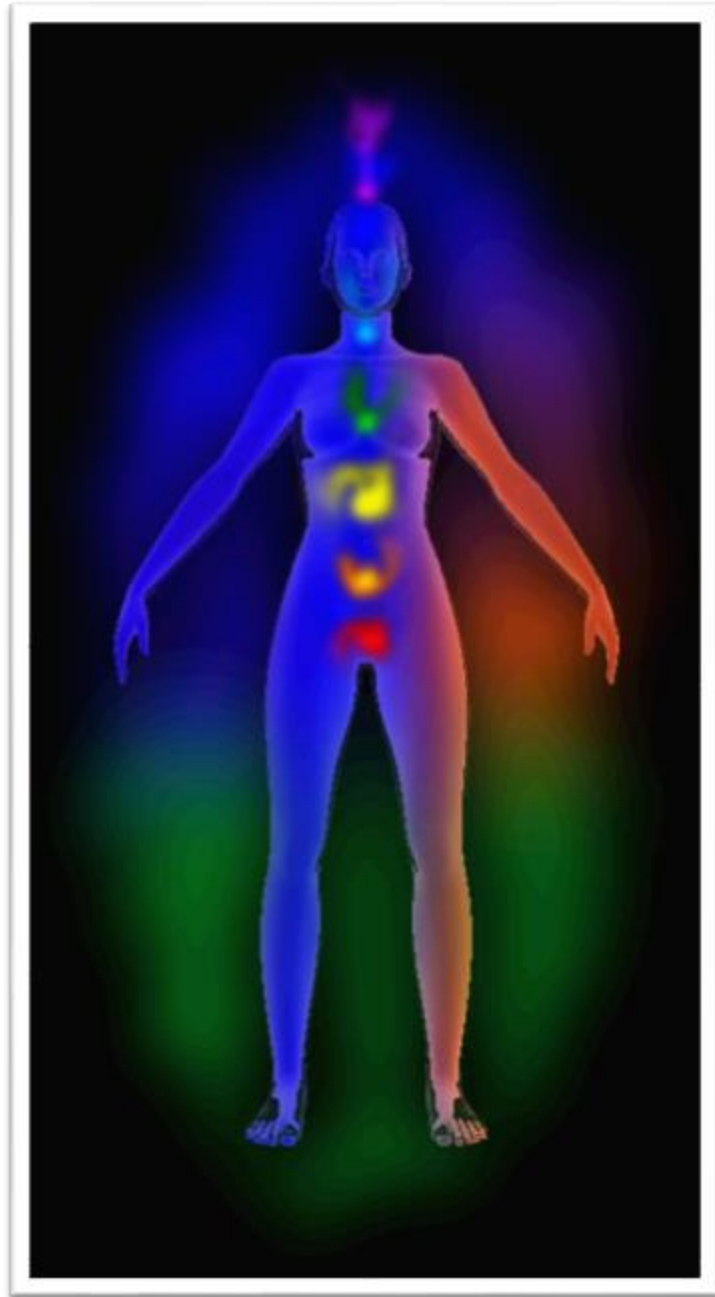


Living on Light

An anthropological study of a seemingly irrational phenomenon



Master's Thesis in Anthropology
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Formalities

The fieldwork was conducted in Danish, and all translations of empirical quotes and concepts are by the author. Informants who wished to remain anonymous are identified with single letters. Consonants are used for men and vowels for women, e.g. “O”.

Quotes are in “double quotation marks” and quotes longer than three lines are in free standing blocks without quotation marks. Theoretical concepts are written in ‘single quotation marks’ when they are introduced, e.g. ‘wonderment’. Emic concepts are indicated by *italics* when they are introduced, e.g. *universal energy*. Citations follow Moesgaard Housestyle 5. Repetitions and empty words such as “you know” have been removed from quotes in places where this facilitates the reading without changing the meaning of the statement.

Dates are written in DD.MM.YY format, e.g. 01.11.15.

Abbreviations:

- LHC: Lotus Health Care
- LAL: *Lev af LYS* (Live on LIGHT)

Since LAL is so new, there is not yet consensus on an emic term for people who have gone through the initiation. *Lyskursister* (light course participants), *lysspisere* (light eaters), and *lysfolk* (light people, only plural) are amongst the emic self-definitions. In this thesis, the term light people will be used as common reference for the therapists at LHC and participants of LAL, as all the therapists at LHC “live on light” themselves.

Warning: As there have been cases without relation to LHC of people who have stopped eating and died, believing that they could live on light (Straubinger 2013, Jacobsen et al. 2015b), I strongly discourage anybody to stop eating or to attempt a *water diet* without proper precautions and supervision.

Frontpage illustration: Screenshot from *aura film* of the author. Filmed by Camilla at LHC by use of the programme AuraCloud™.

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Introduction

In the university town of Aarhus, Denmark, the private alternative health clinic Lotus Health Care offers a course called *Lev af LYS* (Live on LIGHT). The LAL course promises to enable the participants to live on *universal energy* alone. In the cosmology of LHC, everything in the universe consists of the same energy in more or less dense form. This universal energy has the potential to manifest into anything, and so the people who say that they live on light, believe that their bodies are able to absorb this energy in its purest form and manifest whatever they need out of it. When the light people talk of energy it thus refers to an ethereal form of energy, which is not to be confused with electricity. The people who chose to join the LAL course (hereafter “the course”) come from a broad variety of social backgrounds and geographical places in Denmark, and recently also from the Netherlands, Norway, Italy, Canada, Argentina, Russia, and Slovakia. What they have in common is their dedication to a cosmology in which it is possible to live on energy, because this is what everything consists of, it is claimed. This thesis is based on an ethnographic fieldwork studying the therapists and participants of this course. The fieldwork took place from August 2015 to December 2015 and was preceded by a part-time pilot study in March and April 2015.

By contradicting the currently dominating scientific theory that the body is a biological entity, which needs calories to survive, this phenomenon raises two fundamental anthropological questions. Firstly: How should anthropology deal with seemingly irrational claims? Since Bronislaw Malinowski famously formulated the goal of anthropology to be to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world” (Malinowski 1922: 25, emphasis original), anthropologists have debated how best to live up to this goal. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a key figure in the recent so-called ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology (Paleček & Risjord 2012, Willerslev and Suhr in press: 7), suggests that anthropology should be dedicated to taking seriously “what Western intellectuals cannot [...] take seriously” (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 133). Using Edward E. Evans-Prichard’s example of the Nuer of Sudan, who say that twins are birds, Martin Holbraad argues that instead of searching for explanations to how the Nuer can end up at

this wrong assumption, anthropologists should take seemingly irrational claims as indications that “we have reached the limits of our own conceptual repertoire” (Holbraad 2010: 184). The solution to the anthropological problem of dealing with ‘alterity’ (Holbraad 2008: 95) is thus, according to anthropologists supportive of the so-called ‘ontological turn’ within anthropology, not to translate emic phenomena into our own concepts, but rather to take emic phenomena seriously “so as to alternate our own ways of thinking” (Willerslev 2013: 42). This approach is the point of departure of this thesis, but simultaneously, the thesis explores the limits of what anthropologists can and should take seriously, thus being critical to the basic assumption underpinning the ontological turn.

Secondly, the question “what is a body?” becomes relevant when we decide to take seriously that these people claim that their bodies can live on energy. This question is central to both the ontological turn (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 329, Viveiros de Castro 1998: 478) and phenomenology as a theory of perception. In phenomenology, the body *is* the primary self (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945]: 457). Heidegger uses the phrase ‘Being-in-the-world’ (1962 [1926]: 107) to describe the key understanding in phenomenology that “cognition instead of being primary is derived from a practical background of involved activity” (Willerslev 2007: 20), which is necessarily embodied (*ibid.*: 21). The body is therefore central to phenomenological theory, and is anthropologically interesting because all human beings share the fundamental condition of being a body.

Throughout the world, people practice various different techniques for living without eating, including *breatharianism*, *sun-gazing* and *Bi Gu* (Alter 2004: 95, Dhruv, Shah, and Shah 2003, Straubinger 2013, Jasmuheen 1998, Werner and Stöckli 2007, Vojnikovic and Njiric 2010: 127). This project focuses on LAL in the form taught at LHC, and therefore other methods will only be dealt with in cases where it has relevance for LAL.

Besides the questions “what is a body?” and “how to take others seriously?”, ‘rationality’ has emerged as a central concept to the study of LAL, so questions about rationality will also be dealt with in the thesis. Firstly, the claim of the existence of an invisible universal energy contradicts the rationality of ‘materialism’: “The idea that matter is the only reality” (Beauregard et al 2014: 272). Does this mean that the people who hold this claim are

irrational? And which new insights about “our own” rationality can studying these people’s approach to rationality provide? Through the study of the light people’s alternative epistemology, this thesis continues the phenomenological project of providing a critique of reason (Parviainen 1998: 12, Bubandt 2007: 147).

Secondly, anthropology has traditionally dealt with examples of ‘radical otherness’ (Robbins 2006: 292) found in exotic fields far away from home. This project studies an example of radical otherness “at home”, i.e. in a Western context. According to Allen Abramson and Martin Holbraad, ‘cosmology’ has recently once again become a “prime ethnographic concern for anthropology” (Abramson and Holbraad 2014: 2). This comes after a time with an otherwise low interest in cosmology due to the influence of the ‘crisis of representation’ and the post-modern stance that cultures are not isolated wholes (ibid.). In line with this return to cosmology, this thesis studies the cosmology of the light people with focus on what ‘a body’ is to them. What is it like to be a part of a minority who live by a cosmology according to which people can live on light, in a society where the cosmology of the majority says that the body needs food to survive? And what has made these people exchange the cosmology they grew up with for this new cosmology?

This thesis thus answers the following problem statement: *Through investigating the ontological question, “what is a body?” in the context of people who claim to live on light after an initiation at Lotus Health Care, Denmark, this project explores if and how anthropologists can take claims seriously, which contradict our own rationality.*

‘Epistemology’, defined as a “mode of knowing” (Hastrup 2004: 455), is a key concept to this thesis, as the thesis points out that the reason why other Danes have a hard time taking the light people seriously is because the light people are anti-rationalists while many other Danes are rationalists. Another reason why the light people are rarely taken seriously is that their cosmology is in opposition to ‘materialism’, which is the hegemonic cosmology in the Western world. This conclusion serves to remind us that ‘rationalism’ and ‘materialism’ are not universal principles, thus challenging us to pay analytical attention to our own assumptions (Holbraad 2008: 96) and “rethink our analytical concepts” (Holbraad 2010: 184).

The evasive concept of the ‘soul’ is widely used within contemporary anthropological studies of indigenous cosmologies (Willerslev and Pedersen 2012: 465). In the LAL cosmology, a *soul* is understood as an eternal energetic being, which has the ability to divide itself and incarnate a part of itself into a human body. According to the LAL cosmology, by *being-in-the-body* rather than *being-in-the-mind*, the individual has easier access to his or her *intuition*. The intuition is regarded a more trustworthy source of knowledge than the mind, because *intuitive knowledge* comes from the *True Self*, the immortal soul, which has an overview similar to what Holbraad and Willerslev, inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, call ‘a view from everywhere’ (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 333). In his analysis of souls in animism, Rane Willerslev suggests that in animism, souls have a view from everywhere, but that they are not ‘transcendental’, meaning they do not exist “in some higher plane” (2011: 519). In the LAL cosmology, the True Self has a view from everywhere exactly because it exists in a higher plane or *dimension*, from which it can see the Divine plan for the human’s life, which the mind cannot access. Through being-in-the-body, the light people strive to come into closer unity with their true Selves, attaining a view that is closer to a view from everywhere. It will be suggested in this thesis that the emic mode of being-in-the-body can be helpful as a trajectory for rethinking the anthropological method, which in turn can facilitate a ‘decolonization of thought’ (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 128). According to Willerslev and Suhr (in press: 7), a decolonization of thought is crucial in taking others seriously, and can make way for sudden new insights.

Instead of avoiding the question of the validity of claims of the studied people in classical anthropological manner (Jenkins 2015: 346), this thesis supports Willerslev and Suhr’s approach of ‘methodological faith’ (in press: 20), where the anthropologist uses his or her personal belief and doubt in others’ convictions to propel the study, as a productive and realistic alternative to ‘methodological atheism’ (Gell 1999: 160-61).

Methods

The two main ethnographic methods used during my fieldwork on LAL were ‘qualitative interviews’ (Kvale 1990) and ‘participant observation’ (Spradley 1980). Most of the interviews were ‘semi-structured’ (Bernard 1994) and they included two ‘focus group interviews’ (Schensul 1999, Halkier 2002). In total 20 informants were interviewed.

The field of LAL is challenging to observe because people live in their own homes while they take the course. Therefore, it was not easy to observe the light people interact with each other outside of the events at LHC. To accommodate this challenge, I participated in all the events at LHC I could, 14 in total plus three days of observation at a health fair. I found it to be too invasive to observe people in their own homes for extended periods of time, except from in the case of my key informant Daniel A, with whom I developed an especially good relation, so I arranged to visit him in his home for six consecutive days in his holiday. When the interviewees agreed to it, the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' own homes, which provided me with a chance to observe the homes. Besides observing and interviewing the light people, I did 'complete participation' (Spradley 1980: 61) in the 'role' (O'Reilly 2012: 110) of a course participant. The objectives of this were firstly, to get a first-hand phenomenological experience of LAL, which would provide me with a 'sensory'- and 'embodied knowledge' (Okely 1992: 34, 36) of the invisible aspects of LAL. Secondly, this provided me with more opportunities to observe the action at LHC through 14 private sessions with the individual therapists. Thirdly, going through the course with my own body signalled to the light people that I meant to take the phenomenon seriously, which was crucial to being granted access to the field.

After the end of the fieldwork, I have visited LHC once a month to join a question and answer session called *satsang*. I have used these events as an opportunity to test how my analytical conclusions resonate with the light people. I have also stayed in contact with some of my key informants and discussed my analytical ideas with them. I already began discussing my analytical ideas during the fieldwork, and have continued to do so as they became more elaborated. This method was inspired by George Marcus' concept of 'complicity' (Marcus 1998: 107), and the main aim of it was to make sure that the analytical ideas relate to the actual ideas of the informants (Willerslev 2013: 48).

Following the AAA ethical guidelines for research, I have taken a range of precautions in order to make sure that I "do no harm" to my informants, the discipline or myself (AAA 2012: §1). The fact that the light people are very interested in getting scientific proof of LAL undoubtedly made it easier for me to get access to the field, and because of this I repeatedly explained that my study would not provide a positivist proof of LAL, to make sure that my informants participated in the study under 'informed consent' and not under false hopes (ibid.: §2-3). Since many initiates have only told the people they trust

and whom they expect not to react with condemnation about their participation in LAL, I have been careful to ensure anonymity to those who wanted this (AAA 2012: §2).

Outline of chapters

The first chapter introduces the field of LHC and LAL, focusing on the question “what is a body?” The emic distinction between being-in-the-body and being-in-the-mind is accounted for, and the emic understanding of the body is compared to that of René Descartes and of phenomenology. It is also shown how the cosmology of LHC clashes with the cosmology of the majority of the people in the light people’s social circles, who do not believe in LAL. Chapter two focuses on rationalities and epistemologies by summing up the rationality debate in anthropology and arguing that the light people operate with two epistemologies depending on their mode of being, namely intuition when they are being-in-the-body and rationality when they are being-in-the-mind. The emic method of being-in-the-body is suggested as a method to facilitate a decolonization of thought. The problem of translating from lived experience to conceptual account is discussed. In chapter three it is discussed why it is worthwhile to attempt taking seemingly irrational claims seriously, and where the limits are to what anthropologists can take seriously. Finally, the conclusion argues that the willingness to take other cosmologies and epistemologies seriously is an important contribution, which anthropology has to offer to the public discourse, because it is key to producing understanding between people. The study shows that currently there is not much understanding between the light people and the surrounding Danish community, perhaps because of the strong dominance of rationalism in Denmark and the light people’s anti-rationalist epistemology. It also concludes that even though there are limits to what anthropologists can take seriously, it is a worthwhile effort to take seemingly irrational claims seriously, because we can learn a lot about both them and ourselves through the process.

Chapter 1 - The field and its cosmology

Lotus Health Care

Right at the edge of the university town of Aarhus, neighbouring a golf course, lies a newly renovated white house in two stories with an annex and two sunrooms. A large sign on the field next to the road, full of images of happy faces, reveals that the white house is home to Lotus Health Care. Some hubs of gravel outside the house tell that the parking lot is in the process of being expanded. Behind the house, on the field, a new extra building is under construction. A sign on the door on the ground floor says “private”. Four of the therapists and the partner of one of them, live behind this door and in the annex. A metal staircase leads to the reception and the clinic rooms on the upper floor. Inside the reception, the visitors are met by the sound of soft music and a smell of essential oils. Right inside the door is a reception desk on the left, and in front of the door two sofas are arranged around a wooden coffee table. The room is decorated with Buddha figures from Thailand. Connected to the reception is a hallway with doors and large windows with blinds. Behind the doors are little clinic rooms, all of them fitted with two chairs and a little table, and most of them with a massage table.

Lotus Health Care is a private clinic where seven therapists offer a wide range of ‘alternative health’ (Chryssides 2012: 260) treatments including healing, acupuncture, iris analysis, applied kinesiology, homeopathy, hypnosis, clairvoyance, and massage. In addition to the individual treatments, LHC is host to weekly classes in martial arts and mindfulness, a monthly satsang, two to three *theme evenings* a month where the therapists explain about their work, and two courses in *healing* and *mental training* per year.

The therapists at LHC believe and teach that the human evolution is taking a giant leap forward in these years, and that LAL is both made possible by – and propels this evolution. Kay, the initiator of LAL and owner of LHC, claims that a *change in energies* happened on 21.12.12, and that this change was the immediate precursor for his sudden impulse to stop eating for three weeks and then begin to teach others how to do the same.

The variety of treatments offered at LHC have roots in diverse, predominantly Asian medical traditions. For instance, the therapists at LHC work with *chakras*, energy centres corresponding to the main glands of the body, a concept which comes from Javanese and

Indian health care traditions (Kumar 2005: 80). The concept of *meridians*, which is central to the acupuncture treatments, describes links in the nervous system (ibid.), and comes from Chinese medical theory (Alter 2005: 36). Kay's wife, who is from Thailand, offers Thai massage, and the clients at LHC are often given homeopathy, which was developed in Germany (Chryssides 2012: 224). The therapists also develop the methods further themselves. The therapists at LHC thus draw on traditions from both "Eastern" and "Western" traditions, mix them together in the way they find most useful, and adjust the methods to their personal skills.

The therapists at LHC see their services as an alternative to Western biomedicine. This is obvious at the information evenings, where the therapists tell about their work. At an information evening, where I was the only listener to show up, I got to talk to Frank, who practices acupuncture, homeopathy, and applied kinesiology at LHC, about how it is to work with Chinese medicine in a Western context. He said:

...you start to see a lot of connections, when you begin to go into this system [the Chinese theory of five elements], whereas we in the Western world still look at it very separated. We can remove pain in exactly this area, but to start to see that the things are connected, one doesn't do in the medical world. And that is actually very often visible here [in the Chinese system].

As Frank's answer exemplifies, he does not identify with Western medicine, but rather uses the Chinese model in combination with other models and takes a critical stance towards Western biomedicine.

