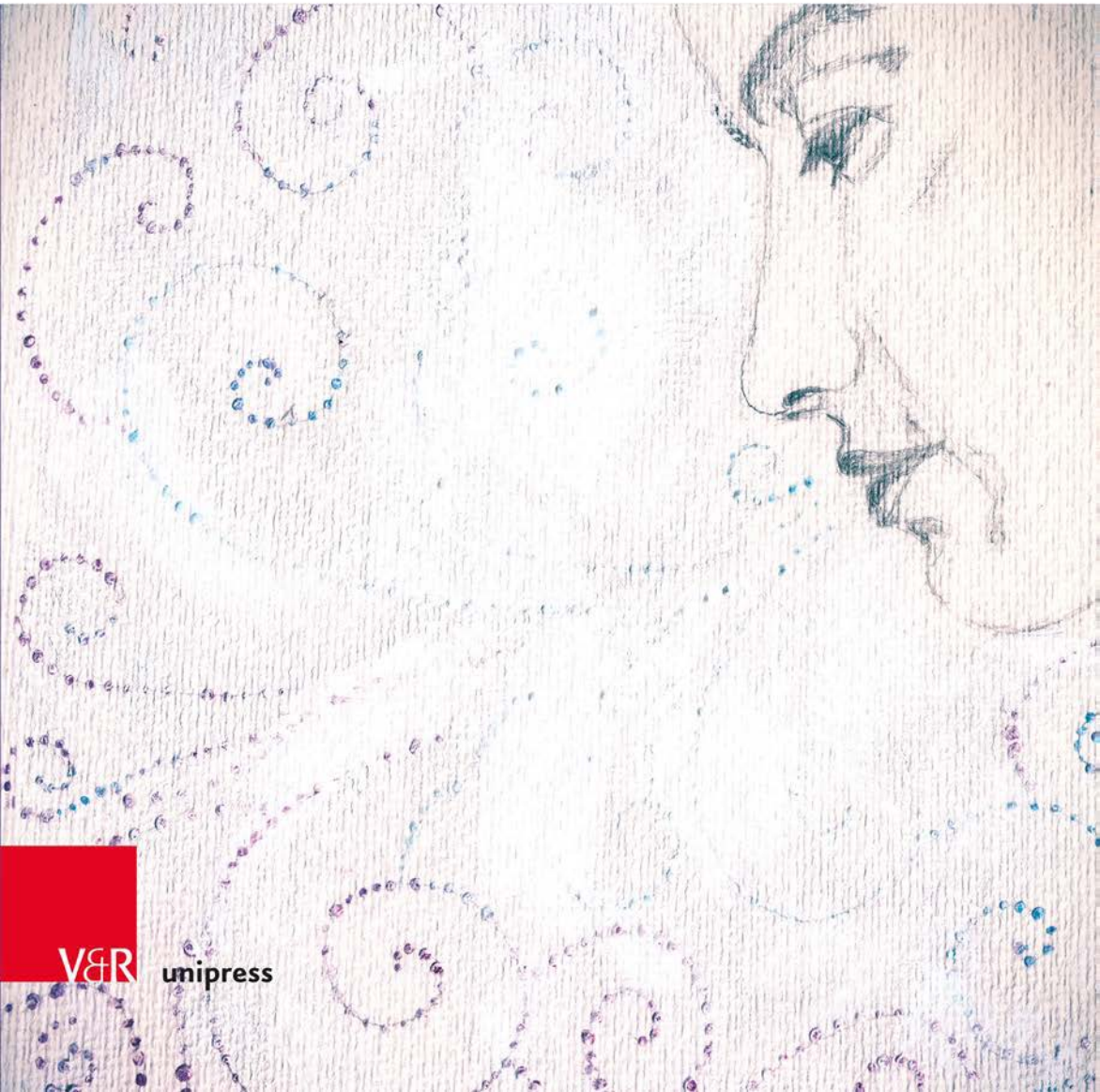
Magdalena Kraler

Yoga Breath

Vienna University Press



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Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga

