CHAPTER 2

Remembering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: The Forgotten Lineage of Integral Yoga

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First-time visitors to the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry might well have a difficult time locating it. While they would reasonably assume that the ashram of one of the most influential figures of twentieth-century India would be easily found, it is quite possible, particularly if they are visiting in the hot season when temperatures reach 40 degrees Celsius and the numbers of visitors drop, that they could walk straight past the side or back of the unassuming ashram building. As their search continues, they will be relieved to come upon a twelve-foot bronze statue; here he is, they sigh; I must be close. It will be a shock, then, to discover that the figure is not Sri Aurobindo, but his contemporary, Mohandas Gandhi. This gives one cause to wonder: there is little doubt that Aurobindo's forty-year residency here has firmly planted the former French seaside colony of Pondicherry on the scholastic and devotional map, so where *exactly* is he?

This geographical predicament functions, moreover, as a metaphor of a neglect or amnesia of Aurobindo in modern yoga scholarship. In studies of modern yoga, as with a first visit to Pondicherry, one gets the sense that Aurobindo is somehow both everywhere yet nowhere quite specifically to be found. On one hand, a number of the main studies credit him with playing a major role in the formation of modern yoga. Joseph Alter (2004), for example, acknowledges Aurobindo and Vivekananda as the "two chief architects" of the Indian yoga renaissance and notes that there is little doubt that they defined the broad intellectual context within which it occurred (pp. 26–28). On the

other, however, whereas Vivekananda appears as the protagonist of Elizabeth De Michelis's (2004) seminal study of modern yoga, Aurobindo curiously does not even merit a reference in her text. Similarly, while Mark Singleton (2010) labels Aurobindo as "the most famous freedom-fighting yogi" within the physical culture movement that determinatively shaped transnational yoga, he gives few details and only glances at Aurobindo in his pre-guru revolutionary nationalist days (p. 104).

Given the centrality of Aurobindo in the yoga renaissance, his absence from studies on modern yoga is indeed, as Sarah Strauss (2008) puts it, "conspicuous" (p. 72). A similar situation pertains to his status in practitioner circles; well-known scholar-practitioner George Feuerstein (1998) raves that Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is "the single most impressive attempt to reformulate Yoga for our modern needs and abilities" yet also concedes that it is not as widely known amongst contemporary Western practitioners as it deserves to be (p. 73).

This chapter will attempt to rectify the neglect of Aurobindo by both fleshing out his role as a guru in the modern yoga renaissance and recovering some of the concealed but nonetheless important impacts of Aurobindo on the contemporary yoga climate. First, we will offer an outline of the life and work of Aurobindo, as it pertains to his role in the formation of modern yoga. Second, we will reflect on the status of physical culture and *haṭhayoga* in Aurobindo's system of Integral Yoga. Third, we will track the continuing presence of Aurobindo on the contemporary yoga scene through uncovering what we are identifying as *close* and *creative* lineages. Finally, we will reflect on why Aurobindo has been somewhat forgotten and what can be gained through recovering Integral Yoga for a larger audience.

Before proceeding, however, a word on definition is necessary. We are using *Modern Yoga* in a broad sense as an umbrella term to cover the different iterations of yoga provisionally mapped out by De Michelis (2004) and not, as it is now commonly used, as synonymous with *haṭhayoga*. In doing so, we will show that although it is undeniable that the history of *haṭhayoga* "slips past" Aurobindo (Alter, 2004: 27), in other aspects he still remains part, if a somewhat concealed one, of a wider yoga climate.

Making transparent our own location as researchers is also useful and necessary here. One of us (Gleig) writes as a scholar concerned by recent events which this chapter will discuss both in the Integral Yoga community and the American yoga community, which have attempted to erase or undermine the western strands in the construction of modern yoga and claim exclusive Indian ownership over what scholars such as De Michelis (2004) and Singleton (2010) have shown was from the beginning a hybrid creation drawing as much from Western influences as traditional Hindu sources. The other (Flores) is in agreement with the scholarship that documents the construction of Modern Postural Yoga (De Michelis, 2004) and does not believe that the transparent

influence of the Western tradition on Integral Yoga can be erased by detractors. He is vocal within the Integral Yoga community against the exclusive ownership the figure of Sri Aurobindo by any group.

AUROBINDO, THE MOTHER, AND INTEGRAL YOGA

Aurobindo Ghose was born in Kolkata, India, on August 15, 1872. His anglophone father, a rationalist physician who had rejected religion, sent him at the age of seven to England for a Western education. Aurobindo spoke only English, and he knew little about India until he attended King's College, Cambridge, where he studied, along with Greek and Latin, Sanskrit and Bengali and read translations of the Upaniṣads. On his return to India in 1893, he immersed himself in the study of Sanskrit and Bengali and classic Indian literary, philosophical, and religious works. This period also saw Aurobindo, who had supported Home Rule since Cambridge, become involved in revolutionary activities, and in 1906 he moved to Kolkata, where he briefly became perhaps the most important leader in the Indian national movement, critiquing the ineffectiveness of Indian National Congress and audaciously championing the

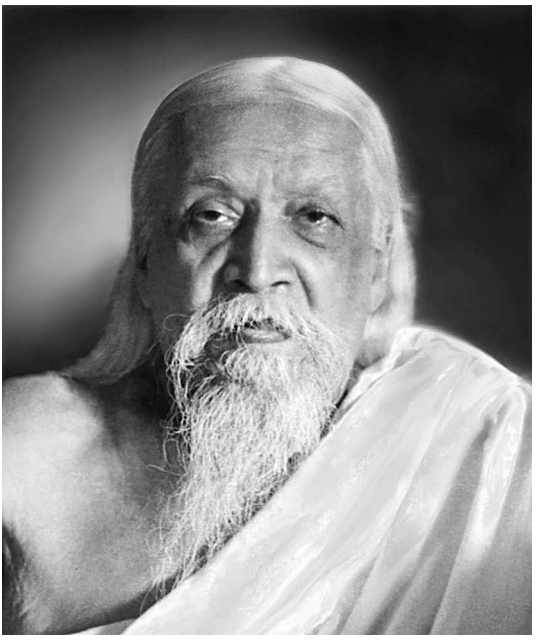

Figure 2.1:
Shri Aurobindo. (With permission of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.)

notion of complete independence from Britain. He was arrested three times by the British—twice for sedition and once for conspiring to "wage war"—and was imprisoned at Alipore jail for over a year.

