

# The poverty of the guru discourse of Yoga Protestantism

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This essay is not about yoga history but rather about yoga historians. The title of the essay is inspired by Karl R. Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957). Here Popper argued that the methods employed within the social and historical sciences cannot be neutral. In fact Popper demonstrated methods are highly political and that methodology *seriously* matters when dealing with history, culture and society. As always Popper also argued that criticism and relentless debate is the cornerstone of *any* scholarship.

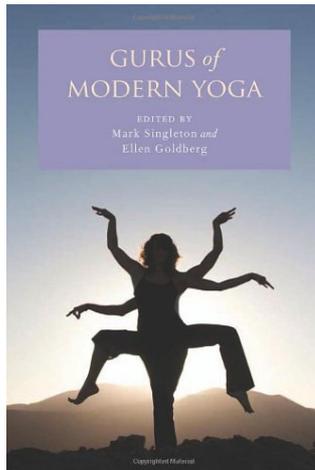
Writing *Why Yoga? A Cultural History of Yoga* made me realise two things in relation to Popper's thinking. Firstly most academic discourse on yoga and Tantra is restricted to religious departments. Subjects like yoga and Tantra does not figure on the radar screen of the social sciences and humanities, which forms my theoretical background. It further appeared to me that yoga and Tantra scholarship in religious departments is isolated from fertile cross-disciplinary research and critical debate. Thirdly the open critical debate urged by Popper – and which certainly rules the social sciences and humanities – seems very muted, polite or utterly absent within the yoga discourses of religious departments. The ruling atmosphere can best be compared with that of an English club of gentlemen: respectful, restrained, and mannered where critical thinking is kept private. Of course you will in academic yoga discourse find critical discussions and critical debate of *historical records* – their translation and signification - but there is very little critical scrutiny of applied *methodologies and fundamental categorisation*. Neither are there signs of what Bourdieu calls *self-reflexivity*: the reflections on the scholars' *habitus*, the unconscious way of categorizing and approaching the subject, the taken-for-granted.

I agree with Popper and Bourdieu that if we ignore such matters scholarship involuntarily and with necessity drifts into investigative journalism, detailed mapmaking, theology, ideological legitimation or implicit culture-political propagation.

This essay – based on the standards of Popper and Bourdieu - is intended to problematize this situation. To breach the gentleman agreement of polite restraint and respect within the academic yoga discourse. Such introduction of Popperian open debate can be very painful but without it there is no growth of knowledge according to Popper.

In this essay I introduce some crucial distinctions from cultural memory studies and Bourdieuan sociology. These are then used to show some limitations of the categories and methodologies popular among modern yoga scholars. Following this I finally show how their preferred categories – among many things – are ingrained in the *doxa* and *habitus* and cultural memory of this yoga scholarship. I label this conceptual bias *Yoga-Protestantism* and show how this orientation generates contradictions and apologeticism undermining scholarship: the poverty of yoga historiography and sociology.

As an instructive representation of Yoga Protestantism I have chosen to explore the recent compilation *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (2014) edited by M. Singleton and E. Goldberg. This compilation of yoga history writing with contributions from sixteen authors who mainly are based in academic Religious Departments carries all the hallmarks of the issues mentioned. However this is not a review of *Gurus of Modern Yoga*. The compilation is discussed as a representative *example of some general and principal problems* of the wider cultural field to which it belongs.



Summary.

The first part of this essay - *The Limitations of the Map-maker* - is introducing central cultural sociological notions as the 'biographical illusion', 'cultural memory', *habitus*, *doxa*, and 'three semiotic reading styles'. These notions are discussed in relation to the compilation "Gurus of Modern Yoga" (2014) which enables us to realise some of the conceptual boundaries of the historical and psychological approaches which this compilation exemplifies. Those well versed in these notions can go directly to the second part where we dive deep into the core of the matter: '*The Habitus of Yoga Protestantism*'. In this last part of the essay I argue that the limitations identified in part one are not coincidental (down to individual scholar choice) but can be traced to the scholar's *habitus* and cultural memory. Here I identify some categories charged with subjectivity and emotions. It is about the historian's emotional relation to historical remembering – to cultural memory. Combining this with the situation of the modern yoga historian I argue that the identified *habitus* of Yoga Protestantism is detrimental for scholarship.

## The Limitations of the Map-maker

### The promoter, the truthful map-maker and the dissident

Faced with any cultural subject (sign) we want to study, contemplate, talk about, or discuss – like 'the yoga guru' - there are within cultural studies and semiotics said to be three different ways of "reading" (dealing with, interpret) such a "signifier": *the dominant reading, the critical reading and the oppositional reading*.

Instead of jumping in at the deep end and right on challenge our reading of (our attitude to) the 'yoga guru' sign I suggest we initially discuss another more neutral but related sign – namely 'the celebrity sign'. Here I want to make the crucial implications of these three ways of reading above clear and relevant. As we will see as we progress, these *three 'reading types'* are more charged with emotions, *habitus* and worldview than we initially presume. So let's start up on dispassionate ground and have a look at 'the celebrity' sign before we turn to the more controversial 'yoga guru' sign.

To many people 'reading' is correctly associated with 'interpreting', 'perceiving' and 'understanding'. 'Reading' is other words *an active process* where the sign – the text, video, photo, notion, object – is *given meaning in the universe of the reader*. In semiotics: the sign is being 'signified'. Reading a sign can be a process of recognising the already known or incorporating something new.

Semiotics see the life and reading of a sign in a wider context of production - distribution - consumption – reproduction. This is where the notion of 'the dominant reading style' enters. When semiotics talk about 'the dominant reading style' it is referring to that reader is *consuming* the sign in a way that's is corresponding to the way the *producer* and *distributor* intended the sign to be internalised.

Take 'the celebrity' sign. When mass media sing the praise of 'celebrities', they are in fact a crucial part of society's *creation* of this very celebrity figure. As we the public audience through the mass media relentlessly are presented with a given person, this person in our awareness (our consumption) gradually becomes a 'celebrity'. Our attitude, interest and engagement with the sign (our re-creation) then stimulates the media industry to further coverage. In this way 'the celebrity' is *produced and reproduces* – which is central to this type of 'the dominant reading' of the sign.

In relation to 'the celebrity' sign we are as 'dominant readers' indulging in our fetishism, projections and cultural narcissism – identifying with and fantasising about idealised images and emotions associated with the celebrity. We as 'dominant readers' *uncritically and wholeheartedly take the sign on board and then uses it to navigate the world*. The sign resonate with and amplify emotions and cultural appreciations already present in us.

I want to give this category of 'dominant reader' some new and thought provoking names. We could dependent on context call this 'reader' *the polisher, the fan, the hagiographer, the cheerleader, the reporter, the storyteller, the missionary, the boulevard journalist, the admirer, the paparazzi or the preacher*. By this we

want to highlight this reader type's *compliant and supportive attitude* to the sign. Hence this 'dominant reader' from now on is referred to as *a creator-promoter, a spokesperson, an advocate, a populariser or a backer*.

However not everybody are happy about this compliant 'reader' attitude. They want to find the *truth* behind the gossips and unchecked stories of the celebrity person. This second type of readers are sceptical because they know that reality is never only bright and polished. There is almost always a downside. An underbelly, something hidden. Hence this second 'reader' type is trying to find the truth behind the surface. Not happy with anecdotes this '*critical reader*' wants to *map the terrain in details* – turn every stone. Check and double check the sources, identify new facts and details. Uncover the truth about the celebrity and lay the myths to rest. Prove that the celebrated Tour de France winner actually was doping. This 'critical reader' we could call, *the sceptical investigator, the fact finder or the neutral observer*. He/she is a *recorder* of facts, a *chronicler* of history. He/she is like the *property surveyor* who scrutinises assets – their origin, history, structure, surfaces, conditions etc. - in order to write a report determining their *true* value. Hence this 'reader' is referred to as *the (truthful) map-maker*.

The final and third type of 'readers' are not so much interested in neither individual celebrity stories nor true and revealing biographies. They rather are interested in the *celebrity sign as such*. They do not find that the efforts of providing facts, chronology and details are enough. They want to understand, explain and often criticise the *general cultural phenomenon* of 'a celebrity'. Why does a society have 'celebrities', what are the causes and functions of 'celebrities', who are creating them, who benefits and who loses? Why are people fascinated by 'celebrities', why do they like to follow others life and neglect their own life? These are the questions of cultural studies, social psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis. Unlike 'the truthful mapmaker' this '*oppositional reader*' does not put question marks at the singular celebrity individual but at the 'celebrity sign' as such. Here the *system* – the sign and its *context* - is questioned: i.e. we are here often talking about 'systemic opposition'. Hence this 'reader' is labelled *the dissident* (system critical), *the philosophical challenger, or the political opponent*.

*Creator-promoter*

*Truthful mapmaker*

*Dissident*

Now imagine a horizontal line. Above at the left we find the (creator-) promoter, in the middle we find the (truthful-) mapmaker and at the right we find the dissident. Along this continuum we can all place ourselves in respect of *any* sign – not only 'celebrities'. There is no segmentation of the line into fixed groups. Just a continuum where the promoter slowly becomes more and more mapmaker who as we move right metamorphoses into a dissident who can become more and more oppositional.

Firstly we can then place our own personal 'reading' of the 'celebrity' sign. Secondly the reader can take the 'modern yoga guru sign' as an example and accordingly place your reading of this sign on the continuum. Some might realise that they have different reading attitudes to the two signs. If there is a difference one could contemplate why it is so. By afterthought one will realise that most of us have different attitudes (reading styles) to different signs. Think about how an orthodox Marxist – very critical to society – is reading *Das Capital*.

I would now like to place the essays of the *Gurus of Modern Yoga* on the line above before I introduce more cultural sociological notions. I believe this exercise will create some interesting, surprising and perhaps even thought provoking insights. I also do this because these essays of this compilation in my view reflect typical styles of 'reading' found within the general academic yoga discourse. In other words I am trying to profile the prevalent reading styles of a cultural field.

At the end of this essay I will argue following Bourdieu that scholars' placement on the horizontal line – their reading style - is perhaps not so much a function of individual choice as of *habitus* – that is their cultural socialization. If we accept this sociological assertion we also have to consider what limitations our socio-cultural background has on our yoga (and similar) scholarship.

### **Mapping modern gurus**

Thus based on the above the question is as we browse through *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, what kind of 'reading' – or attitude – is underlying the compilation? If we leave the introduction of *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (from now on *GMY*) of the editors aside for a moment and read through the first three articles of the first subchapter called *Key Figures in Early Century Yoga* – Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mother and Sri Yogendra - a distinct pattern of presentation quickly appears, which more or less is repeated throughout the book. The basic template consist of a short biography of the person in question (including social background, fragments of the general historical situation, personality forming events, initiation into yoga etc.). This is followed or

accompanied by a presentation of the origin and development of the key figure's yoga teaching (including how this was influenced by modernist discourses and how the teaching spread around the world).

