

***Post-Lineage Yoga: From Guru to #MeToo.* By Theodora Wildcroft. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2020. 226 pp. \$32.00**

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Theodora Wildcroft's book on *Post-Lineage Yoga* examines an emerging subculture within modern postural yoga that represents "a privileging of peer networks over pedagogical hierarchies, or... communities over... teacher-adept relationships" (Wildcroft 2020, 11). Across the book's three parts, Wildcroft argues that this post-lineage subculture is an important extension of the practices that emerged and developed transnationally since the late nineteenth century. A shared characteristic of the practices defined under "post-lineage yoga" is that practitioners are innovators in their own right who do not aim to emulate a particular teacher or style. Wildcroft writes, "To a lesser or greater extent, they are looking outside of ... early sources of inspiration to determine what, for them, is labelled yoga" (5). As Wildcroft observes, many practitioners of post-lineage yoga understand their practice in the context of recent scholarly work suggesting that even practices deemed by their followers to be strictly traditional have themselves evolved in the context of an international process of borrowing and co-production throughout roughly the past two centuries (Alter 2004; De Michelis 2004; Newcombe 2019; Singleton 2010).

Much has been written in the past few decades reflecting scholarly concern over the origins, meaning, and belonging of modern postural yoga, and Wildcroft's book makes an important and timely contribution to these discussions. Whereas much of the past few decades of scholarship focused on identifying and defining modern postural yoga as a distinct development in relation to older, South Asian, and transnational forms, Wildcroft's intervention is to identify the more recent emergence of post-lineage yoga as a set of innovations divergent from guru- and lineage-based institutional practices. Wildcroft reads post-lineage yoga as in some ways sidestepping debates over "the tension of authority and ownership between ideas of 'India' and 'the West,'" simply in that the subculture itself is creating "a form of practice, of transmission, and therefore of authority, that is uniquely emplaced" (207). Setting aside issues of ownership and appropriation, the ethnography follows practitioners who are building or have built their own personal and original practices. Wildcroft deflects early on that "the complex entanglements of race, gender, colonialism and religion are [not] the main focus of this book," a fair claim since the book seeks to tell the story of the "postcolonial evolution of a vast and diverse Indian cultural phenomenon" (10). Even so, there is an unexamined tension here in the legacies of privilege that have allowed for this borrowing, innovation, and reimagining to take place. A dutiful ethnographer, if also an insider to the practice, Wildcroft defines and explores the movement on its own terms in the first two parts of the book, turning to a critique and examination of the movement's social justice aims and claims only in part three.

The book opens with Part 1, "Defining post-lineage yoga," in which the author situates the set of overlapping practices and phenomena that the author dubs post-lineage. In this section,

Wildcroft also introduces a set of innovative research methods, including what the author calls the “co-practice” method of shadowing and entraining with practitioners in their private personal practices (28). To record this, Wildcroft developed a unique system of notation, related to but differently evocative from Laban and Benesh systems for scoring (31). Here, Wildcroft captures not just the movement, timing, and effort, but also aspects of breath, direction, and voice that are important to these practices. The scores accompanying practice descriptions in the “Case Studies” that make up Part 2 of the book served as a useful but casual aside to this reader but would be beneficial to future studies that wished to compare and contrast practices and teachings within the subculture or to those with specific interest in the movement and experiential dynamics of these practices. The notation system is not (and does not claim to be) a universal approach to understanding movement but is a productive attempt at translating some of the ephemeral aspects of the movement practice onto the page.

In Part 1, while setting out the focus of the project, Wildcroft classifies yoga scholars into four categories: “scholars who don’t practice (Doniger 2013), scholars who do (Newcombe 2009), scholars whose own practice is key to their research and can be overly partisan (Langølen 2012), and scholars who are writing as much for a yogic audience as a scholarly one (Horton 2012)” (Wildcroft 2020, 24). Wildcroft is clearly situated as a scholar-practitioner, and the book deftly explores the intricacies and effects of Wildcroft’s positionality, both as an academic holding a mirror to a practice in which the author is also invested and as a co-practitioner and observer in the context of the intimate ethnographic research processes detailed here. In the final chapter of this section, Wildcroft examines “Yoga camp life” wherein the author introduces and analyzes three yoga festivals that take place during the British summer and serve as key points of coming together for the loosely defined communities of practice of post-lineage yoga: Colourfest, Santosa, and Sundara. There are overlapping participants and communities of practice in each of the three festivals, but more important are the ways in which the coming together in these camps demonstrates the shared and overlapping “processes that characterize this subculture: common repertoires of practice; relationships with a more than human world; negotiations with lineage and ontology, and service as a form of yoga itself” (58).