Unlike many medical doctors in the Western world, the therapists at LHC do not only try to find out *what* is wrong with a client's body, but also *why* this problem occurred. This is similar to the Azande people in Sudan, who also are interested in finding the meaning behind events (Evans-Prichard 1976 [1937]: 18). The therapists at LHC do give a causal explanation for symptoms, similarly to when the Azande are aware that the termites caused an old granary to collapse (ibid.: 22). While magic is the Azande's explanation to why the collapse happened exactly while a certain person was sitting underneath it, the therapists at LHC hold that all accidents and physical dysfunctions occur to teach the person a lesson. While for the Azande, the cause of misfortune is a human's malevolent intentions carried out through witchcraft, to LHC physical illnesses are hints from a benevolent divine source, which wants to teach the person a lesson for the benefit of the person and thus of the whole, which the person is a part of. Using a hunting metaphor, the Azande call witchcraft 'the second spear' (*umbaga*) (Evans-Prichard 1976 [1937]:

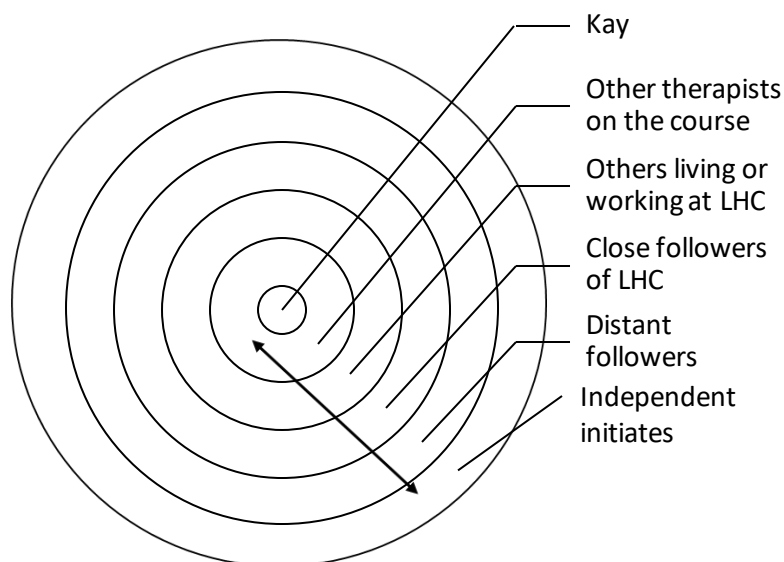
25). When Kay told me why I have become near-sighted through my years at university, the many hours in front of a computer screen was only the physical explanation of *how* it happened, the first spear, whereas the reason *why* was that I tend to “look too far” into the future and must learn to focus on where I am here and now. My lack of focus on the now was thus the second spear that caused my near-sightedness, according to Kay.

The course participants

So far, more than 300 individuals have been initiated to “live on light” at LHC. The course participants are a demographically mixed group. They come from all over Denmark, and since 2015 people from Norway, The Netherlands, Italy, Slovakia, Canada and Argentina have also travelled to Aarhus to be initiated. The age and social background of the initiates span widely and includes e.g. disability pensioners, unemployed, students, therapists, healers, engineers, a surveyor, a shipowner, and a university lecturer. Therapists of many kinds are over-represented among the initiates. What unites the participants is the viewpoint that it is possible, or might be possible, for the human body to live on energy. The question of what makes them come to believe this will be answered in the next paragraph. Kay prefers to give as simple explanations as possible about LAL, which leaves room for diverting individual interpretations of the phenomenon. All of the participants have their own individual interpretation of LAL, which is predominantly inspired by Kay, but is supplemented with information from other sources and personal experience.

Once the course is completed, the participants can choose to stay in contact with LHC and the other participants through Facebook groups for light people, a yearly light people gathering, and courses and events at LHC. Many initiates do not feel comfortable about talking to non-initiates about LAL, because they are scared of being judged as crazy. Therefore, many find comfort in being around other light people, where they feel understood and can share and compare their experiences, but some initiates have no or very little contact to other light people. Kathinka Frøystad defines a ‘religious network’ as “people who interact with one another because they follow the same practice” (2011: 80). Since LAL is no religion in itself, but rather a practice that can be combined with e.g. Christianity, Buddhism, and most commonly non-denominational spirituality, I borrow half of Frøystad’s term, and call the light people a ‘network’. Inspired by Frøystad (*ibid.*),

the light people can thus be viewed as a 'network' in concentric circles with the founder, Kay, in the middle, followed by a ring of the other therapists that work on the course, then the rest of the therapists and inhabitants at LHC, then the initiates who follow LHC



closely, those that follow LHC loosely, and finally the completely independent initiates, who never frequent LHC after having completed the course. As Frøystad (2011: 80) also points out, this model is processual, meaning that the individuals can move towards the centre as their knowledge, belief, and interest in LHC and LAL grows, or they may move away from the centre if they begin to disagree with - or doubt Kay and LAL or simply prefer to deal with their processes on their own, or are forced to this by outer circumstances. Since I have found my informants through LHC, it has not been possible for me to get in contact with any completely independent initiates. This has of course influenced my data, but it does not mean that none of my informants are critical of LAL, as will be elaborated on in chapter three.

When 'the LAL cosmology' is mentioned in this thesis, it refers to the cosmology, which the therapists at LHC share and promote, and which the course participants share to a greater or lesser extent. In cases of uncertainty, Kay's explanations are often quoted, especially by people from the inner circles, and his concepts are thus central in the articulation of the LAL cosmology. Thus, I do not define cosmology as a coherent model of the universe, which all members of a group adhere to equally, as in the 'classical ethnological

period of anthropological research', but as continuously negotiated models of the world (Abramson and Holbraad 2014: 2, 13).

The initiates' motivation

Fasting is a very common religious practice and mentioned in all major world religions (Dollahite et al 2009: 698, Salah-Ud-Din 2011). For the light people however, the choice to be initiated to LAL is not motivated by religious prescriptions. Rather, the most common reason for the participants to join the course is that they feel intuitively drawn to it. They might have doubts in their minds, but if their intuition tells them to take the course, they disregard the mind's doubt. Three other motivational factors are also very common: Health problems, wish for spiritual or personal development, and the wish to find out whether it is possible or not to live on energy. Often people are motivated by multiple of these reasons. A typical example is 26-year old Christina, who studied medicine before the course, and had serious problems with her stomach, and therefore was looking for a cure:

So I tried some different things and then suddenly at a Bruce Lipton event, I found a woman who told me about this Live on LIGHT. And then it was like I came home. Something I had just sought after my whole life, and I just could not explain what it was. And I almost could not sleep for three days because I thought: This is awesome. And then I thought: I am still very interested in the physical body and the transition between living on light and then being in the physical body. But I thought: If I am going to become a doctor, and if I should help people, then I have to have walked the path myself and find out whether this [works]. Because it felt so right for me! I could not say whether it worked or not. I had to try it. So I did.

As Christina's story is an example of, many regard evidence of the possibility of living on energy as evidence that there is much more to the body and the universe than what we understand so far. After Christina had completed the course, she no longer felt that it was right for her to become a doctor, because she did not believe in the medical system anymore, so she quit her studies. Other slightly less common reasons for joining the course are that people are tired of cooking, or have a hard time finding any food they feel like eating, which they also find ethically correct to buy, and which does not harm their bodies.

Some of the participants were skeptical to LHC before they joined the course, but all of the initiates I have talked to already had cosmologies in which living on energy was a theoretical possibility. The vast majority of the participants have at some point in their lives changed cosmology from one in which only matter exists to one where matter is only a part of the universe and spirit plays an important role. This change in cosmologies

has been brought about by experiences that made them question their reality. An example is 24-year old student Daniel A, who is adopted, and one day met what he has concluded must be his deceased biological father:

There had to be an explanation why such a phenomenon could happen. Because everything was real this morning when I saw this figure. The only thing missing was that I could see the face and all of the shape. But it was actually just a black shadow. But it was completely clear and it was in sunlight, so it was very strange. But then I could hear what the person said. I could not understand what the person said. It was another language. But I could hear when he walked up the stairs. I mean it was all so real. I had been lying there for a long time [...] so there was no doubt that I was awake. But that was probably what started it [his search for alternative explanations].

In Daniel's, as in most of the other participants' cases, it was thus an experience, which contradicted what he thought he knew about the world, that made him begin to search for answers. Since their respective revisions of their cosmologies, many of the participants have begun developing *extra sensory* abilities, according to themselves. To be extra sensory, means that they experience using more than the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling, which make up the senses in the Western classification (Robben: 2012: 443). Some claim to be *clairvoyant*, i.e. they get visions, some say they are *clairaudient*, i.e. they hear messages, some believe they are *claircognizant*, i.e. they receive knowledge from another source than the five senses, and some claim to be *clairsentient*, i.e. they feel feelings that are not their own. The initiates find that these abilities can be useful, but that they also can be difficult to handle, when the extra sensory person is affected by others' energy. A few of the participants were born with extra sensory abilities, so to them, non-material energy has always been as real as matter. For instance, 45-year old "E", who explains:

Basically we are energetic beings, so I feel my entire energy system, and it is stuffed into my body, if you can put it like that. So I feel it inside physically, but I can also feel, when I sit like this and wave with the arms, then I can feel energy in some way. I can play with it, sit and make a ball between my hands or something. So it is very physical to me.

Because of the abilities, which "E" and a few other participants were born with, there was never any question in her mind whether energy is real. Besides direct experiences of sensing energy or encountering strange phenomena, many course participants have opened their minds to the idea of LAL through literature. Especially the works of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the anthroposophy, Martinus, a Danish prophet born in 1890, and of Indian yogi Paramahansa Yogananda have inspired many of the participants.

The course: A transformative ritual

By default, the initiates undergo the course alone, but some choose to be initiated on the same day as a friend in order to be able to support each other through the process. The course consists of an *initiation* followed by a *water diet*, which culminates in the so-called *transformation*. The course follows the traditional structure of ‘rites of passage’, defined by Arnold van Gennep as “all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another” (1960: 10). This section will account for the course while analyzing it as a ‘transformative ritual’, drawing on Victor Turner’s “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” (1967). The emic concepts that are mentioned without immediate explanation in this presentation of the course will be explained in the subsequent paragraph.

Turner’s analysis mainly focuses on rituals that have the symbolic function of moving the initiates from one social state in society to another, but transformative rituals can also be used on entry into membership of a group, which does not include the whole society (ibid.: 93), such as LHC. In the case of the LAL course, the participants move from the status of “normal eaters” to become included in the *lysfamilie* (light family), as some initiates call the network of transformed course participants. According to Turner, the function of the rituals he analyses is symbolic: Their purpose is to change the classificatory status of individuals (ibid.: 94). In contrast, in pursuit of taking the cosmology of LHC seriously, this analysis will argue that the ritual actions and bodily changes in the LAL course are not symbolic but experienced as actual and concrete. Differing from the cases in Turner’s analysis (ibid.: 100), this course does not aim to make the initiates obedient to any traditions. Rather, the participants chose on their own initiative to go through the course and thereby discontinue the social norms around food and eating, which they have grown up with. The participants join the course predominantly for their own sake. However, many also see their efforts of joining the course as a contribution to the *human evolution*, because they add their experiences and new abilities to the *common consciousness*. As human evolution is a key concept in the field of LAL, I shall return to elaborate on this concept later on in this chapter.

The initiation

Before the course begins, the initiate signs a disclaimer, reports any diseases or traumas, and pays the course fee of 15.000 Kr, equivalent to 2.235 US \$. By signing the disclaimer, the participant gives up the right to have the money refunded and takes the full responsibility for his or her health. In order to participate in the role of a course participant, I have paid the price of the course out of my own pocket to LHC. In order to avoid owing LHC a certain outcome of the study, and to “compensate contributors justly for any assistance they provide” (AAA 2012: 7), I did not try to negotiate a discount or the possibility of participating free of charge.

After these formalities, the initiation can begin. Camilla shows the initiate two *grounding* exercises designed to help the initiates’ energy remain connected to the energy of the earth, because this is a function food also has, so when the initiates stop eating, they might lose their grounding, which can cause discomforts such a dizziness. Then Camilla takes *aura* photos and -film of the participant who sits down in front of a webcam and places the left hand on a scanner. A computer creates a visualization based on the data from the scanner and combines it with an image taken with the webcam. The scanner reads the aura i.e. the *electromagnetic field* around the body, Camilla explains. Then she gives an interpretation of the film. The most prevailing color is the *personality color*, which reveals the person’s basic traits. Furthermore, she looks at the chakras, to see how much energy the person has, and if there are any imbalances in the chakras.

Then it is time for the first part of the initiation: *The mental training meditation*:

Camilla instructs me to lie down in Frank’s clinic room with pillows and blankets on the massage table, and she gives me a little mp3-player with the instructions on. It is Kay’s voice and some gentle music. There are long pauses between the spoken sentences. [...] The meditation lasts 1 hour and 10 minutes (field note excerpt from my initiation 28.08.15).

After the mental training meditation, the initiate is ready for the second part of the initiation, the *healing initiation*. Before Kay begins to initiate the participant, he makes sure that the person has understood that the procedure is irreversible:

Kay says that getting the initiation is like entering a train, and then the door closes, then the door disappears, and the train takes off, and there is no getting off. (ibid.). Then the initiate lies down on Kay’s massage table and closes the eyes, while Kay performs the initiation. Many initiates describe that they feel a lot of heat coming from his hands, although he does not touch them but keeps his hands a few centimetres above the ir body. According to Kay, a *centre in the brain*, located right behind the left frontal lobe,

controls the intake of energy into the body. According to Kay, during the change in energies on 21.12.12 this center was “opened up”, and can now be activated by him.

Even though the course only has existed since May 2013, it has already undergone great changes, because Kay has received new information from his *Higher Self*, a concept that will be explained later on in this chapter. In the beginning, the initiates had to meet up in small groups of typically four to seven persons at LHC three consecutive Saturdays and meditate for just over five and a half hours with a break half way through, and then have a healing initiation each time, thus in total meditating for 17 hours and getting three healing initiations. In March 2014, the initiation process was changed into only one meditation of an hour and twelve minutes’ duration and one 10-15 minutes long healing initiation.

The initiation marks the ‘separation phase’, in which a detachment from the earlier state happens (van Genneep in Turner 1967: 94). This is particularly evident in the signing of the disclaimer and the talk with Kay, where the participants part with their old life. From the moment of initiation, the body is nurtured by energy instead of food, and all food becomes a source of pollution to the body instead of a source of nourishment, according to the practitioners. Because of her diabetes, 70-year old Emmy was instructed not to go on the water diet right after she had been initiated, but she experienced that the initiation alone made some changes to her body:

I had gathered the whole family; we were going to go to a Chinese restaurant [...]. And when I started on my second portion, the water started running off me. I simply started sweating. I thought “oh well then” and it was also a little warm that day, but anyway. The next day it dawned on me [...]: God, it was because I had been initiated that I could not eat all that food. My body... Now it had started putting its foot down, right? [...] I guarantee that something had happened. So it worked, what he did. And that was a lovely proof of it: Wow! Right?

Some participants chose only to have the initiation and not go through the water diet. This is a cheaper option, and is recommended for those who are not able to carry out a water diet, including children. This study, however, focuses on participants who have completed the water diet.

The water diet

According to the therapists at LHC, from the moment of the initiation, the initiates are fully nurtured by an invisible source of universal energy, and are therefore in theory free

from the need for any calorie intake for the rest of their lives, but have the option of eating something if they should feel like it. However, the potential ability not to eat is not easily carried out in practical reality. In order to change the instinctive conviction that food is necessary for survival, most of the initiates choose to undergo a water diet. During the water diet, the initiate ingests nothing but water, a tiny dose of homeopathic medicine, and if the initiate is in the risk group of gall stone attacks; a ¾ dl of olive oil and the juice of half a lemon once a week. The water diet has the additional purposes of changing the eating habits of the initiate and cleansing the body on three levels: *Physically, emotionally and energetically*. The physical cleansing symptoms are e.g. freezing, white coating on the tongue, bad breath, rashes, coughing, stomachaches and -cramps, and mild versions of earlier health problems such as allergy symptoms reappearing. Emotional cleansing symptoms are when the participant suddenly feels emotions without immediate cause, which are then ascribed to emotional traumas from this or previous lives. The energetic cleansing is only felt by the participants with extra sensory abilities. On the positive side, many experience increased mental clarity, decreased need for sleep, and improved physical senses during and after the water diet. When the course began in May 2013, the typical duration of the water diet was 28 days, but now it only lasts around 14 days. This reduction is due to the previous initiates' contribution to the common consciousness, the therapists explain.

Although there are some rare exceptions, the initiates generally experience the water diet to be very tough. Almost all of them experience weakened powers and weight loss. According to the therapists, the weight loss is not due to lack of nourishment, as the body gets everything it needs from the energy, but due to cleansing of the body. The therapists also claim that the initiates meet exactly the challenges they need for their personal development, and therefore if they want to control their weight, this control is taken from them, so that those who are afraid of losing weight will do so, and those who wish to lose weight will not.

On top of this, many struggle with calming down worried friends and family members, who try to talk them out of their venture. In order to avoid this challenge and causing worry to others, some initiates chose not to tell people, whom they do not expect to understand it, about the course.

The water diet corresponds to the ‘liminal period’ in which the initiate is in the ambiguous place “betwixt and between” to ‘states’ (Turner 1967: 94). The person is no longer “normal” because the body no longer functions like a normal body. At the same time, the initiate is not yet a transformed *light eater*, which means that the *logical left brain* does not yet understand that the body is able to live on energy, and that the instinct to fight for food is still active. Because of their peers’ worries and lack of understanding and support, many initiates end up distancing themselves somewhat to their old social circles after the initiation. Until the transformation, they are not yet recognized as complete light people, which e.g. is visible in the fact that they are not allowed to join the Facebook group created by LHC or join the yearly social gathering for transformed course participants. This change in classification, however, is brought about by what the light people themselves experience as a concrete change in the body, and it is this change that is central for them, while the classificatory change is secondary. The reason why only transformed participants are welcome is that their bodies function in a special way and therefore they cannot compare their experiences with others, according to the therapists. The argument that only those who have been through LAL themselves can understand it is very common amongst the light people and resembles Renato Rosaldo’s argument that only anthropologists who have experienced grief can understand it (2004 [1984]). Social exclusion is characteristic of a ‘liminal phase’ (Turner 1967: 98). In the water diet many initiates retreat from their social life because of the need for extra rest and the inability to join in a meal with others. This is again different from Turner’s cases, where the peers deliberately exclude the neophyte because they do not conform to classificatory categories and therefore ought not to be seen (ibid.: 100). The initiates on water diet are rather in between two social networks: They can no longer join a meal with their old friends, and they are not yet full members of the LHC network, and in this sense they are ‘betwixt and between’ (ibid.: 97). During the water diet, the initiates go through an “inward conceptual process” just like the liminal subjects in Turner’s analysis (ibid.: 96). The point of the water diet is that their minds must grasp the new bodily reality, so that this reality can manifest itself fully without being blocked by the mind. Thus, the process is partly but not only conceptual in the sense that a change happens to the initiates’ conceptual understanding of their own bodies. It is important to understand, however, that from the point of view of the light

people, the physical change of the body is primary and needs to be followed by a conceptual refiguring, which then creates the final bodily change. In their view, a conceptual change can thus not stand alone. Van Gennep distinguishes between rites that work directly and those that work indirectly (van Gennep 1960: 8). The course is thought to work directly, because it is “designed to produce results immediately without intervention by an outside agent” (van Gennep 1960: 8) and the effect is supposedly automatic (ibid.).

