A Spiritual Journey to the East

Experimentation in Alternative Living Among Western Travelers in a

Spiritual Community in India

Camilla Gjerde

Department of Social Anthropology

NTNU

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Abstract

What makes people from the West pursue happiness and inner self-fulfillment in a spiritual community in India? What triggers people to embark on a spiritual quest, and more importantly, what do they find? This thesis is based on my field trip carried out in a spiritual, intentional and international community called Auroville that is based in Tamil Nadu, south in India. Auroville's philosophy is founded on the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo (1872-1959) who assert that man should work towards realizing one's inner real potentials. Auroville became the place this practice should be realized, and were constructed by Mira Alfassa (1878-1973), Sri Aurobindo's closest collaborator. Auroville became an experimental city and is dominated by this spiritual discourse that requires its citizens to seek and realize one's inner self, which is associated with one's origin and authenticity. I assert that the thought about authentic living and an authentic self found a great resonance amongst my informants, and created a change in their notions about the world. This I argue to be a result of the individual's ability and will to change – which correspond with the self's reflexive project in modern contemporary society. There is a need to *become* who one truly *is* (Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991; Helaas 2005). In this thesis I highlight how Western visitors – most of them working as volunteers – work with the self by articulating their inner journey in conversations with other visitors. I also investigate how the adoption of new worldviews became significant, where one picked and mixed from different spiritual discourses. One of these worldviews I have chosen to highlight is how nature became understood as being a big part of how one perceived life and authenticity. It became what was 'real', without being manipulated or transformed into something it was not. By volunteer work on the land and by practicing gardening new ways of experiencing reality seemed to appear, something that was shared and made explicit amongst the volunteers by incorporating Auroville's spiritual vision about self-transformation. This fits well with the idea of modern (and Western) man, or the spiritual seeker; as one who chooses, mixes or exchanges different religious, spiritual and secular perspectives, philosophies and different activities, as a kind of spiritual bricoleur who shops from an eclectic spiritual supermarket (Helaas 2005; Kraft 2011).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> …I have learned that there is no fixed reality of things. I discovered this after traveling a bit, that there is no right way to live, only possible ways to live. I have to travel to be able to see this clearly. It's like the movie Matrix, you know? You think you know what reality is, and then you are exposed to other realities. This is how I see travel. I am introduced to all these new possibilities. All these other possibilities of living.

My friend and housemate, Mona, expressed this while lying on her back on a bamboo mat on the stone floor in our futuristic looking candy house. She and I lived in the middle of the green belt in Auroville's deep forest and it was late evening and dark outside. While in the green belt it was advised to not bike around at night, so during the first weeks we spent our evenings together at home, talking about Auroville and our dreams. We did not have electricity since the Tamil Nadu power grid was very unpredictable, so we used to light up the whole hut with candles. We had both been living in Buddha Garden Community farm (which I will refer as Buddha Garden from now on) for most of our stay in Auroville, and had gotten used to predictable and sustainable electricity converted from solar panels. The sounds from the forest were intense, but after staying in Auroville for a while, the noise just disappears and becomes a harmoniously quiet sound, sometimes interrupted by the sound of the peacocks in the trees at the night, dogs barking or a Tamil village not far away playing loud Kollywood[1] music. Mona was in a deep stream of thoughts, and believed it to be the energies from nature around her that made her feel like she did. From the day I met her, a year earlier, she expressed that there was something about the energies in Auroville that made her continuously return. At this point in time, while we were living in Nilatangam, she wondered whether she should try to become a regular inhabitant of Auroville, and apply for *citizenship*[2].

Mona was originally from Paris but had been living right outside London in a houseboat for the past seven years, in a kind of informal houseboat community. She was now on a journey through India for the second year in a row. During this time she desired to visit Auroville for only a couple of weeks before traveling up north to the mountains to meet her flute teacher

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[1] Kollywood is the South Indian form of Bollywood music/movies (located in Bombay). Tamil Nadu has a big production of local movies, called Kollywood, where most of the movie studios are located in Kodambakkam, also referred to as Kollywood.

[2] One needs to go through a formal procedure to become a citizen of the City, Auroville. This involves interviews as much as background checks, and recommendation-letters from other citizens. This decision is made by an Entry Group Unit that wants to find out if the applicant believes in the city's vision and aim, and is pure at heart.

(who had taught her how to play the flute nine years earlier). But during the second visit she had still not been able to implement the plan. "There is such a great energy here. But also, it is so painful to work with it". Mona, like other people who visited Auroville, seemed to feel a strong aspiration[3] while staying there; an aspiration to face a journey inside themselves and explore what is there, at the same time as one find oneself on a physical journey from home. This thesis is about Western travelers like Mona – travelers who found themselves on a spiritual quest in a spiritual community in Auroville, India. Meaning was created between my informants in the realm of alternative spirituality, and this was expressed in different ways. My questions are: *How do they pursue their experiences while being there, and how are these experiences articulated and given meaning? What do communities like Auroville offer that people do not find at home/outside Auroville?* This inspired me to investigate the way self-narratives (Bruner 2001) were used in autobiographies, and how local metaphors were frequently used; as a local ethos of how to talk about life and oneself. Through my informants' ideas and experiences it is my intention to highlight how Taylor's (1991) claim – that modern man is a being with inner depths – can apply to the Auroville context. The thesis subject is to illustrate how alternative ways of living and views on life – as it is said – have become increasingly important aspects of modern society (Helaas and Woodhead 2005).

My motivation for studying Western travelers on a quest in a spiritual community in India is based on my interest for India and its role as a metropolis for spirituality, Auroville being a clear manifestation of this role. I am also quite fascinated by the idea of wanting to create and manifest a utopian dream.

Introduction and Context

When established institutions and apparent superior forms of knowledge production lose their capability to produce 'the truth' and its role as the authority of meaning, the individual finds itself in a situation where it can choose more freely what is important. Paul Helaas (1999:143) argued that this process of relativism, which connects truth and meaning to what is true or meaningful for the individual, seems to be an increasing feature for many modern Western

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[3] *Aspiration (ambition, hope)* were the local term used to express the yearning or pursuit for something Holy and meaningful in life. The aspiration would be unique for each person as it was found deep inside each individual as a subjective experience.

societies. This is widely understood as a result of the modern world's differentiation mechanisms (Helaas et al. 2005, 1999; Giddens 1991). The modernity's differentiation mechanisms entailed a separation between God and man, between God and nature, and between the holy and the secular. Max Weber put forth the concept of *the disenchantment of the world* (Weber 1946). The belief in God disappeared, paving the way for the Enlightenment era's focus on rationalism where the world was explained through universal laws without an irrational belief in holy substances or Godly existences. With these new scientific truths about the world the individual's social world and reality also changed. Not only did the modern institutions undermine traditional knowledge system by scientifically organizing new boundaries and classifications of the world, they also reformulated the relationship between the self and society, the individual and the collective, nature and man. Different disintegrating mechanisms had led the individual to a paradigmatic separation from 'certain' earlier truths. The ontological uncertainty that followed the fragmented modernity could lead the individual into an existential isolation, separated from the production of meaning in the external world (Giddens 1991). This separation process implied an alienation of man in the late modern era, when the individual was forced to deeply reflect on own status, positioning, and self-identity with one's surroundings. Anthony Giddens, the sociologist, claimed that this process had generated something that altered both daily social practices and individual activities; the reflexive project of the self. Giddens believed this project to increase the individuals' freedom of alternatives in relation to how they live their lives (lifestyle) and expand the individuals' possibility to define themselves (1991:20). The self's reflexive project incorporates several contextual situations and forms a mediated experience where *one* path must be chosen. In cases where no authorities exist, the individuals need to find their own way or discover what gives them meaning. Production of meaning is to be found in the individual's subjective experience, but this type of decision-making can generate both feelings of helplessness and freedom (Ibid.:201). A common result from this process is that the individual seeks to become what they 'really' are, something that implies a reflexive reevaluation of the self in relation to perception of values, lifestyle, relations, affiliations, coherence between place and time, nature and culture and, not least, self-identity. Helaas (et al. 2005:2-3), who's main field of research covers European societies, describes it as a cultural shift from *life-as* (which refers to distinct roles as obedient daughter, dutiful wife, strong leader, father, or good worker) to a *subject-life* which has a stronger association to the individuals' subjective experience and knowledge. It is a (subjective) turn away from a life lived in terms of external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards a life

lived with reference to one's own subjective experiences. One should live life subjectively as oneself and not through a 'life-as' role. This idea is in line with the cultural flow in many Western societies, signified by the philosopher Charles Taylor as "the subjective turn in modern culture" (Taylor 1991:26). This shift increased the individual's integrity in the production of meaning by the introspective search where everyone has the right to shape their lives in their own idiosyncratic way. Taylor claims that "we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths… The source we have to connect with is deeper within us" (Ibid.). This means that there is something 'beneath the surface' that has a potential to be realized.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000:32) claims that the need to *become* who one thinks one *is* marks a clear feature of modern society. This representation demands and has a need for what we know as self-actualization or self-development, and are central elements in the individual's production of meaning. The area that covers all these demands is New Age, or alternative spirituality which it is often called today. Alternative spirituality implies a wide spectrum of activities and philosophy, but can be described as a general quest for realizing the human potential[4] through psychological self-development and/or spiritual self-actualization, and a wish to change the world as it is today (Puttick 2005; Helaas 1999; Hanegraff 1998). Alternative spirituality reunites the holy with the self, God and man, and can therefore be said to be the theoretical antithesis to a fragmented modernity, while at the same time nurturing the individual's unique subjectivity. A British survey about spirituality shows that more than 10 % of the Western population considers themselves as "living an authentic life" (Helaas, Martin and Morris 1998:3). Helaas (et al. 2005:78) asserts that those who prioritize or choose a subjective-life will be more liable to be drawn towards alternative spirituality in order to cultivate their own unique subjective-life. This tendency is apparent in the case of Auroville. Alternative spirituality is based on the individual and is given legitimacy by the individual's personal experiences. The modern (and Western) man, or the *spiritual seeker*, that Helaas discusses in *The spiritual Revolution* (2005), is one who chooses, mixes or exchanges different religious, spiritual and secular perspectives, philosophies and different activities; a kind of spiritual bricoleur who shops from an eclectic spiritual supermarket. This thesis documents *spiritual seekers* as described by Helaas; people looking for their inner selves and some deeper meaning that can complete them. Some make the radical choice of abandoning

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[4] A movement explicitly associated with this idea is Human Potential Movement (HMP) and was one of the most important and most influential counter-cultural movements in the 1960s and '70s. HMP was a principled and experimental resistance against that day's psychology and organized religion (Puttick 2005:201).

the Western lifestyle completely and become a citizen of the spiritual community in India, while others go back with new knowledge, an altered perception, and an aspiration for applying this to their daily lives. Many of them describe their experience in Auroville to be profound and very 'real', and that they have never before felt as connected to themselves as they did there.

Auroville is an experimental city, trying to become a better society. This prompts people to ask fundamental questions such as how modern society treats the individual, and how the hegemony causes a person, who has alternative thoughts, to feel alienated. The informants desired to feel more empowered in their own society, and be a part of creating a better society, as the inhabitants in Auroville were doing. The desire to live in a society where everyone is united by a common vision becomes the dream. They wish for a less superficial, commercial, money-controlled, structured society with clear aims and visions that express and contribute to the individual self.

An important reason for studying New Age, or alternative spirituality is that it epitomizes central features of modernity (Helaas 1999: 4-5). Research into New Age serves to highlight aspects of the cultural world in which we live, and contributes to the very considerable body of scholarship devoted to examine our cultural values, assumptions and difficulties, all set in connection with cultural change. Another important reason for studying New Age is that it claims to offer wisdom. Anthropologically speaking, such a claim, especially when the wisdom pertains to alternatives to modern lifestyles, deserves serious examination. New Age, acknowledged as a contemporary and legitimate alternative to mainstream culture, can tell us something about said culture (and the West in general), and it can reveal aspects of human awareness of being-in-the-world and how the production of what is understood as meaningful can be said to be generated by hegemonic powers in one's society.

The Thesis Structure

The order of chapters is done to provide the reader with the necessary framework and context in order to give a structured, clear and concise picture of the society of Auroville – its vision, daily practices and social, experimental structures – and thus be able to illustrate my informants' creations of new worlds and self-experiences. Each chapter builds on the next, as a continuous process, delving deeper into the Auroville experience.

In chapter 1 I will represent the local area for the field of research, Auroville's philosophical foundation and how and why the city was founded. Further I will contextualize Auroville's relation to New Age, the thesis theoretical perspectives and method. Chapter 2 investigates how the visitors articulated the journey they found themselves on, and which common metaphors they used. I start by presenting five of my informants' stories about how and why they came to Auroville, to be able to analyze the narrative construction of self-identity happening amongst the visitors. Further I discuss how the visitors together shared different concepts about being in a transitional stage in life, where they used metaphors and concepts adapted from a New Age worldview. In chapter 3 I focus on nature, and how nature became understood through a New Age spiritual worldview. This I show by illustrating how nature became interpreted and perceived through a holistic notion, where man is just as much part of nature and should not separate oneself from it. I also investigate how nature became part of the spiritual quest where it was understood as a place to connect oneself to the natural state of being, as a way to materialize the inner transformations the informants went through.   In chapter 4 I continue the discussion about how nature changed the informants understanding of where to place themselves in the bigger whole, and illustrate this by elaborating their understanding of being *in* nature (outside) compared to be in a space somewhere disconnected from nature (inside). I continue this perception of nature by looking at different practices in Auroville (i) the experimentation with money (ii) work vs. service, (iii) and how these practices became a central focus for discussions around moral action and authentic ways.

Representing the Field

During the spring of 2011, and again in spring 2012, I spent six months in Auroville, an experimental city located in southern India in the state of Tamil Nadu, a few kilometers outside the postcolonial French city, Pondicherry. This experimental city is a universal township in the making for a population of up to 50,000 people. Today there are around 2,250 citizens calling themselves *Aurovillians*[5].

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[5] Being an *Aurovillian* formally means you have a citizenship, which one needs to apply for through Entry Service.

The story of Auroville began in 1914 when a woman named Mirra Alfassa came to Pondicherry with her husband, with a desire to meet the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo. Mirra Alfassa was described as an extraordinary and gifted child. In her twenties she studied occultism and worked with several different groups of spiritual seekers in Paris. When she met Aurobindo, she immediately recognized him as a mentor she had encountered in earlier visions, and knew that her future work was by his side. Aurobindo recognized in her an embodiment of the dynamic expressive aspect of an evolutionary and creative Force, in India traditionally known and approached as the 'Supreme Mother'. He therefore started addressing and referring to Mirra Alfassa as 'the Mother'.

It was the Mother who organized the growing group of followers around him into the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in November 1926. Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1950, and in 1952 the Mother created the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education to fulfill his wish of providing a new kind of education for Indian youth. In 1968 she founded the international township project of Auroville as a yet wider field for practical attempts to implement Aurobindo's vision of new forms of individual and collective life, blazing the trail for a brighter future for the whole world.

Figure 1: The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

> Humanity is not the last rung of the terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each individual to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species.

> For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist. (The Mother, August 1966)

Both Aurobindo and the Mother worked all their lives for the manifestation of a mode of consciousness beyond the mind, which Aurobindo named *Supermind* or *The Supramental*. Aurobindo's primary ideological contributions to Auroville's genesis can be summarized in four interrelated insights: (i) he concluded from his several visionary experiences that at the core of physical and psychic reality there exists a Divine, feminine energy he simply calls Shakti or 'The Mother', (ii) he asserted that all beings are evolving in a progressive way towards a transformed consciousness which will participate in and reflect the Divine energy latent in all beings, (iii) Aurobindo's notion of the 'descent of the Supermind' proposed that the evolution of mankind requires transformation of matter such that both body and mind, physical world and consciousness, are inextricably joined in the evolutionary process, and (iv), Aurobindo suggested that through spiritually alert working in the world (integral yoga; karmayoga), the evolutionary progress may be hastened towards its inevitable end of human transformation.

Even though Aurobindo's evolutionary intuitions provide the general theological support for Auroville's creation, it was left to Aurobindo's long-time disciple and head of the ashram, the Mother, to apply his insights to the *intentional community*[6] building. Claimed by Aurobindo to be the incarnation of the Divine Mother it became the Mother's words and influences which generated Auroville and still permeate the present community. Aurovillian's point to a dream the Mother had in 1956 as the crucial event leading to the beginning of the international city of Auroville. The Mother recorded her vision in these words:

> There should be somewhere upon Earth a place no nation would claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of Supreme Truth, a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and miseries... a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions. In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.[7]

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[6] An intentional community is a planned residential community designed from the start to have a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork. The members typically hold a common social, political, religious and spiritual vision and often follow an alternative lifestyle.

[7] 'A Dream' is cited in nearly all the books and pamphlets about Auroville. For example, see Auroville. Aims and Ideas (Auroville: Auroville Publication Group, 2008), p. 5.

In the Mother's utopia there would be non-compulsory education for children, and this would allow for individual patterns in their integral growth of body, mind, and spirit. Social roles, titles, and positions would be leveled in favor of co-operative work based on humble service to the Divine and respect for others. Monetary rewards would not be needed in such a dream-city, because spiritual progress through work, e.g. karmayoga, would be a reward in itself and no focus would be given to profit or personal gain. The material needs of all in the community would be met by a mutual sharing of supplies and services — thereby making money redundant and unnecessary. Auroville can be understood as a clear and practical manifestation of Aurobindo's fourth demand in his vision; that through spiritually alert working in the world the evolutionary progress may be hastened towards its inevitable end of human transformation. This is the physical and basic level of karmayoga, where Auroville was to be a practical project. Auroville is also manifested on Aurobino's other demands for self-transformation, but this fourth one can be said to be understood as the most central said it is the physical practice of the vision, as a human experiment in communal living.

Auroville would be separate from the ashram in purpose and government. The ashram should be the central consciousness, while Auroville should be the outward expressions. In both places the work is done for the Divine. The concept was put before the Indian Government, who gave their consent and took it to the General Assembly of UNESCO (Minor 1999). In 1966, UNESCO gave their full encouragement and passed a resolution commending it as a project of importance to the future of humanity.

On 28 February 1968, Auroville was officially established. Young people from 124 nations placed a handful of soil from their native lands into a marble urn situated at what should be the center of the township (Minor 1999:49-50). It then consisted of about 2,000 acres of deforested and eroded land. The Mother created a 4-point *Charter*[8] that would be the first legislation for the city.

> 1.   Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
> 2.   Auroville   will   be   the   place   of   an   unending   education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
> 3.   Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.

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[8] *Charter* is the grant of authority or rights.

4.   Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

The concept of Auroville was an ideal township devoted to an experiment in human unity. (The Mother, 28. February 1968).

"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity" (The Mother, 8 Sept 1965). This purpose of Auroville, to realize human unity – in diversity, makes Auroville to be recognized, by their citizen's at least, as the first and only ongoing international experiment in human unity and transformation of consciousness. The citizen's also recognize Auroville for their concern with and practical research of sustainable living and the future cultural, environmental, social, and spiritual needs of mankind.

The Aurovillians come from about 45 nations, from all age groups, social classes, backgrounds and culture's, and are supposed to represent human unity as a whole. Approximately one-third is Indians, and the foreigner's represented in Auroville are mostly from Northern Europe and the US, where the biggest group is from France, Germany and Russia. During winter (December-March) the population of Auroville increases to 10,000 temporary inhabitants. These are guests and volunteers who stay in Auroville from a few days to several months on average, some even stay a year, and some never leave as they start their process of becoming a *Newcomer*[9]. The long term volunteers and guests are mostly people from northern European countries and the US. Auroville can be described as an international, intentional, spiritual and experimental community in the making, and by its citizens this is understood as an ongoing process. How the vision is practiced is up to each individual since they have to find the answers deep inside themselves.

In the Mother's mind there was no need for an overarching authority to legislate Auroville's development, and therefore no need to set down rules for its operation or control (Minor 1999). Consistent with the overall worldview she and Aurobindo had, the Mother was convinced that the Divine, the spirit, the Supermind within, was the force at work providing

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[9] Being a *Newcomer* represents the stage before you can become an Aurovillian citizen. This stage lasts for approximately 2 years. In this time period one need to support oneself, where one do not get the monthly maintenance before one are classified and approved as an Aurovillian. To become an Aurovillian one need to fulfill the demands as a citizen, as being a believer in the vision wanting to work for it and having a pure heart and aspirations.

each individual with direction and internal motivation. It would lead each individual to self-perfection, however not in an egotistic sense where this would lead to an individualism that competed with the interest of others. That would be inconsistent with the concept of unity. She believed that this worked and would continue to do so, in terms of unity and diversity. This idea of communalism (unity) *and* individualism (diversity) – which can be seen as a result of social liberation – is a common feature for intentional communities. The Aurovillians activities and work are very varied, but most of them work in Auroville. What is nevertheless expected of them is that they work with their karmayoga, which means to try to reach perfection through the work they do. Normatively speaking a common expression in Auroville that *all life is yoga*[10]*,* which can be understood as a way to describe the practice and attitudes in Auroville, and is part of the practice of the karmayoga.

In terms of physical development Auroville aims is to become a model of the *City of the Future* or *the City the Earth needs.* The Mother gave clear parameters for how the city should be constructed in terms geographic location and overall look, but gave the French architect, Roger Anger, free reins for the township's physical development. One of the central thoughts in Auroville is to create Human Unity, which means an unconditional society; an egalitarian and harmonious social community based on cohesion detached from cultural, social, ethnic, national, political and religious background. In general Aurovillians perceive existing societies as negatively conditioned, which means that they are unconscious of and not very reflected about a modus operandi. In Auroville's philosophy the realization of human unity will not only benefit their own community, but also push forward humanity as a whole to the next step in evolution; *the integration of spirit in matter.* An important element in this process – from the individual's process of detaching from earlier conditioning to the integration of spirit and matter – is that it will only happen if the process also happens in matter. This is why many Aurovillians are quite committed to the physical creation of the city and the practical work that is done to bring matter to perfection, and because this is part of Auroville's philosophy, evolution may happen only by following the Master Plan[11]. It is up to them to clarify that the physical plan will evolve – themselves included – so the 'spirit will drag

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[10] The teaching *All life is Yoga* is founded by Master Gurudev Swami Sivanandajimeans. Life is believed as the great *sadhana*. Life is the supreme yoga. That is why it was given. Each and every one of our actions from morning until evening should have a Godward thrust; they are to be engaged in for attaining illumination. Everything in our life is and ought to be enlightenment oriented. Breathing, sitting, standing, running, resting, working, lying, waking, dreaming, sleeping, all constitute that one single process—*yoga*.

[11] The Auroville Master Plan is a detailed description of the shaping of Auroville's architecture and town planning in general.

matter along' and a new integrated reality will unfold. Auroville is therefore meant to reflect the city's vision about a new and better future as *the City of Dawn.*

Figure 2: The Galaxy Concept.

This vision, based on Auroville's Master Plan, expresses the city's architecture as a way to reflect a galactic shape. *The Galaxy Concept,* designed by Roger Anger, separates the city into four different zones, where each zone represents one important human activity. The international zone represents the city's cultural diversity and the cooperative, the industrial zone is for work, production and maintenance, the cultural zone is for creativity, education and welfare, and the inhabitants naturally live in the habitation zone. These four zones' starting point from the centre area is described as an open movement of a spiral and is meant to symbolize Auroville´s aspiration for development and progression. The physical shape of the four zones is still in an infant stage and not visible when one moves around town. The part that has been most focused on since 1968 until today, which is also near completion, is the center area. It contains a large park, called Peace, and represents Auroville's three main symbols; The round golden temple of Matrimandir, described as *the soul of Auroville* and is a manifestation of the Divine Mother, secondly the big Banyan tree, which was the only tree still standing in the area when Auroville was established. It has an important symbolic significance and is seen as the city's geographical centre. The third symbol is the amphitheater, which was the scene of the foundation ceremony in 1968 and is the place where this is celebrated annually. Around the centre area one finds most of Auroville's important

buildings, such as the administration center (Town Hall), the concert scene (Bharat Nivas), and Auroville's information- and visitors center (Visitors Center). Inside the centre area one also finds the research- and education complex (Savitri Bhavan), SAIIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Education and Research) and the University of Human Unity. The centre area and the four zones are surrounded by the Green Belt: an area of forest, agricultural areas, and a few communities that are involved in 'green work' such as reforestation and organic agriculture.