It was mainly to obtain powers to help the nationalist cause that Aurobindo began to practice yoga in 1905. In 1908 he received instructions by a guru in the Datttātreya lineage on how to silence the mind and unexpectedly realized the *vedāntic* impersonal Brahman or Absolute. A few months later while in Alipore jail, he experienced the personal godhead in the form of Kṛṣṇa (Krishna). These experiences spiritually radicalized him, and in 1910, when facing further imprisonment, he abandoned politics and escaped to Pondicherry to fully focus on his *sādhanā* or spiritual practices. Between 1908 and 1914, he achieved several profound spiritual realizations, and from these personal experiences and his extensive study of Indian and Western religious, philosophical, and cultural thought he developed his new system of Integral Yoga (Heehs, 2008).

Aurobindo credited much of the development of Integral Yoga to his platonic spiritual collaborator known as the Mother. The Mother was born Mirra Alfassa on February 21, 1878, in Paris to a wealthy family of Turkish, Egyptian, and Sephardic Jewish decent. Trained in art in the Academie Julian, she

Figure 2.2:
The Mother. (With permission of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.)

was acquainted with numerous famous artists and spiritual figures in Paris at the time. A prodigy of occultism at an early age, in 1906 she went to Tlemcen, Algeria, to study with adepts Max and Alma Theon and taught in occult circles in Paris between 1911 and 1913. In 1914, she traveled with her husband, Paul Richard, a French civil servant, to meet Aurobindo. She immediately recognized Aurobindo as a figure who had appeared to her in visions and declared that she "at once knew that it was he, the Divine" (Roy, 1929). Aurobindo, for his part, eventually honored her as an embodiment of the Divine Mother or *śakti* force. The Richards had to return to France due to the outbreak of the First World War, but in 1920 Alfassa returned alone to Pondicherry and began to collaborate with Aurobindo in the development of Integral Yoga. In 1926, when the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was founded, Aurobindo gave material and spiritual charge of the ashram to her so that he could concentrate on his *sādhanā*, and he remained in the relative seclusion of his room until his death in 1950.

Integral Yoga is an explicitly modern system of yoga that fuses together Indian and Western thought. Aurobindo reinterpreted the Vedas and *vedānta* philosophy through a Western evolutionary lens to produce a spiritual evolutionary metaphysics. He rejected both traditional Indian renouncer paths and Western scientific materialism in favor of an all-encompassing or "integral" model that recognized the partial truths of both "spirit and nature" and postulated an evolutionary teleology that aimed at the radical divinization of matter rather than liberation from the world. To catalyze this evolutionary process, Aurobindo synthesized certain elements of traditional schools of yoga and set them within his wider evolutionary hermeneutic to produce a new system, which he named *Integral Yoga*.

The foundation of Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is a dialectical metaphysics that advances a bipolar model of ultimate reality. Aurobindo (2005) refers to ultimate reality as Brahman and describes it as both static and dynamic, unmanifest and manifest, transcendent and immanent, spirit and nature. Whereas Indian renunciate traditions have focused on the unmanifest aspect of Brahman and reject the manifest as an illusion or a mistake, Aurobindo attempts to reunite the two through the utilization of an involution–evolution or a descent–ascent narrative. This narrative begins with the Upaniṣadic notion that the "one without a second" (p. 458), Brahman, decided to play a game for its own enjoyment, a type of peekaboo that involved a narrowing and amnesia of its own consciousness in an intentional act of involution. Involution refers to the descent of spirit into nature and the progressive emergence of "matter, life and mind," and evolution signifies the reascent of the latter to their spiritual origin, a process that results in a spiritualization of matter and "the divine life." This reascent is not a return to an original state but the unfolding of a fundamentally new manifestation of Brahman as divinized matter (Heehs, 2008: 232–233).

The principle themes of Aurobindo's evolutionary spirituality are set out in his philosophical masterpiece *The Life Divine* (1970 [1914–1919]). The text begins by claiming that the Western scientific materialist perspective that reality is reducible to matter and the Indian ascetic position that only Brahman or pure consciousness exists are only partial truths. In the "completer affirmation" that Aurobindo proposes, matter and spirit are embraced as two different forms of a unitary reality, which is structured as a hierarchical "scale of substance" (Heehs, 2008: 270–276). At the upper hemisphere of the cosmos is the monistic Brahman, the nature of which is *saccidānanda* or being-consciousness-bliss. At the lower hemisphere are matter, life, and mind, which are characterized by division and multiplicity. Situated between the two is what Aurobindo calls the supermind, a level of consciousness that is simultaneously aware of both unity and multiplicity. The supermind is the principle by which spirit and nature are reunited because, unlike the utterly transcendent realms of Brahman, it can act on and divinize the material (ibid.). Brahman's descent was "not a blunder and a fall" but a "purposeful descent" to obtain a "divine existence." The human being is the first species to be on the cusp of a new kind of evolution, one led not by the force of *prakṛti* or nature but by consciousness. With the human being, "evolution has now become conscious," and through the human's "conscious self-transformation" the evolutionary ascension can proceed more rapidly (Aurobindo 1970: 591–592). Aurobindo presents the human as a transitional being, a turning point, and a central instrument in the spiritual evolutionary process. The human "may well be a thinking and living laboratory" in which nature "wills to work out the superman, the god." Essential to this process is what Aurobindo, borrowing a term from the Mother, identifies as the soul or "psychic being." Unique to Integral Yoga, the psychic being or "true individuality" carries forward the developmental gains of one lifetime to another. Its realization is crucial because unlike the transcendent *ātman* it enables a conscious participation in the evolutionary process (Aurobindo, 2005: 3–7).

