

# Introduction: Transcultural Yoga(s). Analyzing a Traveling Subject

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**Abstract** This book focuses on yoga's transcultural dissemination in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the course of this process, the term "yoga" has been associated with various distinctive blends of mental and physical exercises performed to achieve improvement in terms of esotericism, fitness, self-actualization, body aesthetics, or health care. This introductory chapter surveys the development of modern yoga studies as a new field of academic inquiry in the humanities and social sciences. It shows how the emergence and diversity of today's postural yoga provides rich source material for understanding the process of cultural diffusion and knowledge transfer. With a cursory glance at the sources and approaches in the historical and philological study of Indian yoga the chapter then argues that yoga never constituted a monolithic or homogenous entity. The remaining section explores how recent ways of theorizing global spaces, transnational flows, and cultural interactions can inspire and facilitate the analysis of present-day yoga and its dynamics and thus provide a provisional outline for the notion of transculturality in relation to the study of yoga's global circulation. This leads to a brief synopsis of the following chapters.

*There are more flavors of Hatha Yoga in the West than ice cream.*

Choudhury 2000, xiii

*There is probably no tradition that has been construed as more timeless, more intrinsically authentic, more inherently Indian than yoga.*

Alter 2004, 14

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With reference to its Indian origin, yoga has become a mainstream activity in many parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Today the term is applied to a variety of bodily practices commodified in the name of spirituality, lifestyle, and health. Positioned at the beginning of the twenty-first century, yoga is also big business in the wellness sector: according to the 2008 *Yoga in America* market survey, Americans spent \$5.7 billion per year on yoga classes and products, almost double the amount from the previous survey (2004) and it is still on the rise.<sup>2</sup> Claiming a piece of the pie, the Indian Ministry of Tourism showcases yoga in its advertisement of India as a contemporary healthcare destination.<sup>3</sup> If one considers globalization in terms of cultural flows rather than economic markets, yoga provides rich source material for understanding the process of knowledge transfer—preached, exported, translated, appropriated, touted, assimilated, and modified at various stages along its worldwide journey. In the course of this process, the term yoga has been associated with various distinctive blends of mental and physical exercise performed in order to achieve some sort of improvement—or even perfection—whether conceived of in terms of esotericism, fitness, self-actualization, body aesthetics, or healthcare. The essays in this volume seek to explore some of the turning points in yoga’s historico-spatial itinerary and their relevance to its current boom. The authors focus on central motivations, sites, and agents in the circulation of posture-based yoga as well as on its successive (re-)interpretation and diversification, touching upon questions such as: Why has yoga taken its various forms? How do time and place influence its meanings, social roles, and associated experiences? How does the transfer into new settings affect the ways in which yogic practice has been conceptualized as a system (its ontological status)? On what basis is it still identified as (Indian) yoga? The analytic perspective used to tackle these questions is inspired by recent debates on transcultural phenomena; namely, the conviction that simplistic notions of culture as a territorially bounded and homogeneous social entity and derivative concepts such as diffusion and acculturation are insufficient to conceptualize the dynamics and plurality of yoga and the network of practitioners that exist in today’s globalized world.

The triumphal course of yoga around the globe started more than a hundred years ago. Its beginning is generally associated with the Hindu reformer Swami

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction has greatly benefited from Suzanne Newcombe’s and Anne Koch’s critical reading and feedback of an early draft. My sincere thanks go also to the two anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The 2008 *Yoga in America* market study surveyed 5,050 respondents and was conducted on behalf of the *Yoga Journal*. Whereas the number of yoga practitioners (15.8 million) had stabilized vis-à-vis the journal’s previous 2004 survey, the expenditure on equipment, clothing, vacations, and media had almost doubled ([www.yogajournal.com/advertise/press\\_releases/10](http://www.yogajournal.com/advertise/press_releases/10), accessed 17 January 2011). On the growth and marketing of yoga in the United States see Syman (2010); also Philp’s book *Yoga Inc.* (2009), which is based on journalistic research.

<sup>3</sup> The Indian government promotes yoga as a “tourism product” along with Ayurveda and medical treatments (e.g., surgery, transplantation, dental care) on its website at <http://www.incredibleindia.org>; see also <http://indiameditourism.com> (accessed 17 January 2011); and see Nichter’s contribution (chapter “The Social Life of Yoga: Exploring Transcultural Flows in India”).

Vivekananda and his speech at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago (1893). Vivekananda's interest in yoga was motivated by the reformist search for cultural roots that could provide a modern vision of Hinduism. In his view, yoga could function as a form of applied philosophy suitable for the liberation of lay people committed to both contemplative and scientific thinking (first and foremost the Hindu elite who favored monistic Neo-Vedānta). However, his image of Hinduism also reflected contemporaneous elements of Western esotericists' interest in the sacred wisdom of India.<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda saw yoga as the path to "self-realization," a means for unlocking the potential divinity of a single human being and thereby also serving society as a whole. With these aims in mind he promoted *Raja Yoga* (published 1896; literally, "Royal Yoga") as the supreme path to liberation—alongside the yoga of true knowledge, devotion, and righteous action. Referencing a collection of aphorisms called the *Yogasūtra* (circa second/third century CE<sup>5</sup>), Vivekananda conceived of Raja Yoga as a spiritual and rather disembodied discipline that focused on meditation (*dhyāna*), concentration of mind (*dhāraṇa*), the withdrawal of senses (*pratyāhāra*), and ethical rules (*yama* and *niyama*—in short: prohibitions and obligations) rather than on the performance of a series of postures (*āsana*). A healthy body served as the precondition for this soteriological encounter, but not as an end in itself. Like his contemporaries, Vivekananda was rather critical of wandering yogis who publicly demonstrated their ability to perform acrobatic postures and "magic." In British India these yogis were condemned for their apparent this-worldly objectives, manipulative powers, and impure if not criminal practices. Against this backdrop, educated Hindus developed their own vision of true yoga.<sup>6</sup>

Around the same time, India was also impacted by the international physical culture movement, which led to the recognition of new athletic regimens.<sup>7</sup> In keeping with principles espoused by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), physical strength gained social value by virtue of its capacity to ward off the degeneracy of modern times. And freestanding gymnastic exercises aimed at the holistic development of mind, body, and spirit (inspired by the work of Pehr Henrik Ling), as well as calisthenic training (common in the British military), were introduced into the Indian educational system.<sup>8</sup> Joseph Alter's sophisticated study on *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (2004) demonstrates how in the 1920s those physical yoga exercises and acrobatic postures

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<sup>4</sup> This is convincingly argued by De Michelis (2004).

<sup>5</sup> As with other early Indic sources, it is difficult to date the *Yogasūtra*. In this case estimates range from the fourth to the second century BCE, to as late as 150–500 CE. According to Whicher (1998, 41–42), Michaels (2004, 267) and Gharote et al. (2006, xxvi) current evidence suggests that the *Yogasūtra* as a collection was compiled between the second/third century CE and only in retrospect ascribed to Patañjali.

<sup>6</sup> Singleton (2010, Chap. 2) and White (2009, 2012a, 15).

<sup>7</sup> See also Singleton's contribution in this volume (chapter "Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga").

<sup>8</sup> Singleton (2010, Chaps. 4, 5, and 6).

silenced by Vivekananda became the subject of laboratory research and therapeutic use and were, with patriotic zeal, identified as the Indian equivalent to Ling's movement cure. By establishing through scientific means the physiological benefits and efficacy of yoga postures, contractions, and purificatory procedures, Indian scholars hoped to substantiate the truth of ancient Hindu wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Alter argues that this medicalization of posture practice was crucial for the emergence of what is today known as Hatha Yoga.<sup>10</sup> Mark Singleton's *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (2010) complements and expands upon Alter's work by exploring the various discourses, motivations, and contexts that shaped yoga into the particular form that existed in India by 1940; a yoga that had by then absorbed several strands of physical culture. In a largely nationalistic and partly anti-colonial spirit, the (new) performance of yoga exercises had developed into a system for gaining a strong physique and enhancing one's manliness. Static postures (*āsana*), energy locks (*bandha*), and breathing techniques (*prāṇayāma*) were supplemented by calisthenic and cardiovascular exercises based on muscle contraction and repetition. These aerobic exercises included the sun salutation (*sūryanamaskār*), the "Hindu push-up" (*danḍa* – Hindi: *danḍ*), elements of local physical culture (from *vyāyām*, wrestling; and other martial arts), as well as foreign exercises that originated in gymnastics and muscle control (promoted in India by world-famous bodybuilders active at time).<sup>11</sup> Due to royal patronage, one of the main centers of this yoga renaissance and transformation was Mysore, where several present-day yoga gurus acquired their proficiency.<sup>12</sup> By the time of India's independence in 1947 this new hybrid form was called Hatha Yoga, henceforth the key designation used to distinguish a "secularized," body-oriented yoga from its alleged counterpart: "spiritual," metaphysical yoga. Yet in a strict sense, even primarily physical (Neo-)Hatha Yoga<sup>13</sup> incorporates esoteric ideas: today's emphasis on relaxation, intuition, positive thinking, mental healing, and harmony can be traced back to late nineteenth-century Euro-American esotericists and psychologists and their interpretation of Hindu spirituality.<sup>14</sup> Singleton concludes that posture-based yoga was the result of a "dialogical exchange between para-religious, modern body culture techniques developed in the West and the various discourses of 'modern' Hindu yoga." He also argues that despite frequent reference to ancient Indian scriptures and medieval body-oriented *haṭhayoga* "contemporary posture-based yoga cannot really be considered a direct successor of this tradition."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, postural

<sup>9</sup> On science as a hegemonic force producing asymmetries between Western and non-Western approaches to the world see Alter (2004, 17, 28–31).

<sup>10</sup> Alter (2004, 77).

<sup>11</sup> See Sjoman (1996, 53–58), Alter (2004, 28), and Singleton (2010, 198–206). On various Indian forms of exercises see Alter (1992, Chap. 5); on the sun salutation see Goldberg (2006), Bühnmann (2007, 32–33), and Alter (2004, 23).

<sup>12</sup> Sjoman (1996).

<sup>13</sup> I owe the term "Neo-Hatha Yoga" to De Michelis (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Singleton (2005, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Singleton (2010, 5). The phrase *haṭhayoga* originated from medieval tantric sources, e.g., the fourteenth-century treatise *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*.

yoga was limited to exclusivist circles of young men and by no means a common practice in pre-independence India.