There are three big villages around Auroville with together around 40,000 Tamil inhabitants. Around 6,000 of these Tamils are employed by Auroville on a consistent basis. The inhabitants are mainly from low casts and untouchables[12] and have since the 1980s been defined by the Indian government as "backward and in need of development". They labour as farmers, fishermen or unschooled/schooled workers in Auroville. Even though they are still defined as poor, better salary and access to the health service in Auroville have increased living standards and improved the economy for the Tamil villagers. The Kottakarai and Edayanchavadi village are located close to Auroville, and Kuillapalayam is located along the main road, leading to Auroville. In a sense it is difficult to say when you have reached Auroville, because Kuillapalayam is a place Aurovillians and visitors use a lot for leisure, meeting friends and shop, and it feels like what should have been the center. In Kuillapalayam there are a lot of shops with the name *Auroville* in it, but these businesses are not part of Auroville or contributing to the Auroville foundation pool, so even if it seems like one has reached the center, this is not part of Auroville. Along the main road one finds many small shops, restaurants and cafes where everything from gasoline, clothes, phone, and jewelries to fresh vegetables and local food like dosa and paratta are available. These are a mix of Auroville owned units and local villager's shops, where the French bakery is quite a popular Auroville unit amongst the visitors and citizens of Auroville. The Auroville Financial Service also has a unit there, where one can transfer money to an account. Auroville' economical distribution system is centralized within *Auroville Central Fund*[13], which is the economic system that maintains Auroville's collective assets and carry out essential community activities. Instead of paper and coin currency, the citizens are given account numbers to connect to their central account. Visitors, however, are requested to get a temporary account

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[12] The untouchables were also called *Dalit,* a caste outside the Indian caste system.
[13] Auroville activities are financed by donations from Auroville residents, through income generated by Auroville business units and by international grants and donations. These activities are co-ordinated by various Auroville working groups, as the *Central Fund*.

and an *Aurocard*, which is a debit card. Aurovillians are on principle against money-based transactions, and this is their temporary solution. The citizens are expected to contribute each month to the community. They are asked to help the community whenever possible, by work, money or kind. *Guest contribution,* or a daily fee payable by the visitors, constitutes a part of Auroville's budget. There is a system of *maintenance*, whereby those Aurovillians in need of income can receive from the community a monthly maintenance allowance that covers one's basic needs. Auroville are of an evolving nature and there are ongoing experiments to move closer towards the vision. This arrangement with accounts is only practiced in Auroville's (commercial units) shops and restaurants, which in Kuillapalayam is the colonial store Pour Tous, the French Bakery, Farm Fresh, which sells organic products and imports, and a pizza restaurant called Tantos. The health centre and dental clinic are also located in Kuillapalayam, as well as four large activity and leisure centers with sports arenas and swimming pool for children and youngsters. Today the city has five schools, but also theater- and dance schools and language schools. The Auroville beach is located in Repos, a community right outside Auroville. The Quiet Healing centre, some hundred meters from Repos, offers everything from Ayurvedic massage, healing, Reiki, Watsu and yoga. It is run by Aurovillians and most of the visitors are tourists. As one continues down the main road past Kuillapalayam to the centre of Auroville the traffic and noise subside and big green trees line the road, casting shadows. This is a very different landscape than the areas around, where the landscape is quite naked and dusty, just like Auroville was before they started the reforestation and development. Inside Auroville's terrestrial ground the different Auroville units are spread within a perimeter of 22 square kilometers. One does not get the feeling of reaching any kind of 'center' where there are a lot of people, like in Kuillapalayam. It is quiet and calm and people who walk past you are wearing Indian inspired clothes that look very comfortable and light. A popular place inside the city center is Auroville's Solar Kitchen. This place is run by solar panels, and is the original community kitchen that feeds over a thousand mouths each day, depending on the time of year. They serve both lunch and supper, and all meals are organic and vegetarian. Over the Solar Kitchen is the popular meeting place La Terrace. They serve lunch, dinner, French cakes and Italian coffee. La Terrace also has Internet facilities, which makes it a popular hangout for people who do not choose the cheapest options, as in Kuillapalayam. One can also loiter around without buying anything, where the roof is big, and it is a nice place to cool down when the sun is on its hottest by noon. Except for the main road that goes through Kuillapalayam and to Auroville's center, the rest of the roads in Auroville are dirt roads that lead you to Auroville's various facilities, units and communities.

Who Comes to Auroville?

Clearly in any community it is the people and the culture they create that is ultimately the foundation for how well that community thrives. In Auroville we can see that there are various groups of visitors, both permanent and temporary, which make up both the spiritual cornerstones and the building blocks of community. But Auroville has also learned how to use its appeal to visitors as an advantage. Since Auroville is one of the extensive and longest lasting experimental communities in the world it attracts a lot of tourists, and Auroville has created a business out of it. They have many guesthouses in different price ranges, from a small bamboo hut (as capsules) or dormitory to hotels with spa and pool. It attracts a lot of Indians who take weekend retreats to relax and to visit Matrimandir, where Indians are said to have a special interest in visiting sacred grounds and temples, and of course to enjoy the green and quiet scenery in Auroville. The Western tourists that come here are, amongst others, are individuals interested in environmental issues. Organic and sustainable farming courses are arranged for such visitors, as well as permaculture courses and the opportunity to learn by working the land, such as at Buddha Garden Community Farm, which was 100 percent based on voluntary work. There were also other communities that offered this kind of exchange, where Discipline Farm, Solitude Farm, Sadhana Forest and Windarra Farm were the most popular communities to stay in while doing agriculture volunteer service. They offered the opportunity of learning by doing, and in return for the work you did you got cheap accommodation. The tourists that come here to stay are often *WWOOFers*[14] (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, or; Willing Workers on Organic Farms) and have worked other places before coming to Auroville. Beside the WWOFer guests and environmentally interested, there are also people who come to explore Auroville as a spiritual, intentional and experimental city, interested in Auroville's aim and visions. These are people from young adult to middle age, and are by some termed as *New Age Travelers*[15]. Most of the travelers from the West were long-term travelers who were away from home for around six months or

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[14] WWOOF is a loose network of national organizations that facilitate placement of volunteers on organic farms. *WWOFing* aims to provide volunteers with first-hand experience in organic and ecologically growing methods, to help the organic movement, and to let volunteers experience life in a rural setting or a different country. WWOF volunteers generally do not receive financial payment. The host provides food, accommodation, and opportunities to learn, in exchange for assistance with farming or gardening activities.

[15] *New Age travelers* are by Helaas described as Western New Agers traveling. India then becomes an important ground, where many sites, communities and ashrams can be explored, and one can have a feeling of learning and develope from the 'source'.

longer. Some never stopped, and worked while traveling, and just moved from place to place. There are also a great deal of students who arrive each year in Auroville, conducting forms of research, apprenticeships and service work as part of their education program. Auroville has its own volunteer Unit called AVIS (Auroville Volunteer and Internship Service), where one can apply to do service work. AVIS will help put you in contact with the units you can work with when they know what kind of sector you are interested in.

The aurovillians who live there on a permanent basis are not easy to characterize, since there are so many different people with equally varied motivations for coming there. The aims also seem diverse in time, as in the '60s and '70s it was followers from the ashram and counter-culturalists who came. Ambre, one of the pioneers, describes the Newcomers today and in the last decades as people who come here to "settle down", and she feels this breaks with the vision and the aspiration the place had in the beginning. She feels Auroville is something different now than it was during its first decades. I experienced that most of the people I met who became Newcomers are people who defined themselves as on a *quest* for something more meaningful than the life they were leading before discovering Auroville. The Auroville Newspaper often had interviews with Newcomers asking them what made them decide to apply for a citizenship. The stories always felt so inspiring and great, and spoke about love, life, finding one's path, self-transforming experiences and finding happiness. I felt I got a sense of the place and people's aspirations for wanting to stay and become a citizen by reading these interviews. They spoke in the same narratives and with the same use of metaphors as the visitors and citizens I met would use.

New Age and Community Living in Auroville

The idea to produce new communities with original lifestyles based on other values and concepts than the one's associated with 'mainstream' society is not new. Already before New Age was known as a movement and as a term in the 1960s, so-called alternative societies had already been established. It can be traced back to the 18th century and what these 'new centers of life' had in common were a wish and a quest for alternative lifestyles. They were part of a counter-culture that by principle rejected the Western scientific criteria of truth and experience of reality (Green 2000:62). These communities represented in various ways the alternative approaches to the existing social and cultural practices. This movement also represented a form of 'secret religion' for the well-educated Western elite, mainly based on

Western esoteric knowledge (Helaas 1999:124, et al. Kraft 2011). Wouter Hanegraff (1998:97) denotes these early idealistic movements as New Age *sensu strict,* e.g. limited in shape and distribution. They were 'alternative' in the sense of challenging the normative practices in society at large by breaking out from these and actively differentiate themselves from them. In the 1960s the New Age movement grew stronger and legitimized its foundation through the emergence of Western counter-cultures. The resistance against the US military involvement in Vietnam, the hippie movement's protests against traditional authorities and materialism, and criticism against race discrimination and the feminist's second wave of liberation, were just some the counter-cultures that characterized the political climate in the West in the 1960s, and that made more people seek out alternatives to the existing Western hegemony. Within New Age this period represented a shift from professional, well-established spiritual seekers to more young, flexible and politically committed seekers (Helaas 1999:124). The new and unifying term from the '60s was based on a notion of a new era, the so-called 'age of aquaris' (Kraft 2011:40-42). The concept is an example of what studies in religion call 'milleniarism' from the latin *millennium.* The term derives from Saint John's prophecy, where Jesus milleniarism is described as the first stage of a final victory over Satan, followed by Doomsday and a new heaven and Earth. As a category from religious studies milleniarism refers to a similar expectation about a new era, but detached from Christianity. The phenomenon is present in many religions, theosophy, amongst others. The process is expected to start with the spiritual development of the individual, and after a sufficient number of people have changed, the result will be a change in consciousness and social change in global dimensions, political, economic, religious, scientific, and community forms.

It was in the '60s that alternative communities like Auroville, Findhorn in Scotland and Esalen in California were established, and New Age was at the same time becoming more accessible to the average person. At the beginning of the '70s New Age was a decentralized counter-cultural movement and involved a huge heterogenic collection of activities, beliefs and concepts affected by different spiritual and partly social and political currents, and thus attracted many different people (Helaas 1999; Kraft 2011:36). The New Age movement was, and is, a rich collection of various eclectic ideas, activities and belief systems inspired both by Eastern religious traditions and alternative Western philosophy, that in many ways are reformulations of ideas about nature and the self's possibilities. Despite the heterogeneity there is a feature of the New Age movement that has proven resistant against time and the

elements of '60s and '70s are still relevant for New Age today. New Age gives an explanation of why life – as conventionally experienced – is conceived as meaningless and what one should do to solve this issue. While the movement in the '80s went over to a new era of so-called New Age *consumerism* in the West – a form of part-time New Ager preoccupied with 'buying' New Age activities and concepts – the '90s developed new forms of nature-oriented activities with a focus on innovative and environmental friendly technology for a better living. Helaas (1999) sees this as the New Age movement once again reuniting with 'mainstream' society. Helaas went from terming the phenomenon New Age, towards using the term *alternative spirituality* or *self spirituality* more frequent, where he argued that he found alternative spirituality to be more suitable for contemporary society. He argues that the phenomenon has developed from a widespread movement where the common ground was the belief in a 'coming astrological Age of the Aquarius' (New Age) to become centralized around producing meaningful *lives,* as a form of self-spirituality; where spirituality is taken to be *life itself* – the 'life force' or 'energy' that sustains life in this world, and what lies at the heart of *subjective life* – the core of what it is to be truly alive. It is part and parcel with authentic ways of being (Helaas 1996:46). This means that a lot of different people seek towards alternatives and practices spiritual therapeutic tools, but they do not necessarily term themselves as being part of a New Age movement. This thesis uses the terms alternative spirituality and New Age in conjunction with how Helaas has interchangeably used the term in his work, whereas other theorists use the term New Age more regularly. Today New Age includes everything from activities such as meditation, energy, Vipassana, healing, magic, crop circles, aliens and yoga to crystal therapy, chanting and Feng Shui. New Age workshops offer the opportunity to 'find your inner voice', 'come in contact with your supreme being' or 'positive visualization'. The terms holism, body-spirit-mind, aura, spirituality and self-realization are all common terms in New Age literature. Kraft (2011:36) refers to this as the 'New religious buffet', where people are interested in a little bit of everything, and take for granted that everything is related to everything else. The main idea is that we all have a self to develop, and that we all have to walk the path alone. This is the 'roadless landscape religion'. Helaas (2005), as pointed out earlier, is also referring to this buffet of different interrelated elements and uses the term 'spiritual supermarket'.

Community living most often has a New Age approach, and can be seen as a result of 'dropping out' from existing society. There can be different reasons for this, such as a feeling of alienation from existing society, a wish to commune with nature and spirit, a longing for

more intimate relations and a feeling of 'brotherhood', the agendas can be many. *Communities Directions* lists over 600 communities in the world. The non-profit Fellowship for Intentional Communities describes community-living as "a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values" (Christian 2003:16). What most communities have in common is therefore *idealism*: they are founded on a vision of living a 'better way'. A community's ideals usually arise from something its members see as lacking or missing in wider cultural circles, and often – like utopia is explained – reflect existing society; what is missing and what feels important for individuals. The volunteers and Aurovillians I met in Auroville displayed these kinds of tendencies; a search for something different than what their own society could offer, and rejection of their own society´s approach to life.

For the passionate followers of the New Age movement it is communities as Earthship in Mexico, Arcosanti in Arizona and Auroville in India which are all experimenting with new ways of living, for example, creating innovative architecture (often sustainable houses that can be built by the community and/or by local re-usable material), egalitarian structures and have different visions of creating a 'new world'. Hanegraff (1998:97) claims that in the '70s an increasing number of people in the Western part of the world started to see variations of 'alternative' ideas as part of *one* new movement; new ideas and activities became in this sense characterized as New Age. Others claim that New Age is not *one* movement, but rather a collection of phenomena linked together with the foundation of Wittgenstein's known term *family resemblance*[16] and can be seen as a *cultic environment*[17] (Barker 1999:189). New Age can also be understood as a particular codeword in the big domains of modern religious experiments (Sutcliffe et al. 2005:1). However you want to choose to characterize the phenomenon New Age will either way symbolize, as the term goes, a new time or new possibilities. The incorporation of Auroville into this wide definition of the term can be justified. It becomes relevant in this thesis as the focus is on that part of Auroville, where elements of New Age become central – in the realm of spiritual growth. "India in particular

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[16] Wittgenstein's point was that things which may be thought to be connected by one essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no feature is common to all. *Games*, which Wittgenstein used as an example in order to explain the notion, have become the paradigmatic example of a group that is related by *family resemblances*. "[…] how is the concept of a game bound? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can draw one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word "game".

[17] A *cultic environment* is a individualistic, tolerant, inclusivistic and efemeric environment with a loose structure, not much demands to one's members, undefined boundaries, fluctuating belief system and rudimentary organization (Hanegraff 1998:4).

provides fascinating material: having been greatly influenced by teachings from this country, New Age is now moving back from the West and back to the East" (Helaas 1999:10).

New Age and Nature

New Age has had a recent revival of interest among younger individuals – particularly those with an interest in *paganism*[18] (Helaas 1999; Kraft 2011). Nature is important in this context, both as holy ground and as an arena for creation. Nature and the past are positioned in relation to the civilization project, which one distances oneself from and which one defines oneself in opposition to. In light of its late modern position as timeless, unchangeable and untouched by civilization, nature emerges as a connection to the past – a room where the past can be re-created and experienced. Respecting nature is described as a result of ideas like these, as through an ecological consciousness and engagement with the environment.

Holism was often mentioned when my informants mentioned nature. *Holism* means *whole* or *complete* and in New Age it refers to the universe as much as to the relationship between body and mind, spirit and matter (Kraft 2011:41). Scholars differ as to the precise and single definition of holism. Hanegraff (1998) argues that holism is to be seen more as a vision than as a consistent theory and as a foundation for a coherent picture of the world. He distinguishes between four distinct basic types, where (i) the universe as expired and emanated from *one* basic source, (ii) universal networks and connections, (iii) the interaction between complimentary polarities (for example the yin-yang-model), and finally (iv) analogies between existence and organisms. Teachings, in New Age principles concerning environmentalism, have been drawn from the great religious traditions as well as the pagans; efforts have been made, by way of New Age science, to affirm the sacrality, interconnectedness and life of nature by way of the *Gaia hypothesis*[19] (Helaas 1999:86, Kraft 2011:41-2). The New Age interpretation of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis is an example

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[18] A focus on the past and nature is characteristic for (neo-) *paganism*, but also typical for New Age. In neo-paganism it is important to re-create the connection to nature that was central in original nature religions. Both Hanegraaff (1998) and Helaas (1999) see neo-paganism as part of New Age. Others claim that it concerns a separate current with similar features, but something different from New Age. Both answers are useful, where both have boundaries, but also ovelapping tendencies and intersecting connections. Self- spirituality is less important in the neo-paganistic environment, but not absent.

[19] Gaia was the goddess of all life for Homeric Greece. But, the *Gaia hypothesis*, also known as *Gaia theory* or *Gaia principle*, proposes that organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a self-regulating, complex system that contributes to maintaining the conditions for life on the planet. The hypothesis was formulated by the scientist James Lovelock and co-developed by the microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the 1970s.

of the analogy, which is the idea that the earth *functions as* an organism, and is developed to an interpretation that the earth *is* an organism, with its own consciousness, intelligence, and intentions. Holism remains a critical part of the theoretical foundation in contemporary ecological studies, and is also the thought behind, for example, the ecosystem, which cannot be predicted or understood by a simple summation of the parts but a higher order of patterns of a functional system. New parts emerge because the components interact, however not because the basic nature of the components is changed. Scientific holism differs from how New Age has often made use of the term. Amongst my informants, though, the ecological studies' approach seemed to fit into their belief system. By not having a reductionistic approach as many other scientific approaches do, and by playing on the same team as nature by not trying to control nature by reducing it to a one-dimensional size, it found its place in the New Age agendas. Ecology surged in popularity and scientific interest during the environmental movement of the '60s and '70s, where this was a time when new attention was drawn to existing and hypothetical threats to the environment and humanity.

New Age is today not only about how to become a new person. The focus is also on teachings and activities that focus on bringing about a counter-cultural world, as Auroville is a good example of. Counter-cultural New Agers seek original ways of relating to the environment: ways that will save the earth from the ravages of capitalistic modernity (Helaas 1999:84). Among other things, this entails the adoption of forms of life (involving work and consumption) which have environmental and nurturing values. These avenues should also contribute to what it means to live as a spiritual person. The early '70s saw a number of significant contributors to the development of New Age environmentalism. Of these three stand out as the more prominent: E.F. Schumacher published *Small is Beautiful. A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (1974). The aim is to "explore what economic laws and what definitions of the concepts *economic* and *uneconomic* result when the meta-economic basis of Western materialism is abandoned and the teachings of Buddhism is put in its place" (Schumacher 1974:43). The second significant contributor is the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1972) who introduced the principles in *deep ecology*. His argument was that nature should be valued for its own sake rather than for its utility value. Other, so-called deep ecologists, have since argued that those who consider themselves as self-actualized come to experience nature as part of an interconnected whole and value it accordingly. This means, those who are *self-realized* identify with the rest of nature, and respect all human and non-human individuals in their own right as parts of the whole. The term eco-feminism, coined by

the third contributor Francoise d'Eaubonne (1974), is where women should quest for a pure, original female consciousness and incorporate the natural order, because until now the patriarchal aspects of modernity have only harmed the earth.

Nature became a significant part of the field research, where it acted as a central discourse for the production of meaning for my informants' life narratives. Different perspectives on the relationship to nature were up for discussion with my informants, but where a *connection* to nature was especially shared by all the different approaches. What all these three contributors have in common is the emphasis on the person as the point of departure (Helaas 1999:85-86). Through critical work on their own consciousness people can clarify their 'intuitions' and act from 'deep principles'. In terms of ecological consciousness, the sense of connection which is then experienced with nature provides the basis for determining what counts as 'right action', something that was also a central topic amongst my informants, both in ways of choice making and discussions with others. They tried to be better people and wanted to contribute in creating a better world. "Knowing, in experience, that nature is sacred, providential and, in itself, harmonious, one knows how to work and consume" (Helaas 1999:85).

The spread of Buddhism in the West and the associated adoption of *right livelihood* (which is a Buddhist term) practices modified ecology to be about awareness and mindfulness. "You must be aware of the environment in which you are living and aware of the effect on it of your actions" (Sangharakshita 1987:26). This is a direct application of Buddhist principles, and was a practice I recognized in many citizens and guests of Auroville. Being conscious about own actions (karmayoga) was an important aspect in my informants' daily lives, especially concerning the environment, where waste control management and conscious consumerism were central.

New Age and Work

Some counter-cultural activists, like many of the citizens and visitors in Auroville, endeavor to make their living by engaging in practices which are good for nature (and the soul). Many in Auroville are trying to live directly off the land, to the extent that is possible. Auroville's aim is self-sufficiency, but today it is far from reaching this goal. Nevertheless, Aurovillians living on farms and working the land often live by these values, and try to get as little resources as possible from outside the community. Also many of the visitors wish to live in a

community, working small-holdings or communal gardens. This can, as a corollary to the work as an involvement with nature and one's connection and respect for nature's resources, also be connected to the view that the work in itself is a healing medium. Work can intrinsically be valued as a means within rather than as a way of making money. Counter-culturalists, at least of the serious kind, simply reject many kinds of work. Striving in terms of the capitalistic mainstream is held to lead to alienation from the self, or, said in another way, to the enhancement of ego[20] operations (Helaas 1999:87). This is a challenge, to find the right kind of work, whilst making an adequate living. Ernst F. Schumacher has stated a solution in his book *Good Work* (1980), where he follows the Buddha's teachings that 'right means of livelihood' is a reasonable standard of living, as well as being beneficial to nature. The basic idea is that by working (as practicing 'labour') one also 'works' on oneself (in a spiritually significant sense). Schumacher made quite radical claims for 'good work', where Helaas (1999:87) would have liked to call this practice 'the self work ethic', because in the process of doing good work, the ego of the worker disappears. He frees himself from his ego, so the Divine element in him can become active. This view has become quite widespread among counter-cultural New Agers. It is therefore not uncommon that a spiritual community like Auroville also has this approach to work, where these elements are often adopted by intentional communities; they try to redefine work as something 'different' than what it is associated with in existing societies, where it is often linked to money and consumerism. In Auroville the aim is that work shall not be about money, but self-progress. In Auroville the citizens may receive a monthly maintenance if required, and this money should not be associated to the work they do for the Divine, but as a means to *coexist*; as a way of not having to think about money, and rather focusing on the work on one's inner spirit. Many of my informants were volunteers, and to stay in this role as a volunteer doing a service to the Auroville community made them reflect on work and what it means out in the existing society. The Aurovillians define themselves as *servants of the Divine*, and say that what they do is not 'work', but a 'service' to the community of Auroville and to the world. This can be connected to the practice and philosophy of karmayoga.

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[20] *Ego* is in a New Age context often referred to as the *lower self*, which keeps you from developing. The ego do not like change, and strive to keep things unchanged.

Spirituality and Religion

The concept of spirituality can be understood by following Asad's (1993) conceptualization of religion and, as a result of a particular socio-historical context, we should understand spirituality in this way. New Age is mainly a Western phenomenon and should not be conceptualized as a universal category. Spirituality separates itself from religion in the following ways: (i) While spirituality often refer to a holy dimension in this world, religion associates the holy with something outside or higher than this world (Helaas 1999:5-7). (ii) Helaas associates 'life-as' (which refer to distinct roles; as obedient daughter, dutiful wife, or strong leader) to religion by its understanding of the holy as something higher, a transcendent authority, while 'subjective-life' in spirituality perceives the holy as subjectivity. This distinction is of course oversimplified and not absolute. There are forms of spirituality within religion (like Christianity's mystical traditions and sufism in Islam) in the same way as there are so-called religious traditions within spirituality (for example codes of moral), but I choose to use Helaas' general and most common formulation. Spirituality, as in New Age, also has other modes of affiliation since it does not demand cultural homogeneity or an elite with enough power to overlook diversity (Helaas 1999:9; Bruce 2005:223; Kraft 2011:36). Alternative spirituality can by this reasoning be characterized as eclectic. Another interesting feature with alternative spirituality is how it can be claimed to be quite adapted to the (post)modern way of life. Steve Bruce (2005) claims that alternative spirituality in the West has an individualistic epistemology, consumerist ethos and a therapeutic focus that resonates with the rest of our culture and that it therefore does not lend itself as an 'alternative' (Bruce 2005:234). It is claimed by both Bruce (2005) and Elizabeth Puttick (2005) that alternative spirituality is not a reaction to a secularized world, but a form of religion that fits a secularized world. Auroville is, similar to the community Findhorn in Scotland, not based on dogmas. The sociologist Carol Riddell (1991) has noted that the Findhorn Foundation claims that spiritual practice anyway is acknowledged as simplified theology, "God is love; God is present; God is therefore our essential self. Seeking to make this essential self our experienced reality is the spiritual approach to life" (Ibid.:7). By promoting alternatives to the individuals understanding of *modus operandi*[21]*,* alternative spirituality attempt to transcend what the individuals' society has to offer, which can help the individuals to feel 'complete'.