The psychic being evolves beyond the human to the supermind or supramental consciousness, which will result in the emergence of a spiritualized species and a "divine life" on earth. Aurobindo believes that it is only through the appearance of such perfected beings that there can be a lasting solution to the numerous religious, social, and political problems inflicting humanity (Aurobindo, 2005: 290–291). The spiritualization of humankind is attained through a "revolutionary individual effort" with rare figures such as Aurobindo and the Mother acting as the forerunners of an "evolutionary general progression." In November 1926, Aurobindo had a major experience later reported as the "descent of the Overmind," a preliminary stage in the "ascent to the Supermind" (Heehs, 2008: 347–381). The Mother declared in 1956 that due to both of their efforts the supramental light and force rushed down on the earth in an uninterrupted flow.

Aurobindo (1972) adopted the generic term *yoga* to signify the process and methods of spiritual evolution. It consists of two progressive aspects: a movement into the depths of the self to realize the psychic being; and the upward ascension to and descent of the supermind. At the heart of this process is a threefold practice of surrender, aspiration, and rejection. Surrender is the foundation of the practice: an inner receptivity to the higher forces that allow a human being to transcend the limitations of their "animal nature." The aspiration for the divine is something that is cultivated over time, an unshakable desire for the higher consciousness. Rejection points to an inner discrimination between ignorance and consciousness and a discernment between choices that move one forward toward emancipation rather than those that reinforce bondage.

Integral Yoga incorporates some of the "indispensible" elements of the traditional yogas—*karma, jñāna,* and *bhakti* —yet rejects asceticism and the renunciate goal of absorption in the unmanifest Absolute. As reflected in his motto "All life is yoga," Aurobindo (1999) proposed a householder model, "the Yoga of Self-Perfection," that incorporated all aspects of life into spiritual practice. Like tantric yoga from which it considerably borrows, Integral Yoga aims at the transmutation of the material rather than its renunciation.

PERFECTION OF THE BODY: *HAṬHAYOGA* AND PHYSICAL CULTURE IN INTEGRAL YOGA

Given the contemporary popularity of *haṭhayoga* and the influence of European physical culture in shaping it, a glance at the role of both in Integral Yoga is useful. Statements by Aurobindo (1967) and the Mother on *haṭhayoga* and physical exercise must be situated in the context of the material divinization affected by the supramental descent. Both gurus insisted that the "perfection" of the physical body was essential to this process. Aurobindo stressed that the physical body was the basis and instrument for a "perfection of being" and could not, as in traditional renunciate paths, be discarded. He understood the perfection of the body as resulting in a new body that would transcend its "original earth-nature" and attain a physical immortality. Similarly, the Mother (2004) talked of a literal reconstitution of the bodily cells, a process that had already begun for her and that, moreover, was possible for all bodies.

Aurobindo (1999) originally assumed that the radical transformation of individual and cosmic "Nature" would occur through receptivity to the divine descent, a process facilitated by work, meditation, and devotion. When he and the Mother began to see physical exercises as also increasing receptivity, it was unconventionally sport rather than *haṭhayoga* that was preferred. Aurobindo identified *haṭhayoga* as a method that employs multiple *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāma* for the primary purpose of accessing *prāṇa* or life force and gaining

health and longevity (p. 34). His understanding of *haṭhayoga* appears to be descriptive of many forms of Modern Postural Yoga such as those described by Singleton (2010), and he was no doubt describing what he knew of the *haṭha* yogi *fakirs* on the streets of India at the turn of the century, decades before the popularization of yoga by Krishnamacharya and Shri Yogendra, with its infusion of Western physical culture practices. In any case, he saw Integral Yoga as quite distinct from *haṭhayoga*, which he did not view as having the power to effect material divinization. If people in the ashram wanted to practice *āsanas* they were allowed to do so for health, but Aurobindo did not want them to view *haṭhayoga* as a means of spiritual opening. He was against *kriyās* generally for being too mechanical and not giving room for the divine force to act on its own. It is understandable, therefore, why those today who think of yoga as primarily postural have little knowledge of or interest in Integral Yoga.

The Mother (2004) also directly refuted the idea that *haṭhayoga* postures were special and insisted that any "well-planned and scientifically arranged program of system exercise" approached with surrender and aspiration "will become Yogic exercise" (p. 227). Under her direction, a comprehensive and robust program of physical culture developed, including an array of individual and group sports and competitions and the establishment of a playground and gymnasium in the ashram. Although physical culture was soon to be ascribed a great spiritual significance, its origins were rooted in the more prosaic aim of keeping the children of the ashram occupied and healthy with adults permitted but not required to participate.

Over time, however, physical culture came to the forefront of Integral Yoga as the Mother (2004) increasingly began to stress its evolutionary impact in numerous statements such as, "Physical culture is the best way of developing the consciousness of the body, and the more the body is conscious, the more it is capable of receiving the divine forces that are at work to transform it and give birth to the new human race" (p. 204). The primary purpose of exercise became therefore to make one strong and supple enough to "bear the pressure" of the divine influx, thereby increasing receptivity to the supramental force and catalyzing the very infusion of consciousness in the cells of the body.