Let us stay initially with these three essays. They put their main effort in showing that these early 20<sup>th</sup> Century yoga popularisers were freely and creatively mingling various yoga signs with various Western discourses and social- and technological innovations. This is perhaps astonishing news for some yoga readers. For those yoga enthusiasts convinced about 'an ancient unbroken line of yoga teachings' this is probably even provoking prepositions. Traditional 'promoter readings' – as so often encountered in popular yoga books and web blogs – are typical presenting modern yoga gurus as 'true inheritors of an ancient tradition of sages and mystics'. Such romantic tales and legends celebrating yoga teachers as solely reflecting ancient wisdom are clearly put to rest in many of the essays of *GMY*. In *GMY* 'cross-referenced records' are replacing 'popular myths and legends' roaming among the yoga enthusiasts.

So these first three essays of the book are a first glance falling in 'the truthful map-maker' tradition adjusting and rectifying chronology and facts. 'Myths and hagiographies' are replaced with 'proper biographies'. All in all most of the essays supply us with interesting new biographical details allowing us to see a given guru, his biography and teaching as 'modern globalised hybrid'.

But far from all essays of the book meet the demands of being classified as 'map-maker readings'. Some essays are blatantly 'creator-propagator readings' and many - as we shall see in the final part - are radiating all the signs of 'map-maker reading' but however on closer inspection they clearly have to be classified as 'creator-propagator readings' undermining their claim to scholarship.

Having categorised the reading styles of *GMY* we now want to investigate how this affects the way *GMY* deals with the *fundamental categories guiding its historiography*. Can we trace any 'dissident' style of reading in *GMY*? To find out I would like to introduce some further cultural sociological notions.

### ***Doxa and truthful map-makers***

Today within the social sciences and humanities it is abundantly clear that we as researchers need to be very careful scrutinising our central categories and how we relate to them. Hidden in our categories are very often implicit assumptions (of often ontological nature) and cultural-political orientations. Within the cultural studies of especially P. Bourdieu this is often called '*doxa*'. The *doxa*, in his view, is the experience by which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident". It encompasses what falls within the limits of the thinkable and the sayable ("the universe of possible discourse") (Bourdieu 1972, p. 164). *Doxa* is the framing and 'common sense' we unknowingly take over from previous generations and from our historical context. The implications of this is that the conclusion we reach in our research is more or less defined by the assumptions we started out with.

Think about the person with a belt of dynamite attached to his torso blowing himself to pieces in a public crowded place. Think then about a range of people who now set out to explain the behaviour of this person. They all use various categories to label this person: Jihadist, terrorist, freedom-fighter, martyr, evil, alienated, or suicide bomber. Each category assumes totally different worlds of categories - worldviews. Each category is also associated with conflicting subjective emotions and politics. Surely we all clear can foresee the various research (epistemic) directions these categories would take each scholar in order to explain. We probably also can roughly guess many of the conclusion (regarding causes, culprits, victims, solutions) which will come out of these various studies.

Thus critical contemplation and self-reflexivity on core categories is absolutely crucial to social sciences and should never be left out of sight. Enters 'dissident' reading: How does *GMY* deal and reflect on its core categories?

### ***Three central categories of GMY***

I find that there are three categories central to *GMY*: 'modern yoga guru', 'biography' and 'charisma'.

First 'the guru' category on which we will spend some time. Here many alternative categories spring to mind: populariser, philosopher, missionary, theorist, propagator, scholar, mentor, teacher, researcher, or life-coach. Or why not use labels directly alluding to the revered identity: sage, virtuoso, spiritual master, immortal soul, liberated one, enlightened, or divine light?

Thinking about 'the suicide bomber' category mentioned above we should contemplate why does *GMY* choose to employ the 'guru' category of all such possibilities? What does the 'yoga guru' sign bring to the table which alternative notions does not? What subjective emotions and sentiments of identity does the category evoke? Thus we wonder what worldview/categories does 'guru' presume in order to make sense? What semantic context of signs gives meaning to the 'guru' sign, and why is this sign interesting and worth spending time on?

These questions typical to the ‘dissident reader’ are now directed to the ‘truthful-map-makers’ of *GMY*. As we inquire into *GMY*’s self-reflexivity of ‘the guru’ sign we shall see how this investigation reveal certain aspects of the *doxa* of *GMY*.

### An elusive sign under metamorphosis

As we read the essays of *GMY* we realise that the ‘yoga guru’ category is not conceptually analysed in any systematically way by any of the contributors. There seems however to be an implicit assumption distinguishing between a pre-modern and a modern ‘guru’.

From *GMY*’s discussions of pre-modern India’s understanding of ‘a guru’ we gather that an apprentice became ‘a guru’ through a ritual of transmission. Typically an apprentice achieved guru recognition through the training and initiation of a senior guru according to legend. A junior guru always stood in the *lineage* of a senior guru. Guru-ship – it’s authority - was a question of legacy. This pre-modern guru narrative often presented the guru as signifying ‘an exceptional state of being’ – the guru was an extra-ordinary and super-human identity. Sometimes even a ‘semi-divine’ being. In other words the transmission and initiation process in a remarkable way transformed the ontology of the apprentice. The guru was awesome and much admired.<sup>1</sup>

This lineage narrative was a crucial part of the cultural memory constructed by various groups in pre-modern India. However any historians would immediately ask if guru-identity-building really happened in this way or ask if this narrative just was a prescriptions by the cultural memory of how things *ought* to be? This is not contemplated in *GMY*.<sup>2</sup> The lineage narrative within the pre-modern yoga cultural memory is in other words taken for good value and adopted by *GMY*.

Turning to modern times *GMY* shows that only *some few* modern yoga adepts still claim to have undergone pre-modern guru rituals of lineage transmission. So lineage transmission is today far from the only or prevalent way to achieve guru-ship. *GMY* clearly asserts that the close personal relationship with a senior guru of pre-modernity is not at all a pre-requisite for becoming a guru under modernity. Today some yoga gurus are auto-didactic and others only have a very short and rudimentary training with a legacy guru. Hence there are today no agreed and shared hard and fast rules of how to become a guru.

As lineage under modernity does not define a guru anymore (and we still question: did it ever do that?) we have to ask what then defines ‘a yoga guru’ today? We would at least expect such issues to be solved by the editors.

Reading the editors’ *Introduction* we find only a few pages discussing the guru sign. Initially they agree that the guru sign today is under transformation due to the forces of modernity. In fact this – the modern transformation of the guru sign - seems to be the red thread of the book. Under *modernity* the editors find it hard to define the notion (we are left with the impression that in *pre-modern* India it was a different story).

The *Introduction* acknowledges that looking at definitions in dictionaries does not clarify the guru sign. Definitions like “Hindu spiritual teacher” or “Head of religious sect” are extremely vague notions at best and in reality they are incorrect definitions. Further in modern discourse the guru notion has become synonymic for an ‘expert’ (for instance an ‘IT-guru’) as the editors correctly points out. In fact the many guru scandals and countless philosophical, sociological and social psychological critique and investigations have left the guru notion “**bankrupt, suspect, or intrinsically corrupt**” (p.8) as the editors rightly conclude.

At this critical point the *Introduction* terminates the discussion of the modern guru sign. Thus there is no explicit definition of the modern guru in *GMY*: what constitutes a modern guru and is he significantly different to a pre-modern guru? If yes, what makes the difference?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Said in sociological terms: through life long personal relationships the *symbolic and cultural capital* of a legacy-guru’s was transferred through specific often secretive rituals of initiation to the guru-in-coming.

<sup>2</sup> Further *GMY* does not discuss if lineage was the only way to become recognised as a pre-modern yoga guru. Could *yogis in spe* become recognised as gurus by practicing yoga unaided by senior gurus? If yes, how did more or less self-taught or charismatic gurus achieve status of ‘guru’? How did society agree that even a “legacy guru” (from a foreign lineage and geography) was a “true guru”? Such straightforward questions are however not contemplated. Neither is it contemplated if perhaps the pre-modern cultural memory of a ‘guru’ primarily was a legitimising device?

<sup>3</sup> The lack of clarification and definition make us wonder how did the contributors choose who to write about when there is no agreement about who are the real modern gurus? Most of them seem to have turned to apply conventional definitions: a person is ‘a guru’ when there is a group of people labelling this person ‘a guru’. Guru-ship as a *social convention*. This is a fully legitimate way of progressing. This approach would naturally lead into investigations of why people are using the guru label; what are for instance the social power games behind the label; what are the social processes creating the convention? - but such obvious investigations does not happen.

However some essays do not treat the guru category as a social convention, because they are mapping modern yoga promoters who actually *oppose* the idea of themselves being labelled a ‘guru’. Some of these non-gurus dismisses the sign as such and do not want to be associated with it under any circumstances. Thus they are clearly not ‘yoga gurus’ by convention. Still these yoga popularisers figure in this book on modern gurus!

So in the end we have to conclude that the question of ‘guru’ status in *GMY* is basically decided by a scholar or group of scholars. ‘A guru’ is someone a *scholar – for unknown reasons* - deems to be ‘a guru’. Scholars are of course allowed to

### The pitfalls of assumed categories

*GMY* is clearly not engaged in clarifying such issues which a 'dissident reader' find revealing. It does not ask why is it beneficial and enlightening to categorise 'a (random?) selection of modern yoga popularisers' as 'yoga gurus'? It does not enquire what certain people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century does get out of using pre-modern categories to build up identities and relations? It does not contemplate the "epistemic directions" the guru category is sending us along. All we are left with is the realisation that the 'guru' category is *inherited* from pre-modern India – but we are left wondering if it is still meaningful and useful today as an analytical category?

Such reflexivity is mostly ignored by the 'truthful map-maker' attitude subscribed to by *GMY*. Instead what is central to *GMY* is to provide detailed maps of new 'yoga guru' species created by the forces of modernity - the internet, mass media, visual culture, globalisation etc..

What is the purpose of mapping out these new species? *GMY* apparently want to address the majority of yoga enthusiasts who share the belief that 'the guru' and 'yoga' are solid and timeless categories. *GMY* wants to demonstrate to the modern yogi audience (who mostly are 'creator-promoter readers' of the 'yoga' sign) that – as shown by the yoga scholar map-maker - 'yoga' and 'the guru' *under modernity* turns out to be liquid categories. 'Yoga' and 'gurus' of today are not what they used to be.

Behind that attempt we almost hear a sigh of distress: modernity has killed the good old yoga guru. But was there ever such a noble guru as we are told by pre-modern cultural memory? Is today's yoga-guru historian carrying with him taken-for-granted assumptions - *doxa*? This suspicion clearly begs the question what was the 'guru' and 'yoga' signs about originally? For instance were they – as claimed and assumed - stable and solid categories transcending the historical changes within pre-modern India?