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[21] A Latin phrase that that can be translated as 'method of operation'. The term is used to describe someone's distinct pattern, habits or method of operation.

Theoretical Perspectives

My hypothesis is how Western travelers understand the quest they find themselves on, how it creates a meaningful experience of self-identity, and how this process is expressed. Anthony P. Cohen views knowledge about the individual's self-consciousness as quite informative for our understanding of the collective and social life. He therefore advises to investigate society through looking at the self (Cohen 1994:133). He points out that the main subject in anthropological studies is still culture, but that the investigation of the self and self-consciousness offers another approach to understanding culture and therefore are not an approach to replace culture. Through my study of Auroville I found that my informants talked much about their experience with an 'inner self'; in how they experienced this self as part of their reality and how they experienced their own self as identity. This often occurred in discussion with others and through inner work with themselves. Being in Auroville (and in India) the self and 'inner life' – where it was something to transform, work with and evolve – seemed to receive a lot of attention.

The theoretical basis for approaching the narratives created in Auroville are grounded in Jerome Bruner's (2001) approach on how he sees narratives as part of creating meaning to ourselves and our lives. He used Nelson Goodman's (1978) terms of *self-making* and *world-making* to highlight this active process; by choosing certain kind of discourses that makes our present (life) situation meaningful and creates coherence in our life story, we are creating meaning in to the concepts of 'a self' and 'a life'. This has greatly influenced how we understand life and events in our lives, and will be my theoretical approach and analytical tool when investigating how my informants created meaning around their spiritual quest and life situation. This also warrants an investigation into the use of certain *metaphors*, which worked as self-making and world-making elements. By my informants it mainly involved concepts and metaphors of being on a journey (both physically and spiritually), nature as holistic and the idea of a unique self and the possession of an 'inner being'.

Autobiography and Narrative in Anthropology

An autobiographical identity is a construction of self and life worlds that draw on a particular genre of language called *narration* (Bruner 1990; 2001). This is a way to give meaning to our lives – and in doing so, we construct ourselves as *Gestalten*[22] in time, as personal and cultural beings (Brochmeier and Carbaugh 2001; et. al. Bruner 1990; Freeman 2001; Harré 2001). Narratology emerged in the 1960 and '70s as a particular structuralistic way of studying written narrative texts, primarily of fictional literature. In the '80s narratives was discovered and constituted within human science as a fundamental linguistic, psychological, cultural, and philosophical framework for our attempt to come to terms with the nature and the conditions of our existence (e.g., Ricæur 1981; Bruner 1986, 1990; Bauman 1986 and Nelson 1989). Bruner suggest to less seek structures through formal 'clausal analysis', and more to investigate the narratives through cultural analyses and the contexts in which stories are told. In this way it will be a focus on the "processes of linguistic constructions by which prototype narratives are adapted to different and varying situations" (Bruner 1997:67). Bruner's point echoes anthropological and ethnographic studies of narrative (e.g., Bauman 1986; Hymes 1981), especially the idea that narratives give 'voice' to social relations and locally embedded cultural meanings (Hymes 1996).

Bruner (2001) writes that most of the writers up to the end of the nineteenth century conceived of autobiographical writing as writing about an 'essential self', and a writing about a 'life', in Goodman's (1978) terms, as 'an aboriginal life' that was independent of the process of constructing it. Today the tide has turned, and we have come to reject the view that a 'life' is anything in itself and to believe that it is all in the constructing, in the text, or the text making; a *depiction* of reality. This constructivist approach to how we create narratives goes hand in hand with discourse analysis and postmodernism. Events in one's life can be facts, but are processed through memory so it will be culturally transmitted to what one remembers as having happened. These facts and events are open to interpretation and used in *metaphoric* ways and are what defines a narrative 'invention'. A narrative is therefore a constructed story that describes a sequence of events. In this approach we are all storytellers, and we use narration as a way to entertain and illustrate points to others, but most importantly it refers to self-identity, memories and meaning-making.

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[22] *Gestalt* refers to a perceptual pattern or structure possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts.

The reason I find it beneficial to use the theory of narratives in my study is that my informants based their quest on their personal stories. My assumption is that these life stories changed in the realm of self-transformation by making them meaningful. This is based on Bruner's (2001) claim that we locate our issues in our narratives in such a way to make them 'comprehensible'. In practice this means they find a way of 'patterning' their deviation from earlier culture – and 'find' Auroville – which gives their initial deviation a new legitimacy; a new narrative structure. The quest and the transformation in consciousness covered in this thesis can in a narrative sense be described as a *turning point*. Bruner (2001:33) describes this as a way in which people, in their self-consciousness, free themselves from their previous historical narrative, their banal destiny and their conventionality. Turning points are steps towards narratorial consciousness, and Bruner points out that it might not be surprising that, in most autobiographies, they are located at points where the culture in fact gives more degrees of freedom. Examples are graduation (becoming an adult) and traveling (away from familiar environment- the *Grand tour*). This signals an 'inside' transformation, a change in intentional state. Had the autobiography been written before these turning points it would have been a different autobiography. This shows, again, how these changes occur in patterned ways at predictable times, and that it is not independently happening in the individuals' as a intention disconnected from culture. Bruner calls this *folk-psychology* and can be understood as 'common sense'. This means that going on a travel suggests that one should undergo some changes. The *Grand Tour* is a term that has grasped this phenomenon in Western folk-psychology, and has a long tradition describing people on a travel as being in a 'transformative and transitional stage'; in meeting with other cultures one widens one's horizons and becomes more self-reflected. India also has these connotations, as representing spirituality and 'soul searching' by finding oneself in the Himalaya Mountains or in an Ashram on a retreat.

In this sense, autobiography involves not only the construction of self, but also a construction of one's culture – just as Geertz (1988) assures us that writing anthropology also involves a kind of autobiography. This I will mention more about in the method sub-chapter.

Metaphors as World-Making

Tord Larsen (2009) looks at the change in perception through different eras, where different symbols change when new discourses are introduced. As when the discourse 'the pursuit of happiness' became relevant to people's perception of the self and their lives, it created a new understanding of the individual. Language is created by man, and language creates the world, as Goodman (1978) claimed, that "there is no world without words". Words create meaning through concepts and metaphors and are tools to create understandings of what is happening around us. Just as much as we are socialized to perceive concepts in this way – having an 'inner self' and a 'character' are manufactured concepts, and become real when talked about and shared with others. They are concepts created in the realm of individualization, modernization and liberation from set roles. Before this one was said to carry one's identity on the 'outside', like social masks, while today it seems to be something hidden 'inside' of us, something personal and unique (Larsen 2009). Bruner brings forward a strange contradiction – while the self is regarded, in Western ideology, as the most private aspect of our being, it turns out, upon closer inspection, to be highly social and discursively negotiable. To study autobiographies in this view involves not only examining the cultural contradiction of personal identity but also the construction of one's social culture.

The genesis of the discourse about organic farming as having a spiritual impact on people and the orientation within an 'inner life', can therefore be continued studied in a perspective of metaphorization, as a sequel to the narrative approach I have chosen. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) claim that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of thought and action, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. This means that the most fundamental values in a culture will be consistent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:22). Some cultural values in Auroville are – A connection between man and nature (holism), man as original a part of nature (free being); on a spiritual quest for authentic ways; self-development as a process towards a higher consciousness.

My point is that in meeting with new metaphors, old perception are replaced and updated. Goodman (1978) describes this process as *world-making*, where he perceives the creation of symbols (metaphors) as what adds character to a society (the world). In this way he emphasizes the close relation between the world and symbols. "We can have words without a

world but no world without words or other symbols" (Goodman 1978:6). Herder uses the image 'the labyrinth' to describe relativism's disorienting feature when people discover that our most fundamental way of perceiving reality is grounded in our local context (Larsen 2009:11). At the same time Herder claims the labyrinth contains a centre, a viewing point that gives us the opportunity to comprehend other worldviews. It is in the meeting with the 'significant other' this becomes possible. World-making as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is remaking. The 'significant other' is pointed out as important in world-making (Bruner 2001), something I comprehended in my field study, where knowledge and life stories were in circulation and shared between the people in Auroville.

Method

Classical anthropological studies were mostly done on tribes and small-scale communities, trying to grasp the social and cultural system in a restricted localized area. This is traditional anthropology, but how should the anthropological field grasp the new reality where location has another meaning? Where a local area can contain people from other local areas that are thousands of miles from the area they now inhabit, like the Aurovillians and their guests. Auroville is an international township where people with different social and cultural backgrounds meet, and where the Mother's vision was that this township should be a melting pot of differences. Even if it was a melting pot of differences I could not help thinking that the people who lived in Auroville seemed quite similar, in both values and aspiration. The difference between a fixed society and an intentional community though, is that an intentional community has a clear vision, where the settlers and guests unite around a common vision. In a fixed society it is quite different, where one cannot, for example, choose one's own inhabitants, and throw people 'overboard' if they do not follow the society's vision and aspiration. This makes Auroville a special place, and makes it quite interesting as a case for field study. Even though I felt I could relate to people staying and visiting there, I found it difficult to relate to the 'imaginary space', where I had a feeling the imagined was fragile, and could at any time break apart. The reason this place was inhabited by Westerners was because of two inspiring figures that today only function as a memory and as an identity marker for the place. It is the inhabitants' task to keep 'the dream' alive. It is likely that the self-image of

Auroville continues to coexist as strong as it does because of the active dialogue with guests and long-term volunteers. The city does now seem to be built for and around the visitors. As stated by several Aurovillians I met, "the energy changed"; Auroville seemed to become something quite different when summer-and monsoon time arrived and most of the guests left. The Aurovillians also used the concept 'off season' to explain this time, which states that the presence of guests have a central meaning to them and the place. Auroville's existence can also be seen as dependent on the visitors based on the money they bring with them, and are a dominant part of the economy and income in the community. Off season the roads are empty and quiet and many shops are closed for business. Most of the cultural activities in Auroville are also put on hold without the visitors. The time people meet is when eating their lunch or supper at Solar Kitchen and the cafe La Terrace.

It took a while for me to realize this, and it was after coming back home and got some distance to the field site that I got the feeling that the site seemed to be maintained by a constant reproduction of the self-image (vision) communicated about the place; the image of it being the only ongoing human experiment for better living. This made the writing process interesting, where I chose narrative as my main theoretical approach to analyse the data. As a field technique and method I chose a phenomenological approach while in the field, where the investigation of the ways people perceive and understand the world is in focus (Tilley 1994:11). This can be seen as a result of both the empiric field and the anthropological development as a discipline which is coloured by the institutional and individual reflexivity that is dominant in postmodernism. Because of this it should be placed in the inter-subjective knowledge production between the anthropologist and the informant where the anthropologist attempts to understand the informant's perception of 'being-in-the-world'. Man's self-consciousness cannot rely on isolated subjectivities, but needs to be connected with discursive analysis and practice, and through this inform us about the dialectic relationship between the self and the local context of society or community. Since Auroville was an intentional and international community, staged in India, I found it important to consider the relationship between individual and local context. It was in this space that the spiritual quest was created and acted upon.

The Fieldwork's Development

My fieldwork took place in two periods – first, in January to May 2011, and the second time, December 2011 to May 2012. During those periods the temperature moved from Norwegian summer temperatures to tropical heat, where the humidity increased and the activities decreased with the rise in temperature. I lived at Buddha Garden during my first stay in Auroville. This was an organic farm where three Aurovillians named Priya, Ganesh and Gerard lived and worked towards sustainable agricultural production. The farm was hundred percent volunteer based, where travelers and students came to stay for a time period from 1 week to several months. The volunteers were placed in *capsules* – which are a sort of bamboo hut built in a local Tamil way – or in dormitories, dependent on how crowded it was. This varied a lot, but in the season, between January to April it was mostly full, housing up to 10-20 people. The volunteers shared a communal kitchen where they could make meals together or separately, and which also functioned as the common area where one socialized. To live in Buddha Garden meant that you also worked as a volunteer on the farm. The working hours were between 0615-0900, and were followed by communal breakfast served as different sorts of rice plates such as lemon rice, coconut trice, rice with samba and rice with ladyfingers. People who lived other places in Auroville could also come to work in Buddha Garden in the morning and get a free breakfast as gratitude for the service.

In the beginning of May 2011 I was in a major traffic accident in Auroville where I was hit by a motorbike and suffered an open fraction in my leg and a broken jaw. I stayed a while in hospital in Chennai, and during the rest of my stay I lived with my friend Sabine, who was a visitor of Auroville and had an apartment more suitable for a patient as me, compared to stay in one of the Capsules in Buddha Garden, which would have been insensible and rather unpractical. Eventually I decided I should face the fact that I could not continue my fieldwork, which was quite a setback for me. I therefore decided to go back for a couple of months when my body was healed again. In December 2011 I was back living in Buddha Garden. I stayed there for about three months before I decided to move to Pondicherry for a while to start writing. After a month I moved back to Auroville and in to a house with my friend Mona in the greenbelt of Auroville. In Nilatangam Guest House one could live like a hermit, which really suited me at that time. I could work with the thesis without being disturbed and go out when I needed to socialize. I also got to know more Aurovillians, which gave me some much-needed new perspectives.

Activities and Arenas

I decided to live and work in Buddha Garden because I saw this as a potential arena for getting to know other volunteers. It was through AVIS that I got to know about Buddha Garden and I arranged a stay there by mailing back and forth with Priya, explaining I was a student in anthropology. She offered both to help me with my studies and would love to have me as a long-term volunteer, as was something they always needed. As a long-term volunteer they gave me more responsibility, as teaching new volunteers how the different tasks in the gardens were performed, and how the farm was structured. I did not predict farming to be an arena where I would collect the majority of data, as this was something I chose to do to be able to live cheaply and to easily get to know people when arriving in Auroville. The volunteers really opened up to each other while working in the garden in smaller groups, something we also often talked about together – this 'stream of thoughts' while working with the soil. The volunteers who floated through Buddha Garden became important informants for me, and whom I spent most of my time with. I worked with them in the gardens, made meals with them and engaged in different activities during the day with them. They saw me as a volunteer just as them, and even when I told them I was there on a field study, they still treated me as any other volunteer.

I also participated in different courses and activities outside Buddha Garden where I met other guests and volunteers from other places in Auroville, and also the citizens of Auroville and Newcomers. I went to courses like Chakra dance workshops, Reiki healing courses, yoga, meditation classes, introduction courses to Auroville, African dance, vegan cooking class and a course in sustainable organic farming. I also participated in activities in different communities such as movie nights, concerts, festivals, farmers markets, activities at the youth center, and so on, to collect data and meet new acquaintances. After work in Buddha Garden me and other volunteers mostly bicycled to different cafes and hangouts in Auroville and just let the day unfold as it went by. I got to know more Aurovillians the second time I stayed in Auroville, where some recognized me from the year before or had heard about the accident. It was not that it was difficult to get to know Aurovillians during my first stay, but I was mostly focused on studying the volunteers. During my second stay I decided I should get to know more about the Aurovillians' understanding of Auroville and their work with the self, as a way to understand better the philosophy the volunteers adapted. Getting to know the citizens

of Auroville was not a challenge. It is not unusual to end up in a conversation with someone while sitting in a coffee shop somewhere, which can develop into some quite interesting conversations, and maybe end with a new friend or at least a new acquaintance. The Aurovillians were used to people coming to Auroville curious about knowing what the place was all about, and many of them were passionate about discussing it with an outsider. The monthly Auroville Newspaper, *Auroville Today* was a great source of information concerning the happenings and current events in the community. In this way I became involved with the debates happening amongst the citizens, the Indian government and the local villages. *News & Notes* was a weekly news sheets, where its pages contain announcements, reports of meetings, home spun philosophies and sermons, poems, advertisements and quotes from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The Informants

To create a network in Auroville was not difficult, as I experienced most of the people I met as quite open. Even when I informed them that I was on a field study they happily shared their life stories and experiences having befriended me. I had no problem getting in contact with enough informants, as there always were new volunteers arriving in Buddha Garden. After getting settled in Auroville I also got a wider network outside Buddha Garden, consisting of some local Tamils, Aurovillians and Newcomers, and other volunteers and guests. In total I had approximately 40 informants where gender and age were spread between 18-70 years old. Almost everyone was originally from a Western part of the world, though a few were from India – both local and other parts of India. Aurovillians and Newcomers were good to help me answer questions about Auroville, as they had often studied Aurovilles' philosophy and history. They had also gone through a sort of quest as the visitors (referring to both volunteers and just being a visitor) who came here did. Every visitor in Auroville is a potential Newcomer, whereas the Aurovillians had all been in the situation of looking for something more and found Auroville as the answer. Despite having many informants I have chosen to only focus on a handful of them. This is because I wanted to present the informants thoroughly, which made it important to only select a few. Hence, many of the same informants appear in various chapters in this this thesis, which underpins the different chapters and themes, informing the reader about the informants' narratives, conceptions and point of departure. The aim has been to 'look beneath the surface' and understand their perceptions around the quest and how they gave it meaning.

Positioning and Interaction with my Informants

Most of the traditional anthropological methodology is based on there being a difference between the anthropologist and those who are studied. This was a bit different for me since most of my informants came from Western parts of the world, and therefore subject to similar cultural references and could easily relate to each other's stories and experiences because of this. They also perceived me as being just as much on a quest as they were. I strived to engage in the activities that interested them, and tried to do the associated activities and courses that suited the realm of self-development. I studied the philosophy to get more in contact with the essence of Auroville, and I read literature people recommended to me. Sherry Ortner (1984) describes a fieldwork as a total, bodily experience. By practicing a phenomenological approach – where man's presence in the world is essential – I used myself as a subject to try to understand the spiritual and existential journey my informants found themselves on. Merleau-Ponty sees the body as an expressive room where our emotions are, and through our emotions we perceive the world (Fürst 2004:50). The sentient and acknowledging human is bodily experienced (Csordas in Moore 2007:183). We do not sense phenomena's as things, but as part of a meaningful flow of experiences. With this approach objects are not fixed and objective, but shifting shapes, content, meaning and value based on man's position in time and space. If I had chosen another approach, much of the tacit knowledge received through conversations with my informants could have been lost. Conversing in the dimension of self-knowledge and spirituality made me become more aware of my own self, and acknowledge the complexity of my own self-identity and the concepts and narratives that created my own choice-making, thoughts, and feelings.

By using myself as a subject it also felt important to try to take a distance. If not I would not have been able to observe with an outsiders look, which can be essential for grasping the phenomenon. The second time in field I was more conscious about this, and kept the volunteers on the farm on a distance. I did not participate in the same degree as the first time, and spent more time getting an overall look of Auroville, where local Tamils, Newcomers and Aurovillians became groups I spent more time with. This gave me a chance to get a glance of the visitors, which was most volunteers, with a new eye, where I observed their activities more than I participated.

Conversations as Social Data

In a context where people are gathered as a result of having a similar vision, as in Auroville, conversation becomes the most effective and apparent way to communicate this interest. Most of my empirical data is based on implicit data, collected through conversations and discussions. Explicit and localized observable data was not as important as what people *said*. Most of this data are collected from formal and informal conversations with informants. Formal conversations happened individually, while informal conversations varied between individual conversations to bigger groups. It was the conversations that eventually shaped the theme of the subject. The visitors of Auroville did not seem particularly interested in my questions during the first round of interviews, where I would end up with answers far away from my theme of questioning. I decided to follow their interests, where the main discourses evolved around transformation in perception, transformation of the self, working with the ego, and the wish to change own lifestyle or situation. These were intimate conversations, where people quickly opened themselves up to each other. They openly evaluated themselves – the good with the bad – and often invited others to do the same. Aurovillians were just as open, where they would tell you how they ended up in a place like Auroville before you even asked, often with quite intimate details around their perceived 'self' and what their heart and soul yearned for.

People who seek out a place like Auroville seem passionate about their quest towards the 'inner being'. Even if this was expressed in various ways, this seemed to be the essential reason for the visit to Auroville. If it was not an aim before arrival, they found themselves influenced and affected while staying there, since this was the dominant discourse of the place. Those who did not like this discourse were quickly gone again, looking for more suitable adventures

Chapter 2: Aspiration and Inspiration

The volunteers who lived in Buddha Garden, spring 2011, sometimes joked with each other that it felt like destiny had brought them together, because they all had something to offer each other, through inspiration and teaching. In their view they all helped each other in different ways. For me this rationale seemed to be permeated by a thought of destiny and I observed that this was a view shared by many visitors and citizens. Two belief systems were thus at play in Auroville; a cosmos built to believe in destiny *and* freedom of creating one's own path. This was interesting to observe since these two worldviews in general are understood as two poles or as antagonist views, but in Auroville they seemed to be practiced side by side. This is by Kraft (2011) described as a feature within New Age, where various elements without previous connections become connected by being organized into the same category. She describes this as the 'New Age buffet', where one can pick and choose and mix together various elements and create holistic and meaningful connotations to it. Helaas (2005), on the other hand, views the mix of belief systems as a result of modern man, which he sees as a spiritual bricoleur who shop from an eclectic 'spiritual supermarket'. In Auroville there is a big buffet offering various ways of viewing life, but at the same time they seem connected and complimentary, like Kraft (2011) claims. My informants shared their views and experiences from life with each other, and also brought new elements to the Auroville buffet. The reason Auroville could offer various worldviews might be because of the overarching philosophy in Auroville, which offered both a model *for* action as much as a model *of* the world. Within this frame there is an assumption – that humans and the world will evolve from the unconscious, illusory[23] and the imperfect to something conscious, fulfilled and perfect.

Aurobindo and the Mother claimed that man can contribute to this development by searching 'within themselves' – which is associated with the natural, the spiritual, the dynamic, the original, and the authentic. By looking into one's 'inner being' one can go through a transformation of consciousness. The quest for one's 'inner being' has no given shape, but is a

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[23] Illusion in a New Age context are often referring to quantum physical theories, who supports the notion of reality being made of vibrations and indicates there is the existence of parallel universes. This shows that our consciousness is involved in creating our reality, and if there is no one to observe (the subjective self) reality, everything will simply be in a wave status, described in quantum physics to be a state with infinite possibilities. This means that our beliefs play an infinite role in creating our world(s).This fits well to the Hindi Philosophy about *Maya*; which is true in itself but it is not true in comparison with the truth. As per this philosophy, illusion is not the opposite of truth or reality. Based on these assumptions Vedas declare that the world as individuals normally see is illusion (Maya). It does not mean the world is not real. The world is only so much real as the image of a person in a mirror.

task given to the individual to find the content. This is because the transformation is embodied in the subjective experience. The process is happening in a dialectic relation, where in this context it is happening between Auroville's conventions and the guests' self identities, which again creates categories about what seems real and what does not; what seems right and what seems wrong. These categories are open to individual interpretation (manipulation), where the conceptual quest for the inner self is based on the freedom of one's own subjective experience. These can vary much, based on the existing interest and motivation. In Auroville, based on the vision of transformation, some will claim physical work is more important than for example yoga and meditation, while others concentrate on disciplining and healing the physical body. Widely understood; the visitors represent a common quest and a common way to orient oneself in the world, because they seem to have the same assumption that they still have some way to go to find what they are looking for. I choose to define this phenomenon as an 'inner journey', which I view as being more about the journey (the process) than the destination (result), and that this is an individual and subjective experience. This also resonates with Kraft's (2011) definition of the 'roadless landscape religion'. In this chapter I will show how the information and the knowledge-flow became rooted amongst the visitors, and how they in this way conceptualized and made their spiritual quest meaningful.

Five Stories about Transformation

To find out what drew people to a place like Auroville, and why these people are attracted to the concept of the spiritual quest, might be answered by looking at where the visitors came from. This place was by many of my informants described as 'the capitalist and materialistic world' which is more closely described with adjectives as 'brutal, ego-centric, self-maximizing, money-oriented, unconscious, greedy and cold'. Bruner (2001) argues that history can effectively be used in creating meaning and context in present time. This is a way for the individual to communicate their own motivation, self-identity and orientation of reality. By defining the significant other, one is defining oneself, and this description was the general definition in Auroville about the modern Western world 'out there' (Goffman 1992; Luckmann 2004).