CLOSE LINEAGES: ORGANIZATIONS DIRECTLY ESTABLISHED BY AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

As Heehs (2000b) noted, documents written by Aurobindo between 1911 and 1920 illustrate he had two ways of viewing spiritual community (pp. 209–223). One suggests that Aurobindo originally showed no interest in and remained ambivalent about starting an ashram. Another, however, demonstrates that as early as 1911 he regarded his group in Pondicherry as a "seed

plot, a laboratory" for perfecting human society. In either case, Aurobindo (1997) was clearly suspicious about the fate of spiritual communities, noting that after an initial inspiration they often became reified into "a Church, a hierarchy, a fixed and unprogressive type of ethical living, a set of crystallized dogmas, ostentatious ceremonials, sanctified superstitions, an elaborate machinery for the salvation of mankind" (p. 264).

From the onset, then, Aurobindo wanted to create a new type of spiritual community that was free of the common problems such as petty regulations, mechanical observations, and proselytism that he saw as inflicting traditional ashrams. The first of what we are calling "close lineages," those associations directly established by Aurobindo or the Mother, was the Sri Aurobindo Ashram formed in 1926. Located in the middle of Pondicherry, Aurobindo insisted that the ashram was not a place for retreat from the world and that all residents were required to work. Ashramites engaged in both traditional forms of practice such as meditation and study and developed innovative practices such as the ritual distribution of food. All were required to be celibate, yet there were no distinctions based on gender.

Between 1926 and 1934 the number of people staying at the ashram grew from two dozen to around one hundred fifty, and during World War II the numbers rose to four hundred. Some individuals also formed groups for study or practice in other cities, although Aurobindo did not permit any type of missionary or outreach work. After Aurobindo's death in 1950, the ashram witnessed a gradual increase under the direction of the Mother and peaked at around fifteen hundred. An International Center of Education was founded in 1943 for members who joined the ashram as a family, and numerous other enterprises such as a printing press were to follow. The Mother also allowed the establishment of the Sri Aurobindo Society in 1960 to promote Integral Yoga and to engage in educational, medical, and cultural activities.

The most innovative community to develop under the Mother was the utopian "Universal Township" of Auroville. The Mother (2004) envisioned Auroville as a place dedicated to human unity and evolutionary progress where, according to the Auroville Charter, "to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness" (p. 193). It would be a nonsectarian space for living the "divine life" without religious dogmatism or authoritarianism. Such aspiration eventually saw devotees of the Mother create a green oasis and a town from a barren landscape literally with their own hands. After such an inspiring start, however, Auroville was threatened by a decade long battle for control between the Aurobindo Society and the Auroville community, a power struggle imbued with cosmic significance that included violent intimidation from both sides. It was a dark and deeply depressing period that saw many people flee and the Indian government eventually take control of the land.

Against expectations, Auroville survived, and while not without ongoing tensions it has grown into a functioning even flourishing community. It is now populated by eighteen hundred residents from thirty-five countries, all of whom have different relationships to Integral Yoga. Many of the older residents strongly identify as devotees of the Mother, the visitor center very much forefronts the Mother, one finds photos of Aurobindo and the Mother in resident's houses, and much energy is devoted to completing the building of the Matrimandir, the spiritual heart of Auroville. There is also a vocal population in Auroville that wants things to be done exactly as the Mother instructed regardless of other weighty pragmatic considerations such as climate and community resources.

At the same time, Auroville is markedly different from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The percentage of Westerners is much higher and the atmosphere decidedly more liberal and progressive. There is no requirement for participants to be devotees of Integral Yoga, although they must be committed to the principles underlying Auroville, and it is not uncommon for participants to have never heard of Integral Yoga before visiting. One will find workshops on t'ai chi and massage alongside Integral Yoga in the eclectic, pluralistic community. Many residents are drawn by the ideals of collective and ecologically sound living, and the numerous tourists passing through are as likely to be attracted by the stunning aesthetics of the Matrimandir as the spiritual principles embodied in its construction.

The current atmosphere at the ashram can be politely described as one of tension and transition. Numerous shifts are under way that appear to have coalesced around a massive controversy regarding the 2008 publication of the seemingly innocuous and scholastically impressive biography *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* by Peter Heehs, an American who has been an ashram resident and worked in the ashram archives since its founding in 1973. A small but vocal number of ashramites engineered the banning of the book in India and are currently mounting a court case against the ashram's board of trustees who have refused their demand to expel Heehs from the ashram. The charges against the book range from the apologetic to the apocalyptic: some are outraged that the book portrays a human rather than a divine Aurobindo; others more sinisterly see Heehs as an agent of a cosmic plot to thwart the evolutionary work of Integral Yoga. Another complaint is that as the archivist who is supported financially by the ashram, Heehs has betrayed the community by not seeking their approval in how Aurobindo is publicly portrayed.

To think of community here as a monolithic and unitive entity, however, is misguided. To begin with, there is no set body or formal procedure by which this abstract notion of "community" approves documents, and none of Heehs' previous scholarship has elicited any response from ashram members. Moreover, many within the Integral Yoga community do support Heehs and see the

charges as reflecting an increasing and deeply troubling "Integral Yoga fundamentalism" within the ashram.