With 19 figures

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To everyone who inspires me
And to the god of flutes

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Lächeln, Atem und Schritt
sind mehr als des Lichtes, des Windes, der Sterne Bahn.
Die Welt fängt im Menschen an.
Franz Werfel (c. 1913)

To those who see the All, there is no difference except formal when Life is materialised, or when Matter is vitalised, or when Spirit is materialised, or again when everything is spiritualised.
Pramathanatha Mukhyopadhyaya (1922)

Obviously, breath has everything to do with nothing.
Maria Engberg (2019)

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7 Yogic Breath Cultivation as a Practice

7.1 Breath as an Intermediary

Within yoga and physical culture, breath has often been conceived as a link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a subtle but tangible intermediary or "connective tissue" between the body and mind. Vedic and Upaniṣadic texts highlight the relation between human breath and a cosmic life principle – the term *prāṇa* implies both. In Haṭhayoga, the breath is linked to various functions within the human system, most notably to the mind and the semen. In Western esoteric traditions, Swedenborg pointed at the intimate connection between the breath and the mind. For animal magnetism, the existence of a fluidum that permeated the cosmos provided the epistemological framework for various religious phenomena and therapeutic interventions. As early as in Anquetil-Duperron's translation of the Upaniṣads into Latin in 1801/02, this fluidum was paralleled with *prāṇa*. To some extent, the mesmeric epistemological framework was substituted by the concept of psycho-physiology from the 1830s onwards. Psycho-physiology became another framework in which the link between the body and the mind was central, and which was thus easily adopted for theories on the efficacy of yogic breathing techniques. Protagonists of modern yoga apply all these conceptual frameworks to yogic breath cultivation.

Having touched on all these aspects in previous chapters, this one is more concerned with the internal structure and physiological side of the practices. To introduce this subject, I briefly refer here to deep breathing, a form of breath cultivation mainly associated with medical and physical-culture discourses. Deep breathing was in vogue from roughly the 1860s onwards, and through the impact of Euro-American hygienic culture it shaped the way breath cultivation was conceived on a transnational scale. Various participants in yoga discourses both appealed to and dismissed these forms of breathing. This yielded further definitions of what *prāṇāyāma* is and what it is not. As such, ideas on deep breathing show how discussions about the nature of *prāṇāyāma* and its various techniques were negotiated. To treat the "internal" and physiological side of the practices, I

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then will present a typology that accentuates the practice in its significance as a physical exercise that assumes a certain logic based on the functions of the body.

7.2 Deep Breathing in Relation to Yogic Breath Cultivation

In contexts of yogic breath cultivation, deep breathing was either conceived as "authentically" yogic or as not being part of an inherent yogic heritage. The following discussion exemplifies the varied reception of a concept that hailed from modern medicine and medical gymnastics, which understood "deep breathing" as a prerequisite for health and as a remedy in the fight against pulmonary tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was the prime cause of death throughout the nineteenth century, and awareness of its disastrous effects sparked a myriad of breathing techniques for preventive and curative purposes (Streeter 2020: 24; Rothman 1995). Furthermore, the success of the concept of deep breathing in Euro-American contexts is also owed to a new dress code for females, who displayed a growing aversion to wearing a corset. Moreover, the necessity of learning and cultivating deep breathing also implied a gender aspect. Females were said to be "chest" or "clavicular" breathers (e.g., Guttmann 1884 [1867]: 138; cf. Summers 2001: 75–77, 107) and exponents of physical culture developed specific attention to training females to become better breathers.[322]

An oft-discussed feature of deep breathing within medical and physical culture was to engage the full capacity of the lungs, as opposed to only parts of it. This understanding of "full breathing" combined the techniques of abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing, side/rib breathing, and shoulder/clavicular/upper-chest breathing, based on a threefold division of breath space. This concept widely influenced yogic breath cultivation and its anatomical understanding and description. It is also reflected in Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "Yogi Complete Breath" in which one aims to sequentially fill the lungs from bottom to top