Such 'dissident reader' questions and the notion of *doxa* highlights the conceptual, emotional and political bias build into our categories. If we adopt the categories of those we are studying we are at the risk of being send in certain direction confirming their point of view.

We recall the example of the man with the bomb belt around his torso. If we want to use 'the suicide bombers' own preferred Islamic categories to give meaning to his doings we are directed into the conceptual world of 'ninety virgins', 'Jihad' and 'heroic martyrdom'. Can we accept the political conclusions which might be implicit in such categories? Do we want such categories to form the analytical basis for our explanations? Similarly we have to ask in what epistemic direction does 'the guru' category send us?

This highlighting of the so called '*social bias*' is what notions like *doxa* and 'cultural memory' are intended for: The unconscious adoption of the views of those who went before us.

In summary *GMY* confirms a general trend among map-makers: they often are not particular interested in *critical analysis of the concepts and signs which guide them*. Map-making historians are often aware of the issues but in the end it is something they just pay lip service to<sup>4</sup>. This regrettably leads them into the fallacy that actually most of humanity are prone to: we instinctually treat our categories not as *mental tools* but as a reflection of *ontological realities*. We do not realise – or we just forget because of our taken-for-granted attitude - that the very categories through which we navigate, understand and order historical reality are loaded with theory (conclusions and interpretations) and culture (socialisation and collective memory) build over generations. Such issues are central to what often is termed 'historical memory approaches' which I would like to introduce now. Here it is not yoga history which is in focus but the yoga historian.

### Cultural memory and social bias

Any historian and social psychologist know that historical mapping is not as innocent and straight forward as it looks like. Today it is agreed by most – based on the writings dating back to 1925 of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs - that when a community or a group of people is setting out to memorise and re-collect the past, the historical memory they construct is a function of their current cultural interest and socialisation. Another of the founding fathers of social memory studies the social psychologist F. Bartlett in 1932 made similar assertions based on his psychological experiments<sup>5</sup>.

Since Halbwach and Bartlett more and more evidence supports that history writing – the construction of historical and cultural memory - is a crucial part of the construction of peoples *present social identity* (Assmann 2012). 'The past' – according to historical and cultural memory studies - is not just something out there which need to be discovered and remembered. 'The past' captured by a cultural memory is a *construction* which involves a selection from infinitely endless materials.

**"Composing a past means constructing certain elements and materials (stories, episodes, texts, objects, places, personalities, beliefs, achievements, institutions) as belonging to this past rather than another"** (Cutlett 2007, p.200).

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work with their own concepts. However this approach requires that the scholar defines his category precisely and give reasons for why the category is useful and reasonable. Which does not happen in *GMY*.

<sup>4</sup> This conclusion is based on my studies of the yoga discourse throughout history – see Madsen 2013.

<sup>5</sup> See Cutlett 2007 for an excellent exposition

We impose order and meaning on what would otherwise be the ceaseless, seamless and bewildering flow of our impressions and perceptions. This holds especially true when we construct a biography. Here we reassemble the scattered elements of an individual's life and cluster them in episodes, phases and coherent narrative.

The resulting polished representation is a collection of what *we at the moment of writing* find important, significant, fitting into our frames of meaning and narrative schemata (for instance into genres of spiritual progress, heroic quest, tragedy, drama of conversion). Where did we get our priorities, interests, narrative schemata, labels, distinctions from? From the people and the culture *which socialised us*: from the historical memory they had selected and presented to us as “a truthful map of the past”. So there is a dialectic process in force as shown by Halbwach: the present creates a past as the past informs the present. This is central to cultural memory studies.

‘Cultural memory’ is memory based on the culture we grow up within. This also applies to scholars and historians who grew up within an academic tradition teaching a certain cultural memory to new comers – curriculum and methodology. Thus our group-specific culture (even as scholars) gives us a *social bias* – which contain our *habitus* and *doxa* - which is translated into an active tendency to notice, retain and construct (i.e. memorise and understand) along certain cultural schemata. Thus within cultural memory studies the historian becomes a crucial part of the equation. Here we are not so much concerned with the past *as such* but rather the past as it is remembered (Assmann 2012).

**“This shift [to cultural memory studies] put at the center the historicity of history writing. It became central to the project of historical understanding to emphasize the historian's act of construction and interpretation of the past. And under these circumstances, it became inevitable to explore how people (including historians) construct their collective representations of the past.” (Confino 2010, p. 82)**

Cultural memory studies brings to the front how social groups – including historians – bring cherished assumptions into their historical reconstructions of the past. This aspect of re-construction – the social bias, the dialectic between past and present – is what the truthful map-maker is struggling to comprehend. This type of reader is instead preoccupied by revealing the *true* biography of the guru and the past. Hence guru biography become categorised and perceived as a ‘mirroring of historical past’ rather than as a ‘schematic re-construction’. *GMY* constitutes a clear example of this. Such historians – often hegemonizing our public representations of the past - do not and *cannot* see their active contribution as they produce a certain version of the past. The notions of *doxa*, *habitus* and *social bias* are crucial in demonstrating how the historical expert (and the cultural memory he is producing) is structured by the cultural memory he was born into and groomed by.

*(The short and general theory of cultural memory studies outlined here will be supplemented in the second part of this essay with many specific examples from GMY).*

### **The social bias of the guru sign**

Returning to our case with this in mind it is now clear that the historical and cultural memory – the ‘biographies’ of the ‘gurus’ which the authors of *GMY* aim to construct (or map) - is *a priori* tainted by the collective historical memory (or cultural memory) the authors/scholars *stepped into as they initially were introduced to existing yoga cultural memory*. The question then is what did the cultural memory – socializing present yoga authors - look like?

It will take too much space to give an answer to this. I just want to highlight some issues. If we observe the yoga discourse over the previous couple of generations or so – i.e. those who created the yoga cultural memory which today's yoga scholars and popularisers stepped into – we will observe following:

1. Some of the yoga gurus studied in *GMY* actually were crucial to the cultural yoga memory construction of the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In this way they also – in one way or another - informed present days scholars yoga categories. Today's scholars are in other words adopting many of their teachers' (i.e. the modern yoga gurus') cultural memories – their frames of meaning, narrative schemata, crucial events, categories, interests etc. Un-reflected they then re-employ those internalised categories in order to analyse and integrate these in a new and expanded yoga cultural memory of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The likelihood of a strong reproduction of already existing social bias – *doxa* – is unavoidable.

Let me give an example of how the *selection process is working implicitly* in the construction of the yoga past. This is often referred to as ‘*forgetting*’. Reading *GMY* what springs to mind is that some very influential groups of yoga *thinkers* (who however are not categorised as ‘gurus’) has been excluded from *its construction of modern yoga's cultural memory*: for instance academic yoga scholars. Where are highly influential “scholar-gurus” (!) like M. Müller, M. Eliade, S.N. Dasgupta and Sir J. Woodroffe who have been absolutely crucial to the construction of yoga's cultural memory. Or where are the biographies of the Theosophist activists who also were unquestionably decisive in forming modern yoga cultural memory? Why are they not seen as gurus, what is the difference?

Most of the ‘yoga gurus’ presented in *GMY* owe much – if not most - of *their* cultural memory of yoga to such pioneering thinkers. But these Orientalists are *forgotten* in the cultural memory constructed by *GMY*. ‘The guru’ category allow them little space and significance. Instead the ‘modern guru’ is pulled into the limelight of

history. But was the modern guru of *GMY* really *that* important in forming the 20<sup>th</sup> Century cultural memory of yoga? Perhaps there are countless popularisers, educators, celebrities, social- processes and movements we have forgotten to introduce in this construction? Perhaps in our search for an understanding of the waves, we have looked at the water drops instead of studying the wind? According to cultural memory studies such ‘forgetting’ is a central part of the construction of any cultural memory and *GMY* exemplifies this clearly as it is blinded by the guru’s claim about his own significance.

The consequences? *GMY* confirms the inherent narrative of the prevailing cultural memory of pre-modern and Colonial Yoga: the history of yoga is created by the ‘yoga gurus’, i.e. the guru is *the* cornerstone of yoga’s history. Which in my opinion is a misleading assumption – now as in the past - serving a power discourse.

2. The last 150 years academic construction of yoga’s cultural memory perceived itself to belong to ‘the truthful map-making readings’ of the past. However my research (Madsen 2013) shows that much of this history writing often slid into implicit ‘promoter-creator readings’. As ‘dissident reading’ styles emerged in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century within social sciences, historiography and cultural studies, these new approaches did not find much resonance within the academic yoga discourse. Methodological self-reflexivity within the yoga discourse is almost absent. Thus *GMY* is a typical example of the methodologies adhered to within academic yoga discourse.

Why this lack of self-reflexivity? As we shall focus on later in this essay the reason for is that the newcomers to cultural memory of yoga are typically adherents and admirers who want to internalise and adapt the categories, schemata and frames of meaning already ruling within the yoga cultural memory. Hence they adapt the narratives, schemata and categories from *the existing yoga discourse* – like ‘the guru’ - which in addition to already mentioned social bias have embedded *power discourses and social distinctions*.

We should not ignore that ‘the guru’ is not just *any* person: he is within the cultural memory of yoga a highly revered and admired person who has “super-natural” or “charismatic” skills. He is a social identity which the yoga discourse – the cultural memory - has created and bestowed with all kinds of superiority. He is a ‘sage’ who embodies the cultural memory of yoga. Due to his lineage and yoga skills he is a physical and ‘spiritual’ manifestation of ‘ancient wisdom’. A living clone only superficially modified by his historical context. He is the living essence of an ageless tradition, according to this sympathetic cultural memory.

This cultural memory (consisting of selected narratives, schemata and categories) has reverberated perfectly with certain contemporary social groups. The sympathetic and eager yoga newcomers of today in other words internalise a yoga cultural memory which among other things has the purpose of presenting it-self and the guru as *timeless, transcendent and super-natural*. However uncritically adapting such an idolized cultural memory charged with power discourses means that there are limits – set by this cultural memory and its *doxa* – on how the newcomer can talk and reflect on it.

Hence keen contemporary yoga newcomers – who want to expand their yoga passion with academic studies - can only pay lip service to the dissident methodologies they encounter at academic institutions. These new methodologies – leaving ‘the map-maker attitude’ behind at the way side – are namely from the outset designed to *de-construct* the very ideological constructs – the cultural yoga memory - the newcomer yoga scholar initially fell in love with. So the yoga map-maker has to remain a map-maker - otherwise she would be cutting off the emotional branch she was sitting on.

So our assumed categories- *doxa* - do matter. If left unattended they clearly play deceptive games with us. Just by scratching the surface of ‘the yoga guru’ sign we have encountered some of the issues.