These are just two glimpses from the entangled transnational history of today's yoga. An awareness of these twists and turns in the interpretation of what yoga is and does opened up a new field of academic inquiry: the "present's just past" of yoga (to use Alter's expression), which was still pervaded by vague memories, oral accounts, and hence a high degree of looseness. Elizabeth De Michelis' groundbreaking study on *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (2004) deserves credit for outlining what is now generally termed "modern yoga studies" as a subject in the humanities and social sciences. In quick succession, several scholars convincingly argued that the stereotype of a modernized yoga adapted to "Western rationalism," vis-à-vis a mystical Hindu past was not only naive, but a myth. Their studies emphasized the ways in which modernity was already present in nineteenth-century Indian notions of yoga and that assumptions based upon a concept of yoga as a coherent historical tradition lacked factual foundation. In light of these findings, today's global image of Hatha Yoga as a gentle, recreational, feminized, pacifist, and non-competitive practice reflects fairly recent discursive strands rather than any inherent and/or elemental features of yoga. Therefore, if one takes a closer look at the social phenomena of postural yoga as they developed over the last decades one is invariably led to analyze the production of values, practices, networks, spaces, and perspectives that transcend national borders and are, in fact, generated vis-à-vis an idealized Other associated with Indianness.

In late 2009, an interdisciplinary group of scholars from Europe and the United States met at the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University in order to discuss the specifics of present-day yoga and its global appeal. They investigated questions such as: For what reasons do people engage in yoga classes? How did particular social environments shape the practice of yoga and how did these situated practices in turn influence the perception and experience of body and self? In what ways has the spread of yoga served as a social and cultural incentive that inspires and reorients general ways of thinking about health and human well-being? The present volume is the result of this intellectual encounter.<sup>16</sup> The collection begins by looking at some historical issues: first, the transnational genesis of modern postural yoga in India (Singleton); second, the overlapping subcultures interested in yoga and magic in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century (Newcombe); and third, the impact of imagined *kunḍālīnī* experiences on Western psychology as a discipline and on psychotherapeutic diagnosis (Hofmann). The next section focuses on contrasting and inconsistent receptions and (re)shapings of global postural yoga in Germany. It thereby

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<sup>16</sup> Special thanks to Pirkko Markula (University of Alberta) and Klas Nevrin (Stockholm University) for their substantial contributions to the conference's debates and outcome. I am very happy that Mark Singleton joined this book project to present his recent research, unpublished at the time of the Heidelberg conference.

offers clues for understanding the production of situated meanings that are located at the interface of local and global spheres. The authors emphasize the impact of yoga instruction as a sociolinguistic genre on the perception of body and self (Hauser); the choice of yoga practice as an individualized strategy for coping with the pressures of a post-Fordist labor market (Schnäbele); and the sociopolitical conditions under which (until recently) yoga classes in German schools had to be disguised in order to bypass widespread concerns against yoga as cult (Augenstein). The last part of the book explores perspectives held by transnational networks of yoga consumers: their recent affiliation with the ecology movement (Strauss and Mandelbaum); the co-creation of an Indian idealized yoga-location by tourists and local entrepreneurs (Nichter); and the production of social, human, and body capital by means of joining a local yoga studio or international yoga retreat (Koch). Apart from a shared academic interest in the worldwide dissemination of bodily practices associated with yoga, the authors clearly differ in their use of the transcultural lens; a lens that provides descriptive terms, serves as a heuristic concept for understanding the motors and dynamics of globalization, or sets its sights on a larger epistemological landscape. Although extensive discussions followed the conference sessions, this collection does not seek to level the differences that arose. In fact they serve as useful representations of the participants' various disciplinary perspectives, located in social anthropology, sociology, psychology, history of religions, and education.

Although yoga constitutes a case in point to consider the transnational flow of ideas about spirituality, health, and well-being; to conceive of yoga as a social practice that has been negotiated, reframed, and partly invented in the last 100–150 years is highly contested. Doing so may not only challenge the experiential reality of yoga practitioners (by virtue of emphasizing its discursive nature) or upset those who hold the *Yogasūtra* in high esteem for its wisdom and timeless truth. Most notably the commodification and business opportunities associated with yoga have caused a series of proprietary claims on yoga-related goods and services: in the United States alone, 2,315 yoga trademarks, 150 yoga-related copyrights, and 134 patents for yoga accessories have been registered by 2005.<sup>17</sup> And in 2008, the Indian government began to register yoga postures in the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in order to substantiate their Indianness and thus prevent sly entrepreneurs from patenting cultural know-how as their own.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Fish (2006, 192) who relies on David Orr's article in *The Telegraph*, dated 20 September 2005 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/3324013/India-adopts-fighting-position-to-hold-on-to-ancient-yoga-poses.html>, accessed 1 March 2011). Unfortunately, Orr neither provides the source of his data nor over which time span it is based. According to R. Saha and Sangeeta Nagar at the Patent Facilitating Centre in Delhi, devices for yoga practice (rather than yogic exercises) have been patented in the United States since 1978 ([http://www.indianpatents.org.in/yogic\\_june06.htm](http://www.indianpatents.org.in/yogic_june06.htm), accessed 15 May 2012).

<sup>18</sup> The TKDL is intended to protect various kinds of cultural knowledge and houses several projects. The initiative to register yoga postures is a collaborative project run by the Indian Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Department of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy) and the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) in Delhi; see <http://www.tkdil.res.in/tkdil/langdefault/common/Abouttkdl.asp?GL=Eng> (accessed 22 February 2011).

Furthermore, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) launched a campaign to “Take Back Yoga,” claiming the Vedic origin and fundamentally Hindu character of today’s posture practice.<sup>19</sup> In light of these realities, it is important to clarify here that the authors of this book do not appoint themselves as judges of questions of ownership, authenticity, or the morals of transnational appropriations; rather, their aim is to describe and analyze social phenomena that are part of a globalized world. In one way or another, their analyses all share the common theoretical supposition that cultural practices are not static but inherently hybrid and prone to change. Moreover, some of the authors have practiced yoga for many years and wish to reflect upon their own insights, this time from an academic perspective.

## Mapping Diversity, Dynamics, and History

This book connects to the growing field of modern yoga studies in the humanities and social sciences. One of the first scholars to define this new field in its development over time and also its systematic breadth was Elizabeth De Michelis.<sup>20</sup> She provided terminology that was extremely useful as an introduction to the subject matter and as such it was quickly taken up by others. De Michelis regards modern yoga (in her spelling Modern Yoga) as the product of an interaction that began in the mid-nineteenth century between Western esotericists interested in Hinduism and the more or less Western-educated Indian reformers associated with the Hindu Renaissance.<sup>21</sup> Analyzing several forms of yoga that originated and flourished in and beyond India in the decades after Vivekananda’s speech at the World’s Parliament of Religions, De Michelis identifies two major developmental strands: that of “modern psychosomatic yoga” (MPsY) and that of “modern denominational yoga” (MDY). Whereas the first category refers to a gradual secularization and medicalization of posture practice and breathing techniques, thus a movement that is only loosely structured and socially fluid, the latter category comprises several sectarian groups in which particular yoga practices—observances, controlled breathing, and meditation—are central to their specific belief systems.<sup>22</sup> In the post-World War II era, these modern psychosomatic forms developed along opposite trajectories: De Michelis classifies those yoga schools emphasizing physical practice as “modern postural yoga” (MPY) and distinguishes them from “modern

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<sup>19</sup> See Meera Nanda on “‘Owning’ Yoga.” in *Himāl* ([www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/3550-owning-yoga.html](http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/3550-owning-yoga.html), accessed 1 March 2011).

<sup>20</sup> For helpful overviews on the growing number of historical, sociological, and anthropological studies on modern yoga see De Michelis (2007), Newcombe (2009).

<sup>21</sup> De Michelis (2004, 2); in Chap. 6 she gives a detailed account of her taxonomic divisions.

<sup>22</sup> Examples of the latter category (MDY) are the Brahma Kumaris and Sahaja Yoga.

meditational yoga” (MMY) in which mental practices are stressed.<sup>23</sup> Following this typology, the recent worldwide yoga boom is clearly linked to “modern postural yoga” (MPY).

The contrast between meditative techniques identified as yoga and rather mundane yoga postures has been noted by academic scholars and yoga enthusiasts alike. The difference correlates historically to the distinction between Raja Yoga as a largely mental discipline promoted by Vivekananda and the concept of (Neo-) Hatha Yoga, which focuses on body practice and kinesthetic experience. However, this distinction is more schematic than real. “In yoga,” Alter argued, “it is pointless to try to define where physical exercise ends and mental meditation begins,” due to the Hindu notion that mind and body are intrinsically linked.<sup>24</sup> Mental activity is subsumed under the physical as one of many senses, constituting a perceptual reality that stands in contrast to the potential achievement of disengaged higher consciousness.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, yogic discipline cannot manifest purely as an objectification of the body, it is equally conceived as a subjectification of the self.<sup>26</sup> Also, with regard to the anthropological paradigm of embodiment, one could classify meditation and purification techniques as bodily practice because both require “somatic attention” (Csordas).<sup>27</sup> De Michelis’ ideal-typical categories thus have a weakness since they imply a vital difference in approaching yoga as belief system *or* as a set of physical exercises.<sup>28</sup> Although this distinction does indeed reflect a particular modern discourse on yoga, to oppose these categories altogether is problematic, both in the Indian context and in the allegedly secularized, late modern, post-industrial settings where the boundaries between health behavior, self-cultivation, and religious aspirations are increasingly blurred, where there is often no clear line between spiritual practice and psychosomatic self-help.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, De Michelis’ model did not account for those representations of yoga that circulate primarily in India (e.g., yoga championships or the politicization of yoga), a constraint she herself mentions.<sup>30</sup> Although her typology was extremely helpful in opening the field of modern yoga studies, the categories she outlined quickly reached their analytical limits. While they exemplify common ways that

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<sup>23</sup> According to De Michelis, Iyengar Yoga is a paradigmatic form of MPY, whereas the yoga of Chinmoy can be classified as MMY.

<sup>24</sup> Alter (1997, 92).

<sup>25</sup> White (2012a, 7).

<sup>26</sup> Alter (1992, 92).

<sup>27</sup> For the concept of embodiment see Csordas (1990, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> In search of a descriptive model to map coexisting and partly overlapping forms of modern yoga, one might more appropriately view the “spiritual” and the “physical” as the x and the y axis in a coordinate system, charting each variant of yoga along these axes.

<sup>29</sup> The emergence and glorification of self-care in post-traditional societies has been explored by Ziguira (2004). The assumption of a particular Hindu view, however, recalls the difficulties in defining Hinduism (see Lipner 2004; Malinar 2009).

