporated into a larger whole. We can note how this works through semiotic logics of similarity and contrast: speakers first identify dissimilarities—that is, contrasts—between signs, structuring them into an axis of differentiation. This involves disaligning with the model that they evaluate: through chronotopic contrasts, speakers indicate that models of yoga are unlike their modern lives. Speakers then identify similarities in these contrasts, such that the contrasts in these signs are felt to correspond with one another. Balance enables speakers to incorporate aspects of both poles of differentiation, so long as they are organized in parallel with one another and felt to be in equilibrium. In incorporating aspects of yoga alongside aspects of modern life, these models are felt to be more like one another. In this manner, balance acknowledges difference but emphasizes the compatibility of these differences as they are felt to enhance the lives of speakers.

To be sure, the seeming self-evidence of these semiotic logics is motivated in part by a neoliberal agency of self-control and time-management. As Gershon has illustrated, under a sociopolitical context of neoliberalism, metaphors of what it means to own oneself emphasize the reflexive management of the self as if one is a business made up of a collection of diverse skills and traits, to be continually enhanced and developed (2011, 2014). The laboring body and self are no longer rented by an employer for set hours each day; rather, the body and self are ongoing projects to be developed. The boundaries between work and life are not governed by an employer but are to be managed by the individual. And, insofar as this management can enhance one's potential value on the

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market, then time "off the clock" is always potential time that can be used for self-investment. Time management was an important reality for both of these women at the time of our interviews: neither reliant on a single yoga studio for employment, both were in the practice of fashioning their own teaching schedules, while also envisioning other arenas to develop for their personal businesses as writers or wellness entrepreneurs. Here balance provided an internal "means-end calculus" (Gershon 2011) through which to interpret and manage contrasting events and experiences. It also enabled speakers a semiotic logic through which to differentiate between spatiotemporal domains and, hence, control and manage their time through logics of contrast.

In the narratives, this self-time management is reflected through the abundance of contrastive space-time metaphors: yoga is in a "compartment," or it is the metaphorical air that one breathes, entailing a sense of being "fully submerged" and "sucked into a bubble." Yoga is a "path" that supports an autonomous self, or yoga is an "end" to which the self surrenders. The particular qualitative experiences these models register either facilitate or inhibit qualitative states, experiences, and attributes of positive value within a contemporary context. In Stephanie's excerpt, yoga as an "end" entails the compression of space-time, requiring that she submit herself to yoga at the expense of following her "full path" and developing other domains and facets of her life and self. For Megan, the "yoga lifestyle" entails space-time compression that inhibits a distinctly social and interpersonal sort of value, not only obstructing an important facet of Megan's self and life but also impeding her from garnering potential yoga students and, thus, potential business clients. The qualisign of balance entails the expansion of speakers' space-time through the implementation of different sides of the axis. That is, balance enables these women to organize tokens of each contrasting model in correspondence with one another. Rather than devote one's self to the yoga lifestyle—and, hence, one side of this axis—one may transform these otherwise disparate models into compatible parts of a new model.

Speakers' invocation of balance as a seemingly self-evident value of the present is also motivated by their relationship to yoga and, hence, by their social positioning in a neoliberal political economy. Megan's emphasis on the value of keeping herself "relate-able" to her students indexes this historical relationship and positioning: yoga instruction may be considered part of a range of therapeutic services in the wellness niche—such as beauty work, massage, and essential oils—that stake out the body, its appearance, and comfort as a profit-making venue (Kang 2010). Yoga instructors guide students through a series of postures meant to increase the body's health, fitness, and aesthetic appeal, while also

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providing a sense of relaxation, interpersonal connection and care. Given that the success of a yoga instructor depends on her gaining a regular following in her classes, it is also in the teacher's best interests to ensure that a student's desire for comfort and safety is satisfied in her class.

Indeed, both of these women narrated the significance of finding respite in the feeling of safety provided by the yoga studios they attended as students, suggesting that this sense of comfort was an important motivator in their decision to pursue yoga. Their discursive evaluations reflexively point to the gendered, racialized, and classed specificities of their social positioning, as organized in and through this practice and political economy. Framed as a therapeutic space of remove through which to work upon and care for the self (Kern 2011), yoga may be considered one of a cluster of techniques and services marketed to privileged white female consuming subjects in their pursuit of stress-relief from the "double burden" of work and life (Parreñas 2009). I take these narratives as evidence of my participants negotiating what happens when the practice they initially sought for this very purpose, as a space of comfort—and thus contrast—from the stress of daily life, becomes their primary ethical practice and lifestyle. In turn, yoga itself becomes a source of space-time compression: entailing a sense of being controlled. Balance structures a sense of comfort and safety by organizing contrasting signs into a parallel structure, such that differences are felt to be compatible with one another through their iconic correspondence. This semiotic structure also contains difference in time and place by deictically anchoring contrastive practices and activities, thereby allowing speakers to preserve their individual freedom and self-autonomy, as they pursue tokens of these models on their own terms.