### **The biographical illusion**

Having explored ‘the guru’ category in the context of *doxa* and ‘cultural memory’, I now want to address two more categories central to *GMY*, namely that of ‘biography’ and ‘charisma’. To do this I will introduce notions like ‘biographical illusion’, and *habitus*. This analysis will then allow us to return to the ‘guru’ category for a final de-construction.

*GMY* is basically a book about how various Indian yoga popularisers (who for unknown reasons are labelled ‘yoga gurus’) have been formed by the process of globalisation and modernity. In fact the compilation consists of a *string of biographies* and its essays never really leaves this genre. By drawing on notions of globalisation and modernity the authors – most of them having a background in religious departments - clearly are moving into the territory of cultural and historical sociology. By doing this they expose what seems to be a lack of training in contemporary methodologies of the social sciences.

Within the social sciences traditional styled biographies as seen in *GMY* - narrated as an agent creating (through choice and personality) her own biography under certain historical circumstances - are often dismissed as the *biographical illusion*. One of the strongest and most renowned spokesperson against the biographical illusion is Pierre Bourdieu.

“Bourdieu mercilessly assails any notion that people create their own biography and that life is a whole, arising as it were, from the subject’s earliest endeavours and unfolding over the course of her life. He repeatedly points to the fact that the ‘meaning and the social value of biographical events’ are not constituted on the basis of the subject,

but on the basis of actors' 'placements' and 'displacements' within social space, which lends biographical events their meaning in the first place, the meaning which they ultimately take on for the actor. Thus rather than 'subjects', people are actors in a field in which they are profoundly moulded." H. Joas and W. Knöbel, *Social Theory* (2010), p. 379

Those acquainted with Bourdieu will know that to understand the agents biography one has to turn to cultural sociological notions like *doxa*, *cultural fields* and *habitus*. Let us explore some of these categories.

In the quote above we see firstly that Bourdieu is challenging our traditional framing of the category 'biography'. He does not see it fit and valid within cultural sociology. It gives the illusion that an agent – within certain constraints – freely make individual choices often based on the agent's psychological constitution. We could call this *voluntarism*. *Psychological categories* are here used to explain the agents biography.

In sociology instead an agents' actions are conditioned and *permeated* by context. Culture is not just *context*. Culture is a crucial *part of* the agent guiding and forming his actions and choices. Terms often used are notions like 'socialization', 'internalisation' and 'incorporation'.

"But", the reader might object, "does *GMY* not include oodles of context in its biographies?" Yes 'globalisations' for instance – a macro sociological category – plays surely a central role. However in *GMY* it plays only a role as *staging*. It is rather a *passive framework* within which the agent acts. This is not what cultural sociology and social psychology is aiming at. Here the agent and his actions are *configured* by context – *context is a part of the individual*. What does that mean?

This mean that agent (action) and context dialectically are floating into each other; they are *not categorised as separates*. Culture as a part of the individual constitutes the (internal) basis – values, norms, rationality, reality perception - on which he acts. Thus from a sociological perspective life, action and biography is not *primarily* products of for instance the individual's 'charisma'. The picture is much more complex: what voluntarism categorise as *separated* (i.e. the agent and her context) is now by sociology categorised as *dialectic relations*.

Does this not imply that the agent is reduced to a puppet-on-a-string, we might wonder? No, this does not mean that the individual is without a choice – that we cannot create our lives. It means choices and action are not as free as they *appear* to be. The agent *tend* to make certain choices because these seem the only ones *realistic and available to him*. In our case it means that biographers might find that there are choices to be made for the agent, but seen from the agents experience of his situation there is *not much real choice*: he chooses what he *feels* is right for him to do. *However he is not conscious where he got this "feeling" from*. And this is where cultural sociology (Bourdieu) and critical philosophy (Popper) sets in. Through for instance methodological self-reflexivity and critical debate of taken-for-granted categories the agent is enabled to challenge such cultural conditioning.

To identify the origin of this "feeling" (unconscious assumptions) we need various types of micro-sociological and social psychological categories like for instance *cultural field*, *cognitive bias* and *habitus*. Loaded with such categories 'culture' is thus not a framework outside us within which we navigate. 'Culture' is instead programs running within us guiding the way we experience and choose. This is what *habitus* is about:

**"By choosing habitus, Bourdieu is able both to integrate and to transcend major insights of the linguistic turn in philosophy, most prominently the idea that conscious intentional understanding necessarily relies on a host of implicit, practical and holistic background assumptions which constitute meaning while being themselves unrepresented." Kögler 2013, p.271.**

Thus *habitus* in other words is the embodied dispositions which *generate practical sense* and organize the agents' vision of the world below the level of consciousness in a way that becomes invisible for articulation and critical reflection. It becomes inscribed in their bodies as social norms, inclinations, taste, appreciation and habits.

This Bourdieuan view is quite similar to the structuralist position of Foucault in its attack on voluntarism. However Foucault in his most radical expressions deprives the agent any autonomy, whereas Bourdieu is clearly aiming for giving the agent's *semi-autonomy*.<sup>6</sup> Freud introduced the *sub-conscious* as a significant

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike Bourdieu's micro-sociological categories Foucault uses the very abstract category of 'power'. Power – as a significant part of our cultural background - not only *represses* the agent but also *produces* the agent as a cultural-social being: "It (power) is also thought of as **productive in its effect rather than repressive in so far as power shapes the actions of individuals and harnesses their bodily powers to its ends. In this sense power operates 'through' individuals rather than 'against' them and helps constitute the individual who is at the same time its vehicle**" (Garland 1990, p. 138).

So we could say that Foucault represents the extreme opposite of the position of the voluntarism seen in *GMY*. Here there is no freedom left for the individual because each way of life imposes its own : **"regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth, that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charge with saying what counts as true"** (Foucault 1980, p. 38).

parameter for the understanding of the psychology of an individual. If *not brought to awareness* the unconscious in Freud's view is at the risk of overtaking the individual's life. Bourdieu's aim is similar: he explicitly introduces the sociological equivalent to the sub-conscious – the *socio-conscious*, the *habitus*. If not drawn into awareness *habitus* similar threatens to *frame* and dominate social action.

In summary we have now encountered examples of a 'dissident reading' of categories like 'biography', 'agent' and 'cultural context'. *GMY* - steeped in voluntaristic categories - is regrettably utterly blind to such kinds of cultural-sociological 'dissident reading' and accordingly is under further suspicion for being caught by its own *habitus* and *doxa*.

### **'Charisma' category in its contemporary sociological use**

*GMY* is in fairness not utterly empty of sociological insights. Often the essays of the book are for instance involving Max Weber's sociological notion of '*charisma*': the modern guru is 'a guru' because he has 'charismatic authority', we are often told. His charisma is used to explain how he has managed to leverage himself to the status of a guru. Leaving the issue of the *biographical illusion* aside firstly we wonder, how much wiser we have become by such a statement. Is it not like saying "Peter is a good piano player because he has got talent"? We are just left with a new word – 'talent' or 'charisma' – which we think we know what is, but a closer consideration we realise we don't know what it really is. Before I return to this let us see how the essays then are using Weber's sociological notions.

Some essays in *GMY* is then drawing on Weber's insight that over time as the charismatic leader dies, the followers have to institutionalise his teachings – otherwise the cult (the followers) will dissolve. So these essays map this process of institutionalisation within the modern yoga guru sign and in the end inform us about what Weber told us hundred years ago: that guru/charismatic organisations tend to become rationalised and institutionalised. Again we wonder how much new we learned here.

However, and this is the fundamental part of the problem, this kind of analysis of 'charisma' is since long left way behind by modern historians and sociologist.<sup>7</sup> Today 'charisma' is not a 'unique trait of a person's character'. Instead it is for instance often conceived as a *relational notion*. For many historians and sociologists it is about how people *under certain circumstances of crisis* are submitting to "guru relations": relations of authority and utterly submission. The leader is promising existential life improvement and is receiving faithful and dedicated followers. The *followers* experience the guru as a 'charismatic authority' however *outsiders* often perceive the guru as a "bit of a nut case". 'Charisma' is all in the eyes of the observer – it only exist within a relation under certain conditions. It is not an evident and tangible personal attribute.

Surprisingly none of the authors using the charisma notion seems to realise that their psychological reading of 'charisma' is out-dated within the cultural-sociological fields from where it originated (see footnote 7). Which has the implication that the volume provide us with no *sociological* valid or acceptable explanation of how gurus accumulate power and become recognised.

### **The *habitus* and cultural field of a guru**

Those of the essays which are contemplating how the aspirational guru managed to become *recognised* as a guru are – staying true to the biographical illusion - all adopting a psychologising methodology (making guru recognition a function of his personal attributes). Lets alternatively try to do a little Bourdieuan sociological sketch of the conditions of a guru identity to emerge.

Within a cultural-sociological perspective the transformation of a given person into a guru is not just a matter of the guru having clever ideas or being a convincing person. Take following example. If I or the reader suddenly demanded that the neighbours in our street treated us like a guru or if a recognised Indian guru entered say a global investment bank and demanded to be employed at the board as their spiritual master we would all either be ignored or be advised to seek psychological help.

From the example we see there has to be some shared cultural presumptions and understandings. In the words of Bourdieu we would say that first of all gurus are conditioned by a *habitus* – a cultural background and socialisation - shared by both the guru as his audience. Otherwise the guru is a fish out of water. The guru sign is in other words a part of a *system of cultural signs* mutually defining and constructing each other. A kind of "guru discourse" or "guru cultural memory" which charge him with what Bourdieu label *symbolic capital*. Otherwise the guru identity simply cannot arise.

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We see the similarities between Bourdieu and Foucault in their attack on voluntarism and the biographical illusion. For Foucault the free agent disappear while Bourdieu gives him semi-autonomy: the agent is situated within *habitus* and cultural fields which are a part of him but still leaves him space to creativity and negotiation.

<sup>7</sup> German historio-sociologists like Stefan Breuer, Wolfgang Schlus and Günther Roth has developed and sophisticated the 'charisma' category so it has become reminiscent of Bourdieu's 'symbolic capital'.

In the West we can see that the imported guru sign has been adapted to discourses of romanticism, spiritualism, psychology, holism, Protestantism and so on. Outside these discourses it tends to be dismissed and deplored in the West.

This modern guru sign is often conditioned by modern social processes like alienation, youth movements, social displacement or deprivation. This cluster of signs and processes – a *habitus* adapting to certain historical specific social and cultural processes – enable a new *cultural field* to emerge: the cultural field of the modern (yoga) guru. It is this new *cultural field* which enables the modern guru to accumulate *symbolic power*: i.e. to become a prestigious, recognised, awesome and hence powerful person.

