tice of yoga during the last 150 years. Future scholars will have the advantage of being able to use se Michelis's terminology and detailed research as a springboard for an increasingly refined discussion.

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Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India. The Body Between Science and Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 376. ISBN: 0691118744.

Joseph Alter's book examines the production of transnationalised yoga and alternative medicine in colonial and post-colonial India, and takes up many of the critical tensions that are found in his previous work. His 'discursive field' is the sprawling body of what he calls 'yogic pulp nonfiction', which proliferated from the 1920s onwards. Indeed, throughout the book, Alter is concerned with the populist and generally anti-mystical formulations of yoga that centre on the health and efficiency of the body, physical education and 'natural' medicine. Rejecting late-Orientalist approaches such as Eliade's—where yoga is an ultimately transcendental system based on the 'gold standard' of classical texts—Alter's ethnography attempts to draw out the messy, human, and radically physicalised aspect of yoga's recent history. It is worth noting, however, that despite his avowed departure from the Orientalist project Alter nonetheless continues to cite Eliade (and, surprisingly, Georg Feuerstein) as his main authorities on the classical yoga tradition.

The first part of the book identifies some of the problems inherent in the study of modern yoga. One of the central concerns is the ambivalence of modern yoga's self-representation as both science and object of science. In the first instance, yoga aims at the investigation and experiential realisation of states beyond the ordinary empirical ken, but in the second such unquantifiables are embodied and made subject to objective, 'scientific' scrutiny. It is in this space of slippage, confusion and paradox, where nerves become *nadis*, and the duration of breath retention indexes states of *samadhi*, that Alter locates the foundational 'mistake' of modern yoga. This is the book's most engaging idea, and one that is elaborately developed. An important analytical tool used to understand the contradictions of this materialist/biological metaphysics is Donna Haraway's theory of cyborgs: the modern yogi seeks to materialise the non-human aspect of the Ultimate within the biological materiality of the human frame, much as the cyborg incorporates flesh and machine into a single unit. Another recurring heuristic emblem that clearly fascinates Alter is Dr K.N. Udupa's head-standing laboratory rats, which he takes as illustrative of the 'rupture of planes' (of meaning and mimesis) inherent in the science of yoga.

Four case studies are used as the basis for sustained theoretical elaboration. The first, on the laboratory work of Swami Kuvalayanada, is the most interesting and relevant from the perspective of a history of yoga in modern times. If Kuvalayananda's work began as scientific nationalism in pre-Independence India, it eventually grew into a kind of transnational corporeal humanism that could be, and was, exported with little or no apparent cultural baggage. Early experiments such as the yogic isolation and 'rolling' of the rectus abdominus muscles (*navli*) and its effect on intra-intestinal pressure are exemplary, Alter argues, of the manner in which the subtle power of yogic technique and gross physiology are made to converge in Kuvalayananda's research. Given that yoga belongs to an ontological sphere that subverts and ultimately undermines the laws of nature (by transcending them), Alter judges that Kuvalayananda's experiments paradoxically proved nothing, but that they did create the condition of 'harmonic hybridity' necessary for yoga's subsequent 'colonisation' of the west.

This is a compelling idea that in turn goes some way to explaining the practical disjunction within transnational yoga communities between what de Michelis calls Modern Postural Yoga and Modern Meditational Yoga. It also helps to bridge the chronological and conceptual gap in de Michelis's own work—not really resolved by this Modern Yoga typology—between the anti-*hatha* stance of Vivekananda and the primacy of *asana* in globalised yoga today. Alter contends that in modern yoga intellectual philosophy is always subordinate to material concerns about nature and the body. Following this logic, he rather iconoclastically (but not without reason) declares the father of body building, Eugene Sandow, to be a more significant influence on today's form and practice than either Vivekananda or Aurobindo. It is unfortunate that this particular claim is not enlarged upon.

His second case study scrutinises naturopathy as engendering internalised regimes of power in contrast to the governmentally controlled and externally imposed systems of bio-power outlined by Foucault. The third case, on 'the spillover of RSS [an organisation for Hindu cultural supremacy] ideology into the arena of health and healing' reprises questions of embodied nationalism that Alter has previously treated in the context of Gandhi, *kabaddi* (an Indian team sport), wrestling and Indian clubs. Finally there is an examination of the 'god in every drop' practice of auto-urine therapy and its cultural dislocation within the discourse of yogic science. Each of these studies provides a springboard for sophisticated and diverse theoretical discussions. Large sections of the book, indeed, are given over to reflections on the complexities of the anthropological method itself, and Alter ranges far and wide over the theoretical backdrop of his topic. For those unfamiliar with the live debates of contemporary anthropology, the sustained complexity of Alter's analytical flights will prove bewildering. Further, general readers and practitioners of yoga enticed by the title will surely be puzzled to find that much of the analysis focuses on cases that are distinctly peripheral to what is commonly thought of as yoga, and deals instead with the ontological and political status of the body in several interrelated modern Indian health regimes. The study remains, however, an invaluable and pioneering account of the manifold creative (mis-)understandings produced in modern yoga's dialogue with alternative medicine and the philosophy of science, and sets a bar for subsequent discussions of yoga's recent past.

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