The visitors of Auroville's quest for the self unfolds within their narratives, where their individual story forms the basis and the foundation of explanation for the quest and creates connections and meaning between past and present. Because of this assumption, based on the theory of *world-making* (Bruner 2001; Goodman 1978), I will start by presenting five of my informants' narratives; on how they perceive their quest, explained by reflecting on their background and past.

This Mirror I get

I met Sabine when I joined a Reiki course during my first stay. She had been in Auroville for about 4 months and was a quite active person, trying to get sense of what Auroville had to offer while she enjoyed the constant flow of new guests. She was a French lady in her late 30s, but she had not lived in France since she was a teenager. She became a good friend and helped me a lot after my accident by letting me stay with her. On my second stay she also came back, now as a Newcomer of Auroville. She was now working as a teacher in Auroville and also as a private tutor in Pondicherry. She heard about Auroville when she lived in Vietnam. She met a Korean lady in a Sauna who after been talking a bit asked her if she would be interested in renting her house in Auroville. She and her husband were once Aurovillians, but now only made short visits and needed someone to take care of their house. Sabine became interested and curious about this big settlement with foreigners situated in the middle of India. She had not been to India yet and smiled and said thanks for the offer. She told me about her strong feeling of aspiration when arriving:

> At the start I was only going to stay here for a few weeks and just see, but immediately I knew that I was going to stay. I still wanted to see what it was like, so I did six months volunteering. But immediately I knew I want to be here, stay! People I met and the way it was going so easily, all flowing…very nice. Yeah and something, I don't know, something *inside*. Right stage for me I guess. Right moment to experience this kind of life, community life. Yes, many different reasons, but the first one is inside, maybe some instinct, or, I don't know… really drawing me here.

Sabine was originally from a small village near Vichy River. Once she was old enough she left home in the direction of bigger places and bigger cities, being quite tired of the isolated life on the country side. She took her teaching degree after years of travelling and studying in several countries. The degree gave her the possibility to live anywhere in the world, teaching at French Schools while living in Vietnam, Japan, Morocco, England, and the US amongst other places. After living in big cities most of her adult life she experienced Auroville to be a place where she could get to know herself better;

I don't know but, the energy is lost in the middle of Tokyo or New York or London. I can't say that I could see who I am, or what I am doing or...everything is very unconscious and just running after things and everything is moving too fast. Other places you could have justified it or put a cover on it like – yeah it's because I'm in a big city. Just like, in here it's like in your face! So for now, that's the most important for me, this mirror I get.

She also really liked the people she met and continued to meet in Auroville. There were people from all over the world, and they all came with new inspiration and ideas. Sabine mentioned how diversity could be something fulfilling:

> Most of the people who arrive here have been, you know, experiencing most of the time quite a few things before. They carry a lot of humanity in them, I don't know. In that sense, ahm.. it's Auroville! It's a gathering of humans with a diversity, that are... If I am in my country I will hear about one subject, I will hear my side of it and I will hear maybe one or two other sides about it. Here, if it's a small conversation I would hear...25 versions of it! Different ways of looking at it, plus the one's they have heard about. It's like.. knowledge I guess, or experience, or input, more perspectives I guess. And for you to, you know, for me while I look at it this way and you can look at it another way. It's like...liberating. It's not just your way. There are other ways too! The other ones can be more enriching then your own, you know?

She saw Auroville as a world city, an international city, a place that could offer her the stimuli she used to get from her travels. Sabine saw that Auroville created a space to have your own thoughts about things, where your life experience and different life approaches would be appreciated by and shared amongst others. At the same time as Auroville had the spiritual realm she was looking for it also had an international environment, which she felt made the conversations even more fulfilling. Her stay in Auroville became an internal journey, where the place seemed to become a symbol for 'change', to 'evolve' and to really look at herself in a new and clear way. Sabine wanted to decide and face what she wanted to become or what she felt she was, and what she wanted to change, something I think she felt Auroville as a place could contribute to. Sabine is what one in Auroville describes as 'coming from the world', 'a world child', or in general terms one could call her a traveller. She was in Auroville to find herself, something she felt she had lost 'out there' in the big cities and in all the travelling with constant new impressions. She found herself at a stage in life where she wanted to settle down somewhere. She was not that focused in community living as an aspect of Auroville, but more of Auroville as a spiritual community. She liked the vibe of the conversations here and the topics that were discussed really interested her.

Do I Dare to go Native?

David was a long term volunteer in Auroville, where he first lived and worked in Sadhana Forest community[24], and after a month's time, he came to Buddha Garden to live and work. David was in his mid-20s and had been studying philosophy, art and social science at a prestigious university in New York. He told me that before he arrived in Auroville he was working in a work environment which was "highly intellectual based on a conceptual and theoretical level". He was working as an art curator and he was editing articles for an art magazine. He came to Auroville for business, as part of an art project he was installing in Istanbul that was called "One day, everything will be free...". This project was supposed to be about people who lived alternative lifestyles, like in communes. People who have 'escaped', as David put it. He found this 'escape' both frightening and exhilarating, but also he really did not like this word, 'escape'. He felt it had a kind of negative connotation to it; that you did something bad or weak trying to do something different than what society told you to do. "I was supposed to do a bunch of seminars in Berlin to get inspiration for the project, but decided to go out and actually do it and live it instead." He was tired of always being involved on the conceptual and theoretical level and wanted to meet people who were actually doing it. "I have lived and worked on organic farms in Belgium, Ecuador, and France. These are some of the best times that I have had, when I have been working and living outdoors." He found himself often involved in things at a distance, being used to only gaze, but not participating in the surroundings and interacting with the people that really attracted him. He reflected a bit on this and thought maybe it had to do with him being scared of involvement. He was scared to really like it, and he was really feeling and thinking about this while staying in Auroville, where he talked a lot about the self-development he experienced there, and change in perceptions. While we were sitting in a collapsed capsule next to the cashew growth in Buddha Garden, we had an invigorating discussion about his time in Sadhana Forest.

> The personal development that happened with me for those two weeks I stayed in Sadhana went really fast, really fast. Quite, ah, maybe amplified. The personal development I encountered in Sadhana within two weeks felt almost amplified! Because.. yeah, within two weeks I all of a sudden, physically, it's like a turnaround. Complete turnaround.. emotionally, spiritually, things like that. It just..self-development! Really quickly. I was shocked actually. My friend Martina... I went up to her one day, and she said; "David, how do you feel?" And I said; "Martina, I've never felt more healthy!"And she started laughing and she goes; "ah that's so good to hear, because it's so many sick people here." And I said; "Really?" And I was totally shocked because for me I.. it was like, I immediately felt like life was back inside of

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[24] Sadhana Forest was a gift-based community within Auroville that is involved in the reforestation project of the evergreen tropical rainforest that once covered large parts of the area around Auroville.

me. I felt quite good! (…) It was particularly difficult for me because I think I was learning at Sadhana that I could really be happy in a place like that. That much of what I was investing my time and energy in Istanbul is actually very unfulfilling for my life, and than once I've left Sadhana I realized this, that there is really no point of me going back to Istanbul. So this question, whether I go back to Sadhana, I was realizing it was becoming something bigger. It was more like, do I go back to Istanbul? Do I go back to this thing that I've been investing a lot of time and energy, even financial resources! And these kinds of career paths that I've kind of set up to myself, and I've been very fortunate. I have had a lot of really great opportunities. The next five years I could do some really good work in that field… and realizing that that was kind of irrelevant (he sighs), and I wanted to shit in a hole, wash my hands with soap coming out of a little tiny pierced whole in the bottom of a bowl, and that, ahm, you know? Wake up at Sadhana! And fucking swim in a mud pool! You know? I'm taking my bath in a mud pool every day, I watched the sunset! THAT was what I really wanted, you know?

The realization of really being happy in a communal setting scared David, just as much as it made him excited to see that his life from now on could have a totally different outcome than what he expected before coming to Auroville. David pointed out the community-living as the important element for him in Auroville; the experience to live so close to other humans and doing service for a community, and not only to earn money for oneself, was for him the most amazing thought and gave him a good feeling about himself and the social setting. It felt 'natural' and the way it was 'supposed to be'. This was invigorating for him, and it felt hard to go back to real life with this new understanding. On the other hand his experiences in Auroville made him feel empowered around own actions. That he was actually the person in control over his own life. Before leaving Auroville he decided to finish off his project in Istanbul before going to Haiti and help plant trees. Sadhana Forest had a sister-project over there helping re-forest evergreen tropical rainforest after the severe destructions in the wake of the earthquake in 2010. He wanted to start doing things he really felt completed him, and not things that to the world at large represented success. This was in his mind features of the 'ego' dominating; something he had learned in Auroville that was not good for one's self-development.

The Need for a Fresh Start

Bella came to Auroville to do six months of volunteer work, which would give her the proper references she needed for her applications to different universities in Germany and Holland. She was 21 years old and came from a small city in the North-Western part of Germany. She was to live and work in Buddha Garden and was one of the first persons I met after arriving in Buddha Garden. She wanted to come and stay on the farm because she was interested in organic farming and in conscious food consumption. She did not intentionally come to Auroville to learn about community-living and spirituality though, but she came with the

intention of getting away from Germany for a while and to work with children. She started working in an after school program called *Tamurai* located in a Tamil village nearby. She was passionate about the concept of volunteer work and volunteering service and was something she had previous experience from. She liked how it made her feel good about her actions, and the appreciation people showed her. She felt this gave her much more than money ever could. The reason Bella chose to go to India to volunteer was because she had just had a bad breakup with a boy she was madly in love with in Berlin. She shaved of all her hair and left for India. Auroville was going to be a new start for her and a place to think things through; what she wanted to do with her life from now on and who she was or wanted to be. She started meditating while staying there and she felt she learned a lot about herself in conversations with others.

She felt the conversations were on a deeper level than she was used to back home, and she really liked this way of interacting. It was like talking from one heart to another, without putting anything in between. She was quite serious and strong in her choice of actions and choice of statements, something that seemed to inspire people she met in Auroville, even if she most of the time was the youngest one in social groups and in conversations. Bella was quite focused on her 'inner life' and her feelings about life, love and different dreams of the future, something that mixed quite well with the spiritual connotations there. She adopted new concepts and metaphors that created a language she could talk from, and was given a new voice she quite liked. She had a new language that could better express her feelings. She also became more interested in the idea of living communally after staying in Buddha Garden, and this was something she wanted to pursue more closely in the future. For her Auroville became a symbol of her new beginning and as a place where she was gazing at the rest of her life that was going to 'become'. It was kind of a gap where she felt she could see things more clearly. Earlier experiences were now seen with more open eyes, and she found this to be some of Auroville's magic. She believed this magic became created by the kind of people that was drawn towards Auroville's vision and that came here to stay, and the citizens that kept the vision alive.

The Escape from Western Culture

I met Nina while working in Buddha Garden, where she lived for a short time before she moved to a quieter zone of Auroville; the green belt. She continued working in Buddha Garden because of the learning possibilities in sustainable farming. She also did other projects while staying in Auroville, as learning about different organic compost techniques in Discipline Farm and working with animals. When I came back for my second stay I was able to conduct an interview with her before she had to go back to Germany to get a new Visa. She had been staying in Auroville for a year and was quite certain she was going to come back. She would have liked to come back as a Newcomer, but they did not take any more applications because of 'housing issues'[25] at that time, and she had really been working to get this settled before leaving, without any luck unfortunately. She was now going back to Germany to sort up her finances and find a way to afford to live in Auroville and become a Newcomer. She told me that for her it had never been a question of staying in Germany after her son turned 18. She was a single mother and was in her mid 40s. Before coming to Auroville she sold all her belongings and her apartment and bought a ticket to India. She wanted to come and live in Auroville to see if this could be a place she could be a part of. For her it was impossible to go through any spiritual transformation in Germany;

> It was because of the people around. People in Germany. It's like, one goes here, yes? And this head is making these thoughts, and you are like a radio, and connect to that. So in Germany there is millions of heads like this; there is very strong structure, you should work like this and blabla. So it's like a very different radio from here, yes? Always in Germany it's like BZZZZZ (making sounds to visualize efficiency and production)..its like electricity!

She continued telling me about how she moved to the green belt. She thought she would feel peace in the forest, but she could not relax. She then described that she went through a powerful mental and physical cleansing where she closed herself inside her hut for several weeks. She just lied still in her bed, trying to avoid moving. Something happened inside of her while lying here, and she started crying, something that lasted for several days. Then it stopped and she felt more vital than she had done in years. She felt she really had let go of something, and she thought Auroville and the forests had very special healing energies that helped her go through old baggage that stopped her from being whole. She knew even clearer now that Auroville was the place she wanted to live, and if there was something she had learned while staying in Auroville and socializing with Aurovillians it was that it is ok to give up, that sometimes it is necessary to just give up everything. She felt that in Germany this

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[25] Auroville could not house any more Newcomers and have several major housing projects, where apartment buildings are being built.

would be looked down upon, and one would be stigmatized as lazy or having mental problems. In Auroville this was seen as brave, because one needed to push oneself out from a comfort zone to do such a thing.

Nina was maybe the person I met that was most concerned about getting away from the modern and capitalist realm. It was interesting the way she gave her period of isolation, and the following crying and the feeling of increased vitality afterwards, such a dominant space in her story. This was a story of her 'inner life', and shows how the things that were happening 'inside' were for her maybe as real as the physical reality. She was doing a lot of spiritual activities in Germany, and was working as an art therapist. She felt alienated in Germany and felt the 'capitalist consciousness' affected her unconsciously, even if she did not want to be a part of it. She believed 'energies' and 'vibrations' from other people in her environment affected her and others, something that makes people 'tune in' to each other. This belief in energies resonates with New Age ideas about how energies constitute everything around us. She wanted to get away from these hostile and alienated energies, and saw Auroville with its vision as a perfect place to 'tune in' to. Translated to a general understanding I think what she is referring to is how society's conventions have a certain control over people's mindsets, something one can refer to as a collective consciousness. For her it was not easy to live on the outside and feel alienated, since most people wants to feel a part of something and feel a belonging in a group, which was something she felt in Auroville.

The Desire to Become the Ideal Self

I met Jade in Buddha Garden, where he stayed for around 2 months. He and his girlfriend, Rose, were not supposed to stay that long, but they both felt such strong aspirations while staying here. Rose started to find out what she wanted to do with her life, where she had just finished her Ph.D. in chemistry. She did not want to work in a lab and at a desk anymore, but wanted to help people. She therefore found an aspiration to teach children about the environment. Jade, who was originally a graphic designer, had an aspiration before coming to Buddha Garden that he wanted learn about sustainable farming. He had been travelling in India once before, where he travelled the world after his fiancé broke off the engagement. He sold the house and went on a journey where he really got to know himself in a new way and got new perspectives on life. He met inspiring people and did some volunteer work while travelling. When coming back to the UK, he started struggling with anxiety. People seemed so

cold back home compared to all the kind and forthcoming people he had met while travelling. He started to perceive Western living in a new light, and started planning and saving for a new trip to India. He felt India was the country he visited that made him go through some radical changes in perception and self-development. He also had decided that he did not want to live in fear of having debt, which he saw as the most common reason why people did not, for example, risk a year to travel or dared to follow their dreams. He wanted to feel free from this imprisonment created by society to keep him working hard. In the meantime he met Rose, who helped him get back on track again, and a friend approached him to create a business together; the vision became to create an ethical graphic design firm. He knew he wanted to travel to India first, but they agreed that he would start making a portfolio on different ethical projects while travelling, making them web pages for free. While staying in Buddha Garden he (and Rose) got some new aspiration about creating a kind of eco village back home in the UK. It did not have to be anything big, and people could or should earn a living independent of the eco village, but they would have a garden together and live communally together.

The reason he wanted to create his own business was because he was tired of working with projects that did not inspire him or did not fit in to his ideals. Most of the work he did was designing web pages for different companies and products. This did not make him feel good about himself, while helping others made him feel good about himself and made him feel 'whole'. He especially enjoyed the mutual appreciation between business partners, where he wanted to work more closely with the organizations he made webpage's for. He had a vision that this kind of cooperation would give each party something back, a relationship where there was an exchange of knowledge. He felt modern society today, and the way it functioned, left the social and intimate behind, and made money become the dominant motivation in people's lives. This also made moral and different aspects of values become marginalized in the constant pursuit of money.

Jade were both looking for a more intimate living arrangement, as he was looking for innovative ideas and people to work with. He was a spiritual person, a side he had discovered on his first travel in India. He then lived and stayed with different yoga teachers and at different ashrams, and learned more about both Buddhism and karmayoga. He was now much more concerned about own actions in life, and the importance of finding inspiration in life and work with the quality of living. He wanted most of all to become a better person, and feel his actions did good things for people around him. He knew now that this always started from the

'inside', and that his actions were a result of how he felt about himself, and that his perception of his environments were inevitably a result of how he felt 'inside'. If he were happy he would see beauty, but if he was sad and angry this would reflect how he felt about people and the surrounding environment; annoying and ugly and with many obstacles. In this sense he really enjoyed how people in Auroville seemed to correspond with this idea, and that karmayoga was a practice also used here. In the UK the stress people felt mirrored their actions, something he did not like. This made him reflect even more about how he could live a less stressful life back home, because he really liked the presence showed by many Aurovillians.

Even though Sabine, David, Bella, Nina and Jade all represent five different and unique stories, their narratives reflect the same tendencies I observed in most of my informants' stories; that while being in Auroville they realized that something essential was missing from their previous lives. The feeling of being unfulfilled or not complete was central. Comments like "it felt like life was back inside of me", "The aspiration here really attracted me", "I felt complete", "Auroville gave me some new perspectives on what is important in life", or "I could not continue living the life I did" was common when my informants talked about the life they had left behind and the new life they had found. It became important to define what one came from, as a way of understanding and defining the present situation.

Analyzing the Narratives

A central step in the field study of Auroville was to investigate what drew people to that place. The narratives above take their starting point in very different people, but through an analysis of these stories one can uncover common references and frameworks at play.

In the following will be an overview of the central discourses and metaphors that became shared amongst the visitors. This I base on my assumption that a common reference frame was created and shared around a spiritual quest. First I look at the 'travel', which has a lot of different metaphors for going through 'changes', and which can be seen as a 'turning point' or as a 'transitional stage'. Another discourse was the concept of having a 'self', open for investigation and examination and the concept of a 'life', as something one perceives as a human right to pursue and get the best out of. The self had a New Age inspired approach

where the 'ego' was central when talking about how to 'evolve the self' or becoming a better version of oneself.

Escaping the West and Embracing the East

Jade started his transformation on a travel he did the year before, while Sabine had been on the lookout for something for a while, and Nina already knew in her heart while living in Germany that she needed to 'get out'. The general metaphor used for approaching a transformation and a new life were nevertheless *spatialization metaphors* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:18), where choice of words as 'get out', 'get away', 'escape' and 'outside' were used as components to give an account for gaining 'new perspectives', 'a change', 'transformation', 'creation' and to develop', which all can be understood as metaphors associated to the concept of being or becoming 'enlightened' or 'conscious', and which also implicitly refer to the concept of having an 'inner self'. In this sense, one did not have to be on a physical journey to be on a spiritual journey, but by being on a physical journey, in space or in a change of role (from child to adult), the 'inside' becomes more explicit. The role of long-term travel in providing authentic experiences of 'the other' and of the 'self' consists of a series of opportunities for escaping the restrictions of previous identities and providing experiential material for the reconstruction of self-identity. Travel experiences are thus drawn upon to re-emagine and re-define the self (Wearing 2002).

The act of 'travelling', of proceeding from one place to another, has since the earliest time been seen as a natural metaphor for 'learning', for the acquisition of experience and knowledge (Bishop 1976:44). The Grand Tour, which refers to the traditional trip undertaken by mainly European aristocrats, flourished during the 17th century (Wearing 2002). It served as an educational rite of passage as much as leisure. 'Hippie trail' is also a form of journey taken by the hippies and others in the 1960s and 70s, where India and Nepal became main targets. One of the key elements was travelling cheaply. The pioneers of Auroville can be understood as been part of this flow of young people travelling to the spiritual centre; India. These journeys evoked the 17th and 18th-century tradition of the Grand Tour. In more modern times the Grand Tour can be associated to what one call a 'gap year', which refers to time out to travel between life stages. It is also known as a sabbatical, time off, time out and a year out, referring to a period of time in which people disengage from education or work and undertake activities such as travelling, volunteering or working abroad.

Most of the visitors I met in Auroville were on a travel which lasted for at least 6 months, something that makes it fitting to put them in to the category of having a gap year, which have replaced the old grand Tour as an educational journey. Bruner (2001) explains travels like these as 'turning points', where change in perspectives and perceptions often happen when in a transformative situation, where he then refers to both transitional stages in life or being physically on a journey. The transitional nature of youth, from adolescence to adulthood, is commonly associated with the redefinition of self-identity, which for young people is often constituted by experiences of anxiety and the possibility for change, or 'fateful moments' (Giddens 1991). Luke C. Desforges (2004) argues that many young people consider travel as a 'rite of passage' that provides answers to questions that are raised about self-identity at fateful moments. Therefore, long-term independent traveler is simultaneously considered as educational and character-building and is imagined as providing for the accumulation of experience, which is used to re-narrate and represent self-identity. Torun Elsrud (2004) regards the traveler as narrator and the journey as narrative, just as Bruner also argues. One is accredited with increased knowledge, a stronger sense of identity and social status.

The New World Created New Stories

My informants' discourse about the society they came from had by many of them changed after leaving home, where the meeting with a reflexive self who experienced and heard about other ways of living allowed them see their society in a different and less neutral light. With this the self-image changes and the self-narratives are re-invented into a new story that fits better to the new self. This can be understood as a result of the individual's 'narrative need' to correlate with one's self-image to give any sense of meaning for the listener as much as the speaker, because the narrative tells them 'who they are', 'where they are coming from' and 'where they are going'. The storyteller is the main character in the narrative, in Greek termed as the *Protagonist* (Bruner 2001). Psychologically speaking the main character is most often the hero, and the narrative and choice of discourse most often try to support the protagonist as making the right choices and having the right views in life, even when meeting obstacles and challenges on the way to learn from. This can be reflected back on individuals as *storytellers*; that how they tell their story will most often be a story created to support the life choices and make the actions comprehensible. Bruner (2001:27) claims that literary forces can shape our autobiography, in the sense that we in Western societies for example use features from the

bildungsroman[26]. But it is not only the genre that has a forming function, but certain organizing metaphors as well, as for example metaphoric events that are often mentioned when telling about turning points in life. By my informants this metaphor often contained the Western mainstream culture's poor development, where the 'individual', the 'inner self' and 'life' in a simple sense, seemed 'lost'. Bruner calls this a *theory of growth*, where one needs an explanation for the transformation one is going through to make the story convincing. It also has the function of making the protagonist and the narrator eventually melt together as the same person.

The coherence in my informants' stories between past and present can also be viewed in light of Baumans' (2000:32) description of modern life, where the need to realize the self is important, the need to 'become' what one truly 'is'. As said, in my informants' stories this seemed connected to the desire to break out from the 'capitalist machinery', that was understood as destructive to man's most holy possession - the relationship to oneself and others. It is therefore in the realm of invention and the need to define and orient oneself in the world that one (re-)creates social categories. Even if the category modern Western society contains specific characteristics, it will as a socially created category – actively used by the public – be open for interpretation, re-invention and manipulation. In this context it became to talk about the 'Capitalist Western society' as the opposite of what they felt Auroville had to offer, and what they felt a society or community should be able to offer. The description of the society they had left behind was (i) materialisms poverty and lack of meaning which emptied man's interest for existential and deeper meaning, (ii) resistance against the hegemonic powers over knowledge, and (iii) the disconnection from nature and the Divine, which they felt were lacking in modern society. These tendencies can be attached to the two interrelated phenomena that are characterized as born in the realm of postmodern society; self-reflexivity (Giddens 1991; Cohen 1994) and the ideas about the self as holy/spiritual (Helaas 1996, 2001). The connection between these two phenomena can in broad and general terms be explained as a result of the individual in modern society having more access to different lifestyles and worldviews; with the decline of institutions determining the individuals' life-choices, the individuals are freer to engage in a reflexive construction of the self. With alternative spiritualities the self is made holy and offer a meaningful re-invention of reality created as a contrast to the so-called material values.

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[26] *Bildungsroman* is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood, where this character-change is thus extremely important.

In a modern Western life the self is given much attention. But, for many of my informants it seemed like they found it difficult to really 'know themselves' in the modernist realm. There was too much disturbances, too easy to run away from what was to be discovered inside of them. The self-narratives can therefore be understood as having similar features localized in the 'subjective turn' as a result of turning away from 'life as' and understand life as a 'subjective life', as I mentioned in chapter 1 (Helaas 2001 et. al.; Taylor 1991). It refers to life lived with reference to one's own subjective experiences. This idea is in line with the cultural flow in many Western societies, signified by the philosopher Charles Taylor as "the subjective turn in modern culture" (Taylor 1991:26).