In this Bourdieuan view the guru sign – due to being situated in a cultural field - is a site of power discourses. It empowers and depowers interactors who move into this cultural field. As the guru field is relatively easy to enter (no formal examines, no specific knowledge required etc.) it is open for impostors, dilettantes and con men, who master the discourse rules of the field. Who can tell the difference between real and fake – is what is celebrated as unique (charismatic) only a myth, a *simulacrum*? How do the audience validate the gurus tales and legends of him having experienced ‘ultimate truth’ and being an ‘enlightened person’ – a *jivan-mukti* - whose soul will never die?

Let me finalize my Bourdieuan sketch here. It has shown us the limitations of the biographical psychological approach. *This approach tries to explain the tidal flow of the sea by analysing the movements of the fish in the water when the scholar instead should have been observing the moon!* As we shall see later on this situation is even worsened when scholars drop their critical stance and in reality function as the mouthpiece of the guru rubberstamping and legitimising him *and his sign*. The ‘creator-promoter reading’.

Often the truthful-mapping exercise is a crucial part of what is called phenomenology. It seems highly popular among scholars employed in religious departments.<sup>8</sup> But why do scholars in religious departments follow such methodologies which the rest of the social and cultural sciences have left since almost half a century? Here we need to have a look at the *habitus* of this scholarship. *GMY* – authored mainly by scholars employed in various religious departments - provides us with an opportunity to investigate this issue of how *habitus* can limit scholarship. This is the subject of the last part of this essay.

## The *habitus* of Yoga Protestantism

### The limitations of religious departments?

According to Bourdieu philosophical reflexivity is a cornerstone of sociology. Otherwise we are easily ending up reproducing the ruling ideologies and *habitus* of the cultural field we are studying. However this kind of self-reflexivity scrutinising the scholar’s *habitus* is regrettably lacking in *GMY*.

If we look at the CVs of the authors in *GMY* we will find that almost everybody are associated with religious departments. Like in all recent edited compilations on yoga ( White 2012, Whicher & Carpenter 2003,

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the essays in the book are now and then referring to social studies of gurus and cults and their accompanying sociological and social psychological concepts. However these studies are never forming the drive of the analysis or even becoming the subject of further reflections. Sociology and critical voices are only courteously referred to as a part of the truthful mapping exercise: “some say this and some say that...”. End of story.

So in the end we are left with *phenomenology*: detailed, cross-referenced and truthful mapping. A guru sign under change is being mapped. This effort however mainly distinguishes itself from investigative journalism by higher standards of validating its sources. There is, mark you, nothing wrong with such mapping exercises. They are important. But there is something wrong with ONLY truthful mapping without critical, philosophical and investigative reflections of the map as a category. An example.

Think about 19<sup>th</sup> Century explorers who travelled the globe and came home with huge collections of butterflies or beetles. These were all neatly set up on boards and sorted and classified according to various sophisticated criteria. Sometimes – and this was the pinnacle of such efforts – it was even agreed and declared that new species had been discovered. Like *GMY* making us aware of new guru species evolving as an adaption to globalisation. This is world of the truthful mappers.

Then there was Darwin. Well, he came up with a *complexity model* based on two drivers – *spontaneous mutations* and *the struggle for survival*. This dynamic adaptive model was able to explain the origin of the various species and the maps we had made of them. In my terminology this turns Darwin into a ‘dissident reader’. How?

Darwin was an outstanding mapmaker but luckily he never stopped there. He challenged the *species sign* adhered to by his contemporaries. He did not see a species as ‘God given and eternal’. Instead he proposed a *genealogical species sign* – liquid and ever changing. Darwin’s revolutionary philosophy/reading of *the species sign* was by many map makers seen as highly provocative and disrespectful of “god’s creation”. In the eyes of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century he was clearly a ‘dissident sign reader’. And it is this last aspect – the philosophical de-construction of the category - which is utterly lacking in *GMY*.

Jacobsen 2005 & 2012, Singleton & Byrne 2008, Diamond 2013) this volume shows little or no signs of inter-disciplinary studies: In these yoga compilations you will find very few if any cultural sociologists, social psychologists, complex system theorists, semioticians, post-structural philosophers, historians and so on. So this lack of inter-disciplinary exchange seems to be a general trait of academic yoga discourse. Hence we have to ask why do scholars from religious departments studying yoga and gurus not invite the humanities and the social sciences to cross fertilize their studies?

Further looking into the CVs and the essays we find that many of the authors are if not devotees of yoga gurus then at least serious and deeply felt yoga enthusiasts, who have transformed their profound passion for yoga into an academic profession. If we take this background into consideration – in other words including the *habitus* of modern yogis who consider themselves ‘serious practitioners’ (a notion often used in these circles) – we realise that in this milieu and in this *habitus* the yoga (and the guru) sign is often elevated to something ‘sacred’ – something set apart and forbidden, something not of this world. In the words of Marx and anthropologists we could say the ‘yoga’ sign has been turned into a *fetish*. This fetishism defines the boundaries and generate the tensions of a research programme which is the subject on the following pages.

So this final part of my essay is a cultural-sociological investigation of the *doxa* and *habitus* of much yoga scholarship. Many of the observations are however also possibly valid for the wider field of religious departments.

### **Can a scholar act as a promoter?**

As we read through the 16 papers of *GMY* it becomes clear that many of the papers are indeed very sympathetic to the guru and his teaching. Even if these authors in their presentations do not utilize strong positive adjectives you do not need a degree in neither communication, semiotics, marketing, PR or advertisement to realise that many of these readings are not the slightest critical – i.e. ‘truthful map-readings’ – but rather subdued and restrained ‘creator-promoter readings’. Too often there is almost no philosophical scrutiny of issues of plausibility, logical consistency, alternative interpretations, ideologies, power discourses, semiotics and spin when a guru and his teaching is introduced. The task of many essays is instead to cross-reference historical chronology for errors and inconsistencies and eventually add new records related to globalisation and modernity. Following this the main purpose is to explain the modern guru’s teachings within a larger religio-philosophical context (and modernity) so they appear rational, systematic and *persuasive*.

As the editors of *GMY* appear to subscribe to an semiotic attitude of ‘critical reading’, one wonder why they have accepted such implicit cheerleader contributions. The question is bluntly should we include scholarship which contribution is mainly to transform what is the equivalent of a political manifest or a marketing brochure into a value-neutral and methodical presentation? I do not think so because by doing this we have accepted that the scholar – and the whole compilation - becomes the *respected* voice of the guru/politician/company. We have turned the scholar into an intermediary, a legitimiser, a transmitter.

Let me introduce an essay in *GMY* where we witness an example of how scholars’ admiration turn them into unwilling promoters and how that hampers the scholars to spot underlying sociological processes.

### **Admiration and scholarship**

Sometimes scholarship is over taken by events. As an essay in *GMY* on the American John Friend and his Anusara yoga was ready for print the Anusara organisation suddenly imploded. In a short prologue to the essay we are informed about this event. The author concedes that the biography and philosophy as presented by her is in an ironical opposition to what happened after her research. However she chooses to publish the essay without letting this event change the content.

The remaining of the un-edited essay on John Friend hence contains no hints or clues to what was brewing in the underbelly of the guru organisation. Instead we are presented with a well narrated account of the guru’s biography: how he since he was a child was exposed to yoga and Tantric ideas and culture and how he developed his own system and teaching. It is all presented in a way that the reader almost have to admire the guru and his teaching which is founded in – as the guru says himself:

**“piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person-s rapport with the cosmos”. (p.230)**

It all sounds very convincing and enticing. We hear about what is to be ‘truly human’ and how each individual is enabled to define ‘ultimate truth’ for herself. The ‘life affirming’ Anusara philosophy is even skilfully presented within a historical and theoretical context. It is compared to other styles within American ‘holistic movements’. Sociologist like Weber and Durkheim and dissident voices like King and Carrette are shortly introduced but does not really play much of a role in the final analysis. So in the end we are left with a very up beat biography.

And then the Anusara organization without warnings – and despite Friends education and possible rapport with the cosmos - collapses. The essay comes to an end here. If we return to the prologue we are told that John Friend probably played “a stronger guru role” than presented in the paper. This is of course not much

of an explanation of the implosion. However we wonder how come that a guru who since childhood has been socialised within milieus of modern yoga and Tantra can fail at all?

Leaving this aside we wonder why a scholar in religious studies who should be aware of endless numbers of sociological studies of guru cults did not even try to investigate the destructive processes and relations of this guru organisation. It seems not to have been on the author's radar screen. Instead we have the case of a scholar of religious studies who spend several years in the company of the Anusara movement without looking for the *typical and well documented* fault lines of a guru organisation. We do not know if the scholar primarily interacted with the movement as an ethnographic observer or if she primarily participated as an enthusiastic Anusara yoga student? Most probably in the latter role we fear. Under all circumstances it is clear that the author's role as 'truthful map-maker' was seriously compromised by her fascination of (and devotion to !?) Anusara yoga turning her research into implicit cheerleading. Blinded by her fascination she did clearly not manage to identify and discuss crucial underlying sociological processes, which so often are making guru organisations implode. Was this a coincident, an unintentional lapse of attention (psychology) or was this due to sociological factors?<sup>9</sup>

### **When scholars become entangled in the guru's web**

Some of the essays sense there is in fact a general problem when scholars become too entangled with modern gurus. This is discussed in one of the essays as a part of a *critical* assessment of Muktananda and his Siddha Yoga movement. Here – unlike the essay above - it is the underbelly of the guru-disciple relation which is in focus: the hidden and uncomfortable side of the truth.

The essay on Muktananda is much more critical to the guru sign as such. Hence we see that the traditional interest in the guru's bibliography and his yoga ideas is moving to the background. We also find much more referrals to the insight of social sciences research in this essay. At the end of the essay the relationship between the modern guru and the supporting scholar surfaces as an issue. However even this critical essay digging into sociological categories shows serious methodological limitations. Let me show how.

At the end of the Muktananda essay it is discussed how some well respected scholars – most of them strongly committed to the Siddha Yoga movement - in 1997 produced a compilation on the history and theology of Siddha Yoga. The compilation was called *Meditation Revolution*. However this compilation clearly ignored the underbelly side of the Siddha movement: the gurus abuse of disciples are absent from the presentation.

Discussing these omissions the Muktananda essay refers to and quotes Jeffrey J. Kripal's critical studies of Hindu gurus in North America which also covered Muktananda. Here Kripal concludes in relation to *Meditation Revolution* that we here are witnessing "a scholarly legitimization, systemization, and canonization of the Siddha Yoga lineage". In other words allegiance and devotion are overshadowing scholarship in such a way, according to Kripal, that scholarship and the cultural memory they are constructing becomes a *part of canon creation*. If scholars do not watch and manage their entanglement with their guru they become a part of the guru organisation and co-writers of its collective yoga memory. The academic observer is no longer an outsider but a participating insider, warns Kripal.

