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*Yoga in Britain* is, first and foremost, a fascinating read for anyone curious about not just the development of modern yoga, but also British twentieth-century counterculture. Without denying the evident scholarship involved, it is rare to have an academic text that is also such fun to read.

The author’s stated aim is to set out the cultural developments that led what we now call “yoga” to be an unremarkable activity in the UK. Much of the original research that it describes formed the heart of Suzanne Newcombe’s doctoral thesis, and for this reason, there will be many in the small but growing sub-field of Yoga Studies that, like me, have eagerly awaited its publication. That doctoral material is supplemented with later research, and the book as a whole covers a period from the early twentieth century to the 1980s. This is a significant period in the development of yoga subcultures in Britain, and indeed much of the Anglophone world. Yet, as a lived and vernacular practice, it remains largely understudied. Whilst there is a body of work that concerns itself with what is variously called the New Age, seekership, or “spiritual but not religious” communities, most of it speculates on commonalities between different practice groups, and indeed, most often, yoga is included within undifferentiated lists of activities, from crystal shopping to visiting stone circles. Modern yoga in Britain is a thing that is commonly done, but rarely examined in itself.

As a result, texts on modern yoga often, as this one does, begin by reminding the reader that the practice is not monolithic in form, nor easily categorized, nor a niche activity. There are, by conservative estimates, half a million people in the UK who practise something that they call “yoga” weekly. Global industries and international events are associated with the practice, as well as health-related interventions in increasing numbers of institutional contexts, from the NHS to prisons. Any book on modern yoga, then, has the potential to surprise the academic reader with the diversity of its research material and the scale of its relevance. This one, like a number before it, also has the potential to be included on the syllabi of yoga teacher training programmes across the country. Academic texts that are considered of relevance to the yoga teaching community are hotly debated. Yoga Studies enjoys a level of engagement with its subject community that many scholars would envy, or in extreme cases, fear.

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As a consequence of the way in which the book came to be written, the understudied nature of the subject matter, and the time span involved in the research, the various chapters do not add up to a single unified narrative. Instead, we are offered in-depth vignettes of adult education classes and yoga on television, yoga references in pop music and New Age bookshops. This is all to the benefit of the reader. It serves to show clearly how other examples could have been chosen, and slightly different stories told. That is not to say that the research here is in any way arbitrary. The depth of archival and painstaking historical work behind these fascinating stories is evident, as is the author’s care for the people whose lives and lifework are included. But all research into vernacular subcultures involves making choices about what to include and how to frame each inclusion thematically, from the diverse, evolving and often contradictory threads within any subculture. Although each chapter and subject here are thoughtfully chosen, we are left with a real sense of how many other stories from the development of modern yoga are left untold. Indeed, the book ends with a postscript about yoga after the 1980s, whilst leaving that story largely for others to tell.

As a reviewer I have a vested interest in the subject, but I hope other readers will also be left with a desire for more research on the various topics included. When so many of us have passed through the doors of a modern yoga class at one time or other, how that came to be an option, how the practice has localized and evolved, and our enduring reasons for practising, are of obvious relevance. Indeed, my own research project started from a similar simple question: what is it that keeps us coming back to the yoga mat, year after year? But there are other threads to be followed from the research included in this book. Similar treatments could be made of the development of other movements’ practices, such as martial arts and Pilates, and the various media opportunities and key figures that were key to their development. There are links here to be made back to existing scholarly discussions of the New Age, and the practice of other esoteric and eclectic arts. There are obvious questions to be asked about the connections and syncretic influences between modern yoga and other meditation and relaxation practices. It is also useful to examine how this early development of modern yoga in Britain still frames the development of the practice from the 1980s to the present day. My own forthcoming monograph makes some contribution to that examination.

However, on finishing the book I am reminded once again how much work still needs to be done to uncover the histories of vernacular, everyday practices of meaning-making such as yoga, not just in Britain, but in diverse national, regional and subcultural contexts. This book is another foundation stone in what I hope is an emerging body of research into all those things we do that have a more than everyday meaning, within our everyday lives.