322 Regarding primary sources of the medical discourses around deep breathing that often, but not exclusively, address females, see William H. Flower's "Fashion in Deformity" (1881), Alice B. Stockham's *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman* (1892 [1885]: 68–69), George H. Taylor's *Pelvic and Hernial Therapeutics* (1885), and W. Lee Howard's *Breathe and Be Well* (1916: 1916:136); regarding a discussion within American Delsartism, with reference to the deformative effect of the corset, see Le Favre (1891: 59–64) and the "Appendix" in Stebbins (1892: 137–150); for the physical culturists' contributions, see Bess Mensendieck's *Körperkultur des Weibes* (1907) and Müller's *My Breathing System* (1914); for the necessity of deep breathing for voice and physical training, see Lewis B. Monroe's *Manual of Vocal and Physical Training* (1869: 24–27), Leo Kofler's *Art of Breathing* (1890 [1887]), and Guttmann's *Gymnastics of the Voice* (1884 [1867]: 21), the latter with reference to tuberculosis and wearing a corset; for the connection between deep breathing and relaxation, see Annie P. Call's *Power Through Repose* (1891: 104–108); for an account of physical culture rejecting the corset from the 1850s onwards, see Summers (2001: 143–172).

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(chapter 8.2.2). Some, however, conceive of deep breathing as a spontaneous involuntary breath, like the kind of breathing that happens during sleep, as for example found in Warren Felt Evans's *Esoteric Christianity* (Evans 1886: 97). Similarly, the Indian theosophist Sris Chandra Vasu held that the "proper duration […] of breath for a Yogi" could be learnt by observing the respiration of somebody in deep sleep (Basu 2004 [1887]: li). Mostly, however, "deep breathing" means *deepened* respiration, which is augmented, prolonged and fuller than spontaneous breathing, often achieved by a conscious interaction with the act of breathing. This usual form of "deep breathing" is, strictly speaking, also distinct from the "Yogi Complete Breath" because it does not specify a particular engagement of breath spaces.[323]

Within the broader discourses of modern yoga, however, a discrepancy between deep breathing and techniques that restrain the breath arose. Kuvalayananda, for example, avers that mere deep breathing cannot be called *prāṇāyāma*, but other yogis endorse it. Let us first consider the proponents of deep breathing. The influential theosophist Rama Prasad suggests that *prāṇāyāma* is "deep expiration and inspiration" and "the drawing of deep breaths" (Prasad 1890: 161). Vivekananda advised his American disciples to "[t]ake a deep breath and fill the lungs", because "[s]ome of us do not breathe deeply enough" (Vivekananda 1992 [1900b]: 519). Similarly, Sivananda prescribes "deep breathing exercises" in a standing position as derived from J. P. Müller's *My Breathing System* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 64–66). Despite these recommendations, both yogis add that deep breathing is only a preparation for advanced techniques. Sivananda states that it is "only a variety of pranayama" (*ibid.:* 66), and Vivekananda argues that advanced yogic techniques are more dangerous, but also bestow greater benefits to the yogi (Vivekananda 1992 [1900b]: 519–520).

In his *Breathing Methods* (1932), also Yogendra seems to have few reservations about deep breathing (Yogendra 1932: 24). Just like Vivekananda, he does hold that mere breathing methods do not have the same benefits as the "Yoga

323 The notion of "deep breathing" is at times rendered in Indian contexts "*deergha svasana*" (Hindi for "deep/long breathing"), e. g., in Bhole (1982: 73), who demarcates it from *prāṇāyāma.* Most likely, the term results from the conflation of *Yogasūtra* 2.50 stating that the breath becomes long and subtle (*dīrgha-sūkṣma*) due to *prāṇāyāma* and of Euro-American deep breathing discourses. "*Deergha svasana*" has, however, also been equated with the "three-part-breath" which appears to be nothing else than Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "Yogi Complete Breath", e. g., in Goldberg (2016: 51, n. *) or on https://himalayanyoganepal.com /science-of-one-nostril-breathing-and-pranayama/ which states that "Deergha Swasa Kriya, also called Three-Part Breath, is a practice of slowing and deepening the breath. Deergha is an essential yogic breathing technique that is taught in most yoga classes along with postures" (accessed Sep 23, 2024). I have not found any specific school or lineage that used the terminology as such, but it appears to be somewhat widespread in contemporary yoga as taught in South Asia.