The transformation

The water diet ends with the so-called transformation, where the brain and body supposedly understand that the person can live on energy, and the instinct to fight for food disappears. Kay predicts exactly what minute the transformation will begin for each initiate and recommends that the person sits down quietly to experience what happens inside themselves at that time. The 24-year old student Mathias tells about what he experienced:

I started to feel that everything just pulsated right from the bone marrow almost, just waves out through all of my aura. Everywhere. It was very special to experience. So maybe three-four minutes where it just pulsated and pulsated. And then it tightened in my head, the top of the head tightened a lot, and then it let go. And then I knew: Okay now it happened. And then the next 15 minutes some things happened. E.g., that suddenly my legs started to tighten crazily, and then they let go. And then I had all powers back in my whole body. So for 15 days I had been completely drained. Then after that, I could just throw big trash bags, walk around and move beds, all sorts of things. Completely like before.

Many initiates have internal experiences similar to Mathias with different sensations in the physical- and *energetic body*, and some also get visions. Others do not notice anything special happening. After the transformation, the initiates are free to eat again when they want. Few choose to test their new abilities and see how long they can manage to go on without eating, but most initiates look so much forward to eating again after the water diet that they cannot wait any longer. Most participants begin looking forward to this meal already in the beginning of the water diet.

The transformation marks the ‘aggregation’, where “the passage is consummated” (Turner 1967: 94). The initiate is now considered fully able to live on energy. The transformation is regarded a kind of rebirth, because the body functions in a completely different way from this day. According to Turner, many rites of passage symbolically play out the death of the initiate’s old classificatory role and the birth the new role (Turner 1967: 96).

In the case of LAL, when the light people refer to the transformation as a rebirth, they do not mean it as a symbolic change of categories. They call it a rebirth because they experience that from this day, the body functions in a new way, e.g. it reacts differently to the various kinds of food than it did before, has a changed energy level, and a changed need for sleep. The initiates now have to get to know their bodies over again, as if they were born again with a new body. To them, the primary change has to do with the actual body, while the change of categories is a secondary consequence.

The degree to which most of the initiates long for food after the water diet shows that although the initiates supposedly have been enabled to live completely without food in theory, this is not what they feel like doing in practice, and thus none of the light people I have met live without ever eating anything. Therefore, it is very hard to know whether they would be able to do so, if they wanted to.

Like for any anthropologist, my role in the field was partly 'insider' and partly 'outsider' (O'Reilly 2012: 98). I have been researching spirituality and the big questions in life for many years, wherefore I had some background knowledge on some of the topics the light people talked about, which made it easier for me to blend in. Furthermore, my sister has taken the course before me, which made it easier for me to be accepted in a field where scientists and journalists are sometimes met with some amount of scepticism. However, being a researcher and new to LAL, my background knowledge alone did not make me an insider. Initiates are recognised as full members of the LAL network with access to the Facebook groups and yearly gatherings once they are transformed, and this acceptance was also granted me once I transformed. The way I could achieve access to the field is therefore connected to the epistemology of the field: Bodily experience is considered necessary for understanding what LAL is about, so only through bodily participation could they accept my intention to take LAL seriously. Being aware that completely objective observation is impossible (Kempny and Burszta 1994: 123), I have been conscious of my own position and its advantages and challenges rather than pursuing complete objectivity. Knowing that the knowledge I gained from my participation is only a 'vicarious knowledge' (Okely 1992: 37), which is partial and never exactly similar to the experience of my informants, I have not concluded anything on the basis of my personal experiences alone, but rather used my insights from participating bodily in LAL to make sense of what my informants were telling me.

After the course

For many, the time after the transformation is the beginning of a long and challenging but interesting process of getting to know themselves over again. They are being told by the therapists that the body is now nurtured by energy, and that food is bad for the body and may cause *food hangovers*. According to the therapists, all kinds of food are to a greater or lesser extent polluting the body because they contain toxins and other material parts, which the body does not need. Pure energy is therefore, in their eyes, the only source of nourishment which is free from side effects. However, the initiates are also encouraged to do what they *feel like*, even if it means eating only the same kind of cake for a month. To many newly transformed light people, this dilemma causes many internal battles: They feel like eating all the things they have missed out on because they have restricted themselves or their parents have denied them it, and they are encouraged by the therapists to live out all these cravings. On the other hand, they know that any kind of food is bad for the body, and the best thing would be not to eat at all. This might seem like the same dilemma that all non-initiated people have when they are faced with the temptation of eating unhealthy but well-tasting food. However, a main difference is that the light people are supposed to do what they feel, whereas others are supposed to restrict themselves, according to health experts and common sense. Although there are many day-to-day variations and individuals who experience different processes, the typical pattern is that the initiates eat a lot of the specific kind of food they have been wanting for some months, and then it gradually becomes easier for them to eat less. Some light people refer to this first time after the course as *a deflipfasen* (the munchies phase). In this phase, the initiates can be compared to children let loose in a candy shop without their parents, who have to gain their own experiences by eating all they can and learning from it. By eating whatever they feel like, more and more of their cravings are satisfied and they unravel the emotional issues behind the cravings. These patterns provide an example of how big a role emotions play in eating (see e.g. Choo 2004 and Hertz et al. 2012). LAL thus functions as a way to facilitate personal development through revealing suppressed emotional issues and getting them resolved. Fasting is a well-known phenomenon from religions, where it is seen as a form of sacrifice (Dollahite et al. 2009: 698). Dollahite et al. argue that in the modern era, sacrifice has become secularized and is now a “means of exploring and articulating the subjective” and is no longer necessarily associated to social and religious systems

(ibid.: 694). Similarly, LAL can definitely be described as a process of exploring the subjective. When the munchies phase eases off, the initiates find their way into an eating pattern that suits them better, although it is a continuous process of finding the perfect balance between eating what they feel like, not eating too much, and keeping the *cleansing symptoms* at bay, which begin again like in the water diet, when they do not eat. It varies immensely how much the initiates end up eating. It is generally easier for those who live alone not to fall back into a pattern that resembles their previous eating patterns. The three participants I have encountered who eat the least are all men who live alone. “J” typically eats 200 g of fried vegetables a day, Eskild normally eats two pieces of crispbread with aioli a day, and Daniel A usually eats a piece of fish a week and some small snacks a couple of times a week. These amounts are their own estimations. Besides these very moderate food intakes, they eat socially on occasion. In terms of health, many participants experience improvements, which they explain by the effect of the energy and the cleansing of the body.

Kay tells the initiates that they must eat what they feel like. By this, he actually means what their soul feels like, and not what their minds feel like. Often it is difficult for the initiates at first to figure out what their souls feel like, because the mind interferes with habits, learned taste, emotional issues etc. However, as they practice figuring out what food they feel like, they gradually become better at figuring out what they feel like in all other areas of life. This makes many initiates change many things in their lives: Some get divorced, some change careers, and many end unrewarding friendships. To many of the initiates, the course thus changes their life radically, although they continue to eat in a new pattern. Stanley Walens writes about the Kwakiutl of coastal Northwest America, that

The Kwakiutl universe is a universe of related beings, all of whom have the moral responsibility to control their eating. Eating is a universal property of the world, and thus it is the basis for morality (Walens 1981: 6).

While controlling one’s eating is central to the morality of the Kwakiutl and many others, this moral obligation along with the obligation to follow other cultural norms is rejected by the light people as Kay directly encourages the initiates to only do what they feel like and not what others expect from them. This way of living is in stark contrast to how the

initiates were raised, where they were taught by their parents to live up to social expectations. In this sense the initiates are encouraged to replace their sense of moral behaviour and stop acting according to social prescriptions and instead listen solely to their intuition. This is a radical change, which sometimes makes the light people appear rather selfish to outsiders.

The LAL cosmology: “Everything is energy”

This paragraph will account for the cosmology of the light people. As mentioned, ‘the LAL cosmology’ refers to the cosmology, which the therapists to a great extent share, and which they teach the course participants about. As has been demonstrated, the course participants already have cosmologies, which are overall compatible with the cosmology of LHC, although they might disagree on minor issues.

According to Kay, everything in the universe consists of one energy, from which reality is manifested. With their thoughts, human beings make the energy manifest a reality, which mirrors the person’s thoughts. The universal energy, which the participants are initiated to live on, is synonymous to the Chinese concept of *qi* and the Sanskrit concept of *prana*, Kay says. Prana means “the vital life force” (Alter 2004: 36), and *qi* translates as “vital activity of life energy” or simply “energy” (Xu et al 2005: 300). This is the energy, which he initiates people to live on, Kay explains:

It is not light-energy. It doesn’t have a shit to do with light. It is universal energy. It is what makes everything. So it makes your phone, makes water, makes everything. It is that, which makes it all. That is what we live on.

Because everything consists of one and the same energy, everything is internally connected. This is an example of that which Don Handelman (2008: 181), describing a Native American cosmology, calls an ‘organic cosmos’. In opposition to a ‘discontinuous cosmos’ where belief connects the world with its transcendent creator, the organic cosmos is “held together within itself” (ibid.), because all sentience is “densely interrelated” (ibid.: 182). The 39-year old initiate Kristine expresses the connectedness of the cosmos in this way:

I don’t know how to explain it, but you are a part of the universe, you are a part of God. God has created you in his image but not so that you can look at God. One has to feel what feels right. We have God inside of us - or a part of God - in all of us.

The light people share some ideas with animists. Descola writes that “animism endows natural beings with human dispositions and attributes” (Descola in Pedersen 2001:

412). Similarly, the light people agree e.g. that water has memory, and the initiate “E” even says that she can communicate with animals telepathically. However, I do not consider the light people to be animists, since they do not share the “fundamental animist principle” of ‘analogous identification’, i.e. that “every element belonging to the whole (apart from its holes) can be interchanged with one another” (Pedersen 2001: 416). For the light people there is a clear distinction between humans and animals rather than an animist “continuity between humans and non-humans” (Descola in Pedersen 2001: 416).

Human evolution

For three reasons, LHC could be externally categorized as part of the so-called ‘New Age Movement’ (Chryssides 2012: 247). Firstly, the range of alternative treatment methods offered at LHC are amongst the “seemingly diverse, yet interconnected interests” (ibid.), which Chryssides takes to be the topic that defines the movement. Secondly, LHC recurrently take part in health fairs popularly associated to the New Age Movement. Thirdly, similarly to the belief in the New Age Movement that planet Earth is entering a *new age* with the transition from the astrological *Age of Pisces* to the *Age of Aquarius* (ibid.: 248), the therapists at LHC claim that the world is in the beginning of *den Ny Tid* (the New Times), which began with a change in energies on 21.12.12. However, both the therapists and most of the clients reject the New Age-label, are sceptical towards the movement, and do not identify with it. As Jenkins writes: “A group is a collectivity which is meaningful to its members and of which they are aware; a category is a collectivity which is defined according to criteria defined by the sociologist or anthropologist” (Jenkins 1997: 54). To ascribe the label “New Age” to the *light people* would thus be an external categorization, which is not meaningful to its members. In attempt to take seriously how the light people identify themselves, I decided not to perform such an external categorization but instead to take their claims that LAL is “for everybody” and is “human evolution” seriously as working hypotheses. This approach led me to two important insights. Firstly, it led me to investigate the background of the participants to find out if LAL is actually for everybody. As demonstrated, it turned out that this is not the case, since those who decide to join the LAL course already sympathise with the cosmology behind LAL. The statement that LAL is for everybody can thus be taken as an expression that everybody is welcome to join the course regardless of their cosmologies, and not that the course in

practical reality appeals to everybody. Secondly, by taking seriously that to the participants LAL is human evolution, I came to understand that the light people's relation to LAL is not that of a religious faith but of a different epistemology, namely intuitive knowledge, as I shall also elaborate on in chapter two.

As Stine Krøijer points out, alternative choices of diet can serve as an act of activism, in which the activist exemplifies a wanted change (2015: 79). Krøijer calls this a 'figuration of the future' (2010). Similarly, many of the light people see LAL as a way to exemplify and create a new and desirable way of living. By calling LAL human evolution, the light people refer to the conviction that in the New Times, human beings will develop abilities, which would currently be called supernatural, such as being able to live on energy. In the LAL cosmology, just as individuals have a consciousness, a common consciousness exists for all humans on Earth, which works like a giant memory bank that individuals can learn to tap into. As in the 'organic cosmos' described by Handelman (2008: 181-182), a change in one being can cause changes in others via this common consciousness. When individuals do something new, their experiences will be added to this common memory and influence others. The initiates see themselves as pioneers of the New Times, who by living on energy contribute with valuable experience to the common consciousness, which others can draw on, thus making it easier for others to learn this new ability. Kay sees it as part of a divine plan that he has been given the ability and responsibility to perform the initiations on people so that this part of the human evolution can happen as planned.

The body in the LAL cosmology

The therapists at LHC view the body as a holistic whole, which is made up of two parts. Like the rest of the universe however, the two parts ultimately consist of the same energy vibrating at different frequencies. The first part is the physical body, which has the heaviest vibrational density. This is the body known to biology and medical science. The second part is the energetic body, which vibrates on a higher frequency, which is invisible to the human eye. Kay explains:

The energetic body is big. It can do anything you want. There are no limits for it. That is also why, when you live on energy, if you have had an organ removed, then it does not mean so much, because there is an energetic system within you. So the energetic organ will always be there. (...) The physical defers to the energy.

Besides the distinction between the physical - and energetic bodies, the light people also distinguish between the *left brain* and the *right brain*. Being aware that the terms contain a biological simplification, the therapists say that the left brain predominantly takes care of logical tasks, and the right brain is responsible for creativity. This distinction is important to the light people, because they use it to describe two distinct modes of being: *Being-in-the-right-brain* and *being-in-the-left-brain*. The latter is a state of being in which the person is identified with the logical mind and the emotions and thoughts the mind generates. The mind is a product of the brain, and is therefore mortal. To be-in-the-left-brain is the same as to be-in-the-mind. Being-in-the-right-brain, on the other hand, is a state of being in which the *consciousness*, which is the person's immortal True Self, is in charge. When I asked Kay whether the consciousness is the same as the soul, he replied:

“It is only a part of the soul that is incarnated. It is a part of the soul, and that is why one can contact one's higher Self. It is actually just the rest of the soul you can contact.”

According to Kay, the soul is thus the True Self, which has a part that is not incarnated, called the *Higher Self*, and a part that is incarnated called the consciousness.

The therapists at LHC teach the course participants to be more in the right brain, by being-the-body instead of being-in-the-mind. The motivation for this is partly that it is supposedly a more pleasant mode of being, and partly that when a person is in the right brain or in the body, she is in contact with the Higher Self through the intuition and therefore able to make more well-informed decisions. The therapists at LHC teach the course participants to be-in-the-body, for instance by smacking a rubber band against one's wrist, because the physical pain brings the consciousness out of the mind and into the body. The participants also learn that when they are in the right brain, they can ask their bodies questions and get the answer in the shape of a feeling in the stomach. A feeling of contraction means “no” and a feeling of expansion and relaxation means “yes”. It is important to distinguish these feelings in the stomach, which come from the soul or True Self, from feelings generated by thoughts in the mind, Camilla, a young psychologist working at LHC, explains:

Feelings can be misleading, because they can have been started in the head. If one is angry about something, then it is actually not a feeling. Then it is the left brain, that starts something, which you think is unfair. But it is still not a feeling. It is still your brain that starts the anger. And it is not always certain that one should act according to the anger, because it can just be some figment of the brain, which does so

that one becomes angry about something. The feelings – the real feelings, if you can call them that – they are in the stomach.

Thus, according to Camilla, the feelings from the mind are not trustworthy, while the feelings in the stomach are. According to her, the feelings from the mind are related to the *ego*, which is a part of the mind that is concerned with pride. To the question of how the body can know what is best for a person, she explains:

The left brain can only say what has happened and the probability that something new will happen or that the same will happen. So it can only judge from what you have experienced, and what you have read that others have experienced or something like that. It will not be able to say what your future will bring you, whereas the stomach or your right brain can. They are actually the same. It knows where you have to go. Your body knows where you have to go. But that of course depends on whether you use this interpretation about what the soul is and what our tasks here in life are. Because one does know that, one's stomach knows that. What it is you must learn from this life, you do know, I mean your right brain and your stomach knows it.

In the cosmology of the therapists at LHC, feelings in the stomach are thus coming directly from the soul, which knows the person's destiny and tasks in life. The perspective of the soul is transcendent because it is not incarnated and thus not restricted by a body, which must necessarily be placed in space and time. In contrast, the mind has a restricted viewpoint and is therefore not as trustworthy. Borrowing the term from Merleau-Ponty, Holbraad and Willerslev call the perspective from all places and times simultaneously a 'view from everywhere' and 'everywhen' (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 333, 344). Holbraad and Willerslev argue that a view from everywhere cannot be occupied by human beings in bodies but is "the spirit way of seeing the world" (2007: 337). Not even by shamans, who can "extend their number of eyes" by letting themselves be possessed by spirits, because the shaman is still restricted by his or her own body (*ibid.*). Kay claims to be able to achieve the view from everywhere of his Higher Self through his intuition and this is what he wants to teach the initiates to do too. At a satsang event he explained to all the listeners, who were primarily initiates:

One could say that I am insanely sensitive, because I can feel everything that is happening inside all of you. I can describe to the tiniest detail when one cell does something and when another cell does something.

Although I borrow these terms from perspectivism, I do not claim that the light people are perspectivists. In perspectivism, the material and the immaterial worlds are each other's invisible flip sides (Viveiros de Castro 2001: 42), whereas in the cosmology of LHC, the material world is not invisible to the spirits. Rather, the cosmos of LHC consists

of hierarchically ordered dimensions, where the spirits residing in higher dimensions have the full overview of the lower dimensions.

Interestingly, it is exactly by using the feelings in the body that the therapists at LHC teach the participants to communicate with their own souls, thus becoming their own shamans in a sense. Kay explains that the ability to feel is related to having the restricted perspective of a body, and that the point about incarnating is to learn through feelings:

We must learn all these feelings that are. And the only way we can learn them is by being in flesh. So by incarnating. Because as soul you don't feel anything. You have no feelings in that sense. You just are.

Thus, when it comes to feelings, the view from everywhere is the same as a 'view from nowhere' (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 333), because of the lack of contrast. When the soul does not have a body, it has no feelings, but when it is in a body, it can communicate through feelings. The implications of this cosmology on the epistemology of the light people will be analysed in chapter 2.

The body in LAL vs. the Cartesian subject

According to Jaana Parviainen, 'the Cartesian gaze' – a disembodied gaze, separated from the world outside – has strongly influenced the natural sciences and how people in the Western world see their bodies (Parviainen 1998: 20-23). Parviainen defines the 'cultural Cartesianism' dominating in the Western world as: "a dualistic attitude in which the Cartesian subject, the disembodied gaze, separates itself from the world outside" (ibid.: 20). Descartes (2008[1924]: 69) uses the word 'mind' for the observer, which is separated from the body. In contrast, the therapists at LHC distinguish between the observing consciousness, which is the True Self, and the mind, which is not the True Self but pretends to be it. The same distinction exists in the practice of 'mindfulness', which is becoming increasingly popular as a method for stress reduction in the West in recent years (Purser and Milillo 2015: 4) and is defined as the practice of "moment-to-moment awareness in a non-judgemental stance" (Fjordback and Wallach 2012: 3). LHC also teaches mindfulness. The word *mindfulness* is deceiving as the goal of it, as it is practiced at LHC, is to detach from the experience of being-in-the-*mind* by being-in-the-body instead. Thus the body is used as a tool to get out of the mind.