<sup>30</sup> De Michelis (2004, 189). In 2008 De Michelis suggests a fifth category: the “Neo-Hindu style of Modern Yoga” (2008, 22) including, for instance, mass yoga camps in a Hindu-nationalist spirit (Alter 2008).



yoga schools distance themselves from each other (i.e., emic arguments that constitute a distinct discursive field), they do not help theorize the multiple and competing logics used to interpret and circulate yoga, or the ambivalent manifestations and shifts in overall systemic orientation (its ontological status) that occur while practices and ideas remain. The mimetic process of deciphering and encoding yoga escapes a simplistic dialectic of mind and body, religious versus secular. However, in fairness to De Michelis' intent, the proposed terms were meant as provisional and "convenient" working concepts that in spite of their capital letters were not put forth as dogmatic and absolute types.<sup>31</sup> Her contribution should be understood as an invitation for further elaboration and verification.

Several works have been published on the twentieth-century dissemination of yoga within particular national contexts, such as within Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>32</sup> These studies, written from the scholarly perspective of the host nation, either implied or explicitly suggested that a hitherto foreign set of ideas and/or practices were part of a gradual process of cultural absorption. With regard to yoga in post-World War II Germany, Christian Fuchs identified four periods: (1) the "consolidation" of dispersed individuals interested in yoga from 1945 to 1955; (2) the "institutionalization" of yoga instruction between 1956 and 1966; (3) the emergence and "organization" of a yoga movement between 1967 and 1979; and (4) the "professionalization" of teacher training and quality management between 1980 and 1990.<sup>33</sup> With regard to the United Kingdom, De Michelis distinguished three different time periods: (1) the "popularization" of yoga from the 1950s to mid-1970s; (2) the "consolidation" from the mid-1970s to late 1980s; and (3) the "acculturation" of yoga from the late 1980s to date.<sup>34</sup> These types of regional studies are of great significance since they highlight the social conditions that invited and accompanied the gradual acceptance of yoga in the Western hemisphere. Yet by their emphasis on stages of cultural integration they tend to suggest a strict bilateralism and a one-way diffusion that proves delusive to any systematic analysis of multidirectional flows and transnational developments. Although the spread of yoga differed historically from country to country—for instance in regards to the yoga pioneers who shaped the initial yoga imagery in Germany and in Britain—it would be incongruous to conceive of an explicit British yoga practice or the Germanization of Indian yoga.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as mentioned earlier, no fixed set of ready-made mind-body techniques existed for export to the West prior to this transcultural encounter.

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<sup>31</sup> De Michelis (2004, 7).

<sup>32</sup> See Fuchs (1990, 2006), cf. Schnäbele (2010), De Michelis (2004), Newcombe (2007, 2008), Ceccomori (2001), and Syman (2010).

<sup>33</sup> Fuchs (1990, slightly extended in 2006) uses the German terms: *Konsolidierung*, *Institutionalisierung*, *Organisation*, *Professionalisierung*.

<sup>34</sup> De Michelis (2004).

<sup>35</sup> In the 1960s, yoga in Germany was mainly Sivananda Yoga, whereas in Britain Iyengar Yoga dominated.

Some recent research has focused on yoga practitioners and their long-distance travel, engaged upon improving not only posture practices but also the self. The quintessential destination of this “pilgrimage” is, not surprisingly, India.<sup>36</sup> Social anthropologist Sarah Strauss followed visitors of the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, India back to their respective home countries and explored the ways in which they integrated and transformed yoga and notions of yogic life in their everyday life. Following the various strands of this global network she conducted multi-sited fieldwork in India, Switzerland, Germany, and the United States, evaluated in *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (2005). Although this study only cursorily refers to Indian yoga practitioners, Strauss makes an important point: whereas Indians practitioners appreciated (Neo-)Hatha Yoga for its scientifically proven efficacy, non-Indian followers regarded yoga as a metonym for spirituality and valued its holistic dimension.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the same type of yoga knowledge and exercise that was taught at one exemplary site was seemingly framed in at least two different ways—and probably produced contrasting experiences to some extent. Regrettably, it was beyond the scope of Strauss’ investigation to analyze the underlying reasons for these experiential differences; instead, the spread of Sivananda Yoga Centers into several countries seemed to indicate the existence of a globally shared yoga culture that transcended national boundaries. Similarly, the geographer Anne-Cécile Hoyez provided a multilayered analysis of how the circulation of yoga influenced the social construction of global space, considering the world-wide distribution of yoga centers, the travel routes of yoga gurus and practitioners, the spread of yoga providers and its impact on urban landscapes, as well as the influence of regular yoga practice on spatial categories at home.<sup>38</sup> Although based on interviews with yoga practitioners in France and India (including tourists), her study shows how the circulation of yoga cannot be reduced to bilateral relations but is linked with overlapping national and global networks, discourses on the historic spread of yoga, and also the symbolism of yoga places, here understood in reference to Gesler’s “therapeutic landscapes,”<sup>39</sup> Hoyez shows how the identification of ailments and medical preferences correlate with the assessment of environmental features of yoga ashrams (in India, the United States, and South Africa) that were considered and compared in terms of their therapeutic potential, that is to say as socially negotiated global imaginaries. However, both Strauss and Hoyez are silent in regards the asymmetries involved in these transnational productions. For example, these global sites of yoga—whether in India or elsewhere—are neither created nor shared with equal means: who is in the position to travel, to define, to push, to communicate, to translate?

Both the speed of information flows and the mobility of people have unquestionably accelerated tremendously since the 1990s, and new analytic models have

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<sup>36</sup> On the concept of pilgrimage in this context see Burger (2006).

<sup>37</sup> Strauss (2005, 116).

<sup>38</sup> Hoyez (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Hoyez (2007).

been developed to grasp the dynamics of a cultural interconnectedness that now clearly goes beyond geographic and national boundaries. But before I turn our attention toward the ways in which these challenging circumstances, concepts, and theoretical models are addressed and reflected upon in this volume, let me provide a few historical notes on yoga and cultural change—although space does not permit a comprehensive overview of yoga scholarship undertaken by Indologists and historians of religion.<sup>40</sup>

## Sources and Approaches in the Study of Indian Yoga

The emphasis in this collection of essays on yoga's transcultural trajectory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries does not stem from an assumption that contemporary yoga inherently differs from past practice by virtue of the (in)consistency of transmission. Cultural change did not interrupt one homogeneous practice of yoga at only one point in time; therefore, today's yoga cannot be read in reductive fashion as a consequence only of globalization, of modernity, or of British colonialism. More accurately, several indicators show that the historical development of yoga was itself transient, fragmented, ambiguous, and subject to alteration.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to popular belief or self-proclaimed adherence to an ancient Indian tradition, even premodern yoga cannot be understood as a singular, cohesive system. Imagining the development of yoga as a family tree with Indian roots, a substantial trunk of "tradition," and several more or less globalized branches is a modern trope for a complex formation that more appropriately resembles a huge banyan tree with several intermingled aerial roots that make it difficult to recognize where the tree begins and where it ends, how it is absorbed by other plants, and that it may, in fact, be the product of multiple distant origins.<sup>42</sup>

From the perspective of Indologists, the metamorphosis and plural meanings associated with "yoga" correlate with the general vagueness and semantic breadth of the term itself. In *Yoga in Practice* (2012), David White states that "every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga."<sup>43</sup> He goes on to point out that the range of meanings associated with the term "yoga" is wider than for almost any other word in the Sanskrit lexicon. More than 3,000 years ago—long

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<sup>40</sup> For further readings see Whicher (1998), Whicher and Carpenter (2003), Jacobsen (2005), Samuel (2008), and White (2012b), to mention only a few recent publications.

<sup>41</sup> Jacobsen (2005, 17), Whicher and Carpenter (2003, 1), Singleton and Byrne (2008b, 5), Samuel (2008, 178), and White (2012a, 2).

<sup>42</sup> In popular yoga literature the simplified genealogical tree is commonly used: see Tietke (2007) in his "5000 years" [sic] of yoga. Recently, Lipner (2004), 24 employed the banyan metaphor to explain Hinduism(s).

<sup>43</sup> White (2012a, 2). In the following I shall focus on semantics relevant to grasp the development of modern Hatha Yoga. For lack of space I do not elaborate on interlinked concepts such as *bhaktiyoga*, *jñānayoga*, *karmayoga*, *rājayoga* and others whose meanings were subject of several classical and medieval Indian texts.

before a recognizable system called yoga had emerged—the term was used for yoking an animal and for the yoke itself. It was also a metaphor for a time of war (in reference to the yoke on a warhorse).<sup>44</sup> Even when the term began to appear regularly in Sanskrit literature (between 300 BCE to 400 CE) it meant many different things and “union”—a common translation in today’s yoga manuals—was only one of many interpretive options. According to White, yoga has variously signified:

a conjunction of planets, . . . a constellation, . . . [a mixture of] substances, . . . a device, a recipe, a method, a strategy, a charm, an incantation, fraud, a trick, an endeavor, a combination, . . . an arrangement, zeal, care, diligence, industriousness, discipline, use, application, contact, a sum total, and the Work [sic] of alchemists.<sup>45</sup>

Yet even this list does not exhaust the meanings that have existed over time. Thus, it is by no means clear that the notion of yoga as it appears in a given primary source refers to the same subject matter when found in another manuscript assembled thousands of years later. Very likely we are also faced with a multiple homonym so that broad clusters of semantic meaning emerge only in relation to specific groups of texts.<sup>46</sup>

For the reasons stated above, the main current in linguistic yoga research follows a hermeneutic approach, seeking to evaluate yoga as a historical and pluralistic phenomenon. There is a rich collection of Indic scripture that variously concentrates on yoga and invites a broad spectrum of interpretations. Whether and in what respect this scriptural knowledge reflected ascetic ideals, religious practice, or metaphysical concepts is disputed.<sup>47</sup> Apart from celebrated root texts like the *Yogasūtra* and sections of the *Bhagavadgītā* and *Upaniṣad*, the main texts that relate to modern posture practice appeared between 1350 and 1850 CE.<sup>48</sup> Referencing a tantric theory of the human body with its energy centers (*cakra*) and energy channels (*nāḍī*), they promote the manipulation of the physique and codify yoga as a system of purificatory techniques, controlled breathing, and postures—thus constituting what came to be known as the (tantric) *haṭhayoga* tradition. *Haṭhayoga* literally means “violent effort” or “the yoga of force,” suggesting increased self-mastery for attaining a goal, possibly supernatural powers, immunity from illness, or immortality if not outright union with god. According to Jason Birch the main implication of describing this type of yoga as forceful is, however, an allusion to the tremendous effects of its techniques.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid; for a present-day lexicon entry “yoga” and its diverse meanings see Alter (2004, 11).

<sup>46</sup> Singleton (2010, 15).

<sup>47</sup> On the *Yogasūtra* and its interpretation see Whicher (1998); for other foundational and “classical” yoga texts see White (2012b).