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breathing methods [that] offer more favourable conditions for deeper inspirations and expirations" (*ibid.*: 72). Even if "Yoga breathing methods" are superior to Western breathing techniques, the defining category for Yogendra is still "deep breathing". A different view is held by Kuvalayananda, who does not correlate *prāṇāyāma* with "deep breathing", which he specifies to be a "Western" practice. He argues that due to the factor of retention, *prāṇāyāma* involves internal pressure changes (of the intrapulmonary and intrathoracic pressure), whereas the pressure changes in deep breathing do not differ from those in ordinary breathing (Kuvalayananda 1930b: 49; 1930d).

Summing up, the yogis' arguments revolve here around the "authenticity" of yogic breath cultivation. As a basic argument, there is no doubt on the part of the yogis that yogic breath cultivation is superior to Euro-American deep breathing techniques. Based on this assumption, there are however three different modes to react to it. For some, (1) deep breathing is inherent to yogic breath cultivation (Prasad, Atkinson/Ramacharaka); (2) *prāṇāyāma* is essentially deep breathing, but a *better* variety of it (Yogendra, Sivananda, and Vivekananda); (3) deep breathing decidedly differs from *prāṇāyāma*, and the latter is the superior form of breath cultivation (Kuvalayananda). In (2), deep breathing can be used to prepare for *prāṇāyāma*, and in (3) it is not practised at all, because it is fully substituted by *prāṇāyāma*. The ideas that trickled in from Euro-American contexts were not always as ambiguously received, as has been shown with the concept of psycho-physiology. Likewise, in case of "rhythmic breathing", it easily fell into place, although Stebbins popularising it drew on occult and Delsartean breath practices (chapter 5.2.5; chapter 8.2.1). This is because her concept merged to some extent with the premodern technique of *mātrā* in which one counts the phases of the breath, and it was therefore conceived of as an inherent part of yogic breath cultivation. In other words, the idea of *mātrā* provided a "welcoming structure" (Baier 2016b) for Stebbins's concept of rhythmic breathing, which enabled the latter's easy reception among yoga pioneers. To delve deeper, I will now provide a typology of yogic breath cultivation that is based on various physiological aspects of the practices.

7.3 Typology of Yogic Breath Cultivation

The typology which is presented here is derived from an analysis of the practices as outlined in various anglophone *prāṇāyāma* manuals in early modern yoga up to the 1940s. As such, this scheme is part of my meta-analysis and the terminology used here is neither a traditional approach to classifying *prāṇāyāma*, nor is it developed by modern yoga pioneers, but I have designed it to analyse their practices. Although I give some examples of certain types of breath cultivation of

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the premodern era, I will only do so if these examples are still relevant in the modern period. Generally, this typology aims to analyse the practices between c. 1850 and 1945. It acknowledges the corporeality of the practices and is thus based on basic physiological considerations.[324] It classifies practices in sitting or lying postures, while it is not intended to analyse practices that combine breathing techniques in postural yoga or movement practice. The terminological phrase "modern yogic breath cultivation" includes techniques that combine *āsana* and yogic breath cultivation, because modern yoga pioneers integrated the two into their training (Goldberg 2016: 36–39; Foxen 2020). But these practices are, as stated, for the most part not considered in this study and therefore not part of this typology.