Cartesian subjects hold the body in contempt, Parviainen argues, because the self is identified with the mind rather than the body, and the mind is considered the rational and

thereby “higher” aspect of a person (Parviainen 1998: 21). At LHC, the preference is reversed: The mind is regarded the “lower” aspect of a person, because this is where the ego expresses itself through unenlightened thoughts. The body, on the other hand, is highly respected for possessing a knowledge, which is of a purer quality and more in line with the divine plan than the mind could ever achieve. The mind is not considered useless, but is seen as merely a tool, which should be used consciously to make practical decisions. If not kept carefully under watch, the mind takes control over the person. Consequently, the person will live in the mind and therefore think too much, often on the basis of fear, the therapists at LHC argue. At LHC, the body is viewed with deep respect because it is seen as the object through which the True Self expresses itself. This is directly opposed to the Cartesian view on the body, where the body is merely a vehicle, through which the ego can exert its rightful power (ibid.: 22).

In the LAL cosmology, even though everything is energy at an essential level and the cosmos therefore is non-dualistic, on a conceptual level, dualisms persist. While for Descartes the main dualism is that of mind and body, at LHC the main dualism is between the True Self and the body on one side and the mind on the other. This dualism is mirrored in the two distinct modes of being: Being-in-the-mind, where the True Self cannot express itself versus being-in-the-body, where the True Self is in charge.

The body in LAL vs. in phenomenology

Criticizing the Cartesian ‘dualistic attitude’, Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]: xxii) and other phenomenologists argue in favor of studying the body from the perspective of ‘the lived body’, i.e. “the body as experienced, as a living subject itself” (Parviainen 1998: 33). Parviainen argues that people mostly experience their lived bodies in a “vague and superficial manner” (ibid.), and only pay special attention to the body in case of a disturbance from the body. This opinion is supported by Drew Leder, who argues that “one’s own body is rarely the thematic object of experience” because the awareness is directed outwards (Leder 1990: 1). The body is thus merely the place from where the world is experienced, rather than what is experienced. The mindfulness taught at LHC seeks to teach the participants to change this mode of being, because it is seen as preferable to live in contact with the soul rather than the mind. This is pursued through being aware of one’s body, because the focused attention on sensations makes it impossible to be caught up in the mind at the same time. In Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of embodiment, there is no

inner self distinguished from the visible body (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945]: 45). The light people do distinguish between the immortal True Self and the mortal body, although these two are closely connected as the True Self expresses itself through the body.

Heidegger (1962 [1926]: 107) invented the term ‘Being-in-the-world’, which conveys the idea that practical bodily involvement in the world is prior to the mental reflection, and that we cannot regard anything objectively as a detached observer, because the world and human reality are ontologically inseparable. Heidegger (1982 [1927]: 297) thus criticizes Descartes’ separation of mind and world by arguing that the mind is embodied and already in an immediate relation with the world. In phenomenology and the cosmology of LHC alike, the observer is thus connected to the reality he or she observes and therefore his or her mode of being influences this reality. When the world is met through being-in-the-mind, it will be a different kind of world than if it is met through being-in-the-body. Like Being-in-the-world to Heidegger connoted “being absorbed in the world” (Heidegger 1962 [1926]: 80), being-in-the-mind or -body also connotes being absorbed in the mind or body respectively and therefore experiencing the world in a certain way. Therefore, I choose to write these emic terms with hyphens.

Cosmological clashes

Using the interpretation of bodily symptoms as an example, this paragraph demonstrates how the cosmology of the light people conflicts with the cosmology of biomedicine.

During the water diet, it is normal for the initiates to experience physical symptoms such as tiredness, dizziness, and rapid heartbeat. When I went through the water diet myself, I also had problems with dizziness, and one day it was so bad that I decided to call LHC:

Camilla picks up the phone and asks if I have done the grounding exercises. I must admit I have not been too good at getting that done lately. I tell her that I am worried about my blood sugar, because it feels exactly like when I was a blood donor and had problems with fainting. She says that their explanation is that the grounding is missing, and that the mind runs off with me. (Field note excerpt 09.09.15).

As a safety precaution for my fieldwork, I decided to get a second opinion on my health situation throughout the water diet. I therefore consulted a nurse to have my blood sugar and Body Mass Index measured before, during, and at the end of the water diet. On the same day as described above, I consulted the nurse, who tested that my blood sugar was 3.5 and that the recommended minimum is 4.0. The doctor, who passed through the room,

added that it is natural to feel dizzy when the blood sugar is that low. This was on day 13 of the water diet, the day before my transformation, and interestingly on day 20, my blood sugar had increased to 3.7, and I generally felt better and better each day after the transformation, although I did not eat anything in between these two checks. These two conflicting explanations of my dizziness made me very confused about what to think about my body and how to behave. At LHC, the participants are thus introduced to a cosmology of the body, which is very contradictory to how the body is understood and treated in Western biomedicine. Medical doctors and the LHC therapists interpret the same physical symptoms completely differently. Therefore, the therapists encourage the participants not to ask medical doctors for advice, because they “know nothing about living on energy” (Kay 15.09.15). With remembrance to Holbraad’s (2010: 183) famous statement that anthropologists cannot assume that they know what kind of twins or birds the Nuer are talking about, the doctors have, according to Kay, no idea what kind of body he is talking about.

Usually, the initiates follow the advice of LHC to not have their health checked by medical doctors or nurses, but many experience similar symptoms to what I experienced and have to deal with their worried friends and family members, who interpret the body from a biomedical point of view. For instance, the 76-year old healer Willy, who voluntarily continued the water diet for 60 days to test it, was under a lot of pressure from his son to end the process:

There was my own son – I think I have a letter from him somewhere – he said: Yes father, I love you, and you have taught me a lot but that [LAL] is pure fanaticism and this and that and he didn’t hold back. It was condemnation, and they could not look me in the eyes in the family. (...) So you have to deal with that at the same time. So you can talk about that you throw yourself into a process, which has great psychological effect on the surroundings too. And those who have chosen to keep a low profile, there people just think that “well that person is probably a little ill”. But when one choses to be open about the process, then it will cost.

Because of this clash between the biomedical cosmology of the body and that of LHC, many light people are very selective about whom they tell about their process. This leads to some secrecy about their lifestyle, which paradoxically limits the freedom that is a main goal of the LAL venture.

Preliminary conclusion

This chapter has provided an ethnographic introduction to LHC, the course participants, and the LAL course, which has been analyzed as a rite of passage (van Gennep 1960). The cosmology of LHC has been accounted for with an emphasis on what a body is to the light people. It has been argued that the light people distinguish between the True Self and the mind and that they trust more in the former than in the latter. The view on the body in the LAL cosmology has been compared to the body in phenomenology and to the Cartesian body subject, which is prevailing in Western societies. The emic distinction between being-in-the-body and being-in-the-mind, has been identified and analyzed as defining for the person's qualitative experience of the world. Finally, it has been demonstrated how the same bodily symptoms are interpreted in two very different ways in the cosmology of LHC and biomedicine respectively, which creates a challenging situation for the initiates who have to navigate in a context where these cosmologies are competing.

According to Holbraad (2010: 184), the goal of an anthropological analysis of a seemingly absurd claim is to arrive at a position from which the claim no longer registers as absurd. As this chapter has demonstrated, within the LAL cosmology, it is not absurd that a body can live on energy because everything is energy and the physical body defers to the energy. However, what might remain puzzling to the reader is how the light people can believe in this cosmology when they have not yet seen any proof of LAL. This leads to the question, which will be answered in the next chapter: What kind of epistemology do the light people live by?

Chapter 2 - The rationality and epistemology of LAL

Being-in-the-mind: Rationality

In this chapter, I account for the epistemology of the light people, and argue that being-in-the-mind and being-in-the-body are connected to two distinct epistemologies: Rationality and intuition. I conclude that the light people like any other human beings have the ability to be rational, but that they aim for a balance between using the rational mind and the intuition.

With Jarvie and Agassi, I define ‘rational thought’ as “orderly, systematic, mental concentration” (Jarvie and Agassi 2002: 469). As has been demonstrated, the *light people*, distinguish between mind and soul or true Self. In the LAL cosmology, the mind, often called the *rational- or logical mind*, is located primarily in the left brain hemisphere, and is merely a tool for logical thinking, a calculator so to speak. However, according to Kay, most people in the West “live in the mind” almost all the time with the result that they identify with the mind and thus let the mind be in control. The therapists at LHC teach their clients to become aware of this so that they can avoid that the mind is automatically in charge, and instead use the mind as a tool for logical thinking when this is appropriate. An example is when Helene, who performs iris analysis on the course participants, advised a young woman to talk aloud to her own left brain and tell it to be quiet when it wants to interfere in something which is none of its business. “You must just feel and be in yourself”, Helene told the young woman. “Avoid analysing”. The left brain or the logical mind should deal with practical things, while being-in-the-right-brain is the mode where the soul can express itself: “So that is where you should be the rest of the time, because that is where you are you”, Helene advised her client (field notes 24.08.15). The same day Helene asked me about my future plans, and advised me to use the mind as tool for making an important choice regarding my future: “One needs to sit down with the logical mind and look at the pros and cons”, she said. Thus, being-in-the-mind is a mode of being in which the logical mind, which is rational, is in charge. The light people are advised to use the mind as a tool for making certain rational decisions, but to avoid being-in-the-mind the majority of the time.

Being-in-the-body: Intuition

As shall now be demonstrated, intuitive knowledge is regarded as more trustworthy than rational knowledge in the LAL cosmology.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, according to the LAL cosmology, the body is a tool for connecting to the True Self and circumventing the distractions of the mind. By practicing being-in-the-body, the light people aim at accessing the knowledge of the true Self. As described, a main difference between the True Self and the logical mind lies in their perspectives. The reason why the intuition is so trustworthy to the light people is that the True Self has a view from everywhere (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 333). In the LAL cosmology, only a part of the True Self is incarnated, while the main part of it stays behind in the higher dimensions when a soul incarnates into a body. Through communicating with one's True Self it is therefore possible to receive guidance from the True Self, which has the view from everywhere and everywhen, while being a human being in a physical body.

When a person is in a state of being-in-the-mind, he or she bases decisions on rational, logical analysis of material data, while when a person is being-in-the-body, he or she is guided by his or her intuition. Because of the conception of the intuition as coming from a position of a greater overview than the logical mind, the light people tend to trust their intuition more than their rational minds. An example of this is that, as mentioned, the most common motivation for the light people to join the course is that they feel guided to do so by their intuition. Rationalism can be defined as the belief that humans a) have the capacity to be rational and b) should aspire to achieve as rational a life as possible (Steinberger 2015: 751). The light people agree that humans have the capacity to be rational, but they reject the idea that we should strive for as rational a life as possible, and instead they strive for the opposite, namely a life based more on intuition. Therefore, the light people can be called anti-rationalists. However, they do not argue for abandoning the use of the rational mind completely, but for a better balance between the mind and the intuition.

The LAL lifestyle: Do what you feel

Because of the strong trust in the intuition above rationality, it is important to do what one intuitively feels is right, and not what one thinks is right to do. By acting on one's

feelings, the person is more safe to do what is in the highest interest of the soul and avoid following the wishes of the ego or the mind. The challenge for the course participants is to learn to sense what they feel without letting the mind interfere. Feelings can be difficult to interpret because some of them are created by the mind and others come from the soul, as has been demonstrated. By learning to listen to the intuition, the initiates become aware of how they earlier largely lived according to their minds and external demands, and begin to change their lifestyles radically, so it fits their feelings better. For instance, I have talked to initiates who got divorced, dropped out of university, and ended un-rewarding friendships after LAL, because they could suddenly feel that they were not happy with these elements of their lives. The extent of the changes that happen for the initiates when they begin to act more in accordance to their intuition than their rationality, suggests that it is very common in the Danish society to act based on rationality and external expectations rather than feelings. This ideal of course has great impacts on the social life of the initiates, who become less polite but more honest about their feelings. Camilla describes the social life at LHC, where she also lives:

People say: So it is a commune. Yes but I actually think it is freer than that, because we are just together but without having obligations to each other. If you don't feel like being with the others one night, then you just leave. Nothing is ever questioned. There is never anyone who is after you: "Why do you have to do that?" or "aren't you coming out here?" or "why are you angry?" or something. Not at all. You are just allowed to be. So that is really nice.

This way of being around each other was very new to me, having been raised with the idea that putting one's own needs first is rude. Kay calls this ideal *positive egoism*. He thinks that it is positive because a person's primary responsibility is to take care of what one's soul wants.

Drawing on Levin, Parviainen argues that

"Because the body we live has an 'intelligence' of its own, it can tell us, sometimes very precisely, what it is we need from the present lived moment of our historical situation. There is *givenness* concerning embodiment and participation in nature, cultural and social fields." (Parviainen 1998: 30, emphasis original)

The 'givenness' described here resembles the givenness, which the course participants experience, when they are being-in-the-body. However, in Parviainen's description, the givenness comes from the biological intelligence of the body, whereas the light people, ascribe the givenness to deep and doubtless knowledge held by the True Self, which the person can draw on via the intuition and bodily sensations.

Being-in-the-body as method

Proponents of the ontological turn have argued that anthropologists should let their conceptual understanding of the world be expanded by including emic concepts in their analyses (Holbraad 2009: 91, Krøijer 2015: 80, Palaček and Risjord 2013: 6). This paragraph presents the emic method of being-in-the-body and suggests it as an ethnographic method, which can facilitate a decolonization of thought. I do not claim that this method rids the ethnographer of all bias, but I suggest that it may be helpful in generating reflexivity on our mode of being in the field.

As Willerslev (2007: 184) has argued, anthropologists are not exempt from being culturally biased. As Western anthropologists, we are influenced by the Cartesian epistemology, in which the rational mind is separated from the world (ibid.). Willerslev's solution to this problem is to take seriously not only the content of the Yukaghir cosmos, but also "their perception of themselves and the world around them", i.e. their way of Being-in-the-world and their epistemology (ibid.: 185). Consequently, in order to avoid creating a 'cognized' representation of the Yukaghirs, Willerslev takes a phenomenological approach in his fieldwork, as this fits well with the Yukaghirs' "basic state of human existence", which is "not that of a contemplating subject making abstract assertions about the world, but of a being immersed from the beginning in active perceptual engagement with others" (ibid.). Similarly, I have found that the light people prefer to be in a mode of immersed engagement in the world (being-in-the-body), instead of the Cartesian separated reflection upon the world (being-in-the-mind). Therefore, I found it necessary to pursue being-in-the-body as much as possible during my fieldwork, in order to understand this aspect of their reality. This field note excerpt from my six-day long stay in my key informant Daniel A's home describes the moment when I suddenly understood what it means to be-in-the-body:

Then we decide to go for another walk to another lake (...). The sun is shining beautifully. I continuously catch myself walking fast, and try to slow down in a relaxed speed that fits Daniel's walking speed. At one point I stop to enjoy the sun and just look at how the rays shine through the leaves and branches of a tree. "Now you are starting to get it", Daniel says. "Get what?" I ask. "Being present in the Now" he says. I think it is true that my constant observation mode keeps me from just being present in the now. I am thinking about my methods, theory, and analysis, and trying to remember what we have done and have talked about, so I can write it down later. It is a paradox to do fieldwork "from the mind" about the body and a field in which they all see it as a goal to "come home to oneself" and to "be in the body". In order

to do this, I have to leave the head for a while, which scares me, because I am afraid of forgetting something important, which I need to write down.

Several times before this episode, I had been instructed by the therapists at LHC to “be in the body”, and I attempted to do so by consciously feeling sensations in my body, and then writing down what I had felt right after. I thought that I was automatically being-in-the-body when I used the phenomenological method in my fieldwork:

The phenomenological method is above all one of direct understanding and in-depth description – a way of according equal weight to all modalities of human experience, however they are named, and deconstructing the ideological trappings they take on when they are theorized. (Jackson 1996: 2)

However, as I realized from this experience with Daniel, because phenomenology is still an intellectual endeavour, my observation-mode kept me from experiencing the mode of being, which I was trying to learn about. Being-in-the-mind is a mode of being where the person is thinking, analysing, and figuring out what is happening. Being-in-the-body on the other hand, is a childlike mode of being where one is present in the moment, the consciousness being occupied with experiencing what is happening rather than interpreting and categorising it. Before Daniel pointed out to me that I was being-in-the-body, I was not able to tell the difference between these two modes of being, although it was not the first time I had been in this mode. This showed me, that my informants were right in saying that it would be impossible for me to understand certain aspects of their lives until I tried it myself. After realizing what my informants actually meant by being-in-the-body, I decided to consciously put away my notebook as often as possible in order to let myself be absorbed by the moment and experience it in a different way than if I had to write notes while experiencing something. Being-in-the-body is also called *being-in-the-now*. In opposition to the mind, the body cannot travel to other times or places than were it is right now, so therefore when one is being-in-the-body, one is also necessarily being-in-the-now. When I became aware of the distinction between being-in-the-body and being-in-the-mind, I realized that I was “in the mind” most of the time, and especially when I was working ethnographically, which according to LHC is typical for people in the Western world, and especially scientists and intellectuals. This struck me as paradoxical since anthropologists aim to “grasp the native’s point of view” (Malinowski 1922: 25), because how can this be possible if the world we see is thoroughly shaped by our own concepts? I will suggest that the emic concepts being-in-the-body and being-in-the-mind can be helpful for anthropologists to provide a language to talk about what mode of being we are

in or aim to be in for certain tasks. While the light people strive to be-in-the-body most of the time, being-in-the-body is not only a learned mode of being but also a natural mode of being, which everybody is in every now and then, but some are more than others. Therefore, ethnographers are also naturally being-in-the-body from time to time during fieldwork. Moreover, being trained in participant observation and perhaps even a phenomenological – or ‘anthropology of the senses’-approach, some ethnographers already aim to “challenge a mentalist bias” (Lock and Farquhar 2007: 9) in anthropology during participation in the field, and I suggest that the term being-in-the-body might be useful to describe what they are doing. To those ethnographers, who like myself, have a tendency to observe the field through concepts and already interpret while observing, the concept of being-in-the-body might serve as a suggestion of an alternative mode of participating in the field. The distinction between being-in-the-mind and being-in-the-body can thus both help avoiding being exclusively in-the-mind and be used to describe how we can achieve the phenomenological goal of “direct understanding” (Jackson 1996: 2). By suggesting being-in-the-body as a helpful method in fieldwork, I do not mean to abandon the anthropological tradition of doing a fieldwork that is grounded in theory (Forsythe 1999: 128, O’Reilly 2012: 30) or abandoning the perspective of the ‘ethnographic stance’, which helps to “take as little as possible for granted” (Forsythe 1999: 129). Instead, I simply mean to suggest supplementing our presence in the field where we are being-in-the-mind with moments where we put the notebook physically and mentally aside and let ourselves be grasped by the moment and the experience, and allow ourselves to “lose our minds” temporarily, before we return to being-in-the-mind to describe and analyse our observations. After I learned to distinguish when I was being-in-the-mind or –the-body respectively, I deliberately chose fieldwork methods that would allow me to be-in-the-body as much as possible, for instance by using an audio recorder whenever possible to remove the stress of having to remember everything that is said and done. This allowed me to focus all my attention on experiencing what happened in the present moment, and thereby move one step closer to experiencing e.g. the sessions with the therapists at LHC in a way that is more similar to how initiates experience them. The aim of this suggestion is not that ethnographers should experience everything exactly in the same way as the informants do, since this is both unrealistic (Beatty 2010: 432-433, Dalsgård in press: 21) and would remove the value of ethnographic fieldwork that lies in the ability to observe

different things than people do in their everyday lives (Forsythe 1999: 129). However, inspired by Willerslev and Suhr, I suggest that profound anthropological insights can occur in situations where the ethnographer's "conceptual grasp upon the world is lost" (in press: 1), and that ethnographers are more likely to lose their conceptual grasp upon the world, if they dare to temporarily step out of the mind and into the body. Along a similar line, Willerslev advocates for an Ingoldian phenomenological approach to animism, because:

