



Cluster of Excellence: "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows", Research Area C: Health and Environment, Heidelberg University

International and Interdisciplinary Workshop/Symposium

The Magic of Yoga: Conceptualizing Body and Self in Transcultural Perspective

Friday, Dec 11, 2009 (2 pm) to Saturday, Dec 12, 2009 (5 pm)

Conference Room 212, Karl Jaspers Centre, Heidelberg University, Voßstraße 2, Building 4400

Contributors & List of Abstracts

Yoga, Energy, and the Environment: Transnational Discourses on Sustainable Living

Sarah Strauss, M.P.H., Ph.D.

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The practice of yoga in transnational contexts, from North America to Europe to India, has been linked with what has come to be known as the Green movement for environmentally sustainable living. In this paper, I discuss the utility of yoga in promoting an ecological worldview and also in linking personal energy with broader understandings of the earth's energy system. I focus on web and print media representations of these topics, exploring how personal practice and planetary health are linked through the minds, bodies, and discourses of the yoga world's diverse members.

Empowerment and Authenticity in Modern Hatha Yoga

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In this paper I will discuss various ways in which modern hatha yoga might be said to existentially and socially empower the practitioner. Modern hatha yoga practice, it is argued, typically involves processes of re-habituating because practitioners are learning new ways of using, making sense of, and experiencing their bodies. Various personal skills and social practice environments can be seen to interact in producing the different forms of *empowerment*. However, another important line of inquiry also concerns the issues of *authenticity* that typically arise among both scholars and practitioners. To this end I will propose a Deleuzian-inspired alternative to social constructionist and phenomenological approaches to authenticity.

Everyday Magic: The Case of Yoga in Britain

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This paper will explore the relationship between yoga and 'magic' in post-war Britain. After defining magic, the paper will consider the significance of 'magical' element in the self-reported motivations of late twentieth-century yoga practitioners. This section will largely focus on the



populations of middle-class women who have historically formed the bulk of yoga practitioners in the twentieth century, but will also consider the extent this model might apply to some other yoga groups and to the contemporary practice of Astanga Vinyasa Yoga. The paper will then explore the historical overlaps between the popularisers of yoga, ritual magic and paganism in the twentieth century. It will conclude by drawing some parallels between the contemporary practice of paganism and yoga in Britain. I will suggest that the way British pagans have dealt with recent academic challenges to the historical authenticity of their beliefs and practices might provide a model for the changes in self-understanding of yoga practitioners are likely to undergo in the next ten years.

East Meets West: An Examination of Transnational Yoga Flows

Mimi Nichter, Ph.D.
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In the past decade, yoga has become increasingly popular, both within the U.S. and globally. Recent survey data found that 7% of adults in the U.S. (16 million adults) practice yoga, and an additional 8% of current non-practitioners (18 million adults) report interest in taking classes. Yoga as a healing modality has been mainstreamed and one finds yoga studios in malls across the country. Yoga classes are taught in high schools and colleges as a means to promote exercise, healthy lifestyles and behavior change among youth.

In this paper, drawing on interviews with practitioners in the U.S. and in Mysore, South India, I explore how yoga is being practiced by westerners to enhance health and well-being. Frustrated with the perceived commodification of yoga in the west, some practitioners travel to India in search of a more “authentic” experience. Discourse surrounding notions of purity and detoxification in relation to personal transformation will be highlighted.

Importantly, the burgeoning interest in yoga in western countries has resulted in a revitalization of the practice in cosmopolitan India, especially in locations like Mysore where health tourism has been promoted. I discuss how interest in yoga is rendering change in Indian communities where westerners come to practice. Differences in the meaning and practice of yoga between Indians and westerners will be examined.

The Reception and Development of Yoga in German Schools Between 1999 and 2009: An Overview Together With Some Approaches

Dr. Suzanne Augenstein
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Data was analysed from twenty projects carried out in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, by the GZP Gesellschaft für Zentrierungspädagogik e.V. which investigated the long-term use of yoga as a pedagogical measure for schoolchildren. The review concluded that yoga has evolved from an exotic fringe discipline into one which is supposed to solve complex problems; indeed it is now increasingly subject to excessive expectations.

The specific goals of the project were determined by structural and cultural demands peculiar to the German school system. Bearing these in mind, the methods chosen led to a process of transformation during the period of investigation from 1999 to 2009. Germany has followed a different path by combining traditional yoga methods with additional supporting measures in order to do justice to the requirements of yoga in practice.