To the extent that difference is contained in space and time, framed as an asset of one's personal identity, it may be harnessed by individuals to engage with the market to their advantage, in the spirit of "diversity" (Gershon 2011; Ahmed 2012; Shankar 2015; Inoue 2016). In her analysis of neoliberal diversity discourses, Urciuoli writes that "'diverse' social identities only take on full neoliberal value when they are seen as exemplifications of good worker qualities, implemented as means to productive outcomes" (2016, 31). In this manner, any capacity for action that gives individuals an edge in the market—whether conceived as an aspect of social identity or form of knowledge, becomes a "skill." Urciuoli specifies that "marked skills"—those that contrast with the imagined norm—may be particularly valued for their capacity to increase a company's reach (30). However, marked skills are valued only to the extent that they are cast as neatly bounded, definable identities. A context of neoliberalism transforms

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the "messiness" and contingency of language and identity into a "tidied up" package of diversity (31).

Similarly, the chronotopically anchored models of yoga that speakers discursively reflect upon are of positive value only when they can be defined and controlled in time and place and incorporated alongside practices of their contemporary lives. In the excerpts analyzed, this difference is felt to get out of hand: when Stephanie recalls her experience of feeling unbalanced, for instance, she narrates an experience of losing her self-control to a religious Other. This experience entails an ethical transformation such that she becomes what she is not: a "monk," or "yogi." For Megan, unbalance entails an experience of her own containment: in devoting herself to one side of the axis, she finds herself "sucked into a bubble." She embodies the values, tastes, and practices of the yoga lifestyle to the extent that she loses her own judgment, tastes, and pleasure. For both of these women, unbalance appears indexical cause and effect of losing one's self-control and self-autonomy or, put more simply, of being controlled.

Critics of neoliberalism have remarked upon the contradictory impulses of participating in society as both out-of-control consumer and self-controlled subject (Guthman and DuPois 2006). Precisely the techniques that afford the neoliberal subject a means of self-control may be felt to induce a sense of being out-of-control—or in this case, of being controlled by an Other. As an ethical practice and lifestyle, yoga provides a reflexive measure and guide for these women to assess their individual value and fashion their lives; but it also appears an external control. The registers that speakers reflect upon constitute lifestyles in themselves: they come with attendant norms, figures of personhood, and activities to be pursued in time and place (Agha 2011); in turn, they are interpreted as potentially—and paradoxically—in the way of these womens' pursuit of self-autonomy and individual fashioning. In targeting the yoga lifestyle through the logics of balance, speakers place yoga in a field of other activities, such that its value both as a source of spatiotemporal remove and as commodifiable asset can be felt in contrast to other activities and their attendant space-time. Once contained in time and place, yoga is felt to be compatible with the domain it contrasts with. Balance's relation of correspondence neutralizes the positive and negative valence attributed to these differences by emphasizing their iconic parallel structure.

Conclusion

In this essay I have discussed the semiotic logics of balance, a culturally valorized qualisign in the United States that the social practice of yoga is widely

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claimed to provide. I have shown that balance's logics rely upon three linked semiotic relationships of *contrast*, *correspondence*, and *compatibility*, such that contrasts between signs are delineated and subsequently assimilated into a framework of iconicity. In this manner, speakers first identify differences, structuring contrasting signs into an axis of differentiation. These differences are felt by speakers to correspond in their parallel structure. In turn, the contrasts that balance negotiates are felt to be compatible with one another: they are transformed into congruent parts of the whole in which they are embodied. I have explored how these semiotic logics were invoked by informants in the interactive context of ethnographic interviews I conducted with yoga instructors working in New York City. In these interviews, balance provided a guide for speakers to target chronotopically anchored models of yoga into models that were felt to be sustainable in their contemporary lives. This entailed implementing tokens of these models—such as their "yoga practice," "essential oil foot rubs," and "yoga nidra"—in parallel with tokens of their contemporary lives, thereby positioning the two into an iconic relation of correspondence.

As a socially valorized qualisign, balance is mediated by a particular framework or perspective and hence is motivated by cultural knowledge, social positioning and political project (Gal 2016). In this essay I have explored how the invocation of this sign in the discursive present is linked to its relationship to two political projects in the United States: neoliberalism and second-wave feminism. Examining the positioning of yoga in relation to these projects, I have considered how balance is applied to this social practice by speakers in the present. In the act of reflecting upon their ideals of what yoga is and how it should be practiced, speakers discursively evaluate their associated positioning in the narrating present, thereby reflexively pointing to their racialized, classed, and gendered social positioning as middle-class white women within a neoliberal political economy. These women came to yoga for the very values it is claimed to provide in the wellness market, for a privileged social domain of which they are a part—stress relief, comfort, and space. But at the time of our interviews, yoga was positioned as their work and lifestyle and, hence, had itself become a source of discomfort and space-time compression, thereby inhibiting speakers' sense of autonomy and individual freedom. Balance enabled these women a logic to reposition yoga as a commodifiable technique and practice, to be pursued on their own terms alongside other skills and activities of their lives. Once organized into a parallel structure of correspondence, tokens of yoga and modern life were transformed into compatible parts of a new model and were thereby felt to enhance speakers' lives in the present.

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