By taking seriously the actual experiences of the practitioners in this way, the theory allows anthropologists to analyze animistic beliefs in a way that is compatible with the indigenous peoples' own accounts, which tend to be based on hands on experience with animals and things rather than on abstract theoretical contemplation. (Willerslev 2013: 49)

In my own fieldwork, learning to be-in-the-body turned out to be essential in understanding the way in which the light people engage with the world: When one is being-in-the-body, acting on intuition in the moment, it is easier to distance oneself from the materialist cosmology, which is the basis of the current scientific paradigm (Beauregard et al 2014: 272) in favour of a cosmology based on direct sensing of oneself and the world. When the senses of the light people include feeling energy, believing in the existence of energy seizes to be irrational, and the question of whether it is irrational even loses relevance because of the experience that the rational mind cannot grasp the world in as complex a way as the body and consciousness can. Furthermore, the methodological point, which I claim to be of general relevance, is that after I learned to be-in-the-body, it became easier to bracket my scepticism and experience the events that happened in the field before analysing them. I thus suggest that by being-in-the-body during some of the fieldwork, ethnographers have easier access to taking their experiences seriously, because the enhanced focus on experiencing takes up the full experiential capacity, allowing no conceptual filter to persist, and thus creating what Viveiros de Castro calls a 'decolonization of thought' (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 128), which is effective for generating profound anthropological insights. A decolonization of thought is the alternation of our own ways of thinking that Viveiros de Castro suggests should follow the encounter with alterity (ibid.: 145). "Anthropology is a conceptual practice whose aim is to make alterity reveal its powers of alternation", Viveiros de Castro (ibid.) writes. Thus, to Viveiros de Castro, a decolonization of thought is achieved through a conceptual practice of making sense of

unfamiliar phenomena. My suggestion is that a decolonization of thought is also achievable through being-in-the-body, i.e. a temporary de-conceptualisation of ourselves. I will return to discuss Viveiros de Castro's concept in chapter 3. With his phenomenological theory of perception, Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) "sought ways to explore the body's primordial contact with the world prior to the impact of analysis" (Parviainen 1998: 13). I suggest that the emic method of being-in-the-body is a useful phenomenological method for this, because it enables the person to engage directly with the world without a mental filter of interpretation. My contribution thus lies in the formulation of the concept being-in-the-body to describe an already existing phenomenological aspiration, as well as in the warning that if not deliberately avoided then a constant observation-mode and conceptual focus in the field might in fact keep the anthropologist from experiencing the world in a similar manner to the informants. The phenomenological approach used in this method thus points to a problematic issue in the ontological turn, namely that it aims to understand otherness mainly through concepts (Holbraad 2009), while in fact sometimes the cosmology of the "others" we study is essentially practical and intimately bound up with engaged activity, as is the case with the Yukaghirs in Willerslev's study (2013: 49-50) as well as with the light people.

The challenge of translating from experience to words

A recurring challenge of this study has been the classic phenomenological problem: How to translate from bodily experienced reality to conceptual description without reducing the complex reality of the experience? (Jackson 1983, Sperber 1989: 6). Quoting Kay's comment on an initiate's explanation of how LAL works, the answer to this challenge must be that it is in fact impossible to give a full written account of LAL, because while the state of being-in-the-body allows for perceiving fuzzy and holistic bodily experiences, intellectual accounts are by nature perceived from a state of being-in-the-mind and must be reduced in order to fit into the conceptual boxes that are at our disposal:

It is just a way to explain something so that people can understand just a little bit of it with the left brain. But you cannot explain it with the left brain. It is not possible. So you cannot write it. This is something you have to be in because otherwise you don't know what it is. [...] So it is not completely truthful. Not at all. But it is also not completely a lie. There is just something missing.

However, being aware that anthropological accounts are not exact mirrors of the reality but reducing by nature, it is relevant to look at *what* changes in this translation. Staying

within the emic language, this translation from experiential reality to represented reality includes a movement from the body to the mind. While experiencing reality, a person is being-in-the-body, and as soon as this person puts the experience into words, it is almost impossible not to be-in-the-mind and talk to other people's minds. This is a well-known problem within phenomenology (Jackson 1983). As Parviainen writes

What is the body as experienced? Each time we use language to answer this question, we construct the body according to the metaphysics implicit in language, for instance, in the terms of its the mechanism of a biological organism. The living body as experienced is far from definite. (Parviainen 1998: 33)

The explanation of an experience can thus never be exactly the same as the experience itself, and as soon as an explanation is provided, the person naturally enters a state of being-in-the-mind. The problem of reductionism in the translation between an experience and the conceptualization of the experience is thus a basic condition for anthropology, even for phenomenologists who seek out bodily experiences, but still have to conceptualize it (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008: 48). In bodily experiences phenomena are interconnected and open-ended, but in descriptions it is necessary to divide and reduce the world into words in order to describe it. This, however, does not make the description useless. Rather, by virtue of being different from the experience itself, the description conceptualizes the experience into a language, which the logical brain can understand. This is necessary for verbal communication and for the development of anthropological theory, which is by definition conceptual and in-the-mind. When dealing theoretically with bodily phenomena it is important to be aware of the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge of the mind and body respectively.

Although it is impossible to provide an exact conceptual account of lived experience, all the insights generated by anthropological literature demonstrate that this goal is worth pursuing anyway, because an incomplete understanding is better than no understanding.

After this methodological discussion of being-in-the-body, I will now return to the analysis of the epistemology of the light people.

Belief, doubt, and knowledge

As Viveiros de Castro writes, it is important not to impose the concept of 'belief' on alien thought, when it is not experienced as such by the insiders (2011: 136). The fact that several of my informants corrected me when I called their trust in their intuitive

knowledge a “belief”, guided me to the understanding that in the epistemology of the light people, intuitive knowledge is a different kind of knowledge than religious belief. Kay trusts his intuitive knowledge so strongly, that to him LAL is not a matter of belief but a matter of facts. Therefore, he is convinced that his cosmology is factual and thus relevant for anybody. The initiates also normally speak about LAL not in a language of faith, but a language of knowledge. An example is Emmy, who suggested using the concept *alternative knowledge* instead of my words “spiritual beliefs” (Emmy 26.10.15). As mentioned, the *light people* also draw strongly on their intuition, which they often feel through a bodily sensation or a sudden experience of knowing something for certain, without necessarily knowing the source of the information. This feeling of intuitive knowing is so strong that they all refused my label “faith” to describe it. To them, knowledge from the intuition is more valid than the knowledge from the mind. The difference between intuitive knowledge and ‘faith’ is that in faith there is necessarily doubt (Kierkegaard 2005[1843]: 51), while intuitive knowledge cannot be questioned, because what the soul feels is always true regardless of what the mind can conclude. However, the light people are not always in contact with their intuitive knowledge, because they are also sometimes being-in-the-mind, and therefore they can experience doubt at these times. This is similar to the observation made by Holbraad of the Cuban Santería initiates, *santeros* (Holbraad 2008: 94), where the diviners are regarded “imperfect humans” and may therefore make mistakes, while the deities themselves “never lie” (ibid.: 100). As I shall return to in the next paragraph, while some participants are convinced from the outset that LAL is possible, others join the course as an experiment to test the phenomenon and thereby re-evaluate their own cosmology. It is also common for the course participants, who are convinced that it is theoretically possible to stop eating completely, to doubt that it is possible for themselves at the present point in their development. For instance, 49-year old “O” explained:

I believe that it is possible, but I can be in doubt whether it is possible for me. And I can be in doubt if I can get the right circumstances, but if not before then I might get them when I retire [laughs].

Many initiates say that they have moments of doubt of LAL, but they only rarely doubt their overall cosmology, and never their intuitive knowledge. Rather, what they tend to doubt is concrete elements such as their own abilities, and sometimes Kay’s words. The 53-year old participant Monica explains:

Well deep down I am not in doubt. That is what I have been acting upon, when I say that I have acted and not thought about it. So the part of me, which is not in doubt, which knows what I am here for and so on, which cannot always be described with words: Not a second of doubt. But my left brain or my ego or whatever we should call it, has been a lot in doubt sometimes and thought “I should never have done that”, but that has become less and less.

As Monica’s explanation exemplifies, the light people distinguish between the knowledge of the True Self, which cannot rightfully be called faith or belief according to the light people, and the ponderings of the logical left brain or the mind, which shifts back and forth between doubt and being convinced depending on the experience and evidence available at that moment. It would thus be imprecise to call the intuitive knowledge of the True Self faith, because there is no doubt when the person is in contact with the true Self. The doubt comes in when the mind is in charge, because the mind undertakes a logical examination of the facts at hand, and produces a preliminary conviction, which will remain until further evidence or experience challenges it. Therefore, faith is not the most adequate term to describe the light people’s relation to LAL. Rather, Monica’s example shows that the light people operate with two different epistemologies, depending on “which brain hemisphere they are in”, as they would put it. When being-in-the-mind, the left brain, they think logically, and when being-in-the-body, the right brain, they act on intuition without rational thinking.

Even initiates who have experienced few changes after the course, express that they still believe that LAL is possible and that they remain hopeful that the health improvements they expected from the course are yet to come. An example is the 70 year-old author Rico, who has not experienced any significant changes after the course. When he watched a critical TV-programme about LAL, he got in doubt about the whole phenomenon and decided to re-read his *light-report*, a report written by the therapists at LHC, where they sum up the results of the tests they perform on the participant. When Rico saw the *aura photos* in the report, he became reassured that something had indeed happened, because he could see “an enormous difference” between the aura photos from before and after the course.

As mentioned earlier, according to Handelman (2008: 181-183), in an organic cosmos where everything is internally connected, belief plays a less important role than in a discontinuous cosmos where the transcendent creator is separated from the creation, and where belief connects humans to their god. In the LAL cosmology, belief is not necessary

for connecting the individual with its divine source, since everything consists of the same divine energy, so the person can never become separated from source in reality but only think that he or she is so. When the *light people* are being-in-the-body and in contact with their intuitive knowledge, this knowledge replaces faith and doubt. When they are being-in-the-mind on the other hand, there is room for both faith and doubt.

Experiments and evidence

In this thesis, I use Holbraad's distinction between 'proof' defined as "an incontrovertible demonstration of a hypothesis" and 'evidence' defined as "facts that lend a hypothesis support" (2008: 7).

As has been demonstrated, the light people sometimes choose to listen to their intuition instead of their rational minds, despite that they are perfectly able to use their rational minds for logical thinking. The light people sometimes act according to logic and sometimes according to their intuition, depending on whether they are being-in-the-mind or being-in-the-body. Although many participants felt drawn intuitively to LAL, many also express that a part of them wanted to test the phenomenon. An example is the 70-year old initiate Jørgen, who first asked a lot of questions to Kay to see if he could find any holes in his explanations, and when he could not disregard LAL rationally as a hoax, he asked his intuition whether he should take the course, and if Kay was genuine. Because his intuition confirmed this, he joined the course. It varies from individual to individual how big a role logical thinking and evidence plays in their decision process before joining the course and in their attitude towards LAL afterwards. To those who trust their intuition completely, evidence tends to play a relatively small role when it comes to making up their own minds. There are also examples of initiates who maintain an investigative and inconclusive attitude towards LAL long after they have completed the course.

Frøystad has found that new religious movements in India use scientific validation for public outreach and neophytes, but not for communication with insiders (Frøystad 2011: 78). Frøystad refers to an anecdote about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation:

For Maharishi and his circle of experienced meditators appeals to scientific authority were secondary, if not insignificant, compared to the inner certainty acquired through personal experience (ibid.).

The same is true in case of LHC, where although scientific proof is not a necessity for people who share the cosmology and epistemology of LHC, the therapists are trying to gather scientific evidence for LAL in order to communicate to outsiders. Kay is currently attempting to arrange an experiment in India with a team of neurologists, who have already done an experiment, where they observed the yogi Prahladbhai Jani for 10 days during which he did not eat and drink or pass urine or stool (Dhruv, Shah and Shah 2003). Kay has also contacted Guinness World of Records and requested to be observed for a period of time without eating or drinking, in order to be able to present proof to the public that he can live without food and water. This idea arose after Kay had been publicly criticised on national television in a very sceptical TV-programme (Kontant 2015). Besides these requests for participation in scientific or semi-scientific experiments, the therapists at LHC use new forms of technology to document their results, which are not broadly scientifically accepted, such as a computer programme and connected sensor, which generates a “photograph” of the aura.

According to Benjamin Zeller, “science and technology have achieved massive cultural power and centrality in contemporary and near-contemporary society” (Zeller 2014: 281). Jöncke and Steffen (2015: 15) call “science – or rather certain understandings of the current natural sciences as the ultimate providers of final truths about the world” a ‘super-rationality’, which is difficult to argue against without being labelled as ‘irrational’. This hegemonic status of science as “prime domain for truth-seeking” (Frøystad 2011: 82) also influences the light people to think in terms of scientific evidence, when they are to evaluate LAL rationally. Zeller points out that adherers to Transcendental Meditation, which includes some of the light people, refer to scientific validation of the efficiency of this practice, while they simultaneously challenge the validity of Western science (Zeller 2014: 281). The same is the case for the therapists at LHC, who are keen on getting scientific evidence for LAL, but at the same time have a very critical attitude towards science as it is practiced today in the Western world.

The initiate who has gone on the longest without food is Willy. Even Willy, who has tested LAL the most thoroughly of all, remains uncertain whether it is possible to live 100 % on light. He lived without food for 60 days before he became so skinny that he felt like he could no longer do this to his worried peers. He also began to have difficulties

holding on to things and he started to walk slowly and with rapid heartbeat. He remained clear in his mind and his eyes and continued his work as healer throughout the period. He says that it is impossible to know whether he would have survived if he had continued the water diet because he did not continue: “I still cannot say if I had held on longer, would that light energy really had taken over? That is a question of belief” (Willy 29.10.15). He felt a clear difference between the water diet and a hunger strike he did when he was younger:

There is something which is different from last time. But it is something that is almost ahead of its time in some way. But that is just a feeling I have. I believe that what Kay has started, has done [something]... Because I compare this to when I did a hunger strike out here in '72 that lasted three weeks, right? And back then I was lying down. And I did that mostly so that people should see [...] me all the time. And after three weeks I couldn't really do it anymore, you know? I could barely stand on my legs when I stood up and so on.

LAL is an interesting case because it is testable but not yet scientifically tested. Therefore, I will argue that the most scientific approach to LAL is the attitude that at the moment we simply do not know whether LAL is possible or not.

The initiate Eskild, who is an engineer and former university lecturer and has written a book on the possible merging of science and spiritual science¹ (Tjalve 2001), explains:

When I say that there is no contradiction [between science and spiritual science], then I refer to that which has to do with facts. And some of the theories might have to be changed. Because when a brain scientist says that the thoughts arise in the brain and even that the consciousness arises in the brain: That is not a fact, is it? It is to the brain scientist, if he doesn't think a lot about it. But it is a model. It is a theory that the consciousness arises in the brain, right? And that is directly contrary to spiritual science. So it is the theories that need to be rewritten in some cases. But the scientific method can be okay, then one just has to be aware that one excludes a number of things, because almost everything is connected. Especially when one knows about the spiritual world. Then one needs to know that there are some things, which one excludes. So there are no contradictions. If you take the true in science, then there are no contradictions. But in the theories there are.

Thus, the ambiguous attitude of the light people towards science comes from a sceptical attitude towards the way in which science is practiced in the Western world today, and not a denial of the scientific method as such. According to the authors of the “Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science”, ‘scientific materialism’, has been dominant in academia during the 20th century (Beauregard et al 2014: 272). Scientific materialism is a scientific

¹ Spiritual science (*åndsvidenskab*) is a cosmology based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, C. W. Leadbeater, Alice Bailey, Martinus Thomsen and others (Tjalve 2001: 55), which has inspired several of the *light people*.

paradigm made up by the combination of ‘materialism’ and ‘reductionism’ (Beauregard et al 2014: 272). Materialism is the idea that “matter is the only reality”, and reductionism is the idea that “complex things can be understood by reducing them to the interactions of their parts or to simpler or more fundamental things such as material particles” (ibid.). Materialism clashes with the light people’s cosmology, in which matter is only a small part of reality. Reductionism clashes with the light people’s idea of holism, that “almost everything is connected”, as Eskild expresses. Furthermore, the light people’s trust in intuitive knowledge above rational logic makes them take scientific results with a pinch of salt, while from a scientific materialism-perspective, intuition is not a trustworthy source of knowledge. Whereas science based on the idea of ‘reductionism’ searches for explanations in measurable material parts of reality, the light people would maintain that because the logical mind has a restricted view on reality, it can never provide as complete answers as the intuition. However, as Eskild also points out, this does not mean that the light people’s cosmology and epistemology is incompatible with “the true in science”. Again Eskild agrees with Beauregard et al, who state that

Science is first and foremost a non-dogmatic, open-minded method of acquiring knowledge about nature through the observation, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena (Beauregard et al 2014: 272)

Thus, Eskild’s attitude to science, which seems to be representative of the light people, agrees with a ‘post-materialist’ approach to science, but not with a scientific materialism approach. Beauregard et al suggested that post-materialism, should replace what they call the “ideology of scientific materialism” as “paradigm for science, spirituality, and society” (ibid.). ‘Post-materialism’ is based on the point of view that empirical evidence has proven that “the physical world is no longer the primary or sole component of reality and that it cannot be understood without making reference to the mind” (ibid.). What makes the light people’s attitude to science further complicated is that they have a mixed attitude to rationality: Rationality is a fine tool of the mind, but it can never provide as well-informed answers as the intuition, which comes from the True Self, which has a view from everywhere and everywhen.

The rationality debate

This paragraph briefly summarises the rationality debate within anthropology as a background for discussing the rationality of the light people and how to deal anthropologically with seemingly irrational claims.

The ‘rationality debate’ within anthropology has been going on since the early years of the discipline. Lucienne Lévy-Bruhl argued for the existence of two distinct mentalities: ‘The logical mentality’, based on logical causal explanations, and the ‘pre-logical mentality’, based on a belief in invisible powers (Lévy-Bruhl 1926[1910]). Lévy-Bruhl argued against the evolutionists, who believed that the pre-logical mentality would eventually develop into the logical mentality, and instead he suggested that the two mentalities were products of primitive - and modern societies respectively (ibid.). It was thus a significant change when Evans-Prichard in 1937 argued that the Azande in Sudan, who believed in magic, were rational - although he still concluded that they were wrong in believing that witches exist (Evans-Prichard 1976 [1937]: 18). Evans-Prichard argued that the Azande were rational because they were able to explain causality rationally, but they added an extra explanation, magic, to explain *why* things happened (ibid.: 23). Peter Winch brought forward the critique of Evans-Prichard that anthropologists are not able to judge what is ultimately true or false, because science is only one out of many systems of knowledge, and that one can only judge something to be right or wrong within one’s own system of knowledge (Winch 1964). Later, critique of Winch led to the rationalism-relativism debate about whether truth is universal or culturally specific (Bubandt 2007: 144).