<sup>48</sup> Sjoman 1996; some Indologists assume that what came to be known as the tantric tradition was antedated by the practices of renunciators between 900 and 1200 (see overview by Newcombe 2009, 987), or as early as the sixth century CE (Whicher and Carpenter 2003, 8).

<sup>49</sup> For a profound discussion of the term *haṭhayoga* see Birch (2011); compare the translations by Alter (2004, 24), Bühnemann (2007, 11), Staal (1993, 71), and White (2012a, 15).

Prominent among these texts is the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, a fourteenth-century treatise written from the perspective of a spiritual adept.<sup>50</sup> Other texts such as the *Śivasamhitā* and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* have a distinct literary and philosophical flavor, at times purposely oblique. They were not intended as tutorials but supplemented an embodied tradition that was transmitted from master (*guru*) to lifelong student. These medieval texts seem related to earlier views on yoga in particular as a method for controlling the natural activities of mental organs. Still and all, we must assume that competing meanings did exist since sources use the term in reference to ontologically diverse categories such as a strand of philosophy and also the goal of a specific yogic practice.<sup>51</sup> Hence, text-based hermeneutic interpretation has variously discussed yoga as a philosophical ideal of ascetic living, a theory of consciousness, and a set of guidelines with which to face death.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the scope of primary texts on the subject of yoga can either be widened to include commentaries on associated aspects and topics or limited to only a few major treatises. Similarly, one may focus on pre-*Yogasūtra* sources or on sources ascribed to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, or even related to Muslim practice.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Alter points out that the “somewhat arbitrary” selection of primary texts will influence what aspects dominate the interpretations of yoga.<sup>54</sup> As Ian Whicher and David Carpenter remark, we cannot know what influence these texts actually had, and whether the sources that attracted the most academic attention were indeed authoritative.<sup>55</sup> Whereas colonial India and Hindu reformers valorized some texts—prominently the *Yogasūtra*—others were silenced for their apparently “perverse” content, such as the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*.<sup>56</sup> For these reasons, it is highly problematic to trace modern postural practice back to textual sources, creating linkages that envision a direct line of succession from the *Yogasūtra* to medieval *haṭhayoga* texts and then to the Hindu-reformist visions of true yoga.<sup>57</sup>

One strategy for bypassing the vagueness of the term “yoga” is to focus on the history of actual posture practice by means of scriptural and visual sources that allow for the comparison of *āsana* names, of descriptive remarks, and images. To come straight to the point, even when using this approach it remains difficult to establish a consistent yoga tradition. The early descriptions of *āsana* found in primary sources are very brief; matching the text’s poetic meter they are of limited use in identifying a posture. In some manuscripts the illustrations even differ from the textual description altogether; in other examples the procedure for an *āsana* was

<sup>50</sup> The date of the Indian source is disputed (see footnote 5). Here I follow Alter (2004, 21) although Bühnemann (2007, 7) assumes that the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* was composed in the fifteenth/sixteenth century CE.

<sup>51</sup> Jacobson (2005, 4).

<sup>52</sup> See Malinar (2009, 254–256), Jacobson (2005, 9), and Schreiner (2009).

<sup>53</sup> On Islamic thought in relation to yoga see Jacobsen (2005, 19) and White (2012b, Chaps. 7 and 15).

<sup>54</sup> Alter (2004, 20).

<sup>55</sup> Whicher and Carpenter (2003).

<sup>56</sup> See Sjomán (1996, 56) for Dayananda Sarasvatī’s account on yogis destroying manuscripts of the latter category; cf. Wujastyk (2009, 200–203).

<sup>57</sup> See Sjomán (1996, 37 and 40), Whicher and Carpenter (2003, 6), Bühnemann (2007, 20–21), White (2009, 246–247), Singleton (2010, 5).

changed over time.<sup>58</sup> Most notably, the specific number of canonical postures varied, regardless of the generalized symbolic notion of 84 postures (in some sources listed as 8,400,000).<sup>59</sup> According to the *Yogasūtra*, yoga should be performed in a firm, seated position only so as not to distract the meditating person. Composed roughly a millennium later, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* listed only 15 essential postures; the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* would later mention 32; and the *Śivasamhitā* a total of 84, describing only four in detail.<sup>60</sup> One well-preserved manuscript dated 1737 substantiated the total of 84 with illustrations of each posture.<sup>61</sup> Another treatise with pictures from the Palace of Mysore (dated 1811–1868) described 122 postures, 80 basic and 42 additional *āsana*, each with a few verses on name and performance.<sup>62</sup> In the twentieth century, we once again find renowned yoga gurus building their fame on 25 postures (Yesudian), or taken to the other extreme on 200 postures plus related exercises (Iyengar).<sup>63</sup> The TKDL, housed under the auspices of the Indian government, has even documented “from antique texts” a total of 900 yoga exercises!<sup>64</sup> This raises the question of what is

<sup>58</sup> On the discrepancy between image and textual description see Gharote 2006, xxxii. An example of a changed posture is *kūrmāsana* (tortoise pose): its present-day performance clearly differs from its textual counterpart in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*.

<sup>59</sup> Bühnemann (2007).

<sup>60</sup> Sjomann (1996), Bühnemann (2007), and Singleton (2010, 29). According to White (2012a, 10, 17) there was reference neither to postures nor controlled breathing in sources antedating the ninth century CE.

<sup>61</sup> Bühnemann (2007, 143–145).

<sup>62</sup> Sjomann (1996).

<sup>63</sup> Both yoga gurus published tutorials that were translated into several languages: *Yoga and Health* (Yesudian and Haich 1953, Hungarian original from 1941), and *Light on Yoga* (Iyengar 1966). Since the publication of the latter, Iyengar has continued to develop and vary exercises.

<sup>64</sup> In June 2010, the TKDL had reportedly registered more than 900 postures (see Emily Wax, “The Great Yoga Crackdown,” in *The Washington Post*, 23 August 2010; download at <http://www.tkdil.res.in/tkdil/langdefault/common/PressCoverage.asp>, accessed 12 January 2012). Unfortunately, the TKDL did not provide information in regards to its method of data collection or evaluation. However, on its homepage it lists 38 seemingly authoritative books as “sources of information,” all of which are authored, translated, and published by Indians (between 1920 and 2008) and include both historical and modern texts. (<http://www.tkdil.res.in/tkdil/langdefault/common/SourceInfo.asp?GL=Eng>, accessed 12 January 2012).

This extraordinarily high number of yoga postures is substantiated by the Lonavla Yoga Institute in Pune, India: on behalf of the institute, and subsidized by the Indian government, Manohar Laxman Gharote et al. (2006) compiled an *Encyclopedia of Traditional Asanas* with about 900 entries, including up to 100 different applications of a particular *āsana* and then several entries without any description of the content or technique. This reference book is methodologically problematic because it does not differentiate between *āsana* names used in primary sources, in secondary literature, and in popular twentieth-century books about yoga. For instance, it describes a version of *unmukha-pīṭha* suitable “for the pregnant woman” (Gharote 2006, 326), although before independence women were excluded from learning postural yoga. Elsewhere Gharote (2006, xxxvii) refers to “asanas” from Celtic, Egyptian, and Mexican civilization.

Cf. Bühnemann (2007, 179–290). In her study on yoga postures mentioned in Indian manuscripts between 1625 and 2003, she discovered a total of 351 different *āsana* names, several of which refer to similar postures. Admittedly some positions described in early texts are absent in modern yoga curricula, e.g., *tapakāsana*, hanging upside down by feet tied on a rope see Bühnemann 2007, 51, 151).

considered a yoga posture in comparison to more or less universal human ways of sitting, standing, and flexing (acrobatic artistry aside). Linguistically, one should point out that not every yoga exercise was classified as *āsana* but also as *kriya*, *bandha*, *mudra*, *pīṭha*, *niṣadana*, or *aṅgika*.<sup>65</sup> Then again it seems that the term *āsana* (literally: seat, base) became synonymous with the general English notion of “posture” and was used to describe positions in wrestling and archery as well.<sup>66</sup> In fact, this might help explain the ever increasing number of (yoga) exercises. However, while some scholars (prominently Mircea Eliade) and yoga practitioners regard the Harappan seal—with its image of a person sitting knees apart and feet together—as undeniable evidence that places yoga’s origin 5,000 years ago, modern yoga studies is faced with the methodological conundrum of differentiating between postures that could be simple bodily movements and/or yoga: between an upright position with both hands stretched upward and *tāḍāsana* (mountain pose); between a headstand and *śīrṣāsana* (literally: head pose); between reclined relaxation and *śavāsana* (corpse pose); or between the splits and *hanumanāsana* (Hanuman/monkey pose), to name only a few.<sup>67</sup>

In order to learn about the lived and embodied practice of yoga in premodern India, White took another approach: he focused on practitioners of yoga as described in medieval narrative accounts rather than giving priority to religio-philosophical source material. In *Sinister Yogis* (2009), White convincingly demonstrates that premodern yogis were regarded as dubious individuals, associated with supernatural powers, prone to take over people’s bodies, and thus often objects of dread and fear. In other words, the primary sense of the term yogi was reserved for practitioners of black magic and sorcery. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did British and anglicized Indian individuals begin to romanticize the yogic lifestyle.<sup>68</sup> According to White, this alternate image of a yogi as someone seated in a fixed posture, regulating his breath, and entering into meditation did not even appear prior to the seventeenth century<sup>69</sup>; and by the late nineteenth century one could no longer find solitary yogis lost in meditation somewhere in a far-off Himalayan cave.<sup>70</sup> According to Knut Jacobsen, most yogis belonged to sectarian organizations that provided a communal lifestyle.<sup>71</sup> In modern India, the most visible successors of the medieval yogis are men of the Nath Yogi order; however, there are also other sectarian groups who conceptualize

<sup>65</sup> Bühnemann (2007, 17) and Gharote et al. (2006, xxvii).

<sup>66</sup> Bühnemann (2007, 17) and Sjomann (1996, 45).

<sup>67</sup> Eliade’s view has been taken up in several popular books on yoga, see Tietke (2007). On the meanings and postures associated with *tāḍāsana* see Bühnemann (2007, 162). On the problem of defining a yoga posture vis-à-vis a similar general pose see Singleton’s contribution in this volume (chapter “Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga”).

<sup>68</sup> White (2009, 244).

<sup>69</sup> White (2012a, 15).

<sup>70</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the Hindu reformer Dayananda Sarasvati spent nine years wandering the Himalayas in search of “true” yogis, and finding none (Sjomann 1996, 55).