The Muktananda essay agrees with Kripal's critical comments. It points out that it is not surprising that *disciples* of a guru do not want to damage the image of the movement to which they subscribed themselves. This attitude is often seen within hagiographies – promoting the cultural memory the guru embodies - where a guru's transgressions are ignored or denied. But we would expect better of scholars even if they are disciples of a guru. As the essay says:

**"Surprisingly, however, five of the six authors of *Meditation Revolution* are accomplished scholars who are otherwise committed to the historical critical method of scholarship. ... What this suggest is that, for these Siddha**

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<sup>9</sup> The author is painfully aware that her report do not match significant aspect of events. Hence we are told in the prologue that the paper should be seen as a time restricted "*snapshot*". If we think about for instance Jonestown we will soon realise that this attitude – this *habitus* – to research has its strong limitations. Congressman Ryan, who visited Jonestown in its final days, was neither a scholar nor a devotee but he also made his *snapshot* of Jonestown based on his investigating visit. A few hours before he was killed by sect members he tells on camera the world and the gathered community that he finds this community sound and impressive and he can see that many of the 900 members are living a fulfilling life there. (See the documentary of YouTube: *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple* )

So one could argue that scholarship is not about making detailed and thorough *snapshots* of reality (the map-maker reading), it is about identifying the underlying *processes* at work. This is what religious studies should be about – revealing the hidden processes of reality and challenging the signs we are presented with.

Here is an analogy highlighting the issue. Imagine an economic paper giving us a snapshot of the American house market in 2007 stating that things really looks great. The paper is then published shortly after the financial crash with the words that it was only a snapshot. Most economists would instead of publishing this have hidden the paper in their drawers and started up a process of self reflexivity: how could I go so wrong, how and why did I become a *part of the hype*, where are the flaws in my methodology?

**Yoga disciples, the need to manage its public image takes precedence over a historical account of the movement” (p.207)**

Thus the Muktananda essay here makes the omissions of the six authors – their lapse of memory (‘forgetting’), their assembly of the past - to an issue of the scholars’ *misunderstood public relationship management*. By doing this the essay reveals some of its underlying assumptions (categorisations). How?

The omission is categorised/framed as *individual choice, rooted in psychology and ethics*. The Muktananda essay in other words subscribes to voluntarism criticised by Bourdieu and Foucault. The author is hence “surprised” about the agents’ *choice*: how come that years of academic training did not prevent these acclaimed Siddha scholars in doing such serious and misleading omissions? Their dubious choice is framed as ‘individual’ (psychological) and hence in the end as ‘inexplicable and surprising’.

But there is another way of framing this. By turning to *sociological categories* the whole question about ‘unlucky choices’ moves to the background. In a cultural-sociological context primarily this is not a *coincidental* individual incidence. In this context the agents’ actions (choices) are permeated by sociological and social psychological categories. Thus what *appeared* to be an individual choice is alternatively framed as primarily guided by a sociological conditioned reaction. Yes, there was a choice for the scholars but from *their perspective* there was no other *right* choice.

Thus we need to challenge the assumption (or category) of *unintentional bad choices*. Replace the psychological category ‘choice’ with sociological categories like ‘unconscious socialisation’ (‘*habitus*’ in the words of Bourdieu). Or in the words of Durkheim and Mauss we need to identify the ‘shared emotions’ orientating the scholars’ ‘social classifications’ (Turner 2011, p.39).

So this is the divide: *Biographical psychology* versus *cultural-sociology* as an explanation for the action of the *devotee* Siddha scholars. In summary I have argued that this critical Mukatananda essay (which I define as ‘truthful map-maker reading’) – despite it is drawing on the insights of social sciences - remains within the limitations of the biographical illusion, voluntarism and phenomenology. Hence it cannot explain how so many Siddha scholars – i.e. yoga historians - became so forgetful.

### **Reading style and *habitus***

The example above shows that if we opt for the cultural-sociological approach then we need to include existing scholarship – its discourses, cultural memory, *doxa* and *habitus* - into our investigation of the yoga guru sign: previous generations of scholars’ research/discourse often provides a very important contribution to present scholars’ research. Even if (historical earlier) Siddha scholars do their best to produce neutral reports (truthful maps) employing all kind of *bracketing* (a much cherished ideal among phenomenologists) we can see from this example that their implicit assumptions (their categorisation, their *doxa*) can still lead them astray. So yoga historians should be cautious when standing on the shoulders of their scholar forefathers.

Especially we need to scrutinize yoga historians who see themselves as – mild or strong - *devotees* of a guru or yoga as such. Such adhering scholars should certainly be a part of the equation as they constitute an internal part of the evolving cultural yoga memory. Their voices – their reports, their testimonies, their evidence, their historical memory - should be treated with the same caution as a judicial court would have treated the testimony of a *biased witness*. We are here facing what we earlier labelled the *social bias* of remembering well known to social psychologists and historians. Such devotional scholars are at the strong risk of extending existing *collective yoga memory* (the shared memory of a group) repeating all its social biases. Soon I will look closer into such devoted scholars as I introduce my notion of Yoga Protestantism.

With this line of argumentation we have returned to the issue of the taken-for-granted way of reading a signifier. It might *appear* to us that we have a voluntaristic individual choice regarding reading style, but perhaps our choice of reading style is primarily a reflection of sociology – our *doxa* and *habitus*? Cultural sociology suggests that the reading style adhered to (‘a creator-promoter’, ‘a truthful map maker’ or ‘a dissident’ reading style) is conditioned by the given scholar’s unconscious attitude, dispositions, categorisations - *doxa* and *habitus*. Following this yoga scholars have to consider the possibility that their “choice” of ‘reading style’ is rather seamlessly ingrained in their *habitus* instead of being an isolated function of individual psychological choice.

Soon I will show by an example from *GMY* how reading style is permeated by *habitus* rather than psychological categories. Before that I find the introduction of the category ‘sacred’ will help us to realise how far a reading style is informed by *doxa* and *habitus*.

### **The *doxa* of the sacred**

In many of the essays of *GMY* we realise that the authors often perceive the guru sign as something we could categorise as ‘*sacred*’: i.e. something which is *set apart and forbidden*. The ‘sacred’ is defined by its opposition: the ‘*profane*’ – i.e. *part of everyday world* (Turner 2011, p. 35). Sacred/profane split the world in two: the profane world we already know and a transcendent world which is set apart and made forbidden. Gurus

are often celebrated as sacred. Many guru discourses – pre-modern and modern – directly categorise the guru as *divine*.

Most of the essays – often written by disciples or sympathisers – step more or less explicitly into this guru-sacredness discourse. They put the guru on a pedestal (hence the categorisation ‘guru’): he is set apart (he is *autonomous*) and hence he should not be drawn to much into the brawl of this world. Yes, admittedly in this view the guru is tainted by modernity but still – unlike other categories like ‘pundit’, ‘commentator’, or ‘propagator’ - the guru category is still *anticipated* to be expressing ‘timeless wisdom’. This sacred ‘sage’ contains a transcendent core – i.e. the cultural memory he embodies – which is untouched by historical and cultural conditions. How does a historian explain a person categorised in such an exceptional way?

Often the authors of *GMY* will use the notion ‘charisma’ as they struggle to illuminate the deeds and discourse of this perceived extraordinary personality. By this category they express that the guru is a very “special person” who due to his super-human skills – his charisma - have gained success in this world. However thinking about it the category ‘charisma’ is already presumed in the category ‘guru’: nothing new has been added. Further due to his ‘guru’ categorisation the guru’s teaching is for some authors assumed to express such deep insight that this teaching needs little critical evaluation. Instead this “wisdom” only need to be presented and interpreted in a systematic and academic way so readers are able to comprehend it’s sacred significance.

This line of categorisation forms the *template* – the *doxa* - for most of the essays.

According to cultural sociology what is assumed and taken-for-granted – our categorisation - belongs to the person’s *doxa* and *habitus*. Such a *taken-for-granted categorisation* (i.e. the template) will by necessity inform the reading of a sign. Hence if a devotee scholar categorises a person as ‘a guru’ who is ‘sacred’ we also get a glimpse of the *doxa* and reading-style informing the devotee scholar.

This analysis leads us to the following conclusion. When yoga historians perceive/categorise the guru as ‘sacred’ – i.e. as an autonomous “charismatic” personality transmitting “timeless teachings” – we can expect the following in respect of the semiotic reading process:

- (1) any *dissident* reading by such scholars is *a priori* excluded and
- (2) any *critical* reading (‘the truthful map-maker reading’) by such scholars will unconsciously – as the enchantment of the sign is fading due to academic historical and rational scrutiny - tend to become apologetic (i.e. ‘dominant reading’).

### **The dilemma of the yoga-protestant theologians**

The category ‘the sacred’ does not only reveals the links between reading style, *doxa* and a scholar’s attitude to her subject. It also open our eyes to an illustrative historical parallel between enthusiast yoga scholars and Christian protestant theologians. In the following I will suggest that those of the yoga enthusiasts who quest to discover the truth about their treasured yoga sign (and the gurus who brought it to them) are walking down the same road of Enlightenment/modernity as protestant theologians commenced to walk at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Around 1800 critical European Protestant bible readers - orientated by Enlightenment culture – began to quest to identify the truth and sources of their cherished cultural practice. They wanted to unearth the genuineness of Christianity – the pure uncontaminated teaching hidden below layers of myths. They wanted to excavate a stable foundation supporting their sacred signs, belief system, values, and Christian identity. As we follow their efforts during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century we observe that the more these children of Enlightenment dogged into the old Christian historical sources – the Gospels and the whole canon – the more they realised how their beloved foundation was made of sand. Those Protestant bible-historians were in semiotic terms ‘truthful map-makers’, who developed revolutionary source-critical hermeneutical methodologies. These allowed them to reveal layers after layers of a web of tales, legends, manipulations, political compromises, cultural conflicts, extant branches of Christian teaching all of which was so entangled that these bible hunters in the end had to ask themselves, if there was a solid and indisputable historical core of Christianity to find anywhere. Were they hunting a *chimera* – a *simulacrum*?

Which is somehow the irony facing any map-maker: the closer you want to nail down (map) reality – being it the physical or the historical - the more it disappears. Ask any quantum physicist about that.

Anyway today many modern yogis by means of academic scholarship are travelling down the same path. Like the enlightened Protestants they also have quest for mapping the historical truth of ‘what is ‘the sacred’ to them. They also want to root out myths and find the pure teachings. This effort to illuminate ‘the sacred’ seems to be a path closely connected with modernity (Turner 2011). We see how for instance modern fundamentalist Muslims also want to reconnect to the true teachings of the prophet. However every believer (truthful map-maker) who step onto this path of enlightened Protestantism is opening a kind of Pandora’s box: the quest to identify the truth of the sacredness (that which has been set apart) is ironically ending with the dissolution of that very same truth. Illumination of ‘the sacred’ becomes a painful and contradictory process of mapmaking because you now want intellectually to pull into history what you *emotionally has set apart*.