The rationality question is closely tied to the anthropological question of when and how to take people seriously. When Lévy-Bruhl suggested that two different mentalities existed, this was an attempt from Lévy-Bruhl’s side to judge people according to the standards of their own mentality and thus break with the evolutionism, which judged people on an evolutionary scale with the Western rationalism as evolution’s end goal (Lévy-Bruhl 1926[1910]: 17). Whereas anthropologists from both the “evolutionary and psychologistic tradition”, “symbolic anthropology”, and those who follow a “cognitive and game-theoretical model” all aim to explain *why* others have irrational beliefs (Willerslev 2013: 45), the proponents of the ‘ontological turn’ aim to turn the anthropological project

around and take these seemingly irrational claims seriously, and thereby ‘reconceptualize’ (Holbraad 2008: 101) e.g. LAL so it can “assume a possible mode of existence” (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 131).

The question of how and to what extent anthropologists should take seemingly irrational claims seriously will be discussed in chapter 3. I will now present the insights I got from studying a seemingly irrational claim made by people in a Western context, which are of relevance to the rationality debate.

Rationality in Denmark

This paragraph argues that a central reason why LAL provokes many people in LHC’s geographical context, Denmark, is that rationality dominates the self-image in Denmark and the Western world in general, wherefore LAL seems provocative and out of place within this particular context.

The viewpoint that some ideas are more rational than others and that these more rational ideas are superior to other ideas, is central to the philosophical movement of ‘rationalism’, of which Descartes was one of the first and central promoters (Jarvie and Agasi 2002: 469, Toren 2002: 458). ‘Rationality’ has been an important part of the self-image of European societies, who saw themselves as scientifically and technologically superior to other societies and explained this superiority with the use of rationality, which supposedly made the scientific European’s logically based ideas universal as opposed to the ideas of the non-rational peoples in the world, whose ideas were historical and based on intuition (Jarvie and Agasi 2002: 469).

Max Weber (1973[1922]: 155) is famous for arguing that modernisation would inevitably cause a ‘disenchantment’ of the world, where rationality would replace all irrational beliefs. The hypothesis that secularisation – the movement away from belief and towards pure rational thinking - is an inevitable process in modern societies, has been an accepted notion within the social sciences, although the notion is in fact a ‘Western mythology’ (Sjørup 1997: 34) rather than an empirically provable fact (ibid., Jenkins 2015: 344, Chrystides 2012: 247, Jöncke and Steffen 2015: 10). Bruno Latour (1993) claims that scientific rationality is an ideological self-image rather than an actual sociological reality. As shall be exemplified below, the reactions to LAL from people in the geograph-

ical context of LHC, support the claim that the self-image of being rational is still prevailing as a Western mythology (Sjørup 1997: 34) in the Danish society. Contradictory to this Western mythology, it has been established by multiple scholars that religious or spiritual beliefs are not disappearing in the modern Western world, but rather ‘new age-religiosity’ and interest in holistic health, spirituality, and self-development is on the increase (Sjørup 1997: 37-38, Jenkins 2015, Chryssides 2012, Jöncke and Steffen 2015: 10). It would therefore not be correct to say that all Danes except from the *light people* and their sympathisers are purely rational. Rather, rationality is a Western mythology, an idea by which we generally understand ourselves in the West.

Plato distinguishes between ‘episteme’: certain knowledge or infallible “truths by nature” (Jarvie and Agassi 2002: 467), and ‘doxa’: fallible “truths by convention” (ibid.) that are in fact beliefs or opinions (Scaltsas 2012: 139, Fine 2010: 325). Descartes and the rationalism he promoted has been highly influential on Western academic thinking (Willerslev 2007: 13, Toren 2002: 456, 458), but it is important to remember that rationalism with its belief in – and preference for rationality (Steinberger 2015: 751) is a theory and ideology and therefore doxa and not episteme. Jarvie and Agassi (2002: 470) recommend relativising rationality and not assuming that local teachings, such as rationalism, are superior to other local teachings. As Viveiros de Castro puts it: “Anthropology’s mission, as a *social* science, is to determine which nontruths are taken as “God’s truth” in any given society.” (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 144, emphasis original). As is visible from the way LAL clashes with many members of the surrounding Danish society, which will be exemplified below, rationalism is an example of an ideology that is commonly taken as “God’s truth” in the Danish society, wherefore the light people are generally selective about to whom they reveal their participation in the course.

Epistemological clashes in the field

This paragraph analyses and discusses how the light people’s epistemological preference for intuition clashes with the epistemological preference dominating in the surrounding Danish society: Rationalism.

As has been demonstrated, the light people work with two different epistemologies: Rationality and intuition, depending on the situation and whether they are being-in-the-mind or being-in-the-body. Besides this internal co-existence of different epistemologies, the

light people are also part of a larger Danish society, in which rationality is the dominating epistemology. As Jöncke and Steffen point out, “the establishment of a dominant rationality in a particular society is never complete or final” (2015: 17). With this reservation in mind, I call rationalism the dominant epistemology in the Danish society, because the light people experience to be a minority in opposition to a majority with a different cosmology and epistemology than themselves. This claim is backed up by Jöncke and Steffen, who, as mentioned, call science the ‘super-rationality’ of the contemporary world (2015: 15). As is visible in this quote from Camilla, the light people understand themselves as - similarly to other Danes - influenced by the tendencies in the West to be-in-the-mind, but they consciously try to change themselves away from this tendency:

So in the West we are really good at just thinking and analysing our way to what we must do. And that is why people become sick one by one, I mean they have breakdowns with stress, anxiety, and depression. I mean there are a lot who do that because they have not gotten to know themselves. I mean they don't know what they want, because they have never felt it inside themselves. And that is the more bodily part of it, if one is to divide it like that. Then that is the body-soul part of it whereas the mental is that which is in the head. So it is also about combining those three things and putting them together so it becomes a unity in balance (...).

The clash in epistemologies, which the light people experience is thus not a clash between themselves and all other Danes or Westerners as two essentially different kinds of people, but rather a clash between the epistemology of the rational mind, rationalism, and the epistemology of the soul and body, intuition, which the light people aim to make suitable room for in their own lives now.

Besides the many stories the initiates told me about how their friends and family have reacted to LAL, the divide between the light people and those in Danish society who live by an epistemology of rationalism, became especially explicit in a media controversy that happened while I was doing fieldwork. The TV-programme *Kontant* from the national public service channel DR1, made a very critical programme about LAL, which presented LAL as a deadly scam (Kontant 2015). They filmed an interview with Kay for the programme, and Kay made an audio recording of the interview and published it online to defend himself from any potential manipulative editing of the interview (Lotus Health Care 2015). In this recording, it is evident that the journalist and Kay do not understand each other, because they have different cosmologies and epistemologies, and none of them can see the issue from the other's perspective. When the journalist asks Kay how he got his ability to perform the initiations, Kay sighs and answers “from my higher self. I

just know that it...”. Then the journalist interrupts and asks “you just can?” “Yes”, Kay confirms, but the journalist is far from convinced. At a later point in the interview, the two discuss whether it is true that the body can produce everything it needs out of universal energy:

Journalist (J): We have spoken to a doctor who says that it simply isn’t true. It is rubbish.

Kay (K): Yes.

J: Is medical science wrong?

K: Of course it is.

J: It is?

K: That is the only thing I can say, because he speaks about something, which he knows absolutely nothing about.

J: But you do? He has studied this for many years and you...

K: It doesn’t matter what he has studied. He hasn’t studied energy.

J: And you with a butcher and car salesman background, you...

K: Now I do not trade in cars.

J: You have gotten a special calling, which you cannot explain where comes from, and now suddenly you know what people need. Both children and adults.

K: Yes, that is completely wild [smiles].

J: Yes, that is completely wild! [sounds agitated]. And you haven’t gotten that from anywhere. It was just yourself who got in contact with something internal in yourself?

K: Yes, or something higher, let’s call it that. Definitely.

(Translated transcript of Kay’s recording, Lotus Health Care 2015)

In this excerpt from the interview, it is clear how Kay talks from an epistemology in which it is possible to receive knowledge intuitively, which is more trustworthy than knowledge acquired through medical studies, and that the journalist disbelieves that Kay has gotten any information and that such information could hold any value. Thus, these two men are both convinced that their own truth is closer to being episteme than the other’s truth is. In Holbraad’s terms we could say that they are ‘talking past’ (2008: 95) each other because they are talking about two different kinds of bodies: A purely biological body and a primarily energetic but also biological body. In connection with the TV-programme, DR published three critical news articles on their webpage (Jacobsen et al. 2015a, b, and c), a local newspaper wrote three critical articles about Kay (Ravn 2015a and b, Gustavsen

2015), and a radio channel produced two radio programmes about Kay (Radio24syv 2015a, b, and c). All this publicity created many emotional reactions from the public, for example in the form of angry comments to the online articles. I also received worried reactions from my family, who were now afraid that I had been lured in to a scam and that my health was in danger. Just like my family was worried, the journalist expressed in the interview that he was worried for an ill, underweight lady, who had joined the course, and he and some of the people who commented on the online articles seemed to be angry because in their understanding Kay manipulates people, who are in desperate need for help, in order to get their money. In these people's perspective, Kay must be fooling people, because LAL is impossible, and he must be manipulating his clients, because no sane person would believe that LAL is possible without being victims to manipulation. The initiates whom I talked to afterwards all rejected the idea of Kay as a manipulative guru. As mentioned, they all had cosmologies in which LAL was plausible before they met Kay, and therefore from their perspective, Kay's claims are not so far-fetched that they must be false.

Besides the already demonstrated clash of cosmologies, this conflict is the expression of two opposing epistemologies. Could it be that the agitated reactions to LAL have to do with the fact that LAL contradicts not only the cosmology of materialism, which is popularly perceived as an episteme, but also the Western mythology of rationalism, which is central to the self-understanding of modern Western societies?

Another theme of conflict, which is obvious in Kontant's interview with Kay, is the question of "responsibility" in the relation between authorities and citizens. The journalist talks from a perspective where the health of the citizen is the doctor or therapist's responsibility, while Kay talks of health as an individual responsibility. To give an example, the journalist asks Kay whether he thinks the course participants think of him as a guru and Kay replies:

Kay: I tell them that they shouldn't. Because they need to take responsibility for themselves, and it is them who have to make their choices. It is not me. Whether I know what is right or wrong is not important. What is important is what feels right for that person

Journalist: But you say that you know what is right?

K: Yes but that has nothing to do with the issue.

J: It has something to do with the issue because people listen to you.

K: No because I never tell people what they must do. I tell them what they can do...
So I broaden their horizons so that they themselves can choose.

In this excerpt from the audio recording of the interview (Lotus Health Care 2015), it is clear that the journalist is of the opinion that by treating people's health and giving them advice on health issues, Kay positions himself as a guru or doctor and that this is automatically followed by a special responsibility, because he now has the power to define what is right and wrong. Jöncke and Steffen note that in modern welfare states such as the Scandinavian ones, "institutions play a central role in monitoring, regulating and managing the lives of citizens" and that "health is monitored and regulated by bureaucratic interventions" (2015: 19). Therefore, Jöncke and Steffen argue, state institutions such as health institutions

influence and to some extent define norms and moral evaluations of right and wrong. Based on universally sanctioned methods that systematically pursue answers to specific questions, bureaucratic and scientific rationality has a strong position of authority and legitimacy in modern societies, not least in welfare states (2015: 19).

Thus, by questioning both the knowledge and responsibility of health authorities, Kay challenges the whole way the Danish society is structured with a high degree of trust in authorities.

As has been documented earlier, the cosmology of LAL is irrational when viewed from a cosmology of materialism but rational according to the cosmology of LAL. Besides this cosmological factor, epistemology is also important when deciding what is rational and whether it is important that something is rational. According to the theory of materialism only physical matter exists, and therefore it is of course irrational according to materialism to receive information from an immaterial source. According to Beauregard et al (2014: 272), materialism is one of the assumptions which "the modern scientific worldview" is based on. However, as the same authors establish, materialism is not an unquestionable truth but a theory. Neither is the claim that people can "live on light" an established scientific truth. In a cosmology where everything consists of energy, this is a likely claim, but in a cosmology where only matter exists, this claim is nonsense. In an epistemology where the True Self is the most trustworthy source of information because it has a broader perspective than the logical mind's, it makes perfect sense that a man can receive a message from his True Self about how to treat people and trust this although it contradicts scientific claims. In an epistemology of rationalism based on materialism however, such a claim makes no sense, because it goes against what is rational according

to the cosmology of materialism. The clash between the light people and the surrounding society thus seems to be grounded not only in differing cosmologies, but also in differing epistemologies.

My conclusion that the Western mythology of rationalism is a widespread and dear self-image in Denmark, is confirmed by Jöncke and Steffen (2015: 12), who received multiple objections to their study of so-called magical phenomena in Denmark from citizens who were afraid that the study should provide such phenomena with an air of scientific legitimacy, and who were of the opinion that the only proper scientific way to deal with such phenomena would be to disprove them (Jöncke and Steffen 2015: 12). The consequence of the Western mythology of rationalism and materialism for the light people is that their claim to be able to live on light comes across as bizarre, because it seems strange to other Danes that Western rational actors like themselves can choose to believe a claim that is not scientifically proven and goes so radically against the scientific truths by convention, doxa. When we are to judge what is rational and what is not, it is crucial to distinguish between episteme and doxa, and to keep in mind that even scientific theories are cosmologies under continuous negotiation (Abramson and Holbraad 2014: 13).

Preliminary conclusion

This chapter has accounted for - and analysed the epistemology of the light people. In this epistemology, there are two ways of acquiring knowledge: Through the rational thinking of the logical mind, and through intuition from the true Self. The light people regard intuitive knowledge to be more trustworthy than rational thoughts, because the True Self has a broader view than the logical mind.

The chapter has also briefly accounted for the rationality debate within anthropology. The discussion of how it is decided what is viewed as rational is important for analysing the misunderstandings that happen in the meeting between the light people and people in the broader Danish society. It has been argued that rationalism is a 'Western mythology' by which many people in the Denmark understand themselves, but that even Western scientists are not purely rational. By reference to the 'Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science' it has been argued that it is important not to confuse scientific theories with definitive truths, and therefore to remain open minded in the encounter with alternative cosmologies without a priori accusing these of being irrational. According to the light

people, there is nothing irrational about LAL and it does not contradict “the true in science” but only scientific theories, which are questionable. However, are there any limits to what anthropologists can take seriously? And how can we overcome our own ideas about the world in order to experience “the native’s point of view” with an open mind? These questions will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Taking people seriously

Why take seemingly irrational claims seriously?

In this chapter, I use my ethnographic findings and anthropological analysis of LAL to discuss how and to what extent anthropology should take seemingly irrational claims seriously.

Viveiros de Castro (2011: 133, 130) states that anthropology is dedicated to taking that seriously which, according to Richard Rorty, “Western liberal intellectuals [...] simply cannot take seriously” (Rorty in Viveiros de Castro 2011: 130). It is thus central to the anthropological project according to Viveiros de Castro and other authors of the ontological turn to take other marginalized ideas and values seriously (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 133, Willerslev 2013: 41). Through the history of the anthropological discipline, it has been much debated how to deal with the beliefs of the informants. E. B. Tylor (1929a and b [1871]), James Frazer (2013 [1911]), and Emile Durkheim (1976 [1912]) all treated religious beliefs as a form of illusion, and gave functionalist explanations of these beliefs. Although most present-day anthropologists are less aggressively critical of religious beliefs than Tylor was, it is still common to use an approach of ‘methodological atheism’ (Berger 1973 [1967]: 106), which is based on the idea that non-belief is the most objective and therefore scientific way to treat emic beliefs (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 5). In agreement with Jenkins (2015: 346), Willerslev argues that the functionalist Durkheimian tradition of “reducing indigenous claims about the existence of spirits and other so-called “imaginary” creatures to conceptual devices or metaphors” (Willerslev 2007: 182) is still common in anthropology today, which strikes Willerslev as “not only profoundly arrogant, but also problematic in a scholarly sense, as this mode of analysis obscures and denies the people’s own modes of thought and discourse” (ibid.). Reducing LAL or other beliefs in phenomena that go beyond what science has documented to something imaginary in opposition to the real world would be to reproduce the Cartesian dichotomies of the real and the imaginary and of true and false knowledge (ibid.). As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, it depends on the cosmological and epistemological perspective, which claims are considered irrational. As this thesis aims to exemplify, taking foreign cosmologies seriously creates a better chance to learn about others than explaining

away their viewpoints as erroneous illusions, such as has been done in the Tylorian tradition (e.g. Tylor 1929a [1871]: 500–501, Tylor 1929b [1871]: 356, Frazer 2013 [1911]: 492) or as collective symbols, like in the Durkheimian tradition (e.g. Durkheim [1912] 1976: 206, Leach 1965: 182, Tanner 1979: 136, Bird-David 1990: 194), or by categorizing these viewpoints according to one's own pre-conceptions, as Viveiros de Castro (2011: 133) warns against.

Instead, taking seemingly irrational claims seriously, gives us a chance to alternate our own ways of thinking in the attempt to understand alterity, Viveiros de Castro (2011) suggests. In a recent article (in press), Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr suggest that when facing 'radical otherness' (Robbins 2006: 292) and impossible paradoxes in the field, the anthropologist can be pushed to abandon habitual thinking and acknowledge the limits of his own rational thinking. What replaces his comfortable trust in his old perspective on reality is a state of 'not-knowing', which forms the basis of the continued anthropological work (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 16). This approach is inspired by Viveiros de Castro's concept decolonization of thought (2011: 128). For Viveiros de Castro, the aim of taking others seriously is to alternate our own thinking through a creative intellectual attempt to make sense of alterity, and through this process discover new "insights into the very issue of what constitutes life", as Willerslev (2013: 42) puts it. Willerslev and Suhr use Holbraad's term 'aporia', which originally comes from Socrates (Holbraad 2012: 251), to describe "the perplexity of being at a loss which arises when our thinking confronts apparently necessary, yet effectively absurd, paradoxes (Willerslev and Suhr in press 10). This approach can be seen as part of the trend Michal Scott identifies in the anthropology of ontology, where instead of believing or dis-believing, anthropologists pursue 'open-ended wonder', as has traditionally been done in religion but not in science (Scott 2013: 859).