How the Visitors Inspired Each Other

The group of people I am writing about is people who have chosen to live an alternative lifestyle for a given period of time, and have in this sense made the choice of leaving their original society for this new lifestyle. It is relevant in this instance to consider Luckmann's (2004:25-26) claim about individualization, where he separates between having individualism as an ideology and individualism as a process. While individualization can be thought of as a way to 'become more ourselves', Luckmann considers individualization (which means the development of our individuality) as the way socialization affects us on a deep level. We would never stop and reflect had it not been to meet other societies that presented another worldview than our own. Luckmann (59-60) says that the subjective experience in itself gives no meaning without this. We cannot create meaning by ourselves, just as we cannot develop an individualistic self without a social community. So, the process of becoming an individual is, for Luckmann, inseparably committed to socialization, including the creation of a worldview. This also corresponds with Cohen's (1994) approach to the dialectic relationship between self and society, and Bauman (2000) and Gidden's (1991) approach to (post)modern man, where the individual in a modern world stands more free to find out who they want to be. They can all be understood as inspired by classical constructivists as Goodman (1978), who writes about *self-making* (and world-making) and Erving Goffman (1959) about the social roles we play in everyday life.

The expression of 'working with the ego' had great influence in Auroville, and could also be found in Aurobindo's philosophy, where he describes the ego as something one should work with to reach the goal of *human unity* and the unification with the Divine. In Auroville one expected the citizens to be involved in and work with the ego; as a form of purification process where one identifies and escapes from one's ego-dominated motivations. The 'ego' is, by the Aurovillians, seen as part of man's conditioned mentality and therefore something that should be evaluated. The Aurovillians see this as 'real freedom', and that this freedom can only be reached through unification with the Divine. In this way one can get rid of the 'ego', and live a more 'real life', which means a life that is less illusoric, which can be understood as an element from New Age and Hinduism in the philosophy about Maya (illusion) – the way one perceives the world is created by the individual, and by suppressing the often dominant ego, that represents man's need to make sense of things, and by start listening to the heart instead of the head, one will 'see more clearly'. This is connected to the evolutional change in consciousness that one is aiming for within Auroville.

The visitors of Auroville were also involved with the working of the ego, but did not go this far, where they rather seem to have understood the concept of the 'ego' as a way of grasping the concept around a 'self'. They did not seem to consider the Divine as a motive or a goal, like the Aurovillians. The citizens' aim was human unity and unification with the Divine, while the visitors' aim seemed to be more about their own personal crisis or issues, trying to navigate towards a concept open to a transformative and dynamic self. As shown in Jade and Bella's narratives where both had bad breakups. In terms of personal crisis they needed to reflect and maybe re-define themselves. They seemed to find the discourse about the 'self' as an 'inner' and 'subjective experience' helpful in this way, where it had therapeutic qualities. Helaas (1996:157) describes this inner-versus-outer orientation as the individual's ability and possibility to take responsibility and to think for themselves, and sees this as a trend in modern Western societies, as much as a central feature in New Age. Helaas argues that the core of New Age is what he calls *self-spirituality*, and is primarily about how the human condition can be transformed. The aim is then to find our authentic nature that is inside each person. The self is in this way made Holy. From the narratives we can see that Helaas' description of the self corresponds with the understanding of the self that is practiced within Auroville. He also points out how New Age and self-spirituality seem to have therapeutic

qualities, where the individuals are proclaimed to have great potentials inside of them, one just has to learn how to get to know them through knowing oneself.

"Maya deceives with its illusion". This is something one could hear Gerard, an aurovillian living and working in Buddha Garden, phrase while working in the garden with him. Things that you might think are important may not be that important if you change your value system to this philosophy about Maya. Gerard, who was a *Reiki*[27] teacher, talked a lot about this philosophy. I joined a Reiki course with him and one of the first things he taught us was the philosophy of the Buddha. He asked us why Buddha always was smiling so peacefully. It was here I met Sabine. She answered;"because Buddha knows not to worry about what comes next." This meant that Buddha trusts that solutions will come if one meets obstacles on the way. "Just trust this and you can live a more real life, in the heart, and in the now", Gerard said. When Gerard explained the Buddha's teachings I noticed how peaceful he and Sabine's faces were. Me and other participants in the course discussed this, and compared ourselves to this philosophy. It sounded nice and less stressful, and we wanted to look as peaceful as Gerard and Sabine, so we tried to dive into the Buddha's teachings and the Reiki philosophy, which in some way worked together, as a classical New Age buffet. He also wanted us to try to eat as clean food as possible; organic food and bio-dynamized water, and we should heal our food and water with our hands before consuming, which means holding our hands over the object of focus, empty ones minds and just feeling and thinking about the object. It felt more to be a way of thanking for the food or drink or as to give some appreciation to it. He would ask us to taste the water before and after healing and really feel the difference in taste. The reason he wanted us to heal the things we wanted to consume was because in his worldview everything contained light and shadow. We want our body to contain as little shadow as possible. In his sense it was not enough to practice karmayoga and heal oneself regularly. One also had to watch out for contaminating the body with shadow by consuming bad food. The thought of light and shadow worked in parallel and in a complimentary relationship with the thought about the 'ego' and the 'heart'. The ego was hence hidden in the shadow and the light represented the heart. So this seemed in a way to be two rationales that seemed to melt together with the same aim; to progress and approach the Divine.

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[27] *Reiki* is a spiritual practice that was developed in the beginning of the 1920s by Japanese Buddhist Mikao Usui. The teaching was continued and adapted by various teachers, and the teacher Gerard followed was Drunvalao Through the use of a technique, practitioners claim to transfer healing energy in the form of *Ki* through the palms.

These lessons were found in various practices in Auroville, and not only within Reiki healing. Lessons about the ego seemed to have had a great effect on many of the visitors, where one started to judge situations differently. I watched regularly how they corrected each other and guided each other, maybe both out of love and as a way to legitimize the practice for oneself too. An example of this correction and guidance in to the 'right path' was a situation between the two long-term volunteers, Maria and Katia. One day in Maria's capsule in the Youth Centre, we were discussing Katia's lover in Auroville. While sitting on an old and discolored pillow in the capsule smoking a cigarette she told us she was not sure she liked his person that much. He was quite attractive and he entertained her, but he was acting quite arrogant towards other people, and she did not like that. She found it ok for now because she had merely an interest to sleep with him, and she liked that he was so taken by her. Maria reacted very strongly at this statement and asked Katia: "Haven't you learned anything from Gerard? This is your ego dominating you! This is really not good for your self-development here!" Katia tried to defend herself by saying that at least they were good friends and she felt he respected her. They talked a little bit more on the subject and eventually Katia agreed: "I know what I am doing is sort of an ego trip, but he makes me feel good about myself." Maria replied that: "Well this is your challenge now, Katia. The ego is fighting for its existence, and you are the one in control." Katia was in this sense taking advantage of this man, not considering that he might have strong feelings for her while she only wanted someone to get her back on track after broken off with her previous boyfriend. She wanted someone to make her feel attractive, and she liked that. This Maria found as having shallow tendencies and as not good for her spiritual growth.

This conversation shows how both Maria and Katia acknowledged the new value system about the ego. By acknowledging the concept about the ego made them perceive the situation differently than they might have done in the past. They were more sensitive to own acts and intentions, where this situation around Katia's lover had elements of vain and superficial tendencies, which goes against the intention of eliminating and suppressing the ego. By being together within a new value system it created a cosmos that was shared, which likely made it more accessible to practice. The subjective experience in itself gives no meaning without the significant other (Luckmann 2004: 25-26; et. al. Goffman). This means that individuals cannot create meaning by themselves in a realm of idiosyncrasy, just as they cannot develop an individualistic self without a social community. The process of becoming an individual is

therefore understood by Luckmann to be inseperably committed to socialization, where worldviews are created and adopted.

In Auroville it was, conventionally speaking, highly viable to talk explicitly about the perceived inner experiences one had, which resonates with Taylors (1991) claim of the modern individual in a realm of the subjective turn had the right to shape their lives in their own idiosyncratic way. Conversations amongst people had characteristics of 'deep inner experiences', and as a possibility to talk about the inner experiences one needed to use shared metaphors. To highlight how the inner experiences became a dominant discourse in Auroville one could say that it was more common to end up in a conversation with someone about how their work with the ego had met some challenges throughout the day than talking about superficial topics as which grocery shopping they ought to do or what they had been doing during their day and who they met. In the realm of Auroville it seemed like one 'should' know oneself. This seemed to be a normatively influenced practice, which made the people here even more engaged by the inner-self project.

Social Impression

The spiritual quest can be defined as a normative practice amongst the visitors. Yigal, originally from Israel, stayed in Buddha Garden for about two months and really enjoyed his time living in the community. He also really appreciated the invigorating conversations amongst the volunteers in Buddha Garden and the intimacy of community-living, which he described as love and brotherhood. He made a sudden choice of leaving with a group of people who were continuing their journey to Thailand. When I told him I was surprised that he was leaving and that I thought he was happy, he answered that he had been going through some great transformations in Auroville, but right now he felt it was enough. It became too intense and too much focus on each individuals' personal crisis, where it was brought up to discussion and evaluation with others. He really enjoyed this for a certain amount of time and felt he got some deep relationships and new thoughts around own person, but felt this was a sphere one could not stay in too long. One will end up being consumed by it, because it became your whole cosmos, and there were other things to explore in life that did not have to involve being conscious around the self's development all the time.

It seemed like the cosmos that surrounded Auroville created a perception of life and the self as something to be constantly concerned with and conscious about, like Yigal mentioned. Talking about life in the way they did in Auroville can in this way be seen as a consciously constructed narrative about 'a life'. It seemed like a practice that was highly relevant and viable in the local context of Auroville, but maybe not that easy to pursue outside in 'real life'. In Auroville it seemed like a dominant practice, happening between both the visitors and the citizens, but with small differences in goals, as mentioned earlier. Living in such intimate communities as one did in Auroville made brotherhood and a feeling of coherency important. Despite seeing the group in Buddha Garden in constant change with new volunteers the dominant discourse on the spiritual quest continued to coexist. The practice of karmayoga was in a constant trial, where the volunteers watched each others' actions. Living so intimately there was nowhere to hide. Food arrangements and community-structure changed, as the group changed, but the attributes of brotherhood, sharing, providing service and performing unselfish acts towards each other remained. These were clear actions that could show individuals' intentions, and were discussed frequently within the group. Rose had once confided to Bella and me that she found it difficult to share everything with everyone. "Auroville challenges the idea of what is *mine*; *my* coffee, *my* house, *my* food!" I was quite surprised when hearing this because in my mind she was good at sharing everything she had and always seemed so patient. I remember witnessing a situation on the kitchen balcony once, where Shawn, a visitor staying in Buddha Garden, asked to get some of the banana she was about to eat. Before Shawn came to the balcony Rose had come back from a bicycle ride and was really hungry. She only had a banana to eat before we started preparing for dinner later on. She lovingly gave him the last piece of her small baby banana, and I remember thinking that I found it very generous of her. She continued confessing to me and Bella that she sometimes felt she was about to burst when people asked her for the upteenth time to taste whatever she was eating, especially if it was something she really enjoyed, like a piece of candy. When Rose confessed this, both Bella and I told her we knew the feeling and had felt it ourselves. It almost felt like we were talking about something forbidden. It was a taboo, and something that did not correspond with the local common thoughts around the ego. One should willingly give away whatever people wanted from you, and just hope and believe you would get it back somehow. This faith was tested when individuals, like Shawn, kept coming asking for more and not give anything in return. Goffman (1992:173) uses the term *impression management* to explain how *actors* (which refer to an active individual) try to keep their role constant by acting the role; he calls this phenomenon the art of impression

management, and is something done by all individuals, both consciously and unconsciously. This thought is in line with Bruner's (2001) approach to self-narratives, which can also be understood as a form of impression management, keeping their story valid and consistent with how they see themselves.

I find impression management to be a viable approach to grasp how groups of visitors, living in intimate communities as Buddha Garden, had a system of checks and balances by creating an *ideal role* to act upon. However, here one finds a potential conflict; between being an individualist while one pursues a common goal. Auroville's vision and philosophy preaches about the Divine and human unity being the goal, but at the same time explaining this as a path one needs to walk alone, since this is an individualistic subjective experience. As a result one can observe that dominant practices become normative practices, which give an answer to how one should walk the path in the 'right way'. This is not necessarily a dominant practice amongst the citizens, but amongst the visitors, especially those who lived in intimate communities like Buddha Garden, where a recipe for how one should evolve seemed to be created. This was often stated in the same sentence as the path being individual. I think this was a result of wanting to have something in common. Wanting to share one's spiritual quest one needed common metaphors and discourses to feel that within the brotherhood one was on a journey together. Conversations worked as therapy, where inspiration was collected and shared within the group. If these conversations did not contain some of the common attributes shared by the group I think these conversations would offer something else and might not have worked as therapeutic as they did, because many of the visitors already felt alienated by the place they originally came from. Many seem to find it nurturing and inspiring to meet other people with some similar thoughts, and in that way they seem to create a common language to talk from.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how the information and the knowledge-flow were created and shared amongst the visitors, and how they in this way conceptualized and made their spiritual quest meaningful. The overarching philosophy in Auroville offered both a model for action as much as a model of the world. This made it be a place where meaning was created in the realm of subjective experiences. Different worldviews were therefore tolerated and resonated with Kraft's (2011) definition of the 'roadless landscape religion'. But at the same time as different ways of seeing the world was tolerated, the visitors seemed to create a common shared quest.

I think many of the visitors who stayed in Auroville felt less alienated in a spiritual environment, and felt more in contact with something greater that made them feel complete. Two potential reasons for this observation arises; (i) they were interested in spirituality before arriving in Auroville but did not feel acknowledged for their alternative thoughts and feelings in their own local environment, (ii) self-spirituality attributes as therapy; the importance of realizing how close relationships to other people can be nurturing for man's feeling of presence in the world, where they were not given space to grow in their local environment. The five narratives illustrated earlier presented portraits of five independent individuals who found themselves on a quest. Nina already felt disconnected to society before starting her journey, while the others seemed to feel that by being away from their common environment made them yearn for something their original society could not offer them. They realized the previous life lived did not complete them, and they wanted to change their behaviour and attitudes towards life, in the hope of bringing these new experiences back home. They all communicated that community-living was an experience they really learned a lot from, both about themselves and how one 'out there' in the 'real world' has lost this close connection to other people.

Having the same motives and aims therefore seemed to become an important agenda for many of them and even though Auroville's aim is to progress individually from diversity into unity, it seemed more important to find common ground, due to their different backgrounds. Even though the input and conversations gave different inspiring information, they communicated with a common reference of metaphors and discourses. One could tie this to an interpretation of what the Mother also meant; that one navigates oneself towards each other, and tries to find

a common shared language. Acting with idiosyncratic attributes makes no sense. It is man's nature to live in groups and to share common ground. Even if these common grounds are frequently up for discussion and are constantly evolving over time, they are nevertheless still shared.

Chapter 3: A Re-Connection to Mother Nature

> …I come to this land to grow food - for myself and for the community. I come to this land to feel the living pulse of the earth, to create a place where I can focus, where I can dream, where I can breathe. I give this place my blessing and pray that its wounds may be healed and it be restored to life, as I too may be healed and restored (Vincent, P. 2006:68-9).

These words are written by Priya, a British national in her 60s and the founder of Buddha Garden Community Farm. She came to Auroville 15 years ago to create a life for herself and her two daughters. She has been running Buddha Garden for the past decade, where she has been motivated by the idea of creating a home and a community with an organic and sustainable approach. In Auroville she is known to have an active voice on issues concerning rural life in Auroville, organic and sustainable agriculture, and the use of renewable energy such as solar power and water conservation. The approach Buddha Garden had to agriculture was quite interesting. Not just due to its sustainable and careful management of the land, but also how this approach seemed to affect the volunteers' perceptions of *Mother Nature*[28] and about having a 'connection' to nature. This seemed to be generally understood through a holistic notion where the soil and the earth were part of man, and that one in this sense had a symbiotic relationship to nature.

This chapter is centered on Buddha Garden's approach to nature and farm work. In order to discuss this topic the farmers, Priya and Ganesh, who lived and worked in Buddha Garden, will be the subjects through which the agricultural approach in Auroville can be understood. Priya and Ganesh used different forms of analogies of nature that were quite characteristic and fascinating for a person who did not know much about organic farming. This practice has a different approach to the life in the soil than that of a conventional farmer, who does not have much contact with the soil as something alive. The conventional farmer focuses more on buying seeds from companies that tell him what pesticides he needs to use with the seeds, and assures him that the crop will be ready for harvest at the same time, since every seed is a copy of the other, manipulated in a way where special characteristics are implanted and the seed has been given certain information of how to grow. In this way it has been given one task; to grow quick. People with an organic approach convey a philosophy where nature is the origin

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[28] *Mother Nature* (sometimes known as *Mother Earth*) is a common personification of nature and a metaphorical expression for earth and its biosphere as the giver and sustainer of life. It is embodied in the form of the mother, which can be traced back to prehistoric times where goddesses were worshipped for their association with fertility, reproduction and agricultural reward.

and the authentic matter, and where modern man's ways are contrary to this and have lost this cosmos of nature, thus the latter having 'departed from nature', and therefore also abandoned its origin and true path. There is a great sense of morality in this approach, where it is as much about doing the 'right thing' in life and living the 'right way', thereby advocating a 'certain way'. The moral is to be found in the nature's *circle of life*, where symbiosis is the foundation and associated with 'cooperation' and shows how one is dependent on each other to be 'sustainable'. People who feel they have a certain 'connection' to nature are described in general to 'sympathize' with nature and the connection becomes part of their identity. What is then done to harm nature feels for them as harming them personally. Environmentalism is a movement where part of the group identity can be ascribed as having this connection. From my experience, people who are interested in organic and sustainable approach in farming can also be defined as environmentalists.

This chapter will investigate the practice of farming among the farmers in Buddha Garden, and how they oriented themselves within this organic and sustainable approach to cultivate the earth. The visitors experience of the concept about a connection to nature, especially those involved with farming will be considered in next chapter. It will be a continuation of this chapter where the topic will be about how they with new eyes considered modern living versus primitive man's living conditions.

The Healing Land in Buddha Garden

When arriving as a new volunteer in Buddha Garden one is invited to join a tour, conducted by Priya every Monday morning, around the farm. This is a good opportunity to become more acquainted with what the day-to-day operations of farm, its history and its aims. It is also open for visitors living other places in Auroville. Priya typically starts the tour by escorting a group through the different parts of the farm; first to the cashew grove and the banana trees, then to the different vegetable beds, explaining as she moves long how these are developed. She also talks about the power supply in Buddha Garden, which is all based on renewable energy from solar panels. These produce enough power for the farm lights in the evenings, for internet access and most importantly the water pumps and the irrigation systems for the

vegetable beds. As Tamil Nadu is an area of India where the water supply is limited during certain parts of the year, Buddha Garden therefore has a heightened awareness concerning water conservation. On the tour she therefore talks a lot about the water issue and how this is something Buddha Garden is experimenting with while growing crop. The community farm henceforth tries to think about this before choosing crops, which means that these are selected on a water needs basis. The Garden also experiments with the use of drip irrigation instead of sprinklers, which means they use much less water for the plants, and thus by limiting the water supply they can see how little the plants actually need to grow strong and healthy. The farmers also try to 'teach' the plants to require less water, where the harvested seeds will have a memory of how little water they were given in the past, and therefore will become better at conserving the water they get. The ethics around the use of water is proven to be important in Buddha Garden, and the farmers here try to show other farmers in Auroville and conventional Tamil farmers in the region how they can water their crops more sustainably based on the local context they live in. Since most of the conventional farmers grow cash crop one do not always consider growing crop adapted to the climate. They grow what the market tells them to grow. In addition to this Buddha Garden want to show the conventional Tamil farmers that growing organically and sustainably, based on the region one live in, will be safer and will make one independent from the seed companies. The seeds bought from seed companies also need much more watering than organic seeds. Based on the other Auroville farmers they try to make them better in considering water, based on which crops they use and how they water them. Even if they are organic Ganesh means they should consider to be more sustainable too, based on the region they are living in. Because the most profitable plants are the ones that grow fast, these plants also need a lot of water to support this rapid growth. The conscious thought amongst the bamboo growers in the area (both Aurovillians and local Tamils) is namely that; profit and rapid growth. The bamboo can thus be harvested and sold as material fairly quickly. Priya and Ganesh therefore find it unethical to choose crops based on how much money one can earn from them because this is often contrary to the practice of water conservation as the guiding principle. Priya talk a lot about Water conservation on the tour. This is because being a farmer in that region makes it important to consider, and since Buddha Garden want to highlight the importance for the local environment to grow sustainably this becomes a clear practical example for that area. But the road to sustainability and successfully organic farming has been bumpy, and Priya explicitly talks about how she has been succeeding through trial and error, and points out how she has "learned by doing".

After the tour around the farm where the different crops are talked about, one is gathered inside the nursery, where chairs have been placed. The people who have come for the tour gather around Priya in a circle, and she wants to hear about their motivations for joining the tour, and what interests they have in organic farming. One after another each person introduces himself and stories about everything from having an own garden or a farm and having a desire to learn more about different organic and sustainable approaches, to just being interested in what Buddha Garden's approach to food growing is compared to the other farms in Auroville. Growing organic food does not mean that there is *one* way to do it. There are many different approaches to organic food growing, and the different farms in Auroville are a testament to this. Priya will, after hearing people's expectations and aims, start telling the story about Buddha Garden's development and struggle, and tell the story of the land surrounding Auroville.

The Mythology of the Land

Before Priya became the founder of Buddha Garden, she used to walk to the farm, named Siddhartha Farm, right next to the barren land to get milk. She used to walk around on the barren land sometimes and felt a connection to the earth there. She had been searching for a place where she could realize her aspirations to connect with the earth and to grow food. This had been the passion that motivated many of the experiences and moves she had needed to reach and create Buddha Garden. When the farm manager next to the barren land told Priya that she could have the land to grow her vegetable garden she had been yearning for, a seed was planted in her, and she asked herself if this could be the land she had been searching for. She decided to move onto the land, because only by living on the land would she be able to feel the land's vibration as well as keep in touch with all the large and small practical details that needed taking care of. From the beginning she planned to work in the vegetable garden in the morning and have the rest of the day free for writing and painting. She wanted it to be a place where she could feel and work with the pulse of the earth but where she could also focus, dream and create. She was not just creating a vegetable garden but an environment where all aspects of her being could have expression.

At that time the only vegetation on the land was some rather miserable looking eucalyptus trees and tough grass that was eaten by goats as soon as it grew. The red clay soil was much eroded, especially along the several paths that crossed over it. This was by Priya explained as a result of several components; around two hundred years ago the Auroville plateau and its surrounding areas were covered by jungle, where it in storybooks is described to be a place where a local king hunted elephants and tigers. In 1825 the first trees were felled to drive away the tigers. In the following years the forests were cut down to provide wood to build the nearby cities of Pondicherry and Kalapet as well as for export. The British accelerated the process of deforestation by allocating plots of land to anyone who would clear it and cultivate it for a year. Individuals who seized such opportunities would often do so just for the first harvest after which much of the land was left fallow. During the violent onslaught of subsequent monsoons, erosion began. The last remaining plots of forest in the Auroville area - two thousand Neem trees - were cut down in the mid fifties to make boats.

In less than two hundred years what had once been green and fertile had now been turned into an expanse of baked red earth scarred with gullies and ravines. Each year tons of the remaining topsoil was swept into the sea, turning it red. Coming to such a place, the first needs that confronted Auroville's earliest settlers were for shade and water. In the beginning everyone who came to Auroville was a green worker and everyone planted trees. Since Auroville started one to two million trees have been planted. No one really knows. The greening of this once desert plain is one of the great success stories of Auroville. In the 1960s, when the Indian Government joined in the promotion of industrialized agriculture (like the rest of the world: the green revolution), cropping patterns changed. Instead of mixed farming, monoculture was encouraged and with it the heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Concurrently there was a move away from growing food crops to growing cash crops such as Casuarina trees (for wood), coconuts and cashews. Free electricity for farmers encouraged over-use of water which has led to a lowering of water tables and, in some coastal areas, salt water seepage into fresh water wells. In 1971, when asked if chemical pesticides could be used on Auroville farms, the Mother emphatically replied in the negative. She insisted: "Auroville should not fall back into old errors which belong to a past that is trying to revive." As a result, since 1968 when the first of Auroville's farms came into existence, farming has been carried out using natural approaches. Farmers strive to use no pesticides or chemicals and a variety of organic approaches such as agro-forestry, permaculture and bio-dynamic and other techniques are continuously being used and evaluated.