<sup>71</sup> Jacobsen (2005, 23).

their spiritual path as yoga, such as the Ramanandi Tyagis. Whereas well-known yogic practices mentioned in medieval *hathayoga* texts are beyond the capacity of most present-day yogis (e.g., to curl the tongue backwards into the nasal cavity, *khecarī mudrā*), some seem to have specialized in demonstrating their acrobatic skills to journalists, tourists, and scholars alike.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, the image of the dangerous yogi has left its mark in today's folk beliefs.

These three avenues of research—the focus on yoga's respective meanings, on the history of postures, and on reported practitioners—make it absolutely clear that yoga never constituted a monolithic nor homogenous entity. On the contrary, plural meanings, (re)interpretations, cross-fertilization, and transformations were an essential part of this tradition. Seen from this perspective, “modern” yoga is simply another (re)definition or stage in a long history of interrelated concepts and practices.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, if one thinks of yoga as a practice that is primarily embodied—that is to say, transmitted by means of and through the body—written forms of cultural knowledge are by their very nature limited in their representative capacity.

## The Impact of Language

Several researchers have expressed their reservations in regards to the label “modern” used to differentiate between earlier and more recent forms of yoga.<sup>74</sup> The term is indeed problematic. Does it refer to a particular time period, a paradigm shift, an ideology? Because modernity is not a universal but a cultural construct, some self-proclaimed “moderns” might fail to meet its varied and ambiguous expectations, while others might simply follow essentially competing visions of the concept.<sup>75</sup> Although one can describe yoga as embedded within specific modern settings (e.g., institutionalized instruction, a specific morality of health, or the emphasis on self-identity), even these distinctions undoubtedly privilege a Eurocentric perspective, appropriated and modified in various parts of the world. Therefore, we are left with the realization that no inherent property exists by which we can clearly define “modern” yoga as a separate entity. As a result, Singleton suggests replacing this qualifier with the term “transnational anglophone yoga,” which rightly acknowledges the importance of English as a medium for the emergence and perpetuation of today's yoga discourses.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, this term

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<sup>72</sup> On the performance of *khecarī mudrā* see Mallison (2005, 108); on sadhus who proudly perform their yogic prowess see Hauser (2007, 165–166).

<sup>73</sup> I hesitate to generalize today's yoga in terms of an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) or as “neo-traditionalism” (Pordié 2008) since both concepts presuppose a contrast to an assumed continuity and invariability of tradition. Moreover, some schools of present-day yoga explicitly advance hybrid forms.

<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Singleton and Byrne (2008a, 6–7).

<sup>75</sup> See Bruno Latour's famous argument that *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) and Shmuel Eisenstadt's postulation for *Multiple Modernities* (2002).

<sup>76</sup> Singleton (2010, 9–10, 18).



downplays the extensive body of Indian language material that does not represent an isolated discourse.<sup>77</sup> Singleton himself discusses the significant role played by a yoga compendium that was assembled and written in the Kannada language by Krishnamacharya in 1934/1935.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, the time period generally associated with the phrase “modern yoga” does indeed begin with the documented and reciprocal transcultural communication of the nineteenth century that came into existence between India, Europe, and North America—one that was dominated by the linguistic medium of English. It is important to note that Indian yoga literature was at this time also in the midst of a significant genre shift; moving away from textual redaction and commentary to a nonfiction form that used original sources as documentation or was based upon personal insights (“yogic pulp nonfiction” in Alter’s polemic words).<sup>79</sup> Still and all, both the empirical studies and secondary literature were without a doubt strongly influenced by the transnational anglophone discourse. Yoga is a case in point for what Srinivas Aravamudan termed, as in the title of his book, *Guru English* (2007), in reference to the self-perpetuating dynamics in the history of concepts once they have been translated into another language (in this case, English). This transformative dynamic is shaped not only by the varying categories of cognition provided and structured through language but also by the pragmatics of language use: Over time, the exclusively Indian meanings for terms like guru, mantra, tantra, yogi, and so on fade vis-à-vis their new meanings in English parlance. For example, in today’s global context the term “yogini” signifies a dedicated female yoga practitioner, possibly a lean girl in sportswear; it no longer refers to a flying witch (i.e., a *yoginī*) feared for eating human flesh, as was and still is the common association found in Indian villages.

Similarly, when present-day Germans, Israelis, Argentinians, Japanese, or Russians talk about Raja Yoga or Hatha Yoga, their ideas and practices should not be viewed uncritically in analogy to or as a direct implementation of concepts mentioned in medieval or classical Sanskrit texts,—although references to such terms serve to identify particular strands of modern yoga. In an attempt to provide linguistic clarity, this volume will employ a distinct form of spelling: Whenever an author refers to the social practice of yoga and associated issues, he or she will use anglicized transcription. Accordingly, the various schools of yoga are written with capital letters (and non-italicized): Ashtanga Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Power Yoga, and so on. However, if an author refers to a concept mentioned in early Indian manuscripts the term is spelled lowercase, italicized, and according to the standard system of Sanskrit transliteration: for example, *kunḍālinī* (a distinct type of energy), *aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eight-limbed yoga), or *karmayoga* (in the *Bhagavadgītā*). The advantage of differentiating between “textual” *haṭhayoga*

<sup>77</sup> See Alter (2004, xix). At the beginning of the twentieth century, several Indian authors sought to explain Indian concepts of the body in modern medical terminology, see Wujastyk (2009).

<sup>78</sup> Singleton et al. (2012).

<sup>79</sup> Alter (2004, 21). According to Alter, this development was antedated by Orientalist studies on yoga, published from 1851 to 1930 (ibid. 6).

and “practiced” (Neo-)Hatha Yoga—and similar semantic correlates—is to avoid the implicit and rarely disputed claims of similarity; we thereby open analytic space to clearly elaborate on the relations between earlier and later forms of conceptualizing yoga.

And yet another linguistic observation would seem to highlight a phenomenon that runs counter to the trajectory of “guru English”: the sheer number of postures that continue to appear in the twentieth century strongly suggests the invention of Sanskrit names (although speakers of present-day Indian languages can pronounce them according to their respective mother tongue).<sup>80</sup> For example, an exercise that stretches the spine while on all-fours, unknown in primary yoga texts, is today described as *biḍālāsana* (or *mārjārīāsana*), i.e., cat (stretch) pose.<sup>81</sup> This naming convention proves that hitherto unspecified body postures are framed within familiar epistemic categories, in India as elsewhere. In addition, similarly Sanskrit(ized) terms exist to characterize standing postures, a type of exercise almost completely absent from pre-twentieth-century manuscripts. Ironically, from a non-Indian perspective, the Sanskrit name seems to imply the referent’s origin in “ancient yoga tradition.” For lack of studies that probe this particular issue, this volume refers to all postures by their common English paraphrase, supplemented by the transliterated Sanskrit name.

## Conceptualizing Cultural Flows: Yoga in Transit

As previously discussed, yoga is and was always multifaceted and prone to change. The malleability of the concept was caused by (and simultaneously produced) the wide semantic scope of the term “yoga”. Whereas this semantic fuzziness remains relevant to yoga’s present transnational dissemination, other ways of framing its metamorphoses appear to be obsolete. For example, it has been shown that yoga’s trajectory cannot be reduced to a simplistic, one-way diffusion traveling from East to West. Its ever-changing face was neither the product of mere re-contextualization (i.e., the Westernization of a preexisting set of Indian body techniques), nor did it result from the combination of two or more pristine cultural practices (syncretism). In the last 100 years, yoga’s itinerary did not follow just one

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<sup>80</sup> Sanskrit is primarily a liturgical language that has many loanwords in present-day Indian vernaculars. Strictly speaking, the names of several postures can reference both Sanskrit and Hindi, among others. Both languages are written in Devanagari script, yet pronunciation differs. This distinction is reproduced in transliteration: *yoga* (Sanskrit)/*yog* (Hindi); *āsana* (Sanskrit)/*āsan* (Hindi); yet *guru* (Sanskrit)/*guru* (Hindi), etc. In the case of Hatha Yoga it is generally assumed that Indian names derive from Sanskrit, and therefore several books provide a Sanskrit glossary. This use of Sanskrit is in line with religious conventions, yet also reflects a modern Indian practice that is analogous to the Western use of technical terms from Latin.

<sup>81</sup> Based upon the *āsana* compilations by Sjomann (1996), Gharote et al. (2006), and Bühnemann (2007), there is no evidence of this posture in earlier yoga sources.

path, direction, or logic and its widespread dissemination did not lead to just one shared understanding of what yoga is and does. It is fair to say that the globalization of yoga did not produce homogeneity, all the more so if one takes into account the primarily local forms found in Hindu India (e.g., yoga camps). So how does one classify and systematize these interlinked developments, semiotic chains, references, and structural (dis)similarities in ways that push the methodological and interpretative envelope? Can we generalize certain traits, patterns, and procedures that characterize this traveling subject? In this section, I shall briefly discuss some recent findings and models that relate to global spaces, transnational flows, and cultural interactions, and consider how they might inspire and facilitate the analysis of present-day yoga and its dynamics. This overview is intended to be programmatic rather than comprehensive in its review of concepts and approaches that, so far, do not represent a fully assembled body of theorizing but rather reflect ongoing academic debates at various disciplinary sites. Instead, it is a provisional outline for the notion of transculturality in relation to the study of yoga's global circulation; one that endeavors to invite a wide array of scholarly reorientations. The authors in this volume have each taken steps to advance the possibilities of this approach. Whereas some of them welcomed the transcultural as a descriptive category to reveal the character of specific discourses and developments, others employed it as a heuristic device to position and verify their research data, or to raise altogether new research questions. Against their respective disciplinary background, they have integrated aspects of the transculturality debate into their research, mindful of the methodological opportunities it provides to elucidate and explain the entangled movements of ideas, peoples, and practices in particular as they relate to yoga in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

One of the most influential ways of thinking about translocal processes goes back to the social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. He suggested looking at cultural flows within an analytic framework of imaginary landscapes; that is to say, within various spaces that are co-produced and negotiated between socially and spatially dispersed groups of individuals and globally defined fields of possibility.<sup>82</sup> According to Appadurai, five basic modes exist by which we project and experience global/cultural configurations: ethnoscaples, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. With respect to the spread and perception of yoga one might annotate these modes as follows: (1) yoga practitioners as imagined transnational communities; (2) implicit and explicit ideas regarding the components of a yoga class or exercise, notably "techniques of the body" (Marcel Mauss); (3) notions about international monetary transfers associated with the site-specific commercialization of yoga; (4) representations of yoga produced in diverse media contexts; and (5) ideologies that express the yogic attitude toward societal issues or its universal usefulness. These various "scapes" provide analytic distinctions that help recognize the conditions under which global flows occur and interrelate,