Willerslev and Suhr present a case from Suhr's fieldwork on exorcism amongst Muslims in Denmark, where Suhr witnessed a supposedly possessed man talk Arabic, which he normally could not. Along with other confronting observations, this experience sent Suhr into a state of not-knowing, in which he was incapable of judging what was happening (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 16). This sense of not-knowing intensified when he began hearing the voices of *jinn* (spirits) in his head (ibid.). A parallel example of the creation of a state of not-knowing comes from Jenkins (2015), who is able to bracket the

question of the truth of the phenomenon when he observes a spiritual medium apparently deliver messages from deceased persons to living relatives, until he himself gets a message from his deceased father and changes attitude to a state of not-knowing. In my own fieldwork I had a range of similar experiences of not-knowing. An example was at my final check at LHC, where Frank tested me with applied kinesiology to see if there were still any imbalances in my body. He did this by instructing me to hold a body part in a particular position, while he tried to gently push or pull it out of place. Before my mind could interfere in this process, my body “answered” Frank by either remaining in place or giving in to the light pressure. Before doing the usual next step of making homeopathy and giving acupuncture, Frank suggested doing an experiment on me, which I agreed to. This is a translated transcription of the audio I recorded from the session:

Frank: The experiment is – and I can feel that I can do this more and more – you can put the needles in physically, but you can also just put them in energetically. Now we call it *energy needles*. If you can do something with that, then you can put as many needles as you want in people, because it doesn't hurt. They don't feel it. So we have the possibility of doing something more. And I know that I can do something more, I have experienced that sometimes, but I have not tested how often and how well. And is it as good? I actually don't know. That is what I am investigating. Now I know that it is around there [points to my stomach and closes his eyes for a couple of seconds. It goes so quickly that I am not sure if he has done anything yet]. Try putting your index finger and your thumb together and hold them there. [He tries to pull them apart, like he could easily do before when he tested me, but this time I have no problem keeping my fingers together].

Rie: [Laughs loudly from surprise] Wow!

F: You damn could! You damn could. Great. And try and hold there and I will try to push that way [instructs me physically in holding my arm in a certain position, and then tries to push it out of the position, but I now have control over this muscle too]. And you can do that too. So it is up to you whether we should let that be all, or you want the needle physically too.

This experience was one out of many during the fieldwork, where I experienced being surprised by how my own body behaved after being object to treatments by the therapists at LHC. The many situations where my bodily experiences confirmed the explanations given by the light people made me unable to think of their explanations as purely the result of a different conceptualization of the body. However, I also experienced moments that made me doubt their explanations, such as when I briefly fainted during the water diet because of what would be low blood sugar according to a biomedical explanation but “lack of grounding” according to the therapists at LHC, or when I realised that I had lost

another two kilos during the six days I continued the water diet after the transformation. The latter instance was again countered by the explanations from the therapists that it is normal to lose weight if you consciously or unconsciously wish the opposite, and by the blood sugar measure by the independent nurse, which showed that my blood sugar level had increased during the six days since the transformation although I had not eaten anything. These experiences along with many others made me end up in a state of not-knowing, in which the question of truth was recurrent. Every day since I ended the water diet, I have been confronted with the question of whether or not I trust enough in LAL to live as if it is true, abandoning all dietary advice and eating whatever I feel like, and advisably nothing. Although I experience passing moments of belief and dis-belief respectively, much of the time I find myself in a state of not-knowing, where I end up acting in a manner that is safe in either case: Eating as little as possible but allowing myself to eat what I feel like, and still not eating so little that it would be dangerous from a biomedical point of view. Suhr experienced that being in this state of not-knowing turned out to be ethnographically productive:

In the work of the Muslim exorcist, as well as in the analytic work of the ethnographic fieldworker, the presence of doubt helps to produce cracks in our preconceptions, thereby leaving a space for the otherness of the patient or the informant to become a prism through which a diagnosis or an ethnographic analysis can be envisioned from a point beyond the human subjective self. (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 17).

Similarly, it is my experience that the state of not-knowing following an experience of aporia is productive because it decolonizes the ethnographer's perspective and allows him or her to see the world from a new perspective, which can of course never be completely similar to the perspective of the informants (Beatty 2010: 432-433, Dalsgård in press: 21), but is more faithful to the ethnographic ideal of being "open to surprises" (O'Reilly 2012: 30) than the pre-aporia perspective. In fact, to Willerslev and Suhr, "the ability to inhabit the space of conceptual disruption in which all illusions of intellectual mastery crumble, so as to let oneself be moved by something beyond one's own control" is a requirement for ethnographic perceptiveness (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 17-18). Willerslev and Suhr suggest that by being exposed to an experience of aporia where a deconlonization of thought happens, the ethnographer can undertake a 'leap of faith' – a term they borrow from Kierkegaard – into a new perspective where he or she is receptive to a 'divine rev-

elation' (Willerslev and Suhr in press). Willerslev and Suhr call this method 'methodological faith' (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 20) in critical opposition to the 'methodological atheism' recommended by Alfred Gell (1999: 160-61), in which the ethnographer is "obliged not to adopt the premises of religious convictions" of the people they study (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 20). In my understanding, the methodological faith proposed by Willerslev and Suhr (*ibid.*) is also an alternative to the anthropological tradition of bracketing the question of the validity of informants' claims (Jenkins 2015: 346), because here the anthropologist uses his or her personal faith and doubt in the truth of an ethnographic phenomenon as a catalyst for ethnographic 'wonderment' (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007: 1). As Willerslev and Suhr also point out, there is no faith without doubt, and the doubt is also fruitful in generating anthropological knowledge, since it prevents the ethnographer from taking the studied phenomenon too seriously (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 21). As demonstrated earlier, many of the initiates go through similar processes to mine, where they experience both belief and doubt, and many have had experiences of aporia before LAL, where an encounter with something seemingly unexplainable made them change cosmologies.

Thus, through a decolonization of thought the anthropologist may rid him- or herself of his or her previous conceptual approach to the world, allowing the possibility of grasping a radically different perspective.

Where is the limit to what we can take seriously?

I have now accounted for why it is worthwhile to attempt taking seemingly irrational claims seriously. However, are there any limits to what we can take seriously as anthropologists? With a point of departure in a discussion of the analysis in this thesis, the following paragraph explores this question. The field of LAL offers a great opportunity to test how to take a claim seriously, which goes against the rationality of a scientific cosmology and epistemology. I will now point out four examples, which I dealt with in my own fieldwork, of things which I will argue that anthropologists should not take seriously. These examples provide a non-exhaustive outline of the limits to what anthropologists should take seriously.

1. Taking things at face value

The first thing that needs to be clear, is that when I or other anthropologists argue in favour of taking people and their cosmologies and epistemologies seriously, it does not mean taking their claims literally or at face value (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 135). Two examples of misunderstandings of LAL are very common as the result of people taking statements about LAL literally.

The first misunderstanding concerns the emic term *LYS*, which actually means “universal energy” or “prana” and not “light” as it literally translates to. Because of the word *LYS*, outsiders often think that the light people live on sunlight. This is a likely thought since there are people who practice *sun-gazing*, where people supposedly are able to live without food for long periods of time because they nurture themselves with sunlight (Vojnikovic and Njiric 2010: 127, Solar Healing Center 2013). Because of this confusion, the therapists always have to clarify that LAL has nothing to do with sun-gazing, when they give a presentation about LAL. *LYS* is spelled with capital letters exactly in attempt to avoid this misunderstanding.

The second and more problematic misunderstanding surrounding LAL is the confusion regarding whether the initiates have to eat or not. The elephant in the LAL-room is namely that in spite of the supposed ability to not eat, all the initiates including the therapists at LHC still eat more or less regularly although many have reduced their food intake radically. As I shall return to shortly, this confusion leads to frustration for some initiates. Inspired by the ontological turn, in my fieldwork, taking this claim seriously does not mean accepting the claim that people are theoretically able to live on energy as an unquestionable truth, but to take it seriously as an idea, which has some degree of prevalence in the field, and then use this information to reconceptualise what kind of bodies and rationality the light people and I are talking about, and to ask new questions such as “if the light people are convinced that they do not have to eat, then why do they do it anyway?” The combination of taking this claim seriously enough to ask relevant questions but not taking it at face value, allowed me to come to the understanding that the *light people* to a great extent are convinced that they are able to live without food, and when they do eat, they believe that the food does not nurture them, and that they eat for other reasons than physical need, such as out of habit, for social reasons, to enjoy the taste, to “slow down the cleansing of the body” and thus relieve *cleansing-symptoms*, to

reduce *emotional-* and *energetic sensitivity*, and to live out formerly suppressed wants. It is commonplace for most of the light people to feel hungry now and again, but this hunger is explained as the result of any of the formerly mentioned factors, or from the presence of *Candida fungus* in the body. Both when the therapists advertise LAL and when the light people talk about LAL, the idea that any eating after the initiation is completely voluntary prevails. For instance, Kay said on an information evening on LAL:

I eat much much less. But of course I eat. I actually try to see if I can eat only in the weekends. And to “eat in the weekend” that is not to have a meal. No, that is to eat something in the weekend. That is how I prefer it. But if there is something – now we have just gotten apples, or we have an apple tree here behind the house, so we have made some stewed apples – well fine, then I taste it of course, even though I get all these symptoms. But I do. I just chose to do that.

Some of the initiates express disappointment because of their missing ability to stop eating without negative consequences. For instance, the 53-year old “J” is keeping a close track on his weight, because he fears losing too much weight. He has recorded in his very punctual diary that he loses one kilo per day when he eats nothing at all, but that when he eats 200 grams of fried vegetables a day, he keeps his weight. The therapists at LHC often experience that those who wish to lose weight lose only little, and those who are afraid to lose weight lose a lot. The therapists explain this as something that happens because people must learn to let go of their need for control of the process, and therefore it happens to them as a lesson. “J” says that one part of him disbelieves that LAL works while the other part believes it, because he on the one hand is not able to stop eating without losing weight, but on the other hand can see in his records that he does get some energy from other sources than the food he eats. There are plenty of other examples of initiates who wish they were able to eat less, but experience diverse symptoms if they do not eat, and therefore feel compelled to eat something. It is my hypothesis that this partial disappointment in LAL comes from an expectation that the initiates would become able to live without eating in practice and not only theory, and that this would not be so challenging after the transformation. Thus, when the therapists call it “voluntary” to eat after the transformation, this voluntariness is sometimes perceived literally as if the light people only eat out of sheer want and joy, and not because they experience diverse forms of discomfort if they do not eat. The claim that the light people do not have to eat is therefore not to be taken at face value but with a grain of salt. It is thus important in anthropological analysis not to take claims or expressions at face value.

2. Avoiding critique

Winch has criticized Evans-Prichard for demanding internal coherence from the Azande as a condition for accepting them as rational. Winch argued that this demand rested on a Western ideal of logic, and that it therefore would be ethnocentric to judge the Azande according to this ideal (Winch 1964: 315). With this in mind, I have been careful not to demand internal coherence from the light people and judge them on the basis of a scientific cosmology and epistemology. However, “in order to retain some semblance of objectivity, a degree of professional scepticism is also necessary”, Jenkins argues (2015: 362.). In line with Jenkins, I will thus argue for a combination of respect for the informants’ cosmology and knowledge and ‘professional scepticism’ (Jenkins 2015: 362). In my fieldwork, one issue in particular attracted my sceptical attention: Before being initiated, many are enthusiastic about the prospects of eating less, but during the water diet they come to miss food, and therefore become more focused on the joy of eating. Therefore, after the water diet, they focus more on the freedom of eating and doing whatever they feel like, and less on the fact that it turned out to be difficult for them not to eat at all. As the initiate Christina said: “To live on light is about everything but food. And that was actually quite revolutionary for me to find out”. She explains that since her initiation, she has gone through an immense personal development, where she has begun to act on what she feels and thus has become much more in tune with her intuition. Meanwhile, she has also realized that a considerable amount of time will pass before she will be able to stop eating completely, and that she should not focus on this end goal but rather on her process. The fact that this was not clear to Christina and other initiates when they began the course, points to a weakness in the communication of LAL to potential initiates: Although the therapists at LHC do say honestly in their presentations of LAL that they still eat, all the potential advantages of not eating are emphasized in the presentation, while the fact that everybody still eats and therefore does not get the full effect of these potential advantages, fades into the background along with the previously discussed differences in what it means that eating is “voluntary”. The therapists also do honestly say in the presentations on LAL that actually the main goal is personal development and not living without eating. However, what seems to happen is that during the course the focus of the course participants changes from eating less to doing what they feel like, and therefore few initiates are sceptical of the gap between their expectations of being able to live without food and their

reality of feeling like eating for various reasons and therefore not actually being able to live without food. Roughly speaking, LAL is sold as an easy way to become completely free from the need to eat, while in fact the point of the course is not the potential to stop eating completely (which so far remains a claimed theoretical potential) but the personal development that comes from allowing oneself to do exactly what they feel. The narrative that the light people are completely free to eat as little as they want is easily maintained because nobody feels like never eating at all. The failed expectations of becoming able to stop eating puts some pressure on some of the initiates, who are disappointed in themselves. However, this does not mean that the initiates are generally dissatisfied with the course. Almost all the initiates I have talked to find the output in personal development to be big, and this is of high value to them. Besides this, many also experience significant improvements in their physical and mental health as well as significant reduction in their food intake, which makes the idea that they are in fact nurtured by universal energy credible to them. Because of their trust in their intuitive knowledge that LAL is possible in theory, they can live with the fact that they are not able to live completely without eating, because this is no longer a goal for them, now that they do what they feel like. The gap between the expectations of the initiates and the actual situation after the course, could be reduced by more meticulous communication of the purpose and reality of LAL from LHC's side. To avoid raising this critique would, in my opinion, be to produce a naïve and inexact ethnographic account of LAL. This criticism, however, still takes the phenomenon seriously, I will claim, because it takes the cosmology and epistemology of the light people into account instead of judging LAL according to the standards of the cosmology of materialism or the epistemology of rationalism.

I thus suggest that anthropologists should not take the claims of the informants so seriously that they become blind to the problems of the field, which call for critique. This suggests that taking others seriously can be productive in understanding them, but that the ambition to do so does not exclude the possibility of professional scepticism.

3. Mistaking theory for practice

As a wide range of anthropologists have pointed out, there is often a discrepancy between what people say they do, and what they actually do. This discrepancy comes from the fact

that people often explain what they are supposed to do according to the cultural prescriptions, rather than what they actually do personally (Geertz 1973: 18, Bourdieu 1977: 97, Forsythe 1999: 132, O'Reilly 2012: 119). Therefore, it is not recommendable for anthropologists to accept the explanations of the informants' actions as objectively truthful accounts of practice, but rather as subjective accounts of what the person thinks he or she does or should do. I have observed that this phenomenon of talking more about prescribed behaviour than actual behaviour happened not only in my personal interviews with the informants, but also in the presentations on LAL by the therapists, as described above. It is therefore crucial in anthropological analysis to be aware not to confuse theory with practice and to supplement verbal accounts with observation of practice, if the goal is to say something about practice (O'Reilly 2012: 119). Because I have not been able to observe my informants around the clock, I am thus careful not to conclude how much they actually eat, because this is impossible for me to know. What my observations allow me to conclude, is that they do eat something, and that they do not conceive of this as cheating, because they are convinced that they get their nourishment from the universal energy and not from the food they eat.

4. Taking things too seriously

The fourth example I will give here of a limit to what anthropologists should take seriously, is not to exaggerate how seriously people take their own practice, or misinterpret the way in which they take it seriously. As Willerslev puts it: "By "taking seriously," I simply mean taking seriously what the people themselves take seriously." (2007: 181). Willerslev suggests that through the use of humour, the Yukaghirs of northern Siberia, whom he studies, create an ironic distance to their own rituals, but still carry on with these rituals (Willerslev 2013: 52). Instead of through humour, the most common way for the light people to keep some distance to LAL is through talking and thinking of it as an experiment. For instance, the 23-year old student Daniel B, reflected on how much he believes in LAL, four days before his initiation:

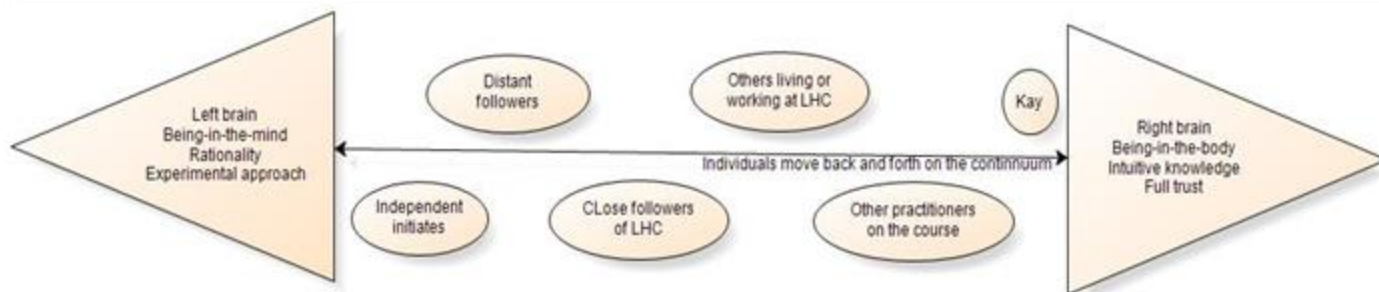
I don't know. I actually think one can live completely without [food]. It can just be a little bit difficult to relate to because one thinks "it damn cannot be true". I have also told myself: What then when Columbus said that the Earth was round? Then everybody laughed at him back then and said "he is crazy". Today we know that it is round. Maybe it will be like that with LAL at some point that it is found out: It is damn possible, one doesn't need food. There have been many new things through time, which people have found out and where in the beginning people have had that:

“no it cannot be true. It sounds too damn crazy. It is not what we have learned. We have been told something else our entire lives, so what you say cannot be true. It is not correct”. So I think that mentality sticks to many people today. I think it will change at some point.

Through this approach, Daniel B allows himself to take LAL seriously as a possibility and at the same time remain rational. By relating to LAL as an experiment, the initiates can justify to themselves and others what they are putting their bodies through, and they can think of themselves as rational and scientific pioneers. Kay, on the other hand, maintains that LAL is not an experiment, because he intuitively knows that it works (Kay 15.09.15). These are two different ways of taking LAL seriously: As an experiment and as a truth. Below I have drawn a continuum with “experiment” as one end pole and “full trust” in the other end. Most of the initiates fluctuate in the space between the two poles depending on their mode of being in that moment. As we saw in the analysis of the epistemology of the light people, they work with two epistemologies alternately: Rationality and intuition. This is for instance visible in the way Willy talks about LAL as something which he is testing rationally because he intuitively feels that he must: “It was something I had to investigate. And I also had to go further than most people to find out: How does this work – on me?” He later elaborated on his approach to LAL:

Scientists love that thing with “oh but what was it then that made it work? Was it Kay? Was it this? Was it that?” And then I just feel like this: That is actually tremendously unimportant. Because the moment something breaks through and you begin to get a hold of or be that which you have always been and which cannot be broken down, I mean that which lives on in everything – then you will just know what you have to know [snaps his fingers] like this, right? So one shouldn’t speculate about it. But that is again this thing: The brain that would like to decipher everything, right?

What Willy refers to here is what we saw in the analysis of the alternating epistemologies of the light people; rationality and intuition. When a person is being-in-the-mind then he



or she ponders and rationalizes, but when one is in contact with one’s True Self, then rationality loses its significance in the light of the intuitive knowledge. When the person

is in contact with his or her intuitive knowledge and completely convinced of its truthfulness, like Kay is, then it does not make sense to think of LAL as an experiment, like it does for a person who is being-in-the-mind, where rational explanations are required.

In the case of this study, it is thus important for me not to assume that all the light people take LAL seriously in the same way as Kay, namely as a certain truth, when in fact many of them take it seriously as an object for experimental investigation – at least some of the time. However, even though some of the light people have this experimental distance to the phenomenon, they still trust LAL enough to pay the price of 15.000 Kr, carry through with the water diet, and abandon their former principles for healthy eating after the transformation. Thus, even if the initiates go through the course to test it, they must have a reasonable degree of trust that LAL will work for them, because the stakes are high.