Breathing is a highly complex physiological action that involves various systems of the human body. In brief, breathing mechanics (e.g., the movement of the diaphragm and related movements of various body parts),[325] pressure changes within the lungs, and the resulting gaseous exchange between the body and the environment are the main underlying physiological principles of "external inspiration", whereas "internal respiration" involves nutrient oxidation of the body cells (Despopoulos & Silbernagl 2003: 106). Breathing is both a voluntary and involuntary process:[326] it is either directed by the autonomic system and its automatic functioning or by the thinking and planning portions of the brain located in the cerebral cortex (Wasser 2017: 7).[327] The automatic action of breathing is initiated the moment the blood, passing through the medulla oblongata (a part of the brain stem), reports a certain amount of carbon dioxide, which builds up when the breath is stopped (Todd 2008 [1937]: 232). It is, in other

324 For obvious reasons, I cannot go into much detail regarding the physiological functions of breathing and *prāṇāyāma* here. A clear outline of the physiology of *prāṇāyāma* and its therapeutic applications is, e.g., found in Lakhehev et al. (1986). Also, the conceptual frameworks established by Bhole (1965; 1966; 1982) in the *Yoga-Mīmāṁsā* are convincing. For a systematic, yet also highly intuitive and practice-based approach to describing *prāṇāyāma*, see also chapter 9 and 10 of Maria Engberg's *Spiro Ergo Sum* which condenses her year-long *prāṇāyāma* practice under the guidance of Swami Maheshananda (Engberg 2019: 324–380). I also recommend the most recent issues of *Viveka – Hefte für Yoga* (issue 62/63/64) by Martin Soder and Imogen Dalman that focus on *prāṇāyāma* practice (particularly Dalman & Soder 2022a; 2022b).

325 The diaphragm is the muscle primarily responsible for breathing. When the diaphragm is contracted during inhalation, it expands downwards and pushes the abdomen out, and it relaxes during exhalation. The diaphragm also moves the lower ribs, and depending on the volume of the breath, parts of the ribcage or the whole trunk. The lungs move indirectly or passively together with the ribcage because they are mechanically coupled to the chest walls by a liquid that fills the so-called pleural space (Wasser 2017: 3–4).

326 "Both voluntary and involuntary paths exist within the human being. Breath is a *rare place* where the two meet, making connection between them possible" (Engberg 2019: 457, her emphasis).

327 On the control of respiratory muscles in voluntary breathing, see also Sears & Davis (1968).

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words, the load of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the blood that makes us breathe (Wasser 2017: 5). It should further be noted that breathing is also influenced and regulated by emotional states and bodily movements, both voluntary and involuntary (Todd 2008 [1937]: 232; Despopoulos & Silbernagl 2003: 132).

Based on these two modes of voluntary and involuntary breathing, I assume that forms of breath cultivation can be classified into practices that do not attempt to alter the flow of the breath and practices that deliberately interfere with or manipulate the breath. Any form of interaction with the breath, non-interfering or interfering, is, however, considered here as "cultivation". Two basic aspects of interfering are noteworthy, which are making the breath rhythmic, and moulding various bodily tissues to change the flow of the breath. This results in four types of breath cultivation that build in complexity (figure 8): (1) "cultivation through witnessing",[328] which is merely witnessing the breath without conscious interference; (2) "cultivation through rhythm", in which the practitioner deliberately interferes with the breath to make it rhythmic either through a specific *mātrā* or by following the concept of "rhythmic breathing" as popularised by Stebbins; (3) "cultivation through moulding", in which bodily tissues are "moulded" according to the respective breath practice, which is the case, for example, in alternate-nostril breathing and in the eight *kumbhaka*s; and (4) "cultivation through rhythm and moulding", which combines (2) and (3), for example in alternate-nostril breathing that follows a specific *mātrā.* In brief, all forms except (1) consciously manipulate the breath. Since the central meaning of *prāṇāyāma*, in both premodern and modern yoga, is "breath control" (i. e., the active manipulation of the breath), (2), (3), and (4) are of great importance and are arguably the direct heritage of Haṭhayoga.[329]

	Without Interference	Conscious Interference	Typical Variations
1	Cultivation through Witnessing		*various breath-related sensations can be observed
2		Cultivation through Rhythm	*applying a *mātrā* *rhythmic breathing

328 Engberg (2019: 336–340) has found a similar vocabulary, which however also includes non-yogic varieties subsumed under "normal" breathing and "playing" with the breath. She distinguishes between "normal breathing – involuntary", "the volunteer breathing voluntarily – play" (all varieties that "play" with the breath including speech and song), "the volunteer breathing voluntarily – pranayama" (in which a description of *pūraka*, *recaka*, *kumbhaka* and the *bandha*s follows). Note that the "volunteer" is the practitioner.