Likewise, in Part 2, through a collection of case studies based in Wildcroft’s method of video-recorded co-practice followed by extended interviews with each participant, the author presents a shared set of dynamics, approaches, and some repeated shapes and movements that characterize and cohere this post-lineage yoga. An important and foundational observation is Wildcroft’s sketch of a basic model of practice described as “Audit, Remedy, Innovate, and Savour” (155). Through a complex process of community transmission evoked in the yoga camp stories and in reflections by the teacher-practitioners profiled in these case studies, Wildcroft observes, “intuitively, all post-lineage practitioners learn to develop this spiralling technology of inquiry, contemplation, action and reflection in a cyclical process of unravelling and remaking of the self” (155). In this way, post-lineage yoga shares much of its impetus and focus with other contemplative bodily practices both in the West and cross-culturally.

Wildcroft describes the practices of post-lineage yoga as improvisational, responsive, and dynamic. The practices (and especially the yoga festivals) are also, to an extent, situated in what has been described as a fading countercultural movement (Jain 2014; Jain 2020). Like Jain, who observes the “gestural” nature of “subversions that largely function as superficial points of resistance already contained within the totalizing framework of neoliberal rationality” (2020, 30), Wildcroft points out that wellness counterculture cannot substitute for actual political resistance. Wildcroft writes, “The use of wellbeing practices is a problematic response to socio-

politically elevated levels of anxiety and a ‘beleaguered self’ because it substitutes personal adaptation for political change” (Wildcroft 2020, 210). In this way, the book is situated with other recent scholarship that reads transnational yoga through the lens of social justice work and theory (Berila, Klein, and Roberts 2016; Hagan 2021). Included in this is a more inclusive approach to yoga bodies and a critical resistance to patriarchal structures of power and charismatic leadership that have come to be associated with modern postural yoga, especially in light of the #MeToo movement (Black 2020; Remski 2019; Remski 2020). Wildcroft does not engage substantially with race in this volume but notes that “the overt syncretism of post-lineage yoga partially guards against many universalized narratives, including ethnic and religious nationalism” (2020, 85).

In Part 3, “Post-lineage practice, culture, and community,” Wildcroft expands on these themes and on the teaching and other community-building work engaged by post-lineage practitioners. One of the questions asked here is “how do practitioners decide what to practice, and teachers know what to teach?” (155). This happens, Wildcroft asserts, largely through a “peer-based practice evolution, where teachers learn from each other, students are encouraged to individualise practice, and the roles of teacher and student are not permanently assigned, but lightly held in turn” (77).

So what is the value and the need for a book and a set of theories such as this? “In considering only the most visible incarnations of contemporary yoga,” Wildcroft writes, “we have been in fact, ignoring a long and storied heritage of re-enchanting bodies through unorthodox, community-based forms of post-lineage yoga, as a form of resistance to modernity and commercialisation. This is the context, the inspiration and the fuel for the untold story that this book seeks to tell” (22). Wildcroft sets this against “the kinds of managerial standardization and hierarchical organization typical of brand and lineage knowledge production, which aim to preserve and propagate rather than evolve and diversify practice” (56).

As someone who has recently dealt with both grief and disillusionment after learning of multi-tiered and widespread instances of alleged abuse in the transnational institution that has been my spiritual home for more than two decades (Remski 2020) – the source of my training and practice, but also the institution around which I have based much of my scholarship – I find hope and inspiration in the post-lineage yoga Wildcroft writes about and embodies here. In fact, perhaps the biggest impact of this study and its analytical framework is in the potential it offers for those yoga-scholars and scholar-yogis who have been frustrated by the “gestural subversions” of neoliberal yoga (Jain 2020). Perhaps we can look to post-lineage forms to more fully realize the liberatory potential embodied in yoga as theory and practice (Black 2020, 13; see also Godrej 2017). Certainly, hierarchical, colonial, and patriarchal institutions, whose aspirations toward preserving “tradition” sit uncomfortably close to religious and ethnic nationalism, have fallen short. But the work of creating just and inclusive spaces does not finish with the creation and imagination of post-lineage forms. Indeed, Wildcroft argues that the stakes of interpersonal power and the effects of charisma are (perhaps just as) important in post-lineage yoga,

In order to build a culture of empathy that is not devoid of ethics or agency, post-lineage yoga must continue to surround transmission with an increasingly robust culture of shared ethical norms (2020, 186).

For the community of scholars writing about and engaging post-lineage yoga, perhaps a model for future intellectual engagement and more comprehensively imagined justice would follow on Wildcroft’s imagining of post-lineage yoga practice: “Audit, Remedy, Innovate, and Savour.” This book provides a wonderful audit of the diverse practices imagined within post-lineage yoga.

Future works, by scholars in various relationships to the practice, can and should engage the next steps – to remedy, innovate, and savour post-lineage yoga – beginning with more robust critiques of the legacies of cultural appropriation and borrowing that have gotten us here, especially the racialized and gendered dimensions of these histories.

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