In sum, taking the advice by Willerslev of not taking phenomena more seriously than people do themselves into account, I have investigated how seriously -, and in what way the light people take LAL seriously, in order to avoid taking LAL more seriously than they do themselves, or taking it seriously in the wrong way. The picture of how seriously the light people take LAL is complicated by the fact that it varies from person to person and moment to moment in what way they take it seriously: As a truth or as an experiment with high stakes.

Andreas Roepstorff outlines three ways of working experimentally with ethnography, of which ‘the experiment as method’ is one (Roepstorff 2011: 138). Inspired by this approach, I thought of my bodily participation in LAL as a form of self-experiment, with emphasis on ‘sensorial fieldwork’ (Robben 2012: 443) and ‘introspection’ (Spradley 1980: 57). In this way my approach to LAL was more similar to those of the participants who take LAL as an experiment than those who take it as a truth.

Dealing with genuine alterity

The theoretical point of departure for this thesis has been the claim of the ontological turn that anthropologists can use the encounter with alterity as an opportunity to reconceptualise or own thoughts (Holbraad 2008: 97, Viveiros de Castro 2011: 131). This approach has been helpful in dealing with the alterity I encountered at LHC. However, this encounter made me disagree with a central element in the ontological turn. Therefore, I will now present a critique of this element.

Holbraad (2008: 95-97) suggests that phenomena, which appear to be examples of ‘alterity’, might be either genuine examples of alterity, or more likely, the result of a misunderstanding, indicating that we have not yet understood what the others mean by e.g. spirits, or in this case a body. Holbraad (2008: 96) argues, however, that concluding that something is genuine alterity is a form of ‘smarter-than-thou-chauvinism’, because it necessarily entails the assumption that if we disagree, then it means that we are right and the others are wrong:

So, provided one wishes to avoid the unwarranted assumption that what makes the people we study interesting is that they get things wrong, we are left with the idea that, far from constituting evidence, ethnographic data consist in misunderstandings. (ibid.).

I will argue that it is not necessarily so. Instead, I suggest that what makes the light people interesting is that they have an alternative cosmology and epistemology, but I do not assume that they must “get things wrong”. As this thesis exemplifies, it is also possible to point out examples of genuine alterity without concluding that we are right and they are wrong, and instead leave the question of who is ultimately right temporarily open and use this confrontation with genuine alterity as an occasion for revisiting our own ideas. It is thus my argument that concluding that a phenomenon is an example of genuine alterity is just as useful for stimulating a decolonization of thought as concluding that the alterity was merely grounded in a misunderstanding. If we conclude that something is a misunderstood alterity, then it challenges us to reconceptualise what is meant by the used concepts (Holbraad 2008: 96), but if we conclude that something is a genuine negation of our own perception of reality, then it provides an opportunity for us to look at our own doxa, from the informants’ perspective and ask questions we would not otherwise have thought of, I will suggest. In this way, the encounter with genuine alterity can create a different kind of decolonization of thought, I propose. What Holbraad (2008: 97), Viveiros de Castro (2011: 131) and others in favour of the ontological turn suggest is that we should use the misunderstandings productively to reconceptualise what the others must be talking about. In this thesis I have performed such a reconceptualization, but I have also been faced with an alterity that is not conceptual but consist in a cosmology of the body that contradicts the current scientific cosmology of the body. By saying that the difference is “not conceptual” I mean that the difference does not lie in a difference of what we mean by concepts, but in a deeper difference in how we perceive reality. This encounter with

genuine alterity has led to a decolonization in the form of a wonderment about which theory of the body is true, because if we assume that we all inhabit the same world where the same laws of physics are at work (Jenkins 2015: 365), then the LAL cosmology about the body and the scientific explanation of what a body is, cannot both be true. In his own analysis of Cuban divination, Holbraad (2008: 96) concludes that the alterity he encounters is only misunderstood as alterity and not real alterity, and he argues that concluding that a phenomenon is an example of genuine alterity presupposes that we have indeed understood what they mean by it, which is ‘unwarranted’, he argues. In my analysis, however, I have found examples of both genuine alterity (people actually mean that they do not need food to survive) and misunderstood alterity (e.g. they refer to a different kind of *light* than outsiders would have assumed), and I will argue that to claim that something is genuine alterity is not necessarily ethnocentric, as Holbraad asserts (*ibid.*), but can be a way to take people seriously. Rather, I will argue, Holbraad himself runs the risk of being ethnocentric when he, in his attempt to conceptualize *spirits* as a rational truth, concludes that spirits are mere conceptual creations, ‘infinitions’ by the diviners (Holbraad 2008: 101). If there is any similarity between the light people and the Cuban *santeros*, the *santeros* would not agree to Holbraad’s interpretation but maintain that spirits do exist as an ontological fact, exemplifying the genuine alterity, which Holbraad seeks to avoid through his analysis. This ambition from Holbraad’s side comes from the assumption that it is a logical absurdity to seek evidence of indubitable religious truths (*ibid.*). However, as my analysis of the rationality and epistemology of the light people shows, such a wish for evidence is not necessarily an absurdity, because it can also be an expression of two conflicting modes of knowing. Just as the *santeros* can doubt the diviners because they are “imperfect humans”, without doubting the deities (*ibid.*: 100), the light people can doubt their own ability to hear their intuition, without doubting their divine higher selves. I thus suggest that through taking alterity seriously as genuine alterity, we can challenge our own scientific theories through asking whether either we or the others have misunderstood something about the nature of reality. This argument is similar to Willerslev and Suhr’s suggestion that ‘aporia’ experiences in the field can bring about a constructive doubt, which can create a decolonization of thought (*in press*: 10).

Based on my encounter with what I take to be genuine alterity, I thus argue that if we want to take unfamiliar phenomena seriously, then we cannot conclude that if their

claims contradict our conception of reality, then we must have misunderstood what they mean. The question whether we might have misunderstood them is of course important to ask, as Holbraad suggests and as I have done. This approach has helped me gain a range of insights into LAL. However, even after clearing away some potential misunderstandings, LAL remains a genuine alterity, because the light people do in fact mean that even though they also eat, they live on an invisible energy. There is no definitive proof that they live on energy. Therefore, I do not claim to have found a genuine physical alterity, because I do not claim that their bodies can in fact live on light. However, the light people's belief that they can is a genuine negation of scientific theories about the body. This negation cannot be deconstructed through a reconceptualization, I will argue. Therefore, my thesis has pointed out the weakness in the ontological turn that it aims to understand others through concepts, while the gap of understanding between those who believe in the currently dominating theories about the body as depending on food, and the light people, is not purely conceptual but is grounded in a disagreement about what a body is, not as a concept but as a physical entity. Although Holbraad (2008: 96) warns that it is unwarranted to claim that I have understood my informants well enough to claim that their negation of Western ideas about the body is genuine, I claim this because my informants explicitly agree with this. Kay is even actively trying to arrange a scientific experiment to prove that he can live on light, well aware that his claim contradicts current scientific theories about the body. In this way my field differs a lot from Holbraad's field in Cuba, and therefore I agree that in his field, it is extra important to be careful not to assume to know what they mean. However, since my informants live in Denmark and therefore are used to navigate in a Western scientific context, I find it less daring to claim here that we have understood each other. What prevents me from being what Holbraad calls a smarter-than-thou-chauvinist (*ibid.*), is that I do not conclude who is right, because I simply cannot know. Instead I remain in wonder about this question. My ethnographic data contains examples of bodily changes that seem difficult to explain from a biomedical point of view, but this is beyond my field of competence to judge. On the other hand, I have not seen irrefutable evidence that people can in fact live on light, because nobody lives without eating at all. This state of not-knowing (Willerslev and Suhr in press: 16) leaves the field of LAL open for further wonderment.

Preliminary conclusion

This chapter has discussed why, how, and to what extent anthropologists should take the people they study seriously. It has been argued that taking people seriously is productive of a better understanding of others and of questioning our own assumptions. However, there are a number of limits to what anthropologists ought to take seriously. Without claiming to present an exhaustive list, this chapter has presented four of such limits or pitfalls: Taking claims at face value, avoiding cultural critique in pursuit of taking everything seriously, mistaking theory for practice, accusing the informants of taking the phenomenon more seriously - or seriously in a different way - than they actually do. The outlining of these four limits has drawn on challenges and examples from my fieldwork on LAL, simultaneously producing a discussion of how and in what way we ought to take LAL seriously. It has been argued that it is important not to take the claim that people live on “light”, or that they can live without food, at face value. It has also been critically pointed out that the initiates expect to be able to stop eating after the course, and that this expectation is not fulfilled, but that the initiates are generally happy about having taken the course anyway, because their focus shifts during the water diet. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that some initiates relate to LAL more as an experiment while others relate to it more as a certain truth, and that these two approaches can be related to the emic approaches of being-in-the-body and –the-mind respectively. Finally, I have argued against Holbraad’s statement that “ethnographic data consists in misunderstandings” (Holbraad 2008: 96). Instead, I suggest that LAL is a case of genuine alterity, and that it is impossible to know at this point whether they are right in their claims.

Conclusion

This thesis builds on an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015 amongst the therapists at LHC and the participants on the course LAL, where people allegedly become able to live on universal energy. The aim of the fieldwork was to investigate what a body is, by taking people who claim that bodies can live on light seriously, and thus explore how anthropologists can take phenomena seriously, which contradict our own rationality.

The LAL course consists of an initiation, a water diet, and a transformation, and can be seen as a transformative ritual. After the completion of the course, the initiates are supposed to do whatever they feel, including eating if they feel like it. In their understanding, they are fully nurtured by the universal energy from the moment of the transformation, and therefore they are convinced that they only eat for other reasons than the need for nourishment. Therefore, it is not conflictual to the light people that they live on light and also eat. To my knowledge, there are no initiates – not even the founder of LHC – who never eat at all, although there are examples of initiates who report to eat small and uniform doses of food and yet thrive. Overall, the initiates who participated as informants in this study are pleased that they have taken the course, because they feel that it has brought them more freedom and a lot of personal development, especially in the form of becoming better at acting on their feelings. None of them live without eating at all, but this does not bother them profoundly, because through the water diet they have come to value doing what they feel like higher than living without eating, and most of the time they remain in faith that they are already living on light and that as time passes it will become easier for them to eat less and less.

In the cosmology of the light people, a human being consist of a physical body, with a rational mind seated in the left brain and a transcendent True Self, which expresses itself through intuitive knowledge and feelings in the body. The light people distinguish between two modes of being: Being-in-the-mind and being-in-the-body. By taking seriously that the light people do not see LAL as a matter of faith, I came to understand that two distinct epistemologies are at play within these two modes of being. When a person is being-in-the-mind, then an epistemology of rationalism rules, where claims can be validated through logical thinking and scientific scrutiny. In contrast, when a person is being-in-the-body, rational knowledge is disregarded in favour of intuitive knowledge, which is not to be confused with religious faith. Because the light people's epistemology defines

intuitive knowledge as more valid than rational knowledge, dialogue often fails between light people and Danes with a rationalist approach to knowledge. Taking people's statements seriously has thus proved to be a key to understanding their epistemology and cosmology. The study has tested the limits to how and in which ways anthropologists can take seemingly irrational claims seriously and found four examples of such limits: 1) taking claims at face value, 2) avoiding criticism, 3) confusing statements with action, 4) taking phenomena more seriously than people do themselves.

I have suggested that approaching the field with wonder and methodological faith instead of methodological atheism is a fruitful way of taking a phenomenon seriously, because it can nudge anthropologists to reconceptualise their concepts. Critically of the Holbraad I have argued that it is not necessarily ethnocentric to conclude that apparent negations between others' and our interpretations of reality are genuine negations, because we do not have to assume that we are right and the others are wrong. I suggest that instead of only using confrontations with misunderstood alterity to reconceptualise what others must mean, we can use encounters with genuine alterity to rethink our fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality. The thesis has pointed out examples of both genuine alterity as well as misunderstood alterity: The light people's conviction that they are able to live on energy is not symbolic but literal, thus being an example of a genuine negation of the current scientific theory about what a body is. In fact, Kay is so convinced that he can live on light, that he is actively trying to make scientists test his claims in a positivist experiment. Although it may appear as if the light people are cheating because they eat, according to their own cosmology eating is not cheating, because it does not change their conviction that their nourishment comes not from the food they eat but from light. This light also turns out not to be the visible kind of light we know, but an invisible universal energy, an unfamiliar concept, which calls for further investigation rather than instant dismissal. When we have cleared these misunderstandings it becomes possible to avoid accusing the light people of being irrational, since it turns out that LAL makes logical sense within the LAL cosmology, because to the light people the body and everything else in the universe consists of energy and the physical world defers to the energy. This cosmology is a theory, which according to my informant Eskild, who is an engineer and a former university lecturer, does not contradict the "true in science", i.e. undeniable

facts, but only scientific theories. Which one of these two cosmologies is true, is a question that I will leave open for further wonderment. Although the light people are not irrational, they can be said to be anti-rationalists, because they disagree with the aspirational aspect in rationalism that human beings should strive to live a more rational life. Instead they argue for acting more in accordance with our feelings, because in their cosmology, feelings come from our divine true Selves, which have a transcendental overview of our lives and the divine plan for them.

Because of the design of this study, the question of whether the light people are nurtured by energy remains a mystery. Such an answer would require a scientific experiment with full-time observation of the participants. Have my efforts to understand LAL then been fruitless? Far from it, I will argue. This study has built a framework for understanding why LAL is plausible within the light people's cosmology and epistemology, and highlighted why it is not so to the many Danes who have what Jenkins calls a "modern rationalist world-view" (Jenkins 2015: 365). Furthermore, the study has provided a new perspective on the propensity for being-in-the-mind during anthropological fieldwork and of the rationalism which is so prevailing in present-day Denmark and in the Western world at large. Based on this study of the friction of these two cosmologies, I will argue that if we want to be rational and scientific, then we have to separate materialism (ideology) from science (method) (Beauregard et al 2014: 272) and acknowledge the limits of our knowledge and epistemology, and be self-critical enough to admit that there are a lot of things in this world, which we can neither proof nor disproof for the time being. In my opinion, LAL is one of them.

This thesis recommends the emic term being-in-the-body to describe a mode of being in ethnographic fieldwork, which some ethnographers might already be using without this name for it. This mode of being is recommended because it can support the ethnographer in undertaking a decolonization of thought and thus engage with the world in a more direct manner. I suggest that within this open and receptive mode of being, anthropologists are more likely to experience alterity on its own terms, giving the anthropologist a peek into a new perspective on the world. This new perspective may shake the old ideas the anthropologist had about the world, bringing him or her into a state of not-

knowing where wonder, becomes the point of departure for further scientific investigation. I thus suggest wonderment as a scientific alternative to the Western mythology that we are rational and right in our ideas about the world while the Others are not.

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Resumé

Dette speciale tager udgangspunkt i et antropologisk feltarbejde om kurset 'Lev af LYS' (LAL), der afholdes af den private alternative klinik Lotus Health Care i Risskov, Danmark. Med udgangspunkt i spørgsmålet "hvad er en krop?" undersøger specialet hvordan og i hvilken udstrækning, antropologer kan og bør tage tilsyneladende irrationelle fænomener seriøst.

I kapitel 1 beskrives kurset og analyseres som en form for initieringsritual. Kurset består af en *initiering*, en *vanddiæt* og en *transformation*, hvorigennem kursisterne efter sigende bliver i stand til at leve af *universel energi* og dermed i teorien ikke har behov for at spise. Efter kurset opfordres kursisterne imidlertid til at gøre hvad de har lyst til, inklusiv at spise, hvis de føler for det. Ifølge de initieredes egen overbevisning, ændrer det faktum at alle initierede stadig spiser fra tid til anden ikke på det faktum, at det de lever af er *universel energi* og ikke den mad de indtager. Ifølge den kosmologi, der arbejdes ud fra på Lotus Health Care, består alting dybest set af den samme *energi*, og det giver derfor mening i deres verden, at kroppen selv kan danne alt hvad den har brug for ud af denne *universelle energi*. Det demonstreres hvordan de samme fysiske symptomer kan forklares vidt forskelligt inden for henholdsvis en biomedicinsk og LAL-kosmologi, og at hver af disse forklaringsmodeller giver mening inden for dens egen logik.

Kapitel 2 undersøger hvilke epistemologier de initierede lever efter. På Lotus Health Care skelner man imellem at "være i kroppen" og at "være i sindet". Det emiske begreb at 'være-i-kroppen' foreslås som antropologisk begreb og metode. Ved at være-i-kroppen bliver det lettere at foretage det Viveiros de Castro kalder en 'afkolonisering af tanken', foreslås det. Problematikken omkring at oversætte fra levede oplevelser til konceptuelle forklaringer diskuteres, og der argumenteres for at selvom det er umuligt at foretage en sådan oversættelse uden at reducere virkeligheden, er det alligevel værd at forsøge derpå. Ifølge behandlerne på Lotus Health Care styrer rationaliteten når man er i sindet, eller i venstre hjernehalvdel, som det også kaldes. Er man til gengæld i kroppen, er det muligt at lade intuitionen styre. Intuitionen tildeles en større troværdighed end rationaliteten, idet den anses for at komme fra personens højere selv, som har et meget større overblik end det rationelle sind, hvis udsyn er begrænset af at være inkarneret i en fysisk krop. Den intuitive viden som kan nås gennem at være i kroppen har en anderledes karakter end tro, da den er hævet over tvivl. Da de initierede ikke altid er i kroppen men

også somme tider i sindet, kan de dog stadig opleve at tvivle. Gennem mødet med andre danskere, der ikke lever af lys, trækkes to epistemologiske fronter op. Det bliver tydeligt at rationalismen dominerer i det danske samfund, og at lyskursisterne har svært ved at blive taget seriøst, fordi de har en anden opfattelse af, hvad der er troværdig viden end majoriteten, nemlig intuitiv viden.

Kapitel 3 diskuterer hvorfor og hvordan man som antropolog bør tage tilsyneladende irrationelle fænomener seriøst og undersøge dem. Der argumenteres for at man gennem forsøget på at tage radikal andethed alvorligt får mulighed for at gentænke sin egen verdensforståelse og sine egne begreber og dermed udvide sin forståelse for både andre og sig selv. Samtidig undersøger kapitlet grænserne for, hvad antropologer bør tage seriøst. Fire eksempler på sådanne grænser opridses med udgangspunkt i den konkrete case, nemlig at det er vigtigt ikke at tage umiddelbart irrationelle udsagn for pålydende uden at undersøge til bunds hvad der menes med dem, at det er vigtigt at fastholde en professionel skepticisme, at man aldrig kan antage at udsagn svarer til praksis, samt at det er vigtigt ikke at tage et fænomen mere seriøst end folk selv gør. Sluttelig argumenteres der for at dette speciale er et eksempel på, at antropologer godt kan hævde at have forstået de folk de undersøger godt nok til at konkludere, at der er tale om et eksempel på radikal andethed og ikke blot misforstået andethed, samt at mødet med radikal andethed er produktivt for at få antropologer til at gentænke verden ved at tvivle på deres egen verdensforståelse.

Det konkluderes at det ikke på nuværende tidspunkt ikke er muligt at afgøre om det er sandt at disse mennesker kan leve af lys, idet denne påstand ikke er blevet testet videnskabeligt. Dette speciale har produceret en anden form for viden om fænomenet, nemlig en forklaring af, hvilken kosmologi og epistemologi der ligger til grund for, at det for disse mennesker giver mening at man kan leve af energi.