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<sup>82</sup> Appadurai's notion of imaginary landscapes (1996, 31) follows Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" (1983), which was developed in the late 1960s.

thereby mapping out heterogeneous, disjunctive, and asymmetric processes rather than forms of homogeneity within the worlds of yoga. Appadurai used the suffix “scape” to emphasize that these circulatory dimensions are not objective entities but highly perspectival constructs whose shapes are fluid and irregular.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike Appadurai, several other scholars concentrated on “deterritorialization” as a conceptual tool for critically reconsidering the influence of place and regional structures. They focused on the perspectives of transnational communities and on their interactions, possibly spanning two or more nations.<sup>84</sup> These multinational social spaces—and transit zones in particular—constituted their specific field of empirical research, methodologically accessible by means of multi-sited ethnography. This research avenue has been fruitfully advanced by Strauss’ and also by Hoyez’s work on global yoga networks (mentioned in the previous section).<sup>85</sup> In the present book a good example of this approach is the joint contribution by Sarah Strauss and Laura Mandelbaum, who analyze a financially robust and ecologically thinking transnational class of yoga practitioners and their interlinked commitments to personal and environmental health (see chapter “[Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment: Transcultural Discourses on Sustainable Living](#)”). Deterritorialized spaces can also include areas that are devoid of any specifically local character and even look remarkably similar no matter where they exist (e.g., shopping malls). Even yoga retreats can be categorized as “non-places” (Marc Augé). Anne Koch’s depiction of the yoga instruction offered at an international holiday resort in Thailand, for example, illustrates how this beachside practice could occur anywhere comparable scenery and climate are found (see chapter “[Yoga as a Production Site of Social and Human Capital: Transcultural Flows from a Cultural Economic Perspective](#)”). Following Mimi Nichter, secluded environments like this invite a distinct category of yoga practitioners (see chapter “[The Social Life of Yoga: Exploring Transcultural Flows in India](#)”). In several other studies on globalization, deterritorialization evolved as a key term used to describe the declining impact of geographically bounded concepts, practices, and identities in relation to particular social phenomena.<sup>86</sup>

The scholarly attention that was given to increased transnational communication, mobility, and networks also resulted in a re-evaluation of the notion of culture as a seemingly static and spatially defined unit; clearly, cultures could no longer be conceptualized as island-like entities (e.g., national cultures) influencing each other at singular points in time. Whereas the inherent sameness and stability of cultural

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<sup>83</sup> Appadurai (1996, 33).

<sup>84</sup> Kearny (1995, 553).

<sup>85</sup> Strauss (2005), Hoyez (2005, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Initially, the term “deterritorialization” was introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980) to address a resolution of chains of associations, and in particular the issue of displaced (rather than deconstructed) significations. For example, a clearly recognizable form (“assemblage”) that occupies a certain discursive terrain can be decentered (i.e., deterritorialized) and relinked with another set of relations (i.e., “reterritorialized”). Thus Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of territory is highly abstract rather than geographical.

groups had been questioned by social anthropologists for a long time, it was the rise in global interconnectedness that initiated a substantial shift of scholarly focus to the performative dimension of culture.<sup>87</sup> Seen through this performative lens, groups of individuals negotiate and mutually reconfirm their shared cultural knowledge, tacit theories, and routines through social practice. Through performance, interaction, and embodiment, these epistemic communities shape and are shaped by their respective values and norms, hierarchies and symbolic orders, aspirations and dislikes, imaginaries, politics, representations and artifacts.<sup>88</sup> In short, these social entities are heterogeneous and subject to change and while they may group together in a specific area, they may not be the sole inhabitants of that locality. Consequently, the heuristic value of studying “Indian” versus “Western” approaches to yoga, or comparing “Indian,” “German,” and perhaps “American” posture practices seems limited, especially if one assumes that cultural sites spill across national borders. As such, it becomes important to ask who qualifies to represent these contrasts? Is it the Indian elite doing yoga in a Mumbai-based gym? Or German yoga teachers who adopt a Hindu spiritual name? Perhaps it’s the Asian-Indian Americans teaching yoga in Germany? In a globally interconnected world, previously unquestioned (national) categories have developed a certain artificiality. Still, major social differences do indeed exist among yoga practitioners. Therefore, it would be illuminating to consider particular yoga cultures (i.e., epistemic communities or social entities), last but not least vis-à-vis other social movements (such as the Green Movement, see Strauss and Mandelbaum, chapter “[Consuming Yoga, Conserving the Environment: Transcultural Discourses on Sustainable Living](#)”) or in juxtaposition to other cultural environments (such as the post-Fordist workplace, see Schnäbele, chapter “[The Useful Body: The Yogic Answer to Appearance Management in the Post-Fordist Workplace](#)”). Alternately, it might prove useful to compare the social impact of disparate yoga cultures, viewed through the discourses and practices shared by aficionados of particular yoga traditions. In this volume, Beatrix Hauser illustrates how contrasting communicative conventions and underlying assumptions shape and are shaped by distinct types of yoga classes (see chapter “[Touching the Limits, Assessing Pain: On Language Performativity, Health, and Well-Being in Yoga Classes](#)”).

This shift in the conceptualization of culture(s) creates some terminological ambiguity. Although flows, spaces, and processes can be both transcultural (connecting epistemic communities) and transnational (connecting citizens), it is important to keep in mind that this need not necessarily be the case. For instance,

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<sup>87</sup> On anthropological debates related to the concept of culture see Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Hannerz (1992) and Hastrup and Olwig (1997); for a summary account see Kearny (1995, 556–557). A sociological perspective on culture theory has been offered by Reckwitz (2005); for a philosophical statement in favor of transculturality see Welsch (1999).

<sup>88</sup> There are diverse opinions as to the analytic role and impact of embodiment (implicit, corporeal knowledge) and as to the role of practice as a mode or negotiating cultural difference (see Csordas 1990; Rao 2005). If “knowledge” is understood to include embodied routines and tacit assumptions (as I do), epistemic communities result from shared social practice and vice versa.

Mark Singleton's contribution shows how the genesis of modern postural yoga in colonial India resulted from the mutual influence of increasingly local physical culturists on the one hand and the Neo-Hindu Renaissance on the other—and hence indicates how transcultural flows on the global and domestic level intermingle and alternate in time (see chapter “[Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga](#)”). Similarly, Suzanne Newcombe draws our attention to the ways in which early British yoga practitioners were influenced by a subcultural movement interested in the occult and witchcraft, and only by the 1960s had developed into a social entity of its own. By that time, yoga had emerged as an acceptable leisure activity; although it continues to nurture hopes of magical powers in respect to issues such as anti-aging, self-empowerment, and healing (see chapter “[Magic and Yoga: The Role of Subcultures in Transcultural Exchange](#)”). With regard to yoga's globalization, it makes little sense to draw hard and fast lines between its more local and long-distance influences and currents. Differences in the cultural interaction that occurs on the international and the national levels (between subcultures) are gradual rather than fundamental, especially noticeable if one considers the size and heterogeneity of a national context such as India. With reference to only one Indian city, Nichter can show the frictions that exist between various types of foreign participants and Indian yoga students, each consulting with different teachers and institutes. Whereas international travelers often submitted to the strict regime of an “authentic” yoga master (and were critical of yoga's commercialization), women in the Indian middle class considered Hatha Yoga a “hobby” and an effective method for weight loss (see chapter “[The Social Life of Yoga: Exploring Transcultural Flows in India](#)”).

Academic interest in transcultural phenomena is guided by the fundamental assumption that a specific ontological relationship exists between subjects (social actors, groups of individuals) and objects of transmission. At best, academic inquiry includes the side effects of traveling practices, ideas, and images, and therefore emphasizes unintended results, the emergence of new meanings and the modification of people involved. Seen thusly, the character of these flows is truly “trans”-cultural—i.e., potentially transformative—rather than cross-cultural (which implies that meanings remain more or less stable as they move across cultures). In this context, the analysis of transcultural processes privileges the recipient's point of view, i.e., the (temporary) outcome as well as the routes and channels of transmission as far as it can be reconstructed. In this respect, it stresses a distinct perspective of knowledge production; the place of origin (or authorship of some kind) is analytically of less consequence but rather a relative point of reference. Along similar lines, the term “appropriation” was suggested to signify the hermeneutic procedure of any cultural exchange in which elements are associated with new meaning and by this process transform those who appropriate them.<sup>89</sup> However, the term commonly refers to the cultural mimesis of hegemonic representations invested with new and at times subversive meanings.<sup>90</sup> Not surprisingly, interstices,

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<sup>89</sup> Schneider (2003, 224).

<sup>90</sup> Taussig (1993), see also Hahn (2011).

ruptures, and discontinuities are considered part and parcel of these transcultural trajectories, rather than seen as exceptions. Suzanne Augenstein's case study about children's yoga in Germany is a good example. She reveals how school authorities were viewed as gatekeepers who complicated yoga's entry into primary-level classrooms for fear it was a cult. Following her case study, yoga exercises were reframed and introduced in schools as part of a campaign against racism. Only a decade later these same authorities placed excessive demands on yoga's capacity for improving both social behavior and health (see chapter "[The Introduction of Yoga in German schools: A Case Study](#)"). Although there is no uniform terminology that is consistently used in these ongoing debates on transcultural phenomena, one could say that the concept of flow (rather than appropriation) invites a more spatially disconnected and long-term processual perspective. It holds the promise of mapping traveling ideas and concepts (like yoga) that constitute a dynamically structured interconnectedness on both the macro- and micro-social levels, scaling long-distance interactions and exploring how agency manifests at a specific site.<sup>91</sup> Seen from this angle, locality is relational and contextual rather than spatial. As a site of social negotiations, the local is an integral part of the global, serving as an interface. However, the academic notion of context and its impact needs further elaboration.<sup>92</sup>

With regard to the study of contemporary yoga the transcultural lens has many advantages: It provides useful terms and descriptive categories that help one grasp more fully the mutual influence of the varying schools of yoga, the competing ways in which yoga has been circulated, and the twists and turns in yoga's overall orientation. In these ways, the terminology not only refines the perspective of the observer but also supplies hints that point toward previously unnoticed research data or assists in a self-critical reassessment of the apparently obvious. The concept of transcultural flows also provides a frame of reference that can locate and connect individual research results to larger perspectives, statements, representations, and developments. However, these benefits should not limit researchers to what Stuart Rockefeller criticizes as a "managerial perspective," i.e., a top-down approach that is likely to focus on large-scale changes at the cost of making it difficult to understand how these processes are initiated on the level of social practice.<sup>93</sup> Instead, the appeal of a transcultural analysis is to discover the interface of translocal notions of yoga, yoga practice, and yogic attitude vis-à-vis situated sites of experience; that is to say, to aid in a close-up look at how agency manifests, how (new) practices and meanings emerge, and how they are negotiated and/or ignored. The discursive production of a "useful body" is a case in point. According

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<sup>91</sup> For a genealogy of the term "flow" see Rockefeller (2011, 566).

