

Conférences de David Gordon White

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Toutes les conférences auront lieu en salle 638, au sixième étage du France
190-198 Avenue de France 75013 Paris

1. The *Yoga Sūtras* Rediscovered

Le mercredi 17 octobre de 15h à 17h

In our present twenty-first century context, in which the *Yoga Sūtras* have become a fixture of popular culture, it is natural to assume, as many have done, that Patañjali's work has been a perennial "classic" in South Asia for some two thousand years. Working from new quantitative research data, I argue that by the time of its "rediscovery" by Henry Thomas Colebrooke in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the *Yoga Sūtras* had been a dead tradition in most of India for several centuries. In his groundbreaking work on Yoga philosophy, Colebrooke referred to Patañjali's system as "fanatical." In the second part of my talk, I will discuss the background for this negative appreciation, which arose out of the colonial "discovery" of India's yogis by the British.

2. The *Yoga Sūtras* Deconstructed

Le jeudi 25 octobre de 15h à 17h

Since the time of Hermann Jacobi and Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Yoga scholars have been deconstructing the *Yoga Sūtras*, raising issues about its authorship, its coherence as a text, and even its actual title. Here, I will argue that this process of deconstructing or dismantling the *Yoga Sūtras* began nearly immediately after their compilation—with Vyāsa himself (as Michel Angot has argued), but more importantly in the writings of the Purāṇic and Smṛti authors, as well as later commentators. One may go so far as to speak of a deliberate strategy on the part of these authors to reduce the content of Patañjali's work to its 31 verses on the "eight-part practice" (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*), to subvert Patañjali's definition of Yoga (in YS 1.2), and to dissociate the *Yoga Sūtras* from their author/compiler. This process would culminate in Vijñānabhikṣu's sixteenth century sub-commentaries, which reduced Yoga into a subsidiary form of Vedānta philosophy.

3. The *Yoga Sūtras* Reinvented

Le mardi 30 octobre de 15h à 17h

Following Colebrooke's "rediscovery" of the *Yoga Sūtras*, Patañjali's work was open to appropriation by self-appointed culture brokers of every stripe, who placed it in the service of their various agendas: philosophical, reformist, self-promotional, etc. Here, after briefly surveying the *Yoga Sūtras*' nineteenth-century reception history, I will focus on the "Yoga mythologies" propagated by B. K. S. Iyengar and T. K. V. Desikachar with respect to Patañjali and, most especially, their master T. M. Krishnamacharya. These mythologies may be read as a palimpsest for two hundred years of the reinvention of a Yoga philosophy situated at the meeting point between the colonial politics, spirituality, and science.

4. Tantric Shadows

Le jeudi 8 novembre de 15h à 17h

The *Netra Tantra*, an early ninth-century text from Kashmir, contains a long chapter on demonology. In it, we find the sole mention in Hindu Tantric scriptures of the "evil eye." The same chapter also contains long accounts of sorcery and counter-sorcery techniques involving zombies and animated weapons. I will argue that many of these elements of Kashmirian demonology—including the term "shadow" for an agent of possession—had their origin outside of the Indian subcontinent. In the light of these data, a reevaluation of certain assumptions concerning Hindu Tantra is in order.