They rightly point out that many of those who have called for the book to be banned have not even read it and that none of the specific charges against it have been substantiated. The situation is a complex one, which reflects many conflicting interests and internal power struggles at the ashram, and to reduce it solely to a clash between Western liberal and Indian conservative currents is a simplification. Yet at the same time many Westerners and Indians have spoken against a fundamental current within the ashram that is imposing an oppressive religious conservatism on others. A growth in worship of Aurobindo and the Mother as avatars is undeniable: over the last forty years there has been a great increase of Aurobindo devotees in Orissa and a corresponding influx of Orissa devotees within the ashram. While some feel such devotional religiosity practiced by these and other devotees is somewhat at odds with Aurobindo's antireligious pronouncements, the problem is less with its appearance and more with its exclusivity. These events have also taken place in a wider context in which Aurobindo has been appropriated by Hindu fundamentalists such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; see Heehs, 2000a). Taken together such occurrences illustrate the type of increasing Hinduization of the community being seen in modern meditation yoga schools such as Transcendental Meditation (TM; Humes, 2005: 55–79).

Mention should also be made of the small but serious number of Integral Yoga practitioners in the United States. While not a close lineage in the sense of being directly established by Aurobindo or the Mother, this community illustrates how Integral Yoga is practiced transnationally today. Scattered across the country, practitioners come together for an annual conference known as AUM (All US Meeting). In addition, a journal called *Collaboration*, which has a subscription list rate of two hundred but a significantly higher readership, keeps them abreast of community news. A few centers are specifically established for the practice of Integral Yoga, each of which functions independently with no formal ties between each other or the Pondicherry ashram. Two long-term American practitioners founded one of these, an ashram in Lodi, North California, that is modeled on the Pondicherry ashram. As with other decentralized Aurobindo centers, the Lodi ashram requested relics of Aurobindo from the Pondicherry ashram and enshrined them in a ceremony attended by around 225 people. It currently has seven residents, a mix of females and males ranging from ages twenty to eighty, all of whom are required to be celibate and do work or *karmayoga* for the ashram. The ashram hosts retreat, study, and community events that are attended by a mix of Western and Indian students. The latter group includes both those with direct connections to Integral Yoga, such as former residents of Auroville, and those for whom the ashram is visited alongside other Hindu pilgrim sites in the area.

CREATIVE LINEAGES: FROM INTEGRAL YOGA TO INTEGRAL PSYCHOLOGY

Yoga is nothing but practical psychology.

—Aurobindo

Aurobindo's Western legacy is arguably carried not by the sincere but small community of Aurobindo devotees but rather through what we are identifying as a *creative lineage* or assimilation of Integral Yoga. There are numerous avenues through which Aurobindo has creatively entered the contemporary yoga world. Both Sri Chimoy and Mother Meera, two transnational gurus, spent time at the ashram and have related their spiritual projects to Integral Yoga. What we are focusing on with our category of creative lineage, however, are direct adaptations of key concepts of Integral Yoga. An integral model, for example, is being increasingly championed by a wide variety of thinkers and applied to fields as diverse as spirituality, education, business, and science (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2010). It is obviously beyond the parameters of this article to track these multiple assimilations, so we will limit ourselves to the more modest aim of picking up one of the central threads, namely, the shift from Integral Yoga to Integral Psychology.

The development of Integral Psychology from Integral Yoga has occurred within the wider context of psychospirituality, an increasingly popular, modern, and decontextualized form of religiosity that often blurs boundaries between psychological and spiritual growth. If, with the rise of *haṭhayoga*, Aurobindo slipped out of the history of Modern Yoga, he has slipped back into contemporary iterations of East–West spirituality through a lineage of psychologized spirituality that runs from Carl Gustav Jung to transpersonal psychology (Parsons, 2008: 97–123).

Aurobindo never used the term Integral Psychology, but, with his permission, one of his students, former psychology, and philosophy professor Indra Sen began to identify an Integral Yoga Psychology in his work in the 1940s. Sen's Integral Yoga Psychology was not a new system but rather drew out the psychological dimensions implicit in Aurobindo's work and put them in dialogue with depth psychology. After meeting Jung in India in 1928, Sen followed his advice to pursue doctoral studies in psychology in Germany, and he saw many parallels between Jungian psychology and Integral Yoga (Sen, 1986: 145).

Integral Psychology as an Aurobindonian-inspired but fundamentally new system appears with philosophy professor Haridas Chaudhuri, the first Indian to bring Integral Yoga to America. Born in Bengal in 1913, Chaudhuri began a correspondence with Aurobindo while working on his Integral Yoga doctoral dissertation. In 1950, Chaudhuri received a letter from Frederick Spiegelberg inviting him to teach at a newly founded graduate school, the American

Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), in San Francisco. Spiegelberg was a German professor who had escaped Nazi Germany and taught Asian religions at Stanford University. In 1949, he had experienced a profound transmission while he attended *darśan* ("sight," to see a great or holy being) with Aurobindo, and he later sought an Indian Integral Yoga scholar to join him and Alan Watts at the academy.

With the encouragement of Aurobindo, Chaudhuri moved to the United States with his family in 1951. AAAS was one of the first cultural spaces to introduce Asian philosophy and religion to the American public and the dynamic colloquiums hosted by Spiegelberg, Watts, and Chaudhuri were soon packed with leading figures from the Beat generation. Chaudhuri also founded the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) where, in a building opposite Golden Gate Park, he would eloquently lecture at his popular Sunday morning service. CIF became the first destination in the United States for many visiting Indian gurus, hosted numerous Asian spiritual and cultural events, and functioned as a popular spiritual hub for the emerging counterculture of the 1960s.