<sup>92</sup> Appadurai (2010); on the epistemological difficulties associated with the term "context" see also Dilger and Hadolt (2010, 19–22).

<sup>93</sup> I agree with Stuart Rockefeller (2011) in his critique that academic studies on cultural flows often concentrate solely on a "managerial perspective" and thus raise several problems as to the authority of a scholar.

to Verena Schnäbele, yoga practitioners in Germany furnish their sentient bodies with an agency that helps them resist unhealthy working conditions. Thus the body becomes “useful,” if not outright subversive in its efforts to combat the pressures of the post-Fordist labor market (see chapter “[The Useful Body: The Yogic Answer to Appearance Management in the Post-Fordist Workplace](#)”). In this respect the concept of transcultural flow serves as a heuristic device that can ask new and/or more precise research questions, such as: Which conditions made it possible for particular forms, elements, and representations of yoga to travel to new settings, and which did not? What factors actually favored the flow of a particular idea or practice? What happened in the course of the journey that allowed these ideas or practices to integrate well into existing social fields? What (if anything) did they replace, and what was gained by their adoption? Who were the agents or cultural brokers? When and how did yoga come to stand for particular issues as defined and structured by its new environment (e.g., beauty)? Which new meanings emerged in the process of translating and reframing yoga in a new context, and was the emergence spontaneous or deliberate?

To approach yoga as a concept and practice in transit has methodological consequences that privilege three distinct entry points for research: first, the supervisory perspective on pathways; second, the close-up view on meaning production; and third, the genealogy of selected ideas, themes, and concepts. Let us discuss each of these briefly. (1) By taking a panoramic perspective as one’s analytic point of departure, one invariably creates opportunities for considering cultural interconnectedness and multidirectional long-distance flows (or rather “jumps”). Just how one goes about taking advantage of these options can best be described by George Marcus’ guidelines for multi-sited ethnography: follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or biography, and follow the conflict.<sup>94</sup> For instance, Koch pursues the creation of value and incentives that attract people to yoga in both local and international markets, considering yoga’s appeal in terms of social and body capital and revealing how non-materialistic consumption patterns still follow market rules (see chapter “[Yoga as a Production Site of Social and Human Capital: Transcultural Flows from a Cultural Economic Perspective](#)”). (2) The next access point—the close-up approach—privileges processes of meaning production on the micro-social level and explores competing strategies, contrasting views, frictions, and inconsistent developments. It focuses on communication in progress rather than on undisputed or even overall positions. This approach illustrates how yoga is made and remade in social practice; in other words, the phenomena that occur at the interface where the global is localized and selective views acquire larger audiences. Questions that arise include: What pragmatics, agents, methods, and logics are involved in the acts of translating, adopting, and selling yoga? On what basis do yoga practitioners link-in with an imagined translocal yoga community? Hauser’s analysis of yoga tutorials, for instance, shows in what ways and by what means yoga has been

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<sup>94</sup> Marcus (1995, 106–110).



constructed as either simple, gentle, and feminized or, in contrast, as a demanding, athletic, and strenuous practice (see chapter “[Touching the Limits, Assessing Pain: On Language Performativity, Health, and Well-Being in Yoga Classes](#)”). (3) The two previous analytical paths are not mutually exclusive but differ basically in their initial direction of focus. Additionally, there is the genealogical approach which highlights particular themes and explores their representations and discourses across time and social contexts. Liane Hofmann’s study is a fine case in point. She explores by whom, when, and how the notion of *kuṇḍālīnī* energy has been taken up in psychology—modulated through the lens of Carl Gustav Jung and others—and by the transpersonal psychologists of the 1960s, and finally within clinical settings (see chapter “[The Impact of Kundalini Yoga on Concepts and Diagnostic Practice in Psychology and Psychotherapy](#)”).

Let me reiterate here that the shift in analytic perspective proposed in these essays neither questions yoga as an applied philosophy or therapeutic system nor denies the experiential reality of yoga practitioners. Rather, it invites the researcher and reader alike to recognize, view, and explore yoga’s macro and micro-social circulation, diversity, and fluidity as a significant living social practice beyond judgmental statements on authenticity or degeneration.

Before I briefly introduce each of the following chapters, let me share some general insights in regards to yoga as an example of a practice in-transit, a traveling concept, and a subject of scientific inquiry. These insights were generated in the course of assembling the present collection and guided by reflections on methodological and conceptual issues such as: Which descriptive and analytic tools have proven most useful? What does yoga’s trajectory tell us about the process of transcultural exchange in general? What findings raise further questions or stimulate forthcoming research? Let me offer these signposts and tentative conclusions as a way of providing a better vantage point from which to view the concept of transculturality as it relates to the array of topics that we call “yoga”:

- It is methodologically helpful to avoid any a priori definition of yoga and instead to assume “yoga(s)” in the plural, understanding the term as a related bundle of ideas, discourses, and practices.<sup>95</sup> By accepting this plurality one invites acceptance of the multiple and potentially inconsistent meanings that (may) exist. Following a similar logic, the researcher should not anticipate connections between local bodily practice and the global yoga movement until and unless they result from the analysis of respective interactions, statements, and representations; acknowledging that the notion of a like-minded (unified) worldwide yoga community is first and foremost a cultural construction.
- From a diachronic perspective, yoga does not disseminate as a complete system. Instead, we observe that it is some component parts which travel (e.g., postures, forms of controlled breathing, particular attitudes, ideologies, and so on). We cannot generalize how these selected elements will be related and (re-)

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<sup>95</sup> See Singleton and Byrne (2008a, 5), c.f. White (2012a).

contextualized in the recipient society (whether within or beyond the national borders). At any rate, the process of cultural translation is inherently partial. Not surprisingly, people sense a form of meaning and a benefit that resonates within their familiar cultural structures, and on this basis recognize only some aspects and miss others. At times, these cultural appropriations appeal only to a minority.

- Regardless of the mobility of yoga teachers and students, there seems to be a hierarchy of epistemic categories that facilitates or resists transcultural dissemination. On the one hand we have explicit knowledge (e.g., yoga philosophy), which can be verbalized and thus learned cognitively. In this case, the translation process might cause interferences (e.g., “Guru English”) and competing interpretations. On the other hand, there are bodily experiences which result from performance rather than verbal communication and whose meaning(s) emerge not only in the course of posture performance but possibly vary according to collective and personal memory. In other words, even if body movements are physically similar, the bodily experience has a fundamentally cultural quality. For instance, the chanting of mantras among yoga practitioners who are neither familiar with Sanskrit nor its liturgical role has a primarily somatic effect: the sensations of voice, sound, and unison dominate. Similarly, while postures performed with folded hands might easily evoke religious connotations for some, an arm balance like the peacock pose (*mayūrāsana*) might remind others of acrobatics rather than conjure images of the superhuman powers with which it was associated in its fourteenth century magico-religious context.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, with regard to transcultural flows, the human body itself seems to have an analytically-neglected potential for releasing creative (mis) understanding and thus inviting discursive change (e.g., the “useful body”). The process of embodiment (the corporeality of experience) allows reorientations in the construction of meaning.<sup>97</sup>
- Yoga practice is not only the object of cultural flow but also serves as a carrier or channel for introducing and verifying cultural knowledge. By means of yoga, notions of a healthy body, the mind-body-complex, body aesthetics, self-identity, spirituality, and so on are communicated, shaped, and at times challenged. In this way, yoga can convey hitherto unknown themes (e.g., the recitation of mantras in Germany) as well as issues familiar to the recipient society (e.g., aspirations for a higher self). In either case, postural yoga can become an agent; a social player that serves to inspire and possibly reorient general ways of thinking about a variety of issues—last but not least among these, human health and well-being.
- Finally, I would like to return to the question that seeks to clarify the basis upon which present-day varieties of “yogic” discourse and practice can, in fact, be identified as yoga? Should we keep on searching for core epistemological principles that enable us to distinguish Hatha Yoga from gymnastics and faith-

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<sup>96</sup> *Mayūrāsana* was already mentioned in the *Haṭhayogapradīpika*. To perform this *āsana* the yoga practitioner must balance the body like a horizontal stick while holding its weight on both elbows and forearms.

<sup>97</sup> Marcus (1995, 106–110).

based practice, or rather explore avenues and sites of equating and dissociation? As mentioned in earlier sections of this introduction, the basic ideas that shaped today's globalized notion of yoga are no more than 150 years old.<sup>98</sup> Around 1900, yoga gradually emerged as a hybrid exercise system for the everyday use of laypersons in search of personal growth and a physical ideal of one sort or another. The practice itself varied throughout the twentieth century, as well as the moral value attached to yoga. Against this background, solely cultural context determines if and how Hatha Yoga differs from other kinds of physical movement, mental activity, and fields of practice. Therefore we can only historicize on what basis people possibly conceive of a particular behavior or activity as yoga. At the present, one powerful concept to facilitate identification is provided by the discourse on alternative and complementary health: the trope of "mind-body practices." Seen thusly, yoga is "easy to think" as a discipline based on the assumed and appreciated interaction between mind and body, and where their amalgamation is regarded as the source of "energy" or "life force."<sup>99</sup> The significance of this internal interaction probably emerged vis-à-vis modern, Cartesian thinking on the mind-body divide (rather than previous assumptions on the tantric body), further substantiated by the recognition of particular body techniques as a method to achieve this supposed union: i.e., an organized synchronization of conscious breathing and deliberately controlled movement that alternates with willful release. However, even the concept of mind-body practices cannot fully explain why some innovations are easily subsumed under the category of yoga (e.g., soft music) and others challenge its very status (e.g., aggressive commercialization). It is likely that (dis)similarities are perceived as a result of comparisons drawn against a backdrop of contemporary, relative and locally dominant yoga *imaginaires*—what I would call the "yoganness" of an element, stance, or practice. Seen from this perspective, yoganness can be achieved with the help of iconic body postures or gestures (such as sitting cross-legged and with folded hands), by means of a specific intention to perform a posture (an assumed "yogic" attitude), or simply by the multilayered name "yoga". In practice, these three lines of identification often blur.

The aim of this book is to look at these interactive moments and processes and at the epistemic twists and turns that exist when elements (apparently) related to yoga are intentionally or unintentionally reframed. In order to do this, we focus on the underlying motivations, sites, and agents involved in the circulation of posture-based yoga.

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<sup>98</sup> See Hauser, chapter "Touching the Limits, Assessing Pain: On Language Performativity, Health, and Well-Being in Yoga Classes".