The question is then how do the modern faithful Protestant – Christian, Muslim or Yogic - deal with this dilemma and pain. Due to the emotional energy weaved into their sacred signs – we now hear the voices of Durkheim, Mauss and Bourdieu – these enthusiast scholars, wrestling with the emotional of the sacred, will easily end up in denial and apology.

To substantiate these claims above I suggest we now finally return to an essay *GMY*. This essay is clearly written with the attitude of ‘the truthful map-maker’ trying to illuminate ‘the sacred’. The essay refers to other critical studies and often employ notions and jargon derived from cultural studies and sociology. This essay – like other essays of the book - shows how very talented ‘truthful map-making’ yoga historians – orientated by their *doxa* and *habitus* – *forced by the contradiction inherent in their project* end up as promoters and apologists. In other words we are going to see how the limitations we have investigated above are not due to psychology and choice but are to find in *habitus* and methodology.

### **When falsifications are creative inventions**

In an essay of Krishnamacharya we see how two serious yoga enthusiast (one of them being one of the editors of *GMY*) are caught by this enlightened Protestant dilemma. We register first of all how the two authors deplore the celebrity status and devotion which their modern yoga fellows are building up around the guru. (We recall how the Renaissance protestants similar complained about the worship of Christian saints.) Through the two authors’ exhausting historical studies we also realise how committed they are in their modern quest for the true core of the yoga legacy. As they admirably dig through existing historical memory – Western and Indian - they realise that the tales and legends constructed by the guru Krishnamacharya and his lieutenants of course not are watertight. Far from. The narratives of these gurus’ cultural memory are not even inaccurate – they are in some cases pure fabrications.

If we call a spade a spade most people would now probably say that Krishnamacharya and his lieutenants have been caught red handed. Most critical readers would agree that these popularisers and creators of modern yoga were stepping over the red line when they claimed full authenticity and true historical roots. These modern gurus were outright lying and they *knew* that they were.

However seen through the prism of notions like *habitus* and ‘cultural field’ truth and deception is not of major interest for a sociologist. Seen from this perspective what is clear is that the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indian guru is negotiating and struggling to cope with his contradictory situation. What at this point of history is motivating and worrying the guru and his lieutenants is not so much *truth*. In cultural sociological terms their main concern is instead - under the strains of modernity - to accumulate sufficient symbolic and cultural capital allowing them to secure their cultural field and their social identity as a gurus. What do I mean by that?

Within most if not all guru discourse myth and legends plays a central role: they legitimise and create difference (identity). No legitimacy, no symbolic capital, no guru identity. However under the Enlightenment culture of modernity the cultural field of the guru was under threat of disintegrating. Its symbolic capital in colonial India had since long been crumbling. New myths and legends were required in late colonial India. The colonial narrators of guru legends - like Krishnamacharya - were trying to address this. They were hence creating *modern* guru myths – a modernised cultural memory - in order to *adapt their cultural field to modernity*. They did so by creating *modern* guru myths.

Doing this reconstruction of legitimisation the late colonial gurus like Krishnamacharya experienced discrepancies and tensions. Eroded old categories and pre-modern guru discourses (giving power and distinction) however *had to be* salvaged. Otherwise the colonial guru risked literally to be out of business. So there really was no choice. The only *credible* solution: new legends, new narratives. Late colonial gurus like Krishnamacharya hence created a new modern yoga narrative where history – normally seen as unchanging - is now admittedly changing significantly. However *the guru and his teaching remain the same*: they are a specific historical manifestation of something eternal, a timeless clone. In this way pre-modern categories and thinking are salvaged. Changed, but not *really* changed.

The modern yoga scholar studying gurus like Krishnamacharya is faced with mounting evidence of “inaccuracies” of this modern legend creation in late Colonial India. Hence we witness in this essay we discuss here, how the two authors – like the gurus they are writing about - have to handle *their own cognitive dissonance* by opting for an apologetic approach. We realise this through the use of vindicating phrases like that the guru for instance has a “**dynamic and creative relationship with the textual tradition**” .<sup>10</sup>

There is no irony hidden in the two authors’ choice of words, because they assure the reader that there was a sound and decent motive behind the guru’s actions: the guru found the old texts “**confusing and difficult to**

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<sup>10</sup> In disbelief we modern readers wonder if we are facing *irony*? We cannot possible imagine that the authors for instance would vindicate politicians and CEO’s with the same phrases when such power elites were caught red handed inventing seducing stories.

understand” and the collective yoga memory hence needed some up-to-date editing. Thus when the guru was reconstructing the historical past he did it actually for his students’ own sake.

We remark that the authors do not consider the possibility that Krishnamacharya’s “editing exercise” is related to sustaining his status as a guru. The two authors ignore this as a possibility (‘the sacred’ does not manipulate, of course). Instead they show us how the guru himself also justified his playful dealing with cultural memory. They quote the guru for saying that each generation of teachers need to “discover” new teaching. (The words “invent” and definitely “fabricate” cannot come into question as they do not fit easily with ‘sacredness’). We are informed how Krishnamacharya and his lieutenants had no concerns with their re-configuration of collective yoga memory: according to them only *appearance* has changed due to “yoga’s perennial sameness” (p.98).

The two authors – both devoted to the world of yoga - accept this the guru’s self justification. I find they must be blinded by their habitus and entanglement.

### When does *ad hoc* becomes *ad libitum*?

In order to save what *must* be saved – ‘the guru’, ‘the sacred’ - any loyal scholar *has to* become apologetic. In our case in stead of probing the authors support the guru’s line of argument. They opt for following line of argumentation: the yoga guru – modern or pre-modern - can change his ideas *ad hoc* (‘for this purpose’) without *the essence of yoga is changing*.

That might be so – *assumed* you subscribe to philosophical essentialism. I will come back to this. Whether we subscribe to essentialism or not we have logically to ask, if there are no *limitations* for such conceptual changes: can the teacher change the collective memory indefinitely and *ad libitum* (‘at one’s pleasure’) and still declare it ‘the same’, we might ask? When is a metamorphosis of cultural memory so comprehensive and fundamental that that there is no common denominator anymore?

So how does the two authors address this philosophical question: when does *ad hoc* reconstructions of collective memory becomes arbitrary and *ad libitum*? It seems their answer is that because the guru is so enmeshed in the yoga guru *institution*, any deviation from the essence of collective yoga memory *cannot* happen.

Let us follow their defensive line of argument. Orientated by contemporary philosophy and psychology the authors of course realise that any memory/idea - including yoga - is marked by the historical and cultural context and hence admittedly does undergo change. So they have to admit – like their guru - that *some* but not *any* change is possible.

Here follows the authors own formulation of the above dilemma, where we see that they believe that the past is something we ‘discover’ ( instead being something we ‘assemble’):

“ **“New” techniques, texts, and teachings are never invented, but always discovered, and thus the new is never really new but is a reframing of the ancient and unchanging logos of yoga. Through the relationship with the guru and the lineage, innovation becomes the manifestation of the continuing tradition, .... In other words, the very instant of the guru’s enactment and utterances of the new is also its transformation into the synchronous present of timeless tradition” (p.98).**

So in a modern jargon a basically pre-modern idea about an unchanging historical essence is expressed in this quote. Thus each era and each generation will create its historical specific *version* of the “**unchanging logos of yoga**”. Historical versions of cultural memory *looks* different, however they are *essentially* the same! How does the (essence of the) collective yoga memory, we might ask, stay intact despite historical metamorphosis? The answer is *the guru institution*. Thus it is an institution with its rules of transmission – the *ritualised relation* between master and disciple - which assure that the adaptation to inevitable cultural change does not transform the perennial of yoga. In summary it is a ritualised transmission (lineage) that guarantee that *ad hoc* interpretations does not mutate into *ad libitum*.

Two initial reflections on this line of argument. Firstly with this line of argumentation the two authors are in fact introducing a traditional pre-modern myth used to legitimise gurus. Within the traditional guru discourse this myth is expressed with the notion *lineage* – ‘direct descent from an ancestor’. In pre-modern India the legitimising myth – ingrained in yoga’s cultural memory - states that because the guru is initiated and trained by a legacy guru his teaching is a *clone* of ancient wisdom and hence true and transcendent. Change is arrested, conformity guaranteed. The authors adopt this pre-modern myth – this *doxa* - belonging to the collective yoga memory.

Secondly we note that the authors are moving out on methodological very thin ice by using the guru’s own stories (the lineage myth, his cultural memory) to justify his re-formulations. The sacred (cultural memory) defending the sacred (guru). Imaging a court case were the defence’s argument is that the defendant is innocent because he says he is innocent.

In summary the two yoga historians have achieved the following: a pre-modern cultural memory has been reformulated in modern academic terms.

### Questions leading to *reductio ad absurdum*

This - what is an *philosophical essentialist defence* of historical changes of guru teachings and collective memory - immediately generates a range of questions. There seems to be a watchdog which secures and guarantees that the essence of yoga is not corrupted by history. This watchdog is a specific institutionalised relation. It is called *lineage* – a certified relation of transmission. Let us see if this defence holds critical philosophical questioning.

Our first question is that based on reading *GMY* we realise that the guru-disciple relation is under dramatic change. Especially lineage and transmission. We read that many modern gurus deny they had a guru at all and most only had a very short relationship with a guru. Some have never met their guru in person or never talked to him. Thus if there is no watchdog – no certified transmission, no institution – where is the claimed protection against the corruption of the “unchanging logos of yoga”? How can we verify if these modern “uncertified” gurus, who all express very different teachings, are still expressing the essence of yoga?

This also brings the *motives* of the yoga historians into questioning. Does this mean that the authors real agenda is to de-legitimize most of modern yoga gurus (as they have no institutional legitimation) only leaving intact those few gurus who insist that they have been through a “proper” institutional certification? Are we just witnessing – camouflaged as scholarship – a classical in-fight about legitimacy within the guru field, where various branches are struggling for the right and power to categorise and dominate this cultural field? Are the yoga historians trying to promote (their guru?) Krishnamacharya as one of the few real legacy gurus?

Regardless of this presumption is correct or not, the essentialist defence of the authors is still facing fundamental questions regarding an *institution under change*. How much can the guru-disciple institution – the rituals of transmission - historical change before we have to acknowledge that we cannot guarantee that the essence of yoga is protected? The issue is that not only does teaching and cultural memory change so do institutions. In other words the problem has just moved: if the continuity of essence is guaranteed by institutions what is guaranteeing that the essence of these institutions is not changing in such a fundamental way that the institutions have lost their ability to transmit in certified way? We need to understand the unchangeable essence of the guru-disciple relation which is guaranteeing the transmission of the essence of the teaching. Who watches the watchdog?