Chaudhuri (1977) initially taught Aurobindo's insights through the lens of Western philosophy, but with the advent of humanistic and transpersonal psychology he realized that his audience related to and benefited more from a psychological framework. In 1970, he borrowed the term Integral Psychology and developed his own psychological system that is based on three principles—uniqueness, relatedness, and transcendence—and stresses the need for individual and interpersonal psychological development as well as spiritual transcendence. The basic project of Integral Psychology is an integration of Western depth psychology with Eastern spiritual teachings to develop a more complete model of the human being.

CIF's website declares that it is "inspired by the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo," and the center displays a number of photographs and a bust of Aurobindo as well as using the same symbol as the Pondicherry ashram. There have never been, however, any formal ties between the two. Chaudhuri created CIF as a pluralistic nonsectarian space that promoted universal spiritual principles rather than an official Aurobindo center. Chaudhuri and CIF have undoubtedly had their most influence through acting as a conduit between Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and the Human Potential movement. One can trace a direct line from Integral Yoga through CIF to two of the major centers of the Human Potential movement and the transpersonal psychology field it birthed: Esalen and the Californian Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS).

Michael Murphy and Richard Price, the two founders of Esalen, met while Murphy was living at CIF in 1960. Murphy's connections with Aurobindo had begun much earlier when as a Stanford undergraduate he had stumbled on a life-changing comparative religion lecture delivered by the charismatic Spiegelberg. The fascinating story of Spiegelberg, Murphy, and Esalen has been told well before and does not need to be repeated here (Kripal, 2005:

113–121). The key point to note is that much of Esalen can be interpreted as a selective, creative, and distinctively American assimilation of Aurobindo's integral vision. Through Esalen and his books, Murphy (1992) contributed much to creating an Aurobindo-inspired evolutionary and integral spirituality centered on the full development of human potentials.

In 1968 Chaudhuri began the California Institute of Asian Studies to continue the mission of the American Academy of Asian Studies, which had closed due to loss of financial backing. Renamed as the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) in 1980, it has grown into a thriving university in the heart of San Francisco. CIIS's distinctive signature is the development of an integral education that combines academic scholarship with spiritual transformation and through its student body, faculty publications, and popular public program it has significantly shaped contemporary East–West spiritualities. As with the other main creative lineage centers—Esalen and CIF—CIIS is committed to a pluralistic spiritual vision and its Aurobindonian roots are somewhat hidden. Nonetheless, Robert McDermott, its former president, has written several books on Aurobindo, CIIS has produced a couple dozen dissertations on Aurobindo making it one of the premier higher education institutions to study Integral Yoga outside of India, and it has recently developed ties with close lineage communities. In 2005, it offered its first study-abroad program in Auroville, and CIIS professors Brant Cortright, Bahman Shirazi, and one of the authors of this paper (Flores) have presented at numerous "Integral Psychology" conferences in India and the United States. Cortright (2007) also developed his own sophisticated system of Integral Psychotherapy that synthesizes the full range of Western depth psychology with Integral Yoga.

Perhaps no one, however, has done more to popularize integral psychology and evolutionary spirituality than transpersonal theorist turned integral pioneer Ken Wilber. Wilber's (2006) basic project is the integration of the Great Chain of Being presented by the perennial philosophers with Western developmental models in an evolutionary framework, and his latest offering is the "four quadrants model" (AQAL) and the "integral map". In 1998, Wilber founded the Integral Institute and has been at the forefront of numerous enterprises to promote his integral vision in fields as diverse as education, spirituality, sport, and business. Given the popularity of his prolific corpus, Wilber is arguably the author most responsible for introducing Aurobindo to a wider Western audience.

What type of Aurobindo he has introduced, however, is debatable. On one hand, Wilber credits Aurobindo as the great forefather of his own AQAL theory and reveres him as being a brilliant "philosopher-sage" who pioneered spiritual evolutionary metaphysics. On the other, however, Wilber declares that Aurobindo's insights have already been transcended and included by his own AQAL model. Flores (2010) challenged Wilber's selective misrepresentation of Aurobindo, who never viewed himself as a theorist but rather as a

yogi co-creating a new spiritual path of Integral Yoga. So ironically, although Wilber has done the most to popularize the name "Aurobindo" in the West, he has at the same time relegated him to the past and left his contributions to Modern Yoga praxis unacknowledged.

While American guru Andrew Cohen is not in the Integral Psychology lineage proper, he also must be mentioned; he joined forces with Wilber to promote an integral and evolutionary spirituality. Cohen presents himself as a "pioneer of evolutionary enlightenment," a spiritual teaching that places a tantric understanding of nonduality in an evolutionary context. He claims that his teaching is rooted in a spontaneous experiential realization and that he was later astonished to discover strikingly similar insights in Aurobindo's Integral Yoga (Wilber & Cohen, 2004). Cohen credits Aurobindo with a seminal role in the lineage of evolutionary spirituality and through his popular magazine *EnlightenNext,* which is reported to have an international readership of seventy thousand, he is disseminating an essentially Aurobindonian spirituality to a large audience most of whom have likely never heard of Aurobindo before.

With the creative psychospiritual lineage, therefore, we see a much wider dissemination of aspects of Integral Yoga than with its close community. The popularity of Integral Psychology over Integral Yoga in the West is not surprising in a cultural context marked by what Philip Rieff (1966) famously called the "the triumph of the therapeutic". Critics of psychologized spirituality have argued that it dilutes authentic Indian spirituality with Western humanism and reduces yogic practice to capitalist commodities to be peddled in the spiritual marketplace (Carrette and King 2006). While it is important to recognize the real and substantial differences between Integral Yoga and Integral Psychology, however, we are more inclined to a sympathetic reading. To begin with, Integral Yoga is itself a synthesis of Indian and Western religious and philosophical thought, and one could reasonably argue that the integration of psychology continues rather than corrupts the internal spirit of the tradition. There is also a strong pragmatic element to the shift as witnessed in Chaudhuri's embrace of psychology as an effective and necessary translation for Integral Yoga in America. Moreover, it is not just a case of one-way influence, since Aurobindo's schematic hierarchy of consciousness greatly influenced the development of transpersonal psychology (Miovic, 2001). Similarly, a number of Indian devotees of Aurobindo such as A. S. Dalal (2001) have continued the project begun by Chaudhuri to combine Western psychology with Integral Yoga, focusing particularly on the importance of the psychic being in the psychotherapeutic process.