Since it was bought from local Tamils after the destruction of the soil with DDT (a chemical fertilizer popular during the green revolution and actually still used by many local Tamils), Buddha Garden has been a clear result of a piece of land that has been affected by the green revolution. When Priya took over this piece of land she was told by other farmers that it would be crazy trying to bring the soil there back to life. The first years, living there with her daughters, she could hardly get much to grow. During the course, and also while working in the gardens with the volunteers, she told about one heartbreaking event after another where the crop continued to die from being attacked by different pests and insects. She kept experimenting with different approaches and different crops, but she kept feeling that for every step forward she ended up taking two steps backwards again. Her book *How I grew with My Garden* (2006) has detailed descriptions from her first five years living and working on the land, and in parallel with telling the reader about the struggles with the crops and the land, she writes about her own spiritual issues. She narrates in a very honest and intimate way, and also writes how she almost gave up on the land several times. The last time she almost gave up she set a deadline for herself; if no one came to the farm within May 2005 (3 months ahead) she would leave the farm. Her dream had been to create a home and a community, but after her children left and no one seemed to come and stay and share the responsibility and vision with her, she lost aspiration and felt quite alone. Within her expiration date Ganesh arrived on the farm, a student in his early 20s from Uttar Pradesh north in India. He was done with his master in agronomy, and came to stay in Buddha Garden as a volunteer. He ended up staying, carrying out the fieldwork for his Ph.D. about organic farming there, and at the same time helping Priya on the farm. While writing his dissertation he also became an Aurovillian. Priya finally got the partner she had wished so long for, and together they created an approach to food growing that had the interesting balance between a spiritual approach and a scientific approach, which I will mention more about later in this chapter.

Today, Priya describes Buddha Garden as a vibrant and constantly evolving place and writes on her homepage that;

> …All of us who now live here – Priya, Ganesh and Gerard[29]– feel that we are evolving with [the land]. For all of us who live here the practical and other work that we do in Buddha Garden is part of our spiritual practice and important part of our growth. We love to share this

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[29] In 2007, Gerard came to live in Buddha Garden too, where he in 2009 became an Aurovillian. His approach to food growing was permeated by his spiritual practice with matter, where he transferred his spiritual creativity to the practical work with the plants, something that fit well with Buddha Garden's approach to agriculture.

experience and opportunity with other people who we hope will be inspired in their own development and growth.

Priya has also written down Buddha Garden's vision, that says that;

Our Vision is:

- To grow food with love and awareness for the community of Auroville; food that nourishes every part of our being, using methods that nurture the earth.
- To create a sustainable farm that is financially viable and in this process, provide a place where others can come to share the adventure with us.
- In an alive and vibrant environment to learn together about organic farming, about Auroville and about ourselves.

To create a clear vision like this, she seemed to hope to attract the right kind of people to the farm, as volunteers or as new inhabitants, wanting to come live and work with them. She would have loved to have, at least, another woman coming to live at the farm, where she missed more female companionship and the energy that followed, now being her and two men.

The *mythology* about Buddha Garden was known by most volunteers staying there longer than a week. The reason I call the story about the land a myth is because of its feature as a *sacred narrative*, explaining how the land came to be in its present form. Priya personifies natural phenomena by creating analogical connections between the garden's transformations and her spiritual transformation. She kept talking about its development and different setbacks while working in the gardens in the morning. She often had a group of listeners wanting to work side by side with her, listening to her stories. When I read the book *How I Grew with My Garden* a lot of the themes were stories I had heard had been told by Priya, Ganesh or Gerard, or a volunteer who had talked to Priya or read the book. These stories were actively in use and quite alive when working and living there, where Priya's figure seemed to work as an inspiration and as a proof of daring to live out one's dreams, even against the hardest of adversities. When telling these stories it worked as a continuation of the oral history and was passed over to the volunteers as a dominant narrative while living there. It became important to understand the land and natures' history; what it had went through, to be able to sympathize with it and understand its legacy and achievements. It could seem as nature in this way was ascribed with an *anthropomorphic*[30] language, where it got human attributes, as feelings and an intention.

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[30] *Anthropomorfism* (*personification*) means the attribution of human form or other characteristics to something other than a human being. When we are criticizing a practice like this it is as a result of our separation between

Barbara Johnstone (1990) highlights the intimate link between narrative and environment, each providing tellers with a variety of themes that express who they are through the idea of where they are. Stories are told – as identities are constructed – in particular places. It is within the local context of Auroville where the visitors create their narratives. Auroville and Buddha Garden also have a story told by their citizens, as a way to orient who they are and what they are doing there, as also the land and nature seem to get a own voice and story one can sympathize with, helpfully told by the citizens. Richard Bauman (1986) is a fine example of just this understanding of narrative. His aim is, like Johnstone's (1990), to offer insights into both the symbolic fabric of local lives and the general role stories play in creating and fashioning societies. For stories, as these investigations demonstrate, not only reflect and express social reality, they are also formative of social life.

Next to narratives, analogies and metaphors are also actively used by these local storytellers. In her story about both Buddha Garden and its surroundings, Priya compares the past and present, the inside and the outside of Auroville. The story about Auroville's land and the land Buddha Garden is founded on seems to create a moralistic story about man's relation to nature. The mythology of the land that is expressed and the history of the region can be described as an analogy based on human greed and how they destroy their own livelihood in the pursuit of quick revenue, instead of thinking long-term and living sustainably side by side with nature. A classical analogy that can be compared to how Auroville presents the local history is the Easter Island analogy, which is a classical story about how man and their greed, civilization and nature, consumption and sustainability, in the end exterminate their own livelihood. Within only a couple of hundred years the Polynesian people exterminated most of their vegetation, and made the green vigorous scenery on an island in the Pacific into a desert, now only the monumental statues are left as proof of an earlier civilization. One can see similarities between the analogy about Easter Island to the barren land around Tamil Nadu, where they within two hundred years had altered the land drastically from evergreen tropical forest to barren, burnt, dry red soil with little vegetation and no trees. It can sound like a doomsday prophecy to talk about a scenario based on what happened on Easter Island, but the analogy seems more relevant for each day. Aurovillians are in this story the tree hugging

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the human-and non-human, objective world (Larsen 2009:15-6). The result becomes a separation of an expressive language and an objective language. One can thus not longer put moral qualities on nature, because nature becomes amoral, non-intentional, non-communicative and dead.

hippies, who by their controversial, non-mainstream ways, try to mediate a message to the rest of the world on how there are still possibilities to reverse the great destruction already done to the earth; for example by using organic, sustainable techniques where one can over time give back life to once dead soil.

The Feminine Creative Force

> I want to live in a way that I can feel nature's heart beat which I think means living with less of a skin between myself and nature. It's not just a matter of living in a beautiful place but living simply in natural materials and working closely on the land in tune with the greater rhythms of the earth. (Vincent, Priya 2006:20)

Priya understood nature as being a creative force of energies, which again was a symbol of feminine energies and woman as the creator of life. The wish of creating a home and a community was just as important as harvesting one's livelihood from the land one lived on. She became interested in growing food when she lived in Africa, where she wrote about women and breastfeeding. At the same time she also experienced the sensitive line between accessible and inaccessible shortage of food because of the draught. She realized that to cultivate the earth and to grow food is 'life itself'. This she also observed being mirrored in the dependent relationship between a mother and her baby.

While living in Buddha Garden Priya's being and presence in the garden became a living inspiration of a woman who had been struggling through life, but had kept listening to her heart. This is part of her being a spiritual person, and what led her to Buddha Garden in the first place. A sensible person would never have chosen to start growing anything on this piece of land, but she did not listen to her mind, she listened to her heart, and the heart told her this was the right place to create a home and a garden. In Auroville this makes perfect sense, being a place with a spiritual discourse where one's heart should rule over one's mind's rational thinking. Ganesh often mentioned Priya when wanting to highlight how a scientific approach was not always the right way of doing things, and to show how he also trusted Priya's feminine instinct. After living in Buddha Garden for a while, a lot of the research he did demonstrated that many of the solutions Priya had chosen to implement had proven to be beneficial for the soil. For example when she chose to raise the beds with brick-walls, she had chosen the perfect length of the beds, and also the best material to frame them in, because of their ability to keep the beds warm, something that would help the microorganisms in the soil thrive. The length was also chosen perfectly in the sense that it was at this length the plants

could communicate and send important information to each other. Priya did not know this before Ganesh demonstrated it. She had chosen to raise the beds in a hope that it would require less weeding. In this way Priya became a figure of learning by doing, and to dare to trust oneself. She did things that felt right for her in the moment, and experimented with practices just by trying to listen to the plants and soil, and observe their growth. She meant that one should never be afraid of experimenting, since this is the best way to learn and evolve. In modern farming where monoculture and mass production is the essential characteristics one have a lot to lose by experimenting. Buying seeds from companies assures you in your choice of crop, and the earning goals can be estimated already before harvest. Living in Auroville as a citizen one is asked to live a simple life, so one will not have a lot to lose and one can live more sustainably with and within nature. Modern society is in the local context of Auroville understood as doing it the other way around; where one is requested to buy a house and fill it up with material assets, and in this way the society's wheels keep turning by keeping the shopping-morale up and through this cycle one communicates to others that one is happy and successful. In Auroville a lot of the citizens have chosen to live simple lives; one should not become too comfortable in one's living, but find pleasure in the simple things, like nature, which one is a part of.

Priya told me one morning while planting tomatoes that Ganesh had just come back from Sikkim (which is north in India between Tibet and Bhutan) and he told her that he was quite amazed to see that they were almost totally organic up there. The government of India has also considered making it 100 percent organic by 2014. Priya continued to tell me that she was quite astonished to hear from Ganesh that it was actually women who predominantly managed the farming in Sikkim. This she connected to the thought of Mother Nature being a feminine energy. She seemed to use this information to support her own beliefs about creation being based on feminine energies, which one also can find in religions like Hinduism and several nature religions, but also in paganism and New Age, which are inspired by the latter. Essentially one can say that New Age is structured on the belief in the *matriarchy*[31], where spirituality often takes feminine forms and considers feminine processes as fertility and birth as holy. The creative force embodied in women could be said to be founded on the association of women having the power to 'create life' and is often a symbol of fertility. Priya manifested this thought in the work she was doing with the land. Even the name, Priya, the name she

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[31] *Matriarchy* is a form of social organization where the female is the family head and title is traced through the female line.

gave herself after coming to Auroville, is the Sanskrit word for 'dear' and 'beloved', and is, as I have experienced and heard, often used as a nickname between Tamil men when referring to their sister(s).

Martin Thomassen (2008) posits in his research "Adoption, balance and bricolage[32]" that there is a difference between organic and conventional farmers' way of thinking about the practice of farming. His research was done in Northern Norway, where he also highlights women and men's different expectations to farming and how one can see men as more one-dimensional in their expectations. Women want to create a home, where the farm and family are integrated together. He writes that "if the business activity do not only have a one-dimensional size, but are having values in several ways, then 'biology', 'environment' and 'ecology' are good metaphors to think with, since the expressions do not convey a precise meaning, and therefore have the possibility to create a meaning that can be filled with several definitions" (Ibid.:2). What these metaphors reflect is that the agronomic-part does not become separated from the nurturing part, like what is happening in the one-dimensional agronomy and masculine knowledge system which feature more mechanical and dualistic metaphors. Organic metaphors based on simple body analogies are better to use if one wants a multiple dimensional agricultural activity, a total output, and thus these are more attractive to women in the new role as farmers. Thomassen's points out how these Norwegian women often have an education as agronomists too, and have a wish to create a home as much as cultivating the land. Organic farming is therefore described as having more to do with 'creating life' than conventional farming that uses unnatural man-created methods to take control over the natural process. The reason I mention a Ph.D. carried out in Norway is because he mentions the discourse in an organic approach that can be understood as a global phenomenon, something that makes it valid to take an account for also in my context. Organic farming can be said to be part of a movement and as a result of man wanting to (re-)create the active dialogue with nature, which were understood as being lost under the great enlightenment, something I will come back to later in this chapter.

The way Priya used metaphors was not unique in Buddha Garden and other places in Auroville, but took on different points of departure in others. As a scientist, Ganesh used biological and ecological analogies and metaphors when he talked about the land and the

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[32] Direct translation from Norwegian; "tilpasning, balanse og brikolage".

practical work done on the land. He used these similes to reveal an intention and a relation to farming and to nature as a holistic biosphere we have to learn to adapt to. Priya, Gerard and Ganesh seemed to all have this approach to farming, where Priya and Gerard considered the knowledge from the opposite pole from Ganesh, but they seemed to meet each other on the way; Ganesh considered the holism in nature's cycles, while Priya and Gerard considered this holism as the 'wheel of life' in New Age, and in Buddhist terms. This approach to food growing and their attitude towards nature seemed to create a framework for the volunteers' experiences while working on the farm.

A Holistic Approach to Nature

As a point of departure Ganesh had a scientific approach to nature, and I will look at the analogies and metaphors practiced by him in the course about sustainable food growing. He had a Ph.D. in organic farming, which meant that Ganesh's role in Buddha Garden was related to the Center for Sustainable Farming (CSF), an education program set up in Buddha Garden. Earlier they had been training local Tamils in sustainable organic farming, while today it mostly functioned as a center accepting to help students who are on a field trip or a field study, consulting Indian farmers with little resources who want a transition to organic farming, and Ganesh sometimes held courses if the interest was big enough in Buddha Garden. Most of the time he traveled around India and internationally, holding lectures in sustainability amongst the business world representatives as much as different universities and sat in meetings with India's politicians to try to create legislations more suitable for Indian farmers. Much of these contributions went to the CSF, and the research and consultation done there. When I joined the course with Ganesh I found it inspiring and fascinating, just as the other participants showed an admiration for and fascination of the knowledge he had to offer. Ganesh had a way of enchanting the room with his voice and words, and seemed to have great influence on his audience. I decided to observe his effect on the audience thoroughly while taking the course, where I tried to just as much to observe the audience and listen to their comments about the course, as much as observing Ganesh's performance.

The Moral behind Nature's Processes

 "How we grow with the soil and how the soil grows with us. Both me and Priya wouldn't have been here if it wasn't for that." This was Ganesh's opening sentence in the course, and I felt he really framed the whole idea of how I experienced Buddha Garden's approach to agriculture, where life lessons were just as much a part of the work as with development and transformation in the garden and within oneself. The course was held in Buddha Garden, and we were placed in a room a couple of floors above ground. The breeze up there was cooling and in the background one could hear the surrounding nature; birds, squirrels, geckos, dogs and trees were the chorus between Ganesh's rhetorical pauses during his lecture. We were around ten participants where most of them were volunteers in Buddha Garden, except for one older lady from Australia who lived in a guesthouse in Auroville. She was interested in biodynamic farming and wanted to learn more about different methods of making organic compost and fertilizers. The volunteers who signed up for the course had all been staying in Buddha Garden for at least a couple of weeks. The overarching themes of the course were; soil, plants, seeds, weeds, compost, water, and insects and diseases. Ganesh started talking about soil and pointed out how people think that soil is something dead, but how it is really not. "It is full of microorganisms, fungus and bacteria's", he said. "Soil is a living being where cooperation is the process." He talked about how one should never dig too much in the soil, where one disturbs the microorganisms in the soil. Here one finds different layers, and by stirring too much in the soil one creates disturbances in the different habitats of microorganisms. Ganesh continued telling about how the ideal is to make a natural cycle on the farm (or garden), and attempt to make everything locally, like compost. "These plants (placed in the compost) 'know' the soil, and therefore 'know what it needs' of nutrition". Again cooperation is the keyword. "Organic farming is about imitating and embracing nature, while conventional farming interferes with nature by keep trying to change its processes." This means that if a plant has a disease, for example, one should harvest the seeds and mix them with healthy seeds. By planting these together they will 'share' information. When plants are attacked by diseases it is not just a loss of production, it is by Ganesh seen as an 'investment'; the seeds will have a 'memory' of the disease which will make them better equipped the next time the disease attacks. Another important factor is that the soil and nature[33] should be able to have its share of the crop and thereby creating a holistic cycle in the local area. Ganesh pointed out that organic sustainable farming emphasizes an understanding

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[33] By nature I mean insects, bigger animals, diseases, etc. and together they create the cycle.

that one is 'part of nature' and that nature also 'wants a part of your crop'. When insects and animals attack the crop it is because their food has ceased to exist. They prefer *weeds*[34], since this has more nutrition than domesticated crops, but because their own plants are gone they might eat some of your crop instead. This means that if they start eating from your crop it is because the food chain somewhere is broken, and they are hungry. The local environment is then out of balance where the aim becomes to watch out for these signals, and try to create and maintain an organic vibe that satisfies the different parts of the chain. Ganesh came up with a good example of a farmer up north in India that he was helping. He was struggling with wild boars coming down from the highlands when his sweet potatoes were ready to be harvested. Ganesh recommended that he planted some sweet potatoes up in the highlands, because if the wild boars came down to his farm it might be because they were hungry. The farmer did this and he stopped having problems with wild boars. Another point that Ganesh continuously mentioned was the importance of creating a healthy soil, not just in the top soil and for the time you are using it, but to create a long lasting, healthy soil, deep down in the earth, so when you leave the land, others can take over and continue harvesting from it.

When Ganesh told stories that linked together different components to an interrelated process, David started to laugh of excitement. Bambi, the Australian middle aged lady, looked at Ganesh with wide open eyes, and when he finally came to his final points of a theme, she looked towards the other participants with the same wide open eyes and said; "wow". Karina seemed a bit harder to convince, having studied biology and having written about GM seeds and plants and how they could be seen as the solutions for external unpredictable events like extreme weather and draught. She later told me that for her, what essentially won her over to Ganesh's perspective was to acknowledge and become more alert to nature's active participation in life. When having a scientific perspective, as she did as a biologist in molecular biology, the focus was more directed towards how science was developing to become more powerful than nature. It was more bound to a perspective where nature was something wild and unpredictable that needed to be tamed and controlled. In this view science undermined nature's power to evolve and adapt. This means that nature's complexity, which in science is described with the rather rhetorical term 'unpredictable', is actually a result of nature's way of adapting itself to change, something that is not always visible to the human eye.

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[34] *Weed* is a term for 'unwanted plants', but can also be termed as 'wild plants', often found to have health beneficial features and used in traditional folk medicine world over.

Making the Plant Come Alive

Ganesh used bodily analogies to help us perceive the different functions that occur within the plants. When Ganesh talked about the plants' roots and its functions, he created a connection between roots and human 'nerves'. He asked the participants in the course if they knew what essentially separated plant species from one another. People came up with different answers like the appearance, colors, the stem, the shape, and the smell. Nobody had the correct answer. "Are you all done guessing now? The answer is quite obvious after you have learned it. It's the roots." He then started talking about the plants' 'roots' as if they were 'nerves' in a human body, and that the plants, if they were planted with the right distance from each other, would 'communicate' with each other through their roots. In this way they could more easily overcome natural obstacles, like pests, diseases and extreme weather, by 'remembering' and 'sharing information'. That means that if a plant is attacked by a pest, it is better to let the pest do its work and then collect the plants' seeds. These seeds will have a 'memory' about the pest that will make them stronger in overcoming that particular pest another time. It makes the plant stronger and resistant to the local environmental challenges. He also described the leaf of plants as having 'veins', like human blood veins, and said that this was where photosynthesis was happening and where the nutrition was transferred and stored when coming from the soil; quite similar to how the blood veins function, transporting nutrition and oxygen through the body.

The Plants Also Have Feelings

The analogies of the plants to the human body did not stop on the physical level, but could also be related to the emotional level. Different human attributes were compared to different plants. Ganesh mentioned how some plants were more 'sensitive' than others. A plant being sensitive seemed to mean that they were sensitive to the external environment and conditions. The most sensitive plants were plants that started producing fruits after 45 days. Crops in Buddha Garden that were categorized as sensitive plants were beans, tomatoes and seeds in general. As a volunteer one was only allowed to harvest the spinach seeds, where all other seeds were harvested by Ganesh, Priya or Gerard who acknowledged this notion about the plants. The spinach seeds were the exception because they produced so much and needed to be several people to harvest them before they started dropping the seeds to the soil. In his

lectures Ganesh described the tomatoes as sensitive because if you are not careful with them they will start dropping fruits. "Plants have just as much to do with feelings that they have to do with science", Ganesh said. "The plant 'knows' when your intention is to cut them down (…) the plant can also 'help' you." He pointed out that short lived plants like salad and ruccola were not that sensitive. He continued telling how Buddha Garden seemed to have a certain attraction to people with psychological problems, and he thought that people with problems like this would have great use of doing farming and put their hands in the soil, because plants could have a healing effect. He pointed out how people in the science world did not believe in this. He himself did not believe in this before either, but being in Buddha Garden for several years now had made him see the healing effect it has had on him personally.

Ganesh's approach to organic farming seems as much permeated with morals as knowledge about how different processes interrelate with each other. Seen from a scientific perspective different processes are often studied independently from the bigger picture and the interrelated processes, while Ganesh seems to have understood that what people need is to understand and to sympathize with and acknowledge the practice that gives them the whole picture, showing how nature is full of interrelated processes that cooperate and communicate, and as a result, creates sustainability, which seems to be an analogy for the 'cycle of life'. He clearly made everything into a lesson on 'life itself', by including terms like; the plant 'knows', it 'remembers', you need to 'invest', 'share', 'communicate' and 'cooperate' with and in nature, and think about the next person coming to live on the land in terms of the sustainability and continuation of the living land.

After the course the volunteers in Buddha Garden who joined the course started discussing with each other, and they highlighted much of the same things, that they felt like he just had given them a recipe for life; what seemed important in life and which morals and values that seemed best for people's well-being and in a community aspect; nature created a self-sustainable cycle by cooperating with each other. The different elements are in a relationship of total dependency on each other to keep the 'wheel turning' (the cycle of life).

Next to presenting the different processes in a holistic account where cooperation and communication were essential for (self-) sustainability, Ganesh also gave these processes and the different elements human attributes, also called *anthropomorphism*; and in this way

created an analogical connection between nature 'out there' and human nature. It seemed like the volunteers were quite open for this anthropomorphic language and made them more explicitly converse in analogies and metaphors which reflected how they started placing themselves *in* nature. I asked Ganesh on a later occasion if he was aware of making these analogies and metaphors, like giving the plants nerves instead of roots, and he told me that he was conscious around the way he talked about them; "(…) this is how I see them. I find plants conscious for their existence like all of us. I relate of course my understandings to them, just as I hope one day they would speak like us". He said this with a big smile, and it was difficult to understand if he meant this literally or figuratively, but I think it was both. He seemed to want people to make up their own mind about nature, where this for him seemed to be his philosophical approach to life.

There is today a lot of literature that speaks for a new ecological view in the notion of the holistic-organic paradigm, both as self-help books with a New Age character, non-fictional books written in the name of human science doing research on the phenomenon, and philosophical literature; as Arne Næss who is the founder of *deep ecology*. He refer to Asian philosophy and culture, how they have kept the dialogue with nature, while in Western understanding this dialogue was broken with the entry of the dualistic way of thinking about nature as separate from culture. In this way he also criticizes the Western 'logical positivism' and emphasizes with a more plural understanding, as 'theoretical diversity'. He refers to great thinkers as Spinoza, Wittgenstein and Gandhi. To continue about the notion of the holistic-organic paradigm; man and nature (individual and its surroundings) is here not longer seen as two separate opponents. What one can see is a narrowing gap between us and the other, subject and object, nature and culture, and body and the body's surroundings. I felt Ganesh (Gerard and Priya) gave a clear expression of this in the teachings of sustainable and organic food growth; this I felt was shown through the wish to join forces with nature, something I see as a result of having a holistic notion towards life. As Sigmund Kvaløy Sætereng (1986) points out about Buddhist communities, where they in Bhutan for example understand 'space' as a 'function of time', something the writer argues mirrors a learning process without static, permanent variables. In Tibet also, we can learn that they never remove a tree if it is not really necessary. They always remove the oldest trees first. They never build houses on fertile land. And they keep some trees and mountains holy. Indo-Tibetan Buddhism is, by the writer, a philosophy that brings forth an important knowledge that individuals do not exist on their own, but that everything and everyone melts in to a greater whole, something that removes all

individual struggle and teaches us a non-violent way of life. This was clearly a message the participants in Ganesh's course understood and grabbed on to, where they developed a clearer meaning of the virtue of cooperation. Indo-Tibetan ways also highlight that everything is in a continuous change, and that everything that happens should be understood as a continuous creating activity. Knowledge therefore becomes a question about understanding that one is on the path towards knowledge. Nirvana is the condition one enters when one has mastered this knowledge. What these Buddhists therefore understand is that they are a part of a 'whole'. This holism is 'wavy' and contains cycles, of phases and wheels. In Samsãra[35] the wheel (the cycle of life) of time is organic, irreversible and asymmetric. Present, past and future are mixed together. From this grows the process-oriented perspective on life where the world has an eternal existence. This was a view also practiced in Auroville, where the discourse of feeling presence in one's own life was highlighted. This can be seen as a result of separating themselves from modern living where for example the expression 'Time is money' can be understood as an expression of how a quantitative size of time has become dominant (which I will mention more in next chapter). What this Buddhist knowledge ascribes to life is that the only reality is the one you create, and it is in constant change. One just has to be aware of living it, and not dwell too much in one's memory (the past) and one's imagination of a future. One should hold on to the things one has now, and not yearn for something one does not possess.