Secondly today we are encountering a plethora of yoga teachers, who do not even claim they are gurus (and we meet some of them in *GMY*), but still are propagating what they argue is ‘legitimate new teachings of yoga’. Should we (as the authors presumably do?) *a priori* dismiss their teachings as they had no gurus to properly initiate them? If we should select between such guru-less modern teachers, how do we then verify if they are true to the perennial of yoga as we cannot ask for lineage certificates and as we do not know what ‘the logos of yoga’ is?

So this leads directly to the third question: what is it this essence of yoga – this “unchanging logos”? Who has the insight to outline this logos? A problem well-known by *any* respectable Protestant. This could then lead to further uncertainties for what do we do if it turns out that there are several conflicting guru versions of the perennial of yoga? As we well know, gurus (and Protestant sects) are often very dismissal about each other teachings. How can *essential* disagreement be possible among them if they all *qua gurus* had proper lineage transmission? Or should we *a priori* assume that any disagreement between gurus can only be superficial and never substantial (essential)?

This leads us into a new line of questioning. How come that there are various rituals of transmission within even the pre-modern guru institution? How do we know that they *all* are ensuring correct transmission? What are the institutional criteria for correct transmission? And moving to the issue of verifiability: how does a student verify that his guru is a certified guru? How do we know we are not facing a con man – how do we check his legendary past and his cultural memory of it?

### The defenders of myths

Any reader acquainted with the writings of Karl Popper and his *fallibilism* will immediately realise that the authors’ defence has all the hallmarks of doomed *philosophical fundamentalism*. The more we question and the more we think about it the more it becomes obvious that the guru institution cannot ensure continuation of yoga essence. This *scholar defence of the guru* is leading into absurdities.

Instead we should consider if the guru’s narrative (the story that he is embodying the essence of yoga due to lineage) is a myth and an ideological device. The more the *Yoga Protestant* looks into global and pre-modern yoga legacy the more it becomes clear that the ruling cultural memory about the “timeless yoga tradition” transmitted by the guru institution is a myth and an ideological construction. Let me explain this in terms of cultural-sociology.

In my ‘dissident reading’ of the guru sign the guru is embodying a power discourse. Power is as inherent in the guru sign as it is for instance in the capitalist sign. Like ‘the capitalist’ is embodying *economic capital* so is ‘the guru’ representing *symbolic capital* and power. If we accept this sociological proposition we then have to shift our focus to power.

Power always needs legitimisation otherwise it will not persist in the long run. This is where myths and ideology – *embedded in cultural memory* - is entering. They legitimise power. Make power look natural, rational or traditional. They are narratives ensuring that the submissive person is accepting the superior. They justify repression and hierarchy. Some call this strategy *hegemony* – the repressed accepting repression thus keeping the powerful in power. Others like Bourdieu calls this for *symbolic violence*: the guru sign and its ideological narratives as instrument for cultural violence.

Such narratives and ideology weaved into collective yoga memory enables gurus to generate symbolic capital within their cultural field. So according to this dissident reading of the historical memory assembled by *GMY*, its authors through apologetic argumentation in fact have become the mouthpiece of the guru and his narratives and myths. The devotee historian – steeped in his *habitus* and unconscious emotionality - has become an apologist of collective memory: a defender of the sacred sign and the *social distinctions* it embodies.

### **Essentialism in the midst of post-structuralism**

In these days where the insights of genealogy, post-structuralism, and Darwinism has become widely accepted many readers probably struggle to accept that, the two authors line of argumentation, is presuming good old essentialist philosophy. Most people would have thought that philosophers like Karl Popper since long has put such essentialism to rest. Today everybody within cultural studies are working with fluid concepts. Essentialism has no place within such thinking. Who believe for instance today after Darwin that various ‘species’ has an essence? ‘Species’ are liquid evolutionary processes – human categories - constantly undergoing metamorphosis.

As the authors clearly subscribe to the terminology of contemporary cultural studies it is hence surprising that they do subscribe to essentialism – which is incommensurable with post-structural thinking - to defend the guru. Did we misunderstand them? I don’t think so.

As the authors are acquainted with post-structural and ‘dissident reading’ they apparently found it necessary to go on the offensive:

**“Constructivist studies that work from the premises that yoga is contingent product of the (fallible) imagination through time...” (p.99)** have their limitations, we are warned. Such constructionists treating cultural forms (as yoga) as *contingent and historical situated* (like most social sciences and humanities do since the dawn of post-structuralism) are going too far in their reductionism. Even if cultural products – as reflected in various historical specific cultural yoga memories – seems different the constructionist should not get carried away assuming that *everything* is transforming. Something just doesn’t change and the social constructionists who fail to realise that:

**“... are therefor suspect insofar as they fail to recognise the transcendent and perennial sameness that always underlies the appearance of difference in the guru’s teaching.” (p.99).**

I assume this mean that, yes, there are cultural forms, which are historical situated (to use the jargon of post-structuralism), but *some* forms are excluded from this: namely the essence of the guru’s teaching? In other words a repetition of the essentialist stance now expressed in the jargon of post-structuralism: some cultural forms (the sacred?) are exempt from the change brought about by time.

### **The Taboos of Yoga Protestantism**

The next thing which catches our attention in this quote is that the reader is *suspect* (!) if he/she is not able to recognise that the guru sign system is something very special – “transcendent and perennial same”. If a reader is not able to comprehend that the guru sign has an ahistorical essence which is transcendent and unchanging – dare we say ‘sacred’ - then this constructionist reader for unknown reasons has some kind of a problem (it is unclear to me what it means to be “suspect” – ‘suspect’ of what?).

So this is the line of argumentation: readers who cannot comprehend that the guru sign is ‘something set apart’ (sacred, i.e. historical transcendent) of this profane world have a problem. If such constructionists dare to believe that *everything* – including the guru sign (the sacred) – is profane (part of everyday world and history), then they are making the guru sign contingent, genealogical and historical situated. And that is definitely unacceptable (susceptible). But we are never told why.

In the two authors view such an constructionist understanding does not respect their distinction between the sacred and the profane – their categorisation. They warn us there are limits for how forward we can push the profane – the historical contingent. In other words they cannot and will not contemplate the rejection of the distinction ‘sacred’ versus ‘profane’. Why? My answer: we are here reaching the taken-for-granted. The *doxa* and *habitus*.

So through this warning they show us the taboos of their own thinking – their *habitus*: what they *cannot* critically analyse and what they *have to* leave as ‘set apart and forbidden’ (sacred). What is ‘sacred’ is *forbidden*. Hence we - as they - are forbidden even to contemplate the possibility of the sacred being entirely profane. I believe – to paraphrase Karl Popper - this emotional and sacrosanct boundary (categorisation) to constitute the *poverty of Yoga Protestantism*.

Thus in my conclusion the methodological poverty exposed in *GMY* is not founded in arbitrary individual choice: the subscription to ‘creator-promoter’ and ‘truthful map’ readings adhered to in *GMY* is the expression of the *habitus* of a “modern Protestantism” – a quest caught between faith and truth.

### **The emotional aspect of the cultural memory of the Yoga Protestant**

Thus when the Yoga Protestants set out to re-collect a past *which has significance for them* we can see there is and has to be a kind of an unconscious emotional agenda. When a social group want to memorise certain events and persons of the past and wrap them with chosen schemata and narratives there is always reasons. These are often fired by sub-conscious and emotional motives – our social bias. Assembling a past is a part of creating group identity and coherence by establishing common symbols and emotional points of reference. Thus any emotional subtext embedded in collective memory is not special to Yoga Protestants. According to historians concerned with memory’s relation to history this is typical for any group.

**“Sometimes remembering carries a sense of regret, of nostalgic yearning, of loss or disruption. The emotional meanings that particular memories carry with them are never simply anchored in past episodes that are being recalled; nor are they simply recollection. They are rooted rather in the mind’s continuous effort to maintain and to police the connections between past and present, prospect and retrospect, identity and possibility.”** (Cubitt 2007, p. 108)

Thus my essay is about introducing critical self-reflexivity to those who are assembling the collective memory of yoga and its gurus. Self-reflexivity is a wide and never ending field of enquiry. I have chosen to focus on this in relation to historical memory: why do we try to re-collect a past, what are the categories we work with, how is it all related to contemporary cultural and political context? So let me finalise with this quote from an outstanding study in history and memory which summaries the situation I find neglected within the yoga discourse

**“Once we start to view remembering as something that is often socially structured and possibly collaborative, it becomes clear that it may be influenced by a wide variety of social considerations: people may find it more important to develop an account of things that is coherent, or that commands general assent within the group, or that minimizes friction, or that enhances self-esteem, or that legitimizes certain claims or structures or authority than to build a detailed and accurate picture of past reality. Remembering social settings is not to be analysed as if it were a form of computational data-processing, but as an activity at least partially geared to the production of social effects”** (Cubitt 200, p.130)

So all of us involved in the assembling of the cultural memory of yoga need to scrutinise why we find it important to construct a certain narrative of the past. We need to look at what kind of past is it we want to compile and what is the symbolic and emotional significance of this composed past for us and our audience. I find that those scholars driven by motives similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant theologians are in strong need of looking into their perception of historiography (historical memory writing perceived as ‘truthful mapping’). Especially they need to address the restraint and limitations their emotional relation to yoga enforce on their collective memory writing ( i.e. ‘creator-promoter readings’).

A historian is of course welcome to subscribe to Yoga Protestantism and hence operate within its boundaries. This means however first of all that such scholars never can produce the deep philosophical insights like that of Darwin and Foucault – both being outstanding ‘dissident readers’ (genealogists) challenging cherished signs. Devotional yoga scholars - caught between truth and faith like 19<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant theologians - will instead struggle to strike a balance between being ‘truthful mapmakers’ and ‘creator-promoters’. And in this essay on Krishnamacharya discussed above we saw how such partisan scholars did not manage to strike that balance as long as they rejected to deconstruct favoured assumptions. Instead they were reproducing the ideology of the guru sign – becoming promoters disguised as scholars.

Seen from the point of the social sciences and humanities the writings of such religious scholars will struggle to find much recognition as their *habitus* and *social bias* has restricted how much they can challenge their treasured sign. In the words of K. Popper their bias restrict them in making significant contributions to the “growth of knowledge”.

I believe this limitation is expressed succinctly in the following quote from the scholar Bruce Lincoln (2000) :

**“When one permits those who one studies to define the terms in which they will be understood, suspends one’s interest in the temporal and contingent, or fails to distinguish between “truth”, “truth-claims”, and “regimes of truth”, one has ceased to function as historian or scholar. In that moment, a variety of roles are available: some perfectly respectable (amanuensis, collector, friend and advocate), and some less appealing (cheerleader, voyeur, retailer of import goods). None, however, should be confused with scholarship.”**

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