Rather than dismiss Integral Psychology, therefore, a more fruitful approach is to be transparent about what adaptations have been made and why. Such a perspective also allows for discrimination between the different iterations within the creative lineage and an illumination of why certain forms of Integral Psychology have been more popular. Wilber's Integral Psychology, for

example, includes multiple spiritual traditions and perspectives, and it makes sense that in a pluralistic society such as the United States it would gain much greater popularity than those forms that focus exclusively on Integral Yoga. While close lineage devotees often problematize Integral Psychology as failing to capture the essence of Integral Yoga, the creative translations do find some grounds in Aurobindo's own writings and resonate with his approach of offering multiple ways into the yoga.

THE FORGOTTEN YOGA: REFLECTIONS ON THE INVISIBILITY OF INTEGRAL YOGA IN THE WEST

Many of Aurobindo's pioneering concepts—the evolution of consciousness, an integral approach to spiritual development, and a socially transformative this-worldly mysticism—permeate contemporary East–West spirituality, yet it is indisputable that Integral Yoga is unknown to a wider Western audience. We want to offer some reflections on its relative invisibility by focusing on the following interrelated areas: (1) publicity and marketing; (2) accessibility; (3) methods; (4) lineage; and (5) conservative currents within the Integral Yoga community.

(1) Publicity and Marketing

The growth of postural yoga has gone hand in hand with a multimillion-dollar industry in which legal battles have been fought over who owns certain postures, styles have been franchised, and trademarks patterned (Singleton, 2010: 3). While perhaps not attaining the heights of *āsana*-oriented yoga, meditational yoga groups have also engineered highly successful marketing and publicity campaigns. The global status of transnational gurus such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Ammachi, and Satya Sai Baba attest to their success in constructing powerful institutional structures to promote their teachings. Studies show that these communities have engaged in careful strategies and marketing innovations to facilitate the growth of their movements in the West (Forsthoeffel & Humes, 2005).

Integral Yoga goes against the grain of the marketing mentality that has facilitated the mass dissemination of many meditational and postural yoga movements in the West. Aurobindo was a reluctant guru who lived in seclusion for the last twenty-six years of his life. In contrast to the American tour undertaken by Vivekanada and the later "world tours" of gurus such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, neither he nor the Mother ever left Pondicherry, nor did they encourage any direct form or specific program of "spiritual missionary" activity to the West. In fact, Aurobindo (2011) insisted that in "serious work"

propaganda was a "poison" resulting either in a "boom or a stunt" or "a movement" and "a movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damn nonsense. It means that hundreds and thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence" (p. 71). Similarly, while both Aurobindo and the Mother conceded it was necessary to have some organization within the ashram, for the most part they eschewed the type of organizational structures necessary to sustain any expansion or development campaigns. The Mother, for example, insisted that after she passed away Auroville was to have no central authority except that of the "Divine Consciousness."

Aurobindo and the Mother had little interest in promoting Integral Yoga because they believed that it was meaningful only for certain select evolved souls. All that was necessary for the descent of supermind was the participation of a select few, and great numbers of practitioners were not only irrelevant but might well have also been counterproductive since, as Aurobindo (2011) wrote, "nothing depends on the numbers" (p. 310). Following this view, it makes little sense to actively promote Integral Yoga; consequently, the Integral Yoga community in America does very little in the way of publicity. In an inversion of the supermarket spirituality model, many students believe that they do not choose but rather are chosen by Aurobindo and the Mother. Some claim that the gurus have appeared to them in dreams or visions and understand this as a subtle body encounter through which they are initiated into the yoga. A select few have even reported a type of mystical transmission or esoteric encounter with Aurobindo through his writings (Walker, 2008).

(2) Accessibility

For most readers the sheer size of Aurobindo's canon, not to mention his abstract and scholastic Victorian writing style, is intimidating. Aurobindo, simply put, is not an easy read. His prolific and sophisticated corpus demands an intelligent, careful, and committed reader. This helps explain why the concerted attempts of perhaps his most famous American devotee, Margaret Wilson Woodrow, who during her residence at the Pondicherry ashram between 1938 and 1944 became a "one woman publicity machine" sending Aurobindo's texts to scholars and literary figures, yielded little results. Only one short review of his twelve hundred page epic *The Life Divine* appeared, and Aurobindo's books failed to sell well in the United States (Syman, 2010: 143–159). Similarly, although there are numerous books on Integral Yoga, none have ever succeeded in popularizing it for a wider audience, and it has never gained the type of exposure that classic spiritual texts such as Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* have afforded their communities.

(3) Methods

The popularity of both first-wave and second-wave gurus and guru traditions in America can, in large part, be attributed to their ability to provide practical methods and technologies of transformation to a receptive utilitarian and technologically oriented audience. As De Michelis (2004) noted, much of the success of Vivekananda's Modern Yoga can be attributed to the fact that it delivered efficient methods to a Western esoteric audience that was hungry for them (p. 118). Vivekananda capitalized on the "strong craving for practices" that had arisen in cultic milieus toward the end of the nineteenth century by providing "techniques and methods to achieve immediate, practical and rational goals" (ibid.). Similarly, second-wave guru traditions flourished by supplying the spiritual technologies desired by the new age milieu within which they flowered. Cynthia Ann Humes (2005), for example, shows that much of the appeal of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's early TM movement was because it offered an easy-to-learn, effective, and cheap meditation technique (p. 57).