What is being criticized about an organic approach like this, where Buddha Garden's approach and vision continue to play on the holistic thought and connect it with eco-mysticism, is a lack of a positivistic utility-oriented attitude towards nature. To orient oneself within an eco-mystical cosmos means to show ritual respect in a relationship with nature, something that again mirrors an attitude towards nature more characterized of awe than utility. What this attitude to nature often considers is the more symbiotic, organic relationship between man and nature with balance and unity, compared with a positivistic orientation with an active subjective force and a passive object. To understand these different ways of perceiving nature it can be helpful to look back in history and see how man has developed and changed paradigms through different eras, from where man felt as part of nature till modern times where man saw themselves as an opposite to nature.

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[35] Samsãra (in Sanskrit) meaning 'continuous flow', is the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth (reincarnation) within Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Asian religions. During the course of each life the quality of actions (karma) performed determine the future destiny of each person.

Man's Relation to Nature

The orientation towards nature in a holistic perspective is not something new and can be traced back to the ancient Greek notion of nature and man. The natural science of the Greeks was based on the idea that the universe was a living organism permeated by a Spirit. It was based on the simple premise that man, spirit and nature were all an integrated part of this organism (Morris 1996:26).This anthropomorphically cosmological attitude towards nature was visible in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and manifested a term about the universe as a Divine order where man was an integrated part: "A person's natural status, *humanitas*, was associated with flesh and carnality (…) In this conception of *universitas*, the individual was (as in a caste ideology) not recognized as such, but rather, as one historian put it, 'submerged in society' " (Morris 1996:11).

In the 18th century these ideas were challenged by a more positivistic attitude towards nature, which expressed a more commodified-and utility-oriented view on the natural world. In this knowledge system nature and natural resources are understood as something to be harvested and used. This development corresponds with peoples' feelings of not being that attached to the earth to reproduce, as they used to; Machines have replaced the earth as primary resource for production, while money and trade permeate all aspects of social life since both earth and labour becomes a product that are bought and sold. The attitudes above can be found first and foremost with Newton where the earth is no longer counted as a living organism, but more as a machine. The task to find out how this machine functions is given to mathematics, and by translating nature to general laws one discovers how the dead thing with no will in nature is connected through cause and effect. Nature is no longer understood as cosmological, but defined through mechanical terms. Where man's relationship to nature was a cosmos-mystical orientation that corresponded to God and the Divine or family, humans were now given control of nature and the space to have it submit to man's will. Francis Bacon took Newton's views even further because he did not just want to understand nature, but also give man power over it. By separating God and nature and give man control of nature the Judeo-Christian tradition contributed to associate a whole range of positive values to positivism. Nature was in this way de-sacralised. People challenging the mechanical and positivistic view on nature emerged in the 19th century with Darwin's understanding of the internally constructed relationship between an organism and its surroundings and thereby placing man in nature as

an answer to the powers that tried to keep man outside and in opposition to nature. Darwin saw man as part of the complex biotic system, and this new term for nature was *ecological*, a term originally used by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1870 when he barrowed the Greek *Oikos* which means house, home or family. Oikos suggests that nature is a place one can live and feel one can commune with. Ecology as science generated its own ethics towards nature, where man should not take control of nature, but that we should adapt and relate to nature with respect as it is our home. Brian Morris points out that "the ecological orientation towards nature was a rather inchoate movement, stemming from Darwin, although it represented a break-away from mechanistic conception in theory, its main impetus was ethical and it sprang from the realization that the Baconian attitude towards nature could only have one logical result; 'that mankind in his effort to subdue and explain nature might very easily end up destroying himself" (Ibid.:35). As we can see ecology was established as an alternative version to the mechanistic notion of the world, which Western philosophy had inherited from the philosophy of the enlightenment era. Morris claims that the ecological social movements can be traced back to early anarchism with emphasis on decentralization and non-authoritarian forms of social organization, self-sustaining livelihood and critical attitudes towards the way of production in centralized industry, where a combination of local industry with farming should tone down the large divide between manual and intellectual work (center and the periphery; city and out in the regions). In the 20th century there were again strong voices that wanted to build bridges between the individual and society just as much as between man and nature. Ernest Thomson Seton found it important to do this without being connected to some mystical tradition. He and the naturalists wanted to separate ecology from its mystical overtones and connect ecology to scientific rationalism. Ecology was introduced, both without mechanical and mystical relations between man and nature, although it no longer existed as a prerequisite for struggle and opposition between man and nature. Through this ecology as science tried to transcend both positivism and mysticism as own dependent alternatives anchored in scientific rationalism, but without its mechanical and dualistic metaphors. With some help from the metaphor 'organic', man was counted as part of the living, rhythmic and complex processes as nature represents. As a worldview ecology is in line with the idea that in the end man is part of nature, something modern man today is trying to (re-)create through concepts as 'connecting with nature' and having a 'dialogue with nature'. Auroville is a clear example of a place where people come and want to re-connect back to an original and authentic idea about man. Acknowledging that modern way is destructive the solutions becomes to look to the past. In Auroville they mix this up a bit, by

looking to the past but at the same time looking to the future, where they are experimenting with new and innovative ideas of how to create a better and more sustainable world. This idea of progress can be seen as a development discourse where they are taking a distance from modern values, but at the same time tries to build bridges between past and future. They seem to want to skip or reverse the era where man became mechanical *(Gesellschaft)*, as a result of the industrial era with its technology, and jump forward to the future where the technology is used in a more sustainable and constructive way, as a result of having a more organic (*Gemeinschaft)* view on life. The relation between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* is in social theory understood as the two categories for human condition introduced by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) as purely conceptual tools. *Gemeinschaft* are characterizing close and intimate bonds between people, where social interaction, roles, formal values, and beliefs are based on such interactions. Tönnies meant this type of bond also characterizes the so called 'traditional community', while 'modern society' in an increased degree can be characterized as *Gesellschaft,* where man first and foremost sees each other as 'exchangers' and tries to in an economic sense to maximize their relationships. Gesellschaft therefore characterizes individual calculation, the competitive market and formal contracts, while Gemeinschafts' central impetus that keeps man together are the social power and sympathy. Auroville can in this way be seen as a symptom of modernity at the same time as they can be understood as a resistance against modern ways.

The New Concept of Man and Nature

 The organic approach in Buddha Garden gave the volunteers new ideas and created a new way of seeing themselves in the world. They no longer saw themselves as superior to nature, but as part of nature. My informants seemed to become conscious about their role in the greater whole, and started reflecting around this, investigating where they wanted to place themselves. This is where the thought of a 'disconnection' as a concept amongst the volunteers started to spring forth, by placing themselves 'at home' in nature by reflecting around Ganesh and Priya's approach to organic and sustainable farming. They wanted to be connected back to nature, which is something they had started to perceive as something 'original'*;* an authentic manner (Larsen 2008). This also made them reflect on existential rights, duty and freedom. How we perceive the world is close connected to how we perceive

society, something that is mainly controlled through hegemonic powers and has constructed our image of the world. The political act has been controlled by different people through different eras, such as philosophers, theologists and academics. Currently this is society's way of justifying and legitimizing action and structure; the individual's duty to work (a topic covered in Chapter 4). One is not living free in nature and living off the land anymore.

This realization, of being placed in a greater whole, created a new worldview for many of the volunteers who already found themselves on a spiritual quest. To see themselves side by side with nature was a new and invigorating thought, which opened up new possible ways of pursuing life. The feeling of empowerment also seemed to become stronger when working with the soil, and one reflected a lot on being able to grow food and how important this was for basic survival. The empowering feeling of helping a plant to grow and being able to nurture it was mentioned more than once, and people felt good about themselves and what they were doing. It felt like a positive practice to use one's energy and time on, and there were no tasks that felt more authentic and real than that of cultivating the land. Many felt strange when realizing how far away from reality they had been living before and this is where the realization of the disconnection surfaced. By working with the soil they realized how these simple tasks were lost in most men, and they reflected on how there are a few farmers growing food for a large amount of people. This was a scary thought, to realize that to buy food from the grocery store was an act that made them quite disconnected to basic practices of man, which is to grow food for themselves and the community or family; the ability of reproduction without being part of the barter system. So it was by living this life that made them reflect on how far away from this life they had actually been. Quite a few of the volunteers I met in Buddha Garden went home with the aspiration of creating their own garden, to at least harvest a few vegetables themselves, since everyone who had a piece of land (lawn) should feel a certain responsibility for feeding themselves, instead of only focusing on growing beautiful roses and place leprechauns around in their gardens. Some even had aspirations of creating or moving to an eco-village, which is an intentional community. Many got the feeling that the way one was living in modern society was not sustainable over time and they wanted to live closer to nature.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on outlining the new concept about nature, with its holistic approach. It became both a new philosophical approach to life itself as well as being about practical matters, such as coming in contact with authentic practices as harvesting from nature. In this way it created a symbiotic approach to life, where one realized how dependent one was on each other; both how individuals were dependent of other individuals, and how man was dependent on nature, and nature dependent on man. Being an individual lost its meaning when learning about nature's cycle of life. Self-sustainability is not possible as an individual, but is possible and is manifested in community-living. How society's are built today one are also dependent on the individuals cooperating, but the premises it is happening under are, as understood in Auroville; too far from authentic and original attributes. Modern society can be said to be more dominated by the category Gelleschaft, where organization is based more on formal attributes than Gemeinschaft, which characterizes close intimate bonds between people and a community. In Buddhism analogies about *life* are frequently used where everything is understood as a procedural flow of change, where also an individual loses its meaning if separated from the collective and bigger whole. The lessons given by Ganesh in sustainable food growth course had the same contents, where it was about relationships to others, the importance of sharing with and sacrificing for each other, and of course the essentials; communication and cooperation. If one visits different alternative communities in the world one would see that the mentioned attributes are common, and such that might be made explicit because of their very non-existence in the society one came from. Auroville was not an exception, where also these attributes were communicated as important.

The new concept around nature became created by the use of metaphors and analogies on nature, where it was created a dialogue between man and nature. The practical approach in farming was by Ganesh and Priya communicated in a way that fitted well in to this holistic philosophical approach to Mother Nature, where the organic and sustainable practice became associated with authentic practice. The social norm within the holistic approach to nature is to walk lightly on the land and work side by side with nature. This also corresponded with the social norms in Auroville around behavior, where both practices can be understood as coming from the same practice; karmayoga.

Chapter 4: The Disconnection and the Discovery of Authentic Living

Ganesh and Priya, their message, and how it was communicated, have been central aspects of showing how the concept of nature in Buddha Garden could be understood. Their perception of the natural world and practice of organic and sustainable farming is the framework within which a further analysis of the volunteer experience can be conducted. The discussion must necessarily and naturally move on to look at the realization of a disconnection to nature and how the volunteers reflected around this new concept. The main focus in this chapter is about modern labour compared to 'going back to basics' by practicing service in a community living off the land and modern living compared to sustainable living. These new practices are understood as natural and authentic practices. It also made them reflect on the effect that an alienation from modern society and its working and living-conditions had on the individual, in the way of becoming a fragmented individual far away from one's original condition in nature.

By taking detours within the use of narratives I have mediated the unfulfilled yearning expressed by the visitors in and citizens of Auroville concerning the modern world. The analogies and metaphors used are ways to express their intentions and feeling towards this yearning. I have chosen to label this yearning as a spiritual quest earlier, where I will now look more closely at the volunteers' practical attempts to heal the bond between themselves and nature, as part of their journey, and at the same time heal themselves. This is done through the practice of karmayoga, which they start to relate, not only as something one do on one's leisure time separated from work, but also as an aspect of 'work', which means they are considering the meaning and outcome behind the work they do; as meaningful action.

'Work' is often structured a bit differently in intentional communities, and Auroville is no different. One shall not work for the end of money, but for the end of self-development and fulfillment. It is quite common in Auroville to change jobs, try something else, and often working with completely different things than what one has experience with. The people who are farmers in Auroville rarely have a rural background, but have an aspiration to grow with

the land, and start experimenting with the land. This creates another working atmosphere that differs from a Western labour mentality.

The Feeling of a Disconnection

As a result of feeling a connection to Mother Nature one also started recognizing the 'disconnection' one felt to her and nature itself. By the people in Auroville who acknowledged a disconnection to nature it was described as feeling 'unfulfilled'. This was in general grasped by looking back to the life lived at home. Often their leisure time was described as the reason for this feeling; It was used on watching television or browsing behind a computer, something they had limited access to in Auroville; staying most of the time in one's apartment (alone, with family or partner) rather than going out meeting people in the weekdays after work; shopping groceries in a supermarket without recognizing or thinking about where the food came from. When thinking back to home and one's life it was more than just one's leisure situation that was considered and reflected on. How one spent one's work time felt rather unfulfilling as well; working inside an office most of the time, in front of a computer, performing a service or tasks that often felt pointless. When staying and living in Auroville the visitors that practiced farming experienced, through the work, alternative ways of utilizing one's days. The work one did in the gardens felt simple but nurtured and gave them something back; the practice gave them a direct response on their action. The leisure time spent there was quite different from at home, where one in Auroville had more leisure time and therefore spent more time being social and/or more time connecting to oneself within.

When leaving one's home sphere and visiting other places where one needs to create a new structure in everyday life, especially if one is in a holiday sphere, one often recollects the life at home in a different light (Wearing 2002). In Chapter 2 I posit that a journey can often be related to transformation; that by traveling or going away from everyday life for a while makes us associate the practice and the physical journey with new beginnings, self-development and change, as the Grand Tour, which will influence how we continue to create and rewrite our self-narratives (Bruner 2001). But also part of the Grand Tour is the practice of meeting new ways of living, fresh perceptions, and in general existence in new

surroundings, which will stimulate our reflexivity by comparing different ways of living. So by claiming that one were more social in Auroville and did not use one's leisure time watching television and the computer inside somewhere had essentially to do with being in new surroundings where there was actually no possibility to continue this common pattern practiced at home. One needed to adopt and create new patterns. When traveling and being away from home for a while can change one's original surroundings from neutral ground till highly cultural surroundings with its own specific and subjective ways of understanding life. Before having experienced alternatives, one can more easily take life for granted, with its structure, practices and ways of thinking. 'Away' comes to be constructed through an active dialogue with 'home', and what one experience in one's new surroundings will in this way be mirrored with the familiar (home) (Wearing 2002).

I will now illustrate how even a small change in one's perception between 'outside' and 'inside' a house can create a new meaning around one's presence in the world; as a result of being in new surroundings and in other living conditions. By looking at how the dichotomy between 'inside' and 'outside' was experienced by the volunteers in Buddha Garden one can see how simple changes in one's understandings in the classification system seemed to change one's preferences of how to live life; the feeling of the disconnection to nature was created as a concept in the realm of a new understanding between inside and outside.

"It Is Not Only *Your* Home"

New volunteers in Buddha Garden had to acknowledge that one did not get one's capsule, completely for themselves. They also had to share with other small creatures of nature, as chipmunks, cockroaches, snakes, birds, rats and other small creatures that found it a suitable place for hiding or to look for food. The capsules were quite open, meaning that the walls, roof and floor were not as closed as they would have been in a house in the West. Two of the walls are for example made to work as windows so natural light will come in, and the building material is bamboo, and are built in a way that nothing is completely closed up. The windows only hold back intruders, and are making it difficult to assure privacy since people walking past can look directly inside the capsule. The capsule's function is to keep you up from the ground, protect you from the rain, and keeping people and other big intruders from coming in.

Once I had to share a capsule with a new girl Karina that had just arrived from Europe. In evening time we were sitting inside the capsule getting to know each other, when she suddenly observed a cockroach crawling undisturbed over the floor just in front of us. She freezed up a second while watching it and collected her shoe before she hit the spot the cockroach had been crawling. I was in shock, and she continued hitting the cockroach as it took some time to really knock it out. After she was done she sighed, as order again was re-established after the chaos from the intruder. I told her that she should not do that. She needed to get used to having animals and insects in the capsule. If that was something she could not live with it would not be easy for her staying there, because if one started killing them, more animals and insects would come in the intention to eat it, and the disturbing factor would be even more disturbing for her. I could see this though bothered her a bit and she said she was not used to the fact of sharing her living space with small creatures from the nature. I could relate to that, as I too found it stressful and uncomfortable in the beginning.

When lying in bed at night what made one feel safe was the mosquito net that surrounded you, which you tuck well under the madras, so you know not even a mosquito will have the chance to come in. Jade told me once that he imagined the mosquito net being a protecting wall between him and his surroundings, so even how loud the sounds from nature became, and even if one could hear things crawling in the capsule not far from you, he knew nothing would intrude the mosquito net. Several of the volunteers agreed when he said this, and it was often talked about when someone was telling about a happening throughout the night. This happened on a regular basis, where one woke up by some mysterious animal doing something mysterious, or one was talking about the life that was surrounding you inside your home. Ismail told about a bird nest with eggs in his capsule, which made him happy that the birds felt safe enough around him for laying eggs; Jade told about the chipmunk he and Rose had that ate everything from their natural soaps to postcards; Bella and Rachel had a snake in their capsule, something that was a result of having rats, which attracted the rat-snake; Mona was fascinated by all the frogs coming to her capsule, and mentioned how frogs was associated as 'cleaners' of bad energies; Maria and Haisu had an issue with cockroaches, where they seemed to be invaded. They also had an indefinable animal coming for visits in night time, which they never found out what was; the common kitchen also had some rat-problem, where the rats were as big as the cats, which made the cats stop functioning.

When Bella was living with Rachel they talked about their capsule and its inhabitants like they were one big happy family, trying to live peacefully side by side as a community. Bella told me that she did this to make it familiar and less scary. She knew the rat-snake was scared of humans and were not dangerous, and rats she knew were scared of her and would keep away. Bella and Rachel gave the one rat that seemed to always stand on a beam up in the roof looking down at them a name; Rolf; and the snakes name were Patti; a name that made the scary association to snake seem less harmful with a cute name. Once Bella and Rachel sat inside the capsule talking a small baby mouse fell down on one of the mosquito net. Rachel rushed over to it and put it in her hand coming with emphatically insight to the baby. Bella told her to put it back on the mosquito net and not touch it too much in case the mommy rat would not take it back after human polluted smell. Rachel did as she said and they left the capsule, with a hope the mommy rat would save her pink little baby mouse. They came to my capsule telling me about it, where I had the capsule next to theirs and I heard the commotion from the situation. On a later occasion Rachel were sitting in the capsule and a snake actually fell down from the roof and on the floor in front of her. This was not OK, where she burst out from the Capsule calling for Rajan, the local Tamil that worked for the CSF. He came and told her it was not dangerous. After this situation both Rachel and Bella did not feel that happy about their Capsule, and only went inside when really necessary. Every time Bella had an intention of collecting something from her capsule, she started singing and calling for both the rat and the snake, to warn them that she was coming and that they should go in to hiding, and in this way live peacefully side by side. She told me she felt this would be easier if they did not have to greet each other that often.

Having these issues was not discussed in a negative tone. It was more colored by fascination; one made it to be amusing stories, both with dramatic contents and philosophical insight. It was a new experience for many being this close to nature. Many also found the sounds from the natural surroundings at night being so loud that they needed to sleep with earplugs. Some got used to this over time and stopped using earplugs, while others never got used to the crawling sounds around one's pillow and constant noise outside the capsule and needed to tell themselves while having the earplugs safe inside their ears that they were safe asleep in their bed at home with four walls to be able to create a distinct separation from themselves and the outside. It was first after coming back home to Norway after my first fieldtrip I consciously reflected on this dichotomy between inside and outside of one's homes, and how they in Western living was quite distinct. What keeps them in contact with the outside might be an

open window or having chairs and tables in the garden or on the terrace, so if the weather allows it one can sit outside in fresh air. Except for this one try having routines in letting in 'new fresh air' unto the house every day by keeping windows open a bit. The first night after I came back home to Norway felt strange. One thing was to have a soft bed again, and a heavy featherbed cover, the other issue was the silence. I took myself in having a preference that could not be satisfied; I kept the window as far open as possible, but it was like one could hear based on the silence that the walls were thick and isolated. I could not hear or feel the wind as I could in my capsule in Buddha Garden, where the light breeze in the night would come from all directions. The cleanliness and order as I before I went to Auroville appreciated now felt like an odd boundary and preference made by man to keep nature outside. This will of course vary based on the climate one live in, where one in India for example keep places more open than in Norway or Europe in general, where one wants to keep the warmth inside the home.

Living In Nature as a Moral Practice

this link between the outside and the inside was not only felt by me, but became explicitly discussed and talked about among the volunteers living in these primitive and open capsules in Buddha Garden. These capsule's were also to be found many other places in Auroville, where they were cheap and quick to built, sustainable with nature by using local and natural material, and had a good quality where the roofs only needed changing every 5-7 years. The building technique was common in the area before, but not anymore, as it is more viewed as a traditional practice, where the ordinary Tamil now seem to prefer brick or clay walls, and do not want to live in primitive capsules. This reflection around how one preferred segregating the inside from the outside – culture from nature – made people aware of their preferences as not being neutral and 'natural'; this was a created preference common to orient oneself from in a civilized world. A preference one had been thought through modern Western living. Since modern ways was something they wanted to 'unlearn' – by Aurobindo termed as a practice of 'un-conditioning' oneself from previous states thought through one's society– they started disciplining themselves and reflect around the fictive issues that were discovered while living and sleeping as simple as they did there. The link between the outside and inside was connected to other areas of life in Auroville, where the feeling of being more outdoors in general and being close to nature became a value in itself, something that also was an impetus for being relaxed and comfortable around natural phenomena and processes.

In this way it seemed like visitors in Auroville that were living simple and worked with food growth shared an assumption that *nature* was a synonym for what is 'real', what is 'authentic' manner, and what is 'true', as I mentioned in last chapter. By the volunteers in Buddha Garden, this way to live and sleep in nature was understood as an authentic experience, as the way it should be. Originally we all come from nature; it is our 'origin', and we should also be capable to live in it; a moral that was created amongst the volunteers while staying in Buddha Garden when realizing how difficult it actually was to live in simple surroundings. Even if it felt scary and uncomfortable many tried to force themselves to learn how to like it, because the identity one wanted to be connected to – a child of nature – wanted and needed to have this connection to nature. Because how could one not like what was 'real'?

It is not only in this local context nature became the term and the symbol for what is 'real'. The concept about nature refers to the objects that are natural and as a subject to the 'laws of nature' have been a consistent theme of discussion within the history of Western Civilization, in the philosophical fields of metaphysics and epistemology, as well as in theology and science. The word *nature* derives from Latin *nātūra*, a philosophical term derived from the verb for *birth*, which was used as a translation for the earlier Ancient Greek term *phusis* which derived from the verb for natural growth, for example that of a plant (thefreedictionary.com). It is the natural world as it exists without human beings or civilization, something that makes it *real*, *original* and the *essential* qualities or characteristics by which something is recognized, like "it is the nature of fire to burn". This is also actively used by man in one's language by imposing characteristics on people, as "the true nature of jealousy"; it then becomes an essential character in an individual, something 'true' one cannot escape. Nature has in this way often been perceived as an image of something to aspire to; as a natural state of being one want to be connected to. In general nature is understood as not part of human invention, and persists despite human invention. Thereby it is forced to persist without man, and as something opposite to culture, which is based on human invention. There is a long history between the two binaries *nature* and *culture*, and how the notions of these binaries and how their statuses have kept changing through the centuries based on man's worldview. When the bond between man and nature was disconnected, *man* became the *subject* and *nature* became the *object*.