<sup>99</sup> According to the Indologist Frits Staal (1993, 69) the popular notion that in Asian thought "mind and body are one" is a contemporary Western trope rather than a reflection of Indian theories.

## Synopsis of Chapters

The first three chapters of this volume concentrate on epistemological developments that originated at the beginning of the twentieth century: the reevaluation of yoga as a system of physical exercise that improves mind and body; the Western appropriation of yoga techniques as magical devices used to gain power and effect change; and the discovery of yoga knowledge as equivalent to scientific findings on the transformation of consciousness in the field of Western psychology.

Mark Singleton opens our discussions with his exploration of the genesis of modern postural yoga in 1920s and 30s India. He shows that the foundations for what we today call Hatha Yoga were laid within a relatively short period of time; furthermore, how its present-day ethos derived from the New Thought movement. Whereas *āsana*-practice was initially excluded from the neo-Hindu yoga revival, by the turn of the twentieth century various strands of European gymnastics and bodybuilding (introduced by the YMCA) had entered Indian society. These “imports” changed the ontological status of bodily exercise and were crucial for both the emergence of a militant anti-colonial “yoga training” and the scientific endeavors aimed at verifying yoga’s physiological benefits, the latter supported by key figures such as Swami Kuvalayananda and Shri Yogendra. Singleton shows why and how physical culture and *āsana*-training cross-fertilized in 1930s and 40s Mysore State to produce what later became one of the most famous yoga schools in India—a hybridity most visible in the emphasis on dynamic elements synchronized by rhythmic breathing. Yet more important than locating the Indian or European origins of a particular posture, according to Singleton, is discovering how cultural, religious, and spiritual meanings attach to physical practice and in what respect these new values inevitably change the way people approach posture performance. From this perspective, the identification of a body posture as a particular yoga exercise (*āsana*), and the distinction between both, results purely from associated meanings.

In the chapter that follows, Suzanne Newcombe focuses on the circulation of yoga knowledge in Britain during a period that runs parallel to the emergence of modern postural yoga in India. She explores the association of yoga with occultism and in particular the overlapping networks of those interested in the metaphysics of yoga and the admirers of spirituality, magic, and witchcraft. Her analysis shows the significant role played by esoteric publishers and bookshops as disseminators of subcultural discourses before and after World War II and suggests that in pre-1960s Britain these milieus did indeed overlap; and that even today the practice of postural yoga continues to exhibit magical elements. Newcombe posits that this is most visible when yoga is praised as a youth and beauty elixir, as a method of self-empowerment, or as a healing device believed to surpass even the efficacy of biomedical treatments. In conclusion, she not only stresses the importance of recognizing cultural flows within a particular national context but also hints at the impact of academic knowledge production. Lastly, she ponders the question as to whether today’s yoga practitioners once cognizant of these disconcerting magical

elements might change their attitude toward or become immune to yoga's mysterious effects.

Central to *hathayoga*-theory, the third chapter focuses on the concept of *kuṇḍālinī* and the various ways that it influenced knowledge production in the field of Western psychology. Liane Hofmann traces the history of the Kundalini syndrome: categorized as the single most prevalent type of "spiritual emergency" in psychodiagnosis and psychotherapy. It not only influenced the post-1960s development of transpersonal psychology but also the pathologization of certain types of somatosensory phenomena. While transpersonal psychology emphasized Asian forms of self-cultivation and "spiritual" growth as legitimate subjects of academic research and thus regarded these crisis stages as part of a developmental process, an increasing number of clinically relevant "energy phenomena" resulted by 1994 in the addition of two significant categories to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM): "religious or spiritual problem" as well as "culture bound syndrome." Using the East–West transfer of knowledge on Kundalini Yoga as a case in point, Hofmann critically reflects on the specific challenges and difficulties that psychologists and therapists face when dealing with these new categories. Keeping in mind how ideas and practices circulate within a global context, both diagnostic categories should be viewed through a critical lens. Approached from various analytical perspectives, psychotherapists might consider personality as potentially hybrid rather than emphasize its culture-specific creation, reconsidering their interpretive schemata.

The second part of the book focuses on processes that link global discourses to particular local settings and concentrates on meaning production at the micro-social level. Taking Germany as their focal site, the authors argue for a situatedness of yoga meanings, (re)created in one way or another against the backdrop of both global forces and local fantasies of India and its traditions. It goes almost without saying that the assessment of these factors can produce varying and even contradictory results.

Beatrix Hauser concentrates on the question of how habitual language use in yoga tutorials shapes the experience of yoga practitioners, their perspective of the body and its potential for self-development. By contrasting the standardized teaching instructions of a gentle yoga that is "for everyone" with settings that emphasize a vigorous physical workout, she not only illustrates how yoga tuition reflects a particular zeitgeist but also how the approach taken toward postural yoga may vary in its efforts to maintain a healthy body. On the basis of performance theory, Hauser regards verbal instruction as the crucial medium used to (re)direct the assessment of bodily limits and pain. She notes that in yoga classes of the 1970s, exhaustion and pain were regarded as warning signs associated with having reached one's limits; however, more recent forms teach the appreciation of pains from stretching as an indicator of the transformative process that brings body and self to perfection. In a post-secular and liberalized setting, to transcend personal psychophysical limits and transform into a hyper-flexible body-person is framed within the health discourse. Hauser's conclusions open to the possibility that the performance of similar yoga postures can potentially lead to differing results, which are shaped as much by verbal instruction as by their social contexts.

Verena Schnäbele analyzes contemporary postural yoga as a strategy for coping with the post-Fordist deregulation of knowledge-based work in Germany. A significant number of yoga practitioners, often highly educated professionals, are faced with changes in the workplace: a tight schedule, heavy workload, self-management, and customer service orientations, to name but a few. Moreover, the boundaries between work-related skills and obligations on the one hand and personal recreation and self-fulfillment on the other have become blurred. As such, Schnäbele hypothesizes that yoga provides people not only with the necessary means for stress relief and self-actualization but also with micro-political subversive strategies. In her analysis she departs from mainstream sociological methodology in that she emphasizes the human body as both an object of self-reflection and an agent unto itself. She argues that the sentient yoga body is “useful” in providing the self with an alternative perception that can resist the exaggerated standards of the workplace, while the body’s appearance can be shaped by the hegemonic discourses on beauty.

Suzanne Augenstein explores the implementation of children’s yoga in selected German schools and the funding for these programs by the German health care system. Her inquiry vividly shows how a particular yoga style developed in accordance with specific target groups, in relation to the institutions and patrons immediately involved in the process, and in consideration of the accompanying socio-economic conditions. As a cultural broker who must translate the benefits of Hatha Yoga into the dominant language of school authorities, Augenstein provides an insider’s perspective. Initially, yoga for kindergarten and elementary school children was disguised and labeled as a “body-focused program” (*Körperorientiertes Programm*) in order to avoid any possible association with yoga as a cult and also to aid in the development of quality control standards: the intention was to improve children’s body posture, concentration, and social behavior. However, in 2003, when the German government began to subsidize preventive health care initiatives, the reference to yoga was no longer considered a hindrance but rather a positive indicator for politically desired health-conscious behavior. Since then, high hopes exist that children’s yoga has the capacity to solve complex social problems, likely an excessive expectation.

The third part of the book focuses on practices of advertising and consuming yoga across national, social, and discursive boundaries. It concentrates on transnational and deterritorialized yoga markets, as well as on various classes of mobile yoga practitioners who meet in India. Moreover, it highlights the processes that yoga consumers engage in as they create supplemental values, whether in regard to yoga’s recent association with ecological normativity, the construction of an idealized Indianness, or the production of human and social capital.

Sarah Strauss and Laura Mandelbaum focus on the discursive links between yoga practice and the Green Movement, and how each is mobilized on behalf of the other. This process is closely connected to the dissemination of a transnational, well-educated, and cosmopolitan middle class that defines itself by its thoughts on health, well-being, and ecology. Initially coined as a distinct category of consumer,—Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability, LOHAS—shared attitudes toward the market economy turned into an agenda for the self-identified LOHAS

movement. Based on web analysis and narrative interviews conducted on three continents, the authors describe how yoga practitioners relate their personal yoga practice to wider issues of anti-consumerist morality and planetary health. In this way, yoga practice not only serves as “a technology of the self” (Foucault) but the body becomes the site of a general transformational process that seeks a more “holistic” approach to the world at large and embraces well-being of many kinds. However, the transnational community of yoga practitioners—as well as the LOHAS movement in general—is by no means a homogenous group. They seem to be connected by shared goals and (yoga) practice rather than by socioeconomic categories such as religion, political affiliation, ethnic identity, and so on.

Similarly, Mimi Nichter explores the topics that surround various groupings of yoga practitioners, yet her contribution shifts our focus to Mysore, India. She analyzes four types of international yoga tourists traveling to India to study: they range from “yoga lites” to “yoga professionals,” each group trying to complete their own vision of Indian culture. At the same time yoga practitioners as social actors situated in Mysore join in and create what Nichter terms the “social life of yoga”. This particular social life is structured by attending yoga classes as well as by participating in a variety of other services offered by Indian entrepreneurs in the name of Indian philosophy and health tourism. Significantly, the main yoga institute in Mysore attracts few Indian practitioners, apparently because Indian and non-Indian yoga students pursue different goals. Whereas international yoga travelers in search of self-development generally submit to a strict training regime, the Indian middle class has developed a perspective that tends to view yoga as a “hobby.” In Nichter’s study, the paradigmatic Indian yoga practitioner was female, married, and practiced yoga as a means of losing weight. As a result, yoga teachers had to ease the Indian students into the exercises, accommodating to the practitioner’s physical and health conditions.

In the last chapter, Anne Koch approaches yoga as a transnational site of production: of social capital (social networks), human capital (experiences, subjectivities, and knowledge), and in particular body capital (body awareness). She shows how the commodification of immaterial values (including attitudes and routines) correlates with distinct marketing strategies on the local and global level, comparing the accumulation strategies of practitioners in yoga studios in Munich, Germany with those at an international yoga resort in Thailand. Applying a distinct religio- and cultural-economic perspective, Koch examines the “push-and-pull factors” affecting the flow of yoga, looking at the issue of “transaction costs,” while considering “path dependency,” efforts to increase the durability of experience, and the creation of demand. However, apart from shared “post-materialistic values” the case study reveals that yoga practitioners at the holiday resort were clearly more affluent than their counterparts in Munich. The great advantage of Koch’s theoretical approach is that it pays attention to the economic modalities of cultural flows, to rational decisions taken regarding the positioning of yoga (e.g., vis-à-vis other partial markets), as well as to the contingent local parameters that are involved.

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