329 Birch & Hargreaves (2015: 18–19) have observed that forms of witnessing the breath without deliberately changing it, as found in modern yoga, do not have clear precedents in premodern yoga.

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(Continued)

	Without Interference	Conscious Interference	Typical Variations
3		Cultivation through Moulding	*eight *kumbhaka*s *moulding of any body part involved *expanding the chest/ abdomen (e. g., "complete breath")
4		Cultivation through Rhythm & Moulding	*alternate-nostril breathing with *mātrā* *eight *kumbhaka*s with *mātrā*

Figure 8: Four Types of Yogic Breath Cultivation that Build in Complexity (Author's Illustration).

In the following, some background considerations and further examples of these four types of breath cultivation are presented. As mentioned, the most basic form of breath cultivation is (1) "cultivation through witnessing". Although practitioners may find that "witnessing" already alters the breath to some extent, it is closest to involuntary breathing as a conscious interaction with breath can be. The quality and depth, the tidal volume,[330] the respiratory frequency, rhythm, and length as well as various proprioceptive sensations accompanying the breath, including the feeling of the air at the nostrils (*prāṇasparśa*),[331] are possible objects of observation. One can also observe the breathing spaces, in which one follows the expanding and shrinking motion of the chest, ribs, and abdomen during breathing. Cultivation through witnessing is applied in modern yoga, for example, in instructions for *śavāsana*, or in practices that prepare for meditation (Kuvalayananda 1933a: 114; Yogendra 1935a: 85). Vivekananda also advises "to join your mind to the breath and gradually attain the power of concentrating your attention on its movements" (Vivekananda 1958 [n.d.a.]: 130). The yogi and occultist T. R. Sanjivi holds that "[c]oncentration of the mind on the pause between inspiration and expiration without trying to interfere with their natural course is the ideal method of concentration of the mind via Respiration" (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 34). Cultivation through witnessing is, however, not as ubiquitous as (2), (3), and (4).

330 In humans, breathing is "tidal", which means it consists of both air flowing in and out through the same set of tubes which are the trachea, the primary bronchi leading to each lung, and the subsequent progressively smaller bronchioles (Wasser 2017: 3). This tidal in- and outflow of air is induced by a pressure change within the lungs that results in gaseous exchange with the external atmosphere (*ibid.:* 3–4).

331 For a discussion on *prāṇasparśa* see Bhole (1982) in *Yoga-Mīmāṅsā* and Kuvalayananda (1931: 76).

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The second category, (2) "cultivation through rhythm", includes all forms of counted breathing, or "*mātrā*", as practised in Haṭhayoga and widely applied in instructions on modern yogic breath cultivation. The most common *mātrā* that is often recommended is the ratio 1-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale).[332] It means that the exhalation is twice the length of the inhalation, and the retention is four times as long. Another *mātrā* that is described in the *Gorakṣaśataka* is the ratio 6-8-5, which Yogendra holds is suitable for beginners (Yogendra 1940: 40). Krishnamacharya developed a terminology for *prāṇāyāma* with even *mātrā* (*samavṛtti*), i.e., the phases of the breath being of the same length, and uneven *mātrā* (*viṣamavṛtti*) (chapter 8.5.2). As has been mentioned, (2) also includes rhythmic breathing as understood by Stebbins, which is counting both the in- and out-breath for four heartbeats each and suspending the breath for two heartbeats, resulting in the rhythm 4-2-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale-retain) (chapter 5.2.4). A main difference between the premodern *mātrā* system and Stebbins's rhythmic breathing is that the former includes three phases of the breath (inhalation-retention-exhalation) while Stebbins's technique involves all four phases of the breath. However, modern yoga pioneers also engage the fourth phase of the breath (which includes retention after exhalation) (e.g., Vivekananda, Yogendra, Krishnamacharya).[333] Rhythmic breathing and the concept of *mātrā* are often intermingled in modern yoga, and at times rhythmic breathing becomes synonymous with *prāṇāyāma*.[334]