Somatic Attention in Yoga and in Everyday Life of Practitioners. Observations from the German Yoga Scene

PD Dr. Anne Koch

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Thomas Csordas' concept of *somatic modes of attention* combines the approaches of the phenomenology of the body in the tradition of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and the sociology of the body in the tradition of Alfred Schütz and Pierre Bourdieu. The body is interesting on the one hand insofar as it plays a constitutive role in claims about the world, and on the other hand as a place of social practice. Starting from this concept, the paper examines shifts in the somatic modes of attention of yoga practitioners. They are reconstructed from interview data. Some of the more obvious observations are that yoga practice changes the perception of time (stress, acceleration, pace), the environment (nature, detailed perception, attractiveness of people, their inner glowing, etc.) and the practitioner's own body awareness. Furthermore, some of the body techniques are used as a strategy for self-distancing in various contexts apart from yoga.

As a framework for discussing the results I rely on theories of modernity such as Shmuel Eisenstadt's multiple modernities, Ronald Inglehart's value research in post materialistic modernity, and Bruce Knauft's critical or alternative modernity. The results show for instance that the heterogenization of yoga on the informal level of local institutions is opposed to more homogeneous self-representations in the worldwide networks of specific yoga schools and their branches.

Animations of Deleuze: The Fit, Feminine Body and Mindful Fitness

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In this paper, I will examine how an academic might develop performative strategies to change an oppressive feminine body identity as a practicing fitness industry professional. My discussion is informed by Gilles Deleuze's animation of Foucault's theory by his concept of 'the fold'. I will experiment with using mindful fitness, particularly Pilates, as exercise forms that can be informed by feminist transformation. In addition, I aim to provide actual practical movement interventions to deterritorialize the current fit, feminine body.

On the Effects of the Cultural Transfer of Concepts and Practices from the Indian Kundalini-Yoga Traditions on Psychology as a Discipline and Psychotherapy as a Profession

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Due to the increasing spread of psycho-spiritual practices in western societies which could be observed at least since the early 1980s, psychotherapeutic practitioners saw themselves more and more confronted with specific, psychotherapeutically relevant problems, that were difficult to classify according to the established psychological models and diagnostic schemata. Exponents of Transpersonal Psychology conceptualized this kind of phenomena as "spiritual emergencies" or "transformational crises". Associated therewith was a growing criticism of the respective approaches and concepts of the psychological and psychiatric mainstream. With respect to this, it has been pointed out, that there is an urgent need for enhanced developmental psychological



and psycho-diagnostic conceptualizations as well as for adequate treatment approaches. In its further course all this has led to a lively theoretical discussion as well as an increase in research activities which, by now, have brought forth first results in the fields of psychological modelling, psychotherapeutic practice as well as psycho-diagnostics.

The so called “Kundalini-Phenomenon”, which by experts in the field is considered as the most prevalent type of spiritual emergency, shall be used as an exemplary case for the delineation of the specific challenges and problems, which the profession of psychology and psychotherapists in particular, had to face due to the import of practices, concepts and world-views from eastern spiritual traditions.

In a first step the specific problems, the suggested approaches to their solution as well as the adaptation processes related to this specific phenomenon, shall be described. In a further step, the perspective shall be broadened by outlining some of the recent major developments in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and psycho-diagnostics, which have emerged a) in response to the need for a stronger consideration of world-views and culture specific patterns of interpretations in the psychotherapeutic context (keyword: “cultural sensitivity”), and b) as a result of the encounter of health and development related conceptions and methodologies from east and west.

From Physical Fitness to Bodily Experience: What Language Does in Cosmopolitan Yoga Classes

PD Dr. Beatrix Hauser
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This paper deals with the impact of postural yoga on the social construction of human health. Whereas scientific-clinical research considers (universal) effects of yoga postures and breathing techniques, I shall focus on the (situated) language employed in yoga classes, i.e., metaphors, speech patterns and communication structures. This ‘yoga talk’ is explored in its capacity to shape and reformulate notions of the body and the self in the lived-in world.

In my analysis I shall refer to two examples of highly standardized types of postural yoga (hatha yoga), both practiced in Germany — the site of fieldwork — and elsewhere:

- (1) Bikram Yoga, a rather demanding form of yoga that emphasizes extreme stretches, muscle formation and balance at a room temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. This style is taught in Germany since the year 2000, particularly in large cities.
- (2) Yoga “for everybody” as promoted by Kareen Zebroff. Her yoga instructions on TV and in books can be considered as a paradigm for “yoga gymnastics” that in the 1970s reflected and coined the popularization of postural yoga in Germany and in North America.

The paper will show the ways in that the approach to postural yoga as a form of maintaining a healthy body has changed over the last decades. I argue that more recent fashions of postural yoga (again) convey more than physical education. They rather call upon the self as an agent to transgress bodily limitations. Unlike in pre-war Europe, when a similar approach to yoga was conceptualized as occult practice, in postmodern society this technique to enhance human performance is framed within the health discourse. I shall conclude with some remarks on the conceptualization of cultural flows.