Integral Yoga forms a notable counterpoint to the types of practical and result-oriented spiritual technologies that have proven so popular in America. To begin with, neither Aurobindo nor the Mother ever prescribed any specific routine practices that were to be used by all *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants). They presented Integral Yoga not as a method but rather as a profound and challenging *process* of self-surrender and aspiration for the divine that was to be cultivated over a long period of time. It was, Aurobindo (1972) warned, "an exceedingly difficult aim and difficult yoga; to many or most it will seem impossible" (p. 505). Several practitioners commented on how the lack of specific practical technologies within Integral Yoga has shaped its audience and growth in the West. One participant suggested that Integral Yoga attracts a different type of practitioner from many of the other yoga traditions because it is not oriented around immediate results. She acknowledged that it was a demanding path without a wide appeal and would never become a mass movement. Another stressed that Integral Yoga was about an inner vibrational transformation that was difficult to externally measure and that one had to be immersed in the work to understand it. This type of exclusive insider perspective contrasts with the inclusivism and universalism that marks many of the most popular meditative and postural yogic schools.

(4) Lineage

Within the Indic traditions, the ideal passing on of yogic knowledge is through *paramparā*, the presence of the guru and the live transmission from one person to the next. *Paramparā* highlights the importance of lineage and a personalized embodied example of the teachings over more textual forms

of transmission (De Michelis, 2008: 19). Neither Aurobindo nor the Mother appointed any successors, so there is no official lineage or living gurus within Integral Yoga. For some participants this absence of "live embodiment" is not problematic because they feel in contact with the presence of Aurobindo and the Mother. For others, though, this lack of living teachers is a significant obstacle. One long-term on-and-off resident of the Lodi ashram, for example, shared that she had decided to leave the ashram again because she needed more direct guidance and instruction. The lack of living charismatic teachers undoubtedly affects the numbers of newcomers into the community and illuminates why the majority of Western practitioners are over fifty and began practicing before the Mother died.

(5) Conservative Currents

A number of figures have commented critically on the devotional, conservative, and authoritarian currents in the ashram. As early as the 1950s Spiegelberg and Murphy were wary of what they respectively saw as slavish devotionalism in the community in which Aurobindo and the Mother were deified and their every word literalized. The recent controversy around Heehs's (2008) book has amplified what many feel is a troubling fundamentalism in the ashram. Some Auroville residents interviewed felt that the ashram was not a welcoming place for Westerners, others commented on an increasing xenophobia, and the intensely Indian devotional and religious atmosphere around the *samādhi* (the mausoleum of Aurobindo and the Mother) might well intimidate the casual Western visitor. These currents have undoubtedly affected the dissemination of Integral Yoga in the West. Western spiritual seekers are more likely to be drawn to the progressive and pluralistic atmosphere of Auroville and thus less likely to bring a traditional form of Integral Yoga back to the West. One practitioner, for example, stressed that she was not a devotee but a "child" of Aurobindo and the Mother and was inspired by, but not exclusively committed to, their teachings. Such figures tend to be drawn to and develop the type of inspired iterations that we have seen in the creative lineages rather than practicing and preserving the specific tradition of Integral Yoga.

CONCLUSION

Numerous studies have shown that Modern Yoga emerges through a reframing of traditional Indian practices and beliefs in response to the different assumptions and aspirations of Western modernity. Nowhere is this more evident than in Integral Yoga which, from the very body, speech, and texts of Aurobindo to its creative contemporary iterations, is an intentional, explicit, and

sophisticated hybrid mix of East–West values and thought. As Kripal (2005) notes, Integral Yoga could not have been created in either the East or the West but exists only as a creative fusion of the two cultural, philosophical, and religious horizons and as a cross-fertilization that aims, moreover, at the birth of new and better selves and worlds (p. 111).

Such integral visions have since fallen out of academic fashion; they have either been dismissed as essentializing "affirmative Orientalism" or have been berated for being historically inauthentic. Such critiques are not entirely without merit: claiming modern iterations as traditional is simply incorrect, and monolithic categories such as East–West can erase internal multiplicity and reinforce binaries when used unreflectively. Although we are fully cognizant of such dangers, perhaps there is no better time not just to remember but also to recover and resuscitate Aurobindo and the Mother and their East–West integral legacy. As we write this piece, a battle over "who owns yoga" blazes across religious communities, yoga studios, academic journals, blogs, and even the *New York Times* (Vitello, 2010). In their campaign to "take back yoga" and reclaim "branding rights," Hindu purists perpetuate bad history and pursue a nationalistic agenda. Christian evangelicals, who rant that yoga is an insidious demonic form of false religion that threatens (an imaginary) Christian America, ironically support them in this purist project. Both parties erase yoga's fluid and dynamic history, reinforce a false opposition between the sacred and secular, and perpetuate religious dogmatism, exclusivism, and fundamentalism.

At a time, then, when Modern Yoga and the Integral Yoga community itself are threatened by fundamentalism, perhaps there is no better moment to fully claim and celebrate the spirit of Aurobindo's East–West integralism and the pluralistic and promising worlds that it has and may still birth. From the dialogical texts of Aurobindo to the cosmopolitan and nonsectarian spaces of Auroville and Esalen, we see glimpses of the secular and spiritual transformative potentials of hybrid East–West yoga. It is, we think, a vision worth remembering.

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