Cultivation through rhythm is said to have a specific effect on body and mind. This is often contrasted by the argument that normal breathing is irregular and produces ill-health (e.g., Vivekananda 1896: 57, 128; Kuvalayananda 1933a: 113; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 53). Because of its pacifying capacities, Kuvalayananda recommends rhythmic breathing with in- and out-breaths of equal length for an advanced stage of *śavāsana* (Kuvalayananda 1933a: 113–114). Vivekananda, for his part, explains that rhythmic breathing brings the body into a harmonious condition and recharges it like a battery (Vivekananda 1958 [1900]: 39; 1896: 50–

332 For an overview of the history of *mātrā*, see chapter 3.3.4.

333 This is not the case in medieval Haṭhayoga. *Kumbhaka* literally means holding a "full pot" (not an empty one), which only makes sense when correlated with internal breath retention (Jason Birch in a personal conversation, Nov 25, 2020).

334 While "rhythmic breathing" is often practised without any additional form of manipulation, it should be noted that many cases of utilising a *mātrā* also involve "cultivation through moulding" (the combination of moulding and rhythm is further described below). But if *prāṇāyāma* is understood as the cultivation of inhalation, exhalation, and retention (*pūraka*, *recaka*, *kumbhaka*) (as, for example, found in Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* 5.4; Qvarnström 2012: 165), and this is coupled with a specific *mātrā*, it would still fall under this category. A modern example is Krishnamacharya's idea of *samavṛtti* ("even movement") *prāṇāyāma*, e.g., in the ratio 4-4-4-4 (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 87).

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51).[335] Yogendra explains the correlation of "deep, prolonged and rhythmic breathing" and "mental equipoise" by referring to *Yogasūtra* 1.34 (Yogendra 1940: 52). Elsewhere, however, he explains the same breath-mind interdependence by citing Stebbins (Yogendra 1932: 69). Similarly, Sundaram holds that the rhythm and fullness of breath during *prāṇāyāma* benefits the brain and brings about a calmness of the mind (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 95–96).

In (3) "cultivation through moulding", "moulding" is manipulating various bodily tissues and the breathing apparatus, for example the contraction and relaxation of the throat, the diaphragm, the abdominal muscles as well as the muscles of the trunk and the pelvis.[336] Nostrils can be moulded, thus altering the breath flow, by pressing them with the fingers as is common in alternate-nostril breathing. A technique like *bhastrikā* involves the rigorous action of the abdominal and pelvic muscles. The throat and the pelvic floor are contracted in *mudrā*s, or locks, that often accompany Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* techniques. This category also involves the volume of the breath, emphasising the active expansion of the belly and the chest, as in any form of engaged deep breathing and as in Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "Yogi Complete Breath". In premodern Haṭhayoga, the eight *kumbhaka*s, and breath retention in general, were often practised "according to capacity" (*yathāśakti*) as opposed to following a specific *mātrā*.[337] This meant that the timing of the practice was individually adapted and not strictly made "rhythmic", and this concept is sometimes also utilised by modern yoga pioneers.

The fourth category (4) "cultivation through rhythm and moulding" is often found in modern yoga, and many forms of advanced *prāṇāyāma* involve both rhythm and moulding. A prominent example is alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio 1-4-2, which is already mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.10–16 and is frequently taught in the modern era.[338] Since modern yoga appears to have a stronger focus on *mātrā* than on the concept of *yathāśakti*, this category is even more ubiquitous than (3). All South Asian yoga pioneers treated here engage (3) and (4) in the form of either alternate-nostril breathing or other

335 For the concept of recharging the "body-battery" through breathing techniques, see chapter 5.2.5, and Foxen (2020: 99–100, 162, 245–246).

336 Engberg finds a similar classification when describing "varieties of pranayama": "The volunteer voluntarily agrees to arrange the body (abdominal muscles, tongue, jaws, scull, cheeks, glottis, fingers etc.), and to apply the force, the velocity and rhythm of breathing in a specific way. The dynamics, the quality and quantity of movement, the pressure, friction, sound and touch will differ from gross to very subtle, being indirectly or directly connected to Space within" (Engberg 2019: 340). Note that the "volunteer" is the practitioner and that "Space" (*ākāśa*) is a crucial lens for Engberg's reading of *prāṇāyāma*.

337 See, for example, *Haṭhapradīpikā* 3.20 and *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.58 (Gharote 2008 [1998]: 47, 68).

338 For details on the premodern aspects of alternate-nostril breathing, see chapter 3.3.2.

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Haṭhayogic forms of breath cultivation that are practised with or without *mātrā* (Vivekananda 1896; Abhedananda 1902; Yogananda 1925; Sundaram 2000 [1929]; Kuvalayananda 1931; Yogendra 1935b, 1935c; Sivananda 1962 [1935]; Krishnamacharya n.d.a.).

I should finally note that *kevalakumbhaka*, which is the spontaneous cessation of breath achieved either through *prāṇāyāma* practice or through other meditation techniques, cannot be classified in the same way as the other practices. It is, strictly speaking, not *practised* at all, but it *happens* as a result of other more preliminary practices. If at all, it could be understood as a complementary – but infinitely more advanced – practice of "cultivation through witnessing", which likewise is a non-interfering practice. Since, however, *kevalakumbhaka* results from other practices, and also in premodern yoga it is never described as a *technique*, I refrain from putting it into a classifying box. It should, however, be mentioned that it is, in premodern Haṭhayoga, the pivotal point of *prāṇāyāma* and a prerequisite for *samādhi* (Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 18). Nevertheless, modern yogis do not foreground its significance. As a general remark, it seems that modern forms of *prāṇāyāma* highlight the concept of breath *control* as well as the *techniques* to master the breath. But despite brazen statements regarding the efficacy of the techniques on a therapeutic and soteriological level, the "non-practice" of *kevalakumbhaka* – that which cannot actively be achieved – is not a ubiquitous theme.

7.4 Summary

A detailed analysis of all the breath practices in modern yoga would fill volumes and is therefore not intended here. Instead, this chapter has presented some demarcations that yoga pioneers set against Euro-American practices like deep breathing. The analysis shows that there is no codified canon of yogic breath cultivation, and the discursive negotiations as to what to include and exclude are continued to the present day. The typology presented here, then, serves as a map to understand certain ways to approach and practise *prāṇāyāma* by considering some basic physiological aspects of breathing. It has been shown that certain modern practices were not prevalent in premodern yoga, and vice versa. But there are also overlaps in the premodern and modern understandings of *prāṇāyāma*, as exemplified by the famous and ubiquitously described practice of alternate-nostril breathing in the *mātrā* 1-4-2.

All modern yoga pioneers engaged in the corporeality of the practice, and this will, at least in part, concern us throughout the analysis in the next chapters. *Prāṇāyāma*, however, is never just a purely physical practice. "Breath as a conductor" and its "energetic" quality are as relevant as the details of instruction and

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physical aspects of *prāṇāyāma. Prāṇāyāma* as a practice to link body and mind is as notable as its health benefits. The metaphysical and soteriological speculations associated with *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* are a powerful discursive aspect within modern yoga, and, moreover, linked to *prāṇāyāma* in light of political negotiations. As such, the corporeal practice is the inner core of *prāṇāyāma* discourses, which is mainly relevant within self-cultivation (cf. Kraler 2024). However, its radius of influence is much larger. As has been argued in previous chapters, the wider analysis must also consider the practices in relation to the "social body", i. e., how they are tied into the larger socio-cultural and religious environments. Keeping these various layers in mind, we move on to an analysis of several systems of yogic breath cultivation as developed by ten thinkers and pioneers who have hugely influenced modern yoga's landscape.

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