The point is that there have always been forces that have tried to re- establish the connection between subject and object, man and nature, as a 'longing' for reconciliation (Larsen 2009). This is interesting because it says something about modern society, as is how we also define utopia; the characters found in a utopia change based on what contemporary society seems to be lacking (Manuel 2007). In modern day society it seems like people find the bond between nature and man to be lacking, and a feeling of being in contact with what we define as authentic manner seems lost. Catherine Wilson (1995) says as a science historian: "The coldness and aloofness of the scientist are the price that has to be paid for exceptional vision" (Ibid.:18). She continues saying: "The paradox that understanding seems to imply alienation from what is understood, is one presented in the intellectual version of the scientific revolution, according to which a colorless world of particles was given to us in place of the world of existence" (Ibid.: 37-38). It is only by having the experience of modern living and the knowledge about earlier ways of living, that we can say anything about how we live now; by comparison. This means that the way the past is being glorified often comes from a dream about something different, from something that is already lost. Often the 'authentic' is identified with the 'pre-reflexive'; Tord Larsen (2009:189-90) mention this phenomenon in his book *Global Conversations*[36] where he terms it as the 'melancholia to something lost'. The idea about 'preserving culture' comes from the same melancholic impulse, a wish to own the lost forever. But as he writes "like with Minerva's owl, the preservation impulse comes late: what we wish to be a part of we have already lost, and first when it is lost we can reflect over it" (ibid.:190).

The new concept around having a connection to nature aspired to practical manners as working with food growth, trying to live sustainable and simple, where this was connected to authentic and original manners. In this way practical labor connected to primitive original labor as farming became understood as a way to heal the broken bond between man and nature, and therefore also therapeutic for mans self-development and living an authentic life. I will now look closer on how Auroville understood 'work', since this reflected the volunteer's new aspirations. The work-practice in Auroville made one reflect around one's 'contributions', as 'work' became understood as a 'service' to the community, and not directly for personal gains (payment in money). I will therefore investigate how they

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[36]Direct translation from Norwegian title: *Den Globale samtalen.*

understood economy by being exposed to alternative forms of economy that seemed more natural and authentic.

Authentic Practices

> To be a true aurovillian…
>
> Work, even manual work, is an indispensable thing for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not inject his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let one's consciousness organize a bit of matter by way of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself. One should organize life not according to outer, artificial rules, but according to an organized, inner consciousness, because if one allows life to drift without imposing the control of a higher consciousness, life becomes inexpressive and irresolute. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter persists without a conscious utilization (The Mother, November 1968).

This quote refer both to how work should be understood and to the virtue of simple living, which both can be understood to be the essence in Auroville's aims for work and community-building. Labor was seen as a central practice in Auroville, were it was understood a bit different than at the outside world. The Aurovillians tried to be conscious around labor as a way to grow spiritually as individuals through the work they did with matter. In this sense they practiced their karmayoga through work as much as they did off-work. They also changed labors attributes from action done in the intention for serving money, towards an action in the intention to serve one's inner self-development and the community as a whole. This was the Mothers dream, where she understood money as promoting competition and unsocial tendencies, where she wanted people to develop better social relations to each other and serve each other. Growing spiritually was part of one's work when being a citizen of Auroville. At the beginning when Auroville came in to existence everyone should find their own place in the community and follow their aspiration. They ended up having five photographers in a community that really needed manpower at that time, since most of the work evolved around planting trees and building a community. Today they therefore have a less anarchistic form of organizing labor, where they hire people just like one do outside. But, through the ideology one do not need an education or much knowledge about the field one want to work with, where they give people space to grow in the field they want to work in. Sabine told me she really appreciated this. It was not like one stayed in *one* sector year after

year. "In Auroville people switch jobs just as frequent as they switch houses". They want to work as an egalitarian community, where all are equal, and with as less rules as possible, which is a challenging task.

Servants of the Divine

In Auroville they have an aspiration where money is standing in the way for people's self development. It keeps you from doing the right things. Ambre, a forester in the green belt, one's told me that: "We are all servants of the Divine", which means that in Auroville all the citizens are doing a 'service', and not 'work'. This is based on the thought of not working for money, but for the community and for one's own self-growth. "This is asked of the guests of Auroville also, to do some service while staying here, to help the city grow." The visitors do not get any money for the work they are doing, but they pay less in the daily fee for staying in Auroville (between 20-50 rupees). The citizens are not getting any payment for the work they are doing, except for a monthly maintenance, which is just enough to cover one's basic needs. This is based on a communistic structure which is supposed to erase a feeling of class difference amongst people. In Auroville they share everything. The land and houses are shared by every Aurovillian. Outside Auroville every square meter are owned by someone. In Auroville they try to work against this bad culture and work against the feeling of 'possessing'; by not owning one's own house, but sharing it with the community one can work with the capitalistic feeling of possessing things. One should instead focus in being a 'willing servitor of the Divine', which is a process happening within oneself. The Mother saw this as a way to become a servant of the 'ultimate truth', which was the higher consciousness, and everyone should have an individual relation to these words by the Mother.

Experimenting With Contribution Systems

Without money flow they try to create a more intimate group feeling, where solidarity and cooperation is important and where competition is associated to the lower self[37] and not acknowledged. Micro-economical systems within Auroville are sometimes targets of experimentation. One of these experiments that were being practiced on the inhabitants while I was there was based on money-use and consumerism in the local grocery store. *Pour Tous*

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[37] The lower self is a synonym for the Ego; egoistic tendencies as thinking about own personal gain and happiness, not considering others.

(*from now on referred to as PT*) is the unit where food and necessities are being distributed. In 2010 they got a second shop, and they decided to experiment with the distribution amongst their inhabitants in this store. They wanted to create a 'conscious shopping experience' by creating an account in the *New Pour Tous (from now on referred to as NPT)* where the aurovillians maintenance (approximately 2900 rupees a month) goes to a foundation pool. They can take what they need from *NPT*, the prizes are hidden, and they do not get a bill. They have a record to know how much money every participant use, so they have an idea of how the system works. The goal is to detach oneself from money, and make the participants conscious of getting the things they 'need', and not the things they 'want'. The project has been going on for 2 years, and the people who run the experiment say the system have never been in minus.

Jean Ives was the Aurovillian I heard mention the *NPT* system. He was interviewed on the Auroville Radio and he described Auroville as an 'economic project'; actually, as a society "(…) without circulation of money. The goal is to produce objects to consume". He says they try to change the view people have on economic value by giving them a positive vision of the future, and commit them to create it, which are said to be 'internal values'.

> …If you cannot monetarize things, you cannot know their value, you can't measure the production. It can't be a commercial exchange within Auroville, said money. Work's means is to earn for [a] living. You are given what you need in Auroville. In this way you can concentrate on other things than earning money. You can find your spirituality (…) Work can in this way be a field of self-perfection and self-becoming (Jean Ives, January 2012).

He ended the radio interview by pointing out that "Auroville is an experiment. Relations to money are a beautiful experiment. It's a change in consciousness". I understand Jean Ives message to be that it is more important what they (the aurovillians) have inside of them and what they can contribute to the people around them than how much money they have on their bank account. For this reason they are trying to practice a kind of egalitarian and communistic system in Auroville that can be compared to a marxistic dream of giving the producers soul back in to the product being produced, something Karl Marx (1959) argues is taken away from the producer, who are in a mass industrial production mode alienated from the product.

Auroville also had a restaurant *Bharat Nivas* that was inspired by *gift-economic*[38] principles. It was in a beautiful garden and the lunch meals were usually excellent there. The concept was

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[38] Gift-economy is a mode of exchange where valuables are given without an explicit agreement of reward. It is defined as a contrast to a barter economy or a market economy. Social norms and custom govern gift exchange,

that you offered a 'contribution', deciding yourself how much one wanted to give, and you did not pay for you *own* food but the person after you. When sitting down to eat one could read about the concept with the table on a card placed there. It said that gift economy was originally found in primitive society as an alternative form of economy. By paying forward one should learn how to appreciate the feeling of 'giving'. I went to the restaurant several times, most of the times with new volunteers from Buddha Garden to see what they thought about the concept. It seemed like the concept opened up for discussion around the 'right way' to exchange services, commodities and food. Also several communities had fixed days where they served lunch for guests, as *Aspiration, College Guest House, Sadhana Forest* and *Solitude Farm.* When coming for lunch nobody would remind you about paying. They trusted that you would find you way to the jar of contribution, and give what you found suitable for the meal. This was also a nice way to mingle, where one often started talking with new people, listening to their aspiration for coming to visit, or for living there.

There was also a community lunch every Sunday at Fertile Johnny's place deep inside Auroville's forest. Every participant on the community lunch brought food and would have the meal together, communally. It was always new and old people coming there open to talk and meet new people. It was all age groups, from small kids to quite old pioneers from Auroville, and it was played music and one could take strolls inside the forest there which had a lot of beautiful banyan trees. It was interesting how one could gather like this, without it being a money outcome from it. I found the Fertile Johnny's regular lunch to be a clear expression of Auroville's aims as wanting to be money free community, promoting human unity, and most of the visitors I met there found the concept touching. Bella told me it felt so good to be included in something before they even knew you. They were open for everyone, and that thought was so heart-warming for her and really inspired her to try to engage in something like that when she came back home to Germany.

These contribution systems that are experimented with in Auroville has the function of making people become conscious of what money do to one's social relationships and to experience how these alternative exchange systems can create a higher social intimacy and

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rather than an explicit exchange of goods or services for money. It does not constitute for an economic system per se, but from a Western perspective one term it as the closest thing one can connect to our understanding of economy; as a flow of goods and services. But it has multiple layers, where the exchange is embedded in political, kin, or religious institutions.

connection between individuals. It is about giving and receiving as a social aspect instead of getting paid and pay for services or goods one wish for.

Economic Man

The visitors in Auroville (and the Aurovillian) became quite informed of alternative exchange systems while living in Auroville. Some, of course, were interested in this before arriving, while others experienced it while living in Auroville. This was a central aspect of Auroville, and permeated a lot of practices, services and social life there. These exchange systems was understood as being part of an authentic practice, which involved that it became idealized and glorified. Since it was understood as authentic it also became the 'right' way in a moralistic sense, and as an essential practice that could be the solution for the disintegrating modern society. A coordinator in Auroville said once on an introduction tour I joined that: "(…) we (aurovillians) have not the same attitude as modern capitalism, where Auroville wish to learn from the past by getting in contact with practices and knowledge that is lost. The mother calls this 'Divine reality', which she connects to work as service, organic sustainable farming and zero economy". This more or less sum up Auroville's aims when discussing economic systems, and shows how part of the vision and what is told to the visitors is that pre-modern ways are better and that we can learn from these. Many of the visitors therefore associated the pre-modern practices that were being experimented with in Auroville as part of an ethical and authentic discourse that lectured about how modern ways had failed and made the individual get easily self-absorbed and selfish instead of focusing on features as solidarity, cooperation and unselfish service, which is essential characters also found in nature.

The term *economic man* is a concept of man as a rational and narrowly self-interested actor who has the ability to make judgments towards their subjectively defined ends. Using these rational assessments, the economic man attempts to maximize utility as a consumer and economic profit as a producer. This theory stands in contrast to the concept of *reciprocal man* which states that human beings are primarily motivated by the desire to be cooperative and to improve their environment. The theory about the economic man has been criticized on empirical ground by anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins (1974), Karl Polanyi (1944), Marcel Mauss (1925) and Maurice Godelier (1969,1972), and have demonstrated that in traditional societies, choices people make regarding production and exchange of goods follow patterns of reciprocity which differ sharply from what the economic man model postulates.

Such systems have been termed as gift economy rather than market economy. Criticisms of the model of the economic man put forward from the standpoint of ethics usually refer to this traditional ethic or kinship-based reciprocity that held together traditional society.

But, is it possible to live the dream of not thinking in the terms of money? One has to consider that the individual's who wants to practice a gift economy is individual's who comes from backgrounds where the monetary system has been practiced and have shaped once specific understandings and motivations around being exchangers. Yet, one needs to have the experience of the barter system to grasp the idea about gift economy as an alternative to monetary economy. It therefore becomes the same paradox as mentioned earlier; that one starts longing for a past one never will be able to experience in an authentic manner; this is because authentic practices will lose its authenticity by being reflected upon. What makes it authentic is by being pre-reflexive. This means that it is the primitive and indigenous person that symbolizes the authentic, while the Europeans are the reflexive one's, observing a new and exotic practice from the outside. Bourdieu (1990) argues that a truth behind a practice will be destroyed once the practitioner "reflects on his practice (…) he cannot communicate the essential point, which is that the very nature of practice is that it excludes this question". The observer "has the advantage over him of being able to see the action from the outside, as an object" (Ibid.:91). Living authentic evolves doing practices in a pre-reflexive way as the indigenous people were doing when Columbus discovered America. The colonists with a reflexive experience would never be able to adapt these new discovered practices in an authentic manner, since this is reserved to the indigenous people, and the colonists already have a reflexive relationship to it. As Larsen (2009:189) argues; "We are attracted to the authenticity we have alienated ourselves from in the attempt to have a reflexive control over it".

Max Weber (1946) barrowed the expression 'The disenchantment of the world' from Schiller about the complicated and contradictory nature of the times in which he lived, and we still live in; that 'progress' is at best a mixed blessing. For Weber the disenchantment of the world lay right at the heart of modernity. Richard Jenkins (2000) argues that one of many modern movement of (re)enchantment that is worth mentioning in this context is the diverse portfolio of perspectives and practices that developed as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and which shelters under the broad umbrella of Romanticism. Across a wide range of cultural and intellectual fields, Romanticism's imagining of, and yearning for, a

mythical pre-modern, un-rationalized past perfect remains influential. It is also, these days, commoditized, routinized and organized, if not thoroughly rationalized, as one can see by looking at the widespread movements based on community living and eco-villages. The movement to create eco-villages and intentional communities is perhaps the most comprehensive antidote to dependence on the global economy, as a re-enchantment. What is so interesting about this phenomenon of re-invention of lost practices is that terms like pre-modern living and pre-modern economies is given its own autonomic authority and therefore also given its own new invented meaning, based on the people who start using it with ideological motivations or practicing it, like I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter about the utopian dream being shaped by contemporary society's status. Indigenous people that has been investigated and classified as practicing primitive economies do not have the pre-reflexive experience as the Western modern man that comes in an analyze it. The way it has been described can therefore be understood as a Western interpretation and glorification, which means it is based on coming from a standpoint permeated by certain thoughts about economy, and with a certain historical background permeated by the development of the barter system. In this way re-enchantment (as much as re-invention) of pre-modern practices must, perhaps, be recognized as an integral element of modernity. Not just as a consequence or a reaction, but right at the heart of the matter.

In Auroville it was a central focus around moneys attributes to social relations, and they tried being conscious about integrating the service they did with their self-development. All this information about alternative living and alternative economic systems made the volunteers who did farming in Buddha Garden to see labor and work as something different. 'Work' did not anymore have a neutral basis, but became a highly conscious act, as part of being based on volunteering without payment and as a spiritual act.

Work as Spiritual Action

Auroville had its own local understanding of labour as a practice, which became experienced by the visitors by doing volunteer work there. In a sense this work should be the same work as Aurovillians did; they were also volunteers (servants of the Divine), since they did not get paid for the work they did, but instead received a monthly maintenance to cover once basic need. The monthly maintenance should be understood as separated from the work one did, and more as a maintenance to assure one could continue one's spiritual work without having to think about money.

Work Became Something Different When Money Was Out of the Equation

The visitors doing volunteering experienced labor becoming something 'different' when it was no money involved, which resulted in a creation of a new understanding of the practice of work. Jade said this about volunteering work;

> As soon as you take the money out of the equation it becomes a very different relationship. It can become quite an ego-boost [to do volunteer work). That kind of aspect, and also the actual relationship to the people. So I guess for me it feels pretty good to do it (giggles) and all the feeling I got when I got to work [at home] every day, selling shit to people, that disappears when I work for things I believe in. if I could volunteer for ever, and it would pay for my bills, I would do it! My heart feel fulfilled in what I'm doing when the people I help are doing good things. So, volunteering for me means to do more the things I want to do. Just to help people, giving your services, building websites. Feel I have a more purpose in life when I can help people who need my help. A career felt like a pointless existence. You haven't actually helped anyone. Just helped people earn more money.

Jade describes how work where money is not involved can be an ego boost, but for him it is mostly about the relationships he got. He describes how he felt a more direct connection to the people he worked with when money did not come in between. Also, when working for money you might be doing something that is not part of your value system, but it pays for you bills. Volunteering makes him feel good about himself and seem to be more compatible with his value system. He seemed to become more conscious of what effects his actions had compared to when he was home. But of course, why would you volunteer in something that you did not believe in? Why should you give your free time to something you did not benefit financially *or* spiritually from? I think this made people ask questions around own work situation when doing volunteering; which act they actually did through ones work.

Bella had been doing a lot of volunteer work in Germany before coming to Auroville. When Bella and I were discussing volunteer work and why she did it, she said;

> People often work to get money…Volunteering is more. I work because I like it, because it's giving me something. It's a joy to work! I do this for my personal development also, so I do this because I like it. It's not about, yeah, what you get back from this work. Yeah, it's not money, .it's another thing. Its personal strength, it's just joy. Like, it's really fulfilling me… I think that if you live in a country or a society then everyone should just contribute something without necessarily expecting something back, you should just try to help good projects to grow, because a lot of projects maybe don't have the money to..am.. yeah, if you don't, to pay people to work in them…so.. yeah, it's just, it's for the good, for the community, for the society, just giving my energy for good things…I gave myself to work, but I feel I got so much back from these work experiences, of working, I got so many, so many good experiences, so much inspiration..So much confidence in myself, and it just changed a lot for me, and also to find out that you can actually live with little money.

Bella are saying that she feels volunteer work gave her more back than what a paid job could give her. It gave her personal empowerment and it made her feel that she made a difference, and was doing good deeds. She expresses that money did not mean anything for her. This is a privileged persons uttering though. She had never had to worry about money and, in that case, did not think too much about missing any. She was still too young to have felt the pressure of having debt, where she came from a well off family. The times she worked for volunteering services in Germany or while going to India, her parents supported her. Bella's understanding of volunteer work therefore seemed to be permeated by romantic idealism. How she is describing her feelings around volunteer work reflected her own attitudes against the working mentality common to find in own society. She had a dream of one day living in a community where the work she did would contribute to the community as a whole. Her ideal vision of work can therefore be said to be doing good service for people around her, living communally where each individual contribute to the group in different ways.

Different Name, Same Act

When David was reflecting around service work, he mentioned a proposal done in Sadhana Forest to create a better environment around working; "at Sadhana they recently… they no longer call it the first work and the second work, they call it first *seva*[39] and second *seva*." He told me that some volunteers at Sadhana had come up with this proposal because they did not feel what they were doing was 'work'. What they were doing, was 'service'; what they were doing was 'virtuous work'. At Sadhana one goes and plant trees. David feels this is a service, and not work;

> They do the same thing, they are planting trees, they are just... the same action, the same physical thing, but completely different to me, completely different word behind it. And people no longer say this "ah, I have work and it's so early! (Negative tone)" and now it is "I

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[39] *Seva* means *Service* in Sanskrit

have first seva (said with a neutral tone)". It's different. Are you really going to, like, complain, are you really going to "ah, work work (negative tone)". It is so easy for us to cast it off. With seva I think we kind of have a different engagement, like "ah I don't wanna do...service" and that is contributing my brain. What I'm saying is that I don't want to give service to Sadhana as a community. It's no longer "I just don't want to do the work three hours"(…) So I'm really interested in engaging in these "what we want to *call* it, what is it we *do"* (…) I feel in a free economy *work* does not exist, it's something else. If you are performing something regularly that needs a schedule, I think that within a free economy we can have *exchanges*, you know. I can lead a yoga class that you participate in, and you can do a meditation later on, or you cook dinner. But this has nothing to do with *work*. *We are exchangers*, or…you know, we can think of some floozy word, like *gratitude* or something (laughs) you know? We can think of, we can go off, but it's not *work* and what we do that's regularly scheduled is things we do the whole community together. It's something *else*.

What David is trying to highlight is that service work is done 'voluntarily' and is often done for the greater good and for the community you are a part of. It is understood as an 'unselfish act', which can be associated to the Aurovillians thought of being servants for the Divine, where one 'give service' to each other. That means you have chosen to do it of own free will, and should not talk about it like something you *have* to do, which is often the way one talk about work. Something one has to do to pay the bills. David did not talk with a focus of what moneys involvements in work did with our understanding around work and service. He was rather concentrating on talking about community living and doing services for each other as 'the right way to live' and how this is a way of creating *action*. One could sustain on each other in a community by producing own food and resources, and in this way be able to focus more on good actions;

Now I've realizing that I can find very much fulfilling from certain service. I can do other things with my body besides *work*, and my mind goes.."well, I could do something like *seva*" (…)This is something I think that intentional communities can provide. They can provide with the constructs where people can re-think the kind of distinctions between *work, actions, labour* and *service*, and Hannah Arendt talks about this in her book *the Human Condition*, and she talks about the distinctions between *work, action* and *labor*. I'm gonna mix up labour and work, but what she says is that labor is for the slaves and work is for the artisans, and *action is the human condition*. It is the condition of political life. It is the human capacity to *act out concepts*. Here understanding of action correspond to others understanding of power. We only have power through action, collective action, action in concept. (…)

David is here involved with the political and social aspect of doing service and volunteering, where he seem to have become aware of how much power people actually can achieve through action. Maybe, since the money is out of the equation, David started to reflect more over his own role in *action* while doing service or volunteering; what he was *actually* doing. This was in the same wake as Jade and Bella reflected upon. David started reflecting in a bigger perspective, where he compared the new practice of meaning with his own practice back home, just like Jade did. They both talked about feeling rather unfulfilled in their jobs,

even if they both had good jobs with a good education. They often had to sit with a desk in a room in front of a computer, something that did not feel ideal anymore. They wanted to spend more time outside, being physically active while working. David said he did not find any role models in his job environment, and Jade was tired of helping people selling crap to people. They all three (Jade, Bella and David) mentioned how they felt they helped a good cause by volunteering. Maybe it is possible to say that what they all have in common is that the experience of doing service work for different projects have given them a feeling of being part of something bigger. They embodied a feeling of actually being able to participate in a change. The power of action, as David described. This can also be connected to the philosophy around holism, and being part of the cycle of life. They seemed to actively look for their role in the cycle of life after adapting this worldview, where they wanted to feel they could do something beneficial for the cycle of life. It seemed like if one believed to be part of a cycle like this – knowing that your action create an effect on all the other processes – you will want to do good and create constructive action. This can be explained as the act of karmayoga, where it is a focus on conscious action; one should be conscious around how one think and act in the world, because these motivations will have an effect on everyone, and particularly oneself.

Karmayoga

Gerard was maybe of those persons who very explicitly talked about karmayoga in the connection with working with the soil:

> "Farming (...) is for me, it is very clear that if I am doing farming today it is to *reconnect to the ground*. To the earth, to the earth!(…) humanity is in a super mind space, completely disconnected to the reality and has by definition of the karma yoga. If you work with the soil you will reconnect with the reality. That's also important, if you bring out people from their big mind and the big head, you make them work with soil and it will heal them.

This was expressed by Gerard in my interview with him in his room in Buddha Garden. We were sitting on a carpet on the floor and his room did not contain much. For him simplicity was a virtue, and it was part of his living option to possess as little material objects as possible. He had some books, his computer and some clothes, and that was it. He understood real life as happening and created inside of him, and should not be centralized to the outside of his body disturbed by external elements. To attain a balance between the outside and inside world, Gerard practiced karmayoga, where the goal is to have a connection between action and thought. He points this out by saying that modern man is too much in a 'mindspace', disconnected to one's acts and reality. He continued and said:

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…your actions have an effect on you, and you grow true to your actions... so slowly slowly all this quantity of mental space is communicated into Western people [and] it will desolve! Then we will be able to be much closer to the nature as it is, then spending all the day behind a computer or reading books or leading politic party or whatever (…) So we have to come out from this inner jail, this inner limitation, inner boundary made by few people who are who wants to install order.

Since Auroville was a place for action through work, in contrast to the Ashram he came from where he mostly meditated, this was the place he wanted to be and to put in practice the things he had learned in the ashrams. It seemed to be satisfying for him to see his actions materialize itself through nurturing and working with the soil and plants. He described this as a way to *ground*[40] his energies, which in a spiritual discourse can be translated as a way to see the result of your actions and intentions; you are planting a seed and using energy and time on this seed and the end-product has part of *you* in it, as a result of *your actions*. Something that also can be associated to what I mentioned earlier in this chapter about Marxism and the mode of production. In the book *the Gift* written by Marcel Mauss (1925) he describes that *the gift* (term based on gift economy) have another feature than commodities; *the gift* have the souls of their exchangers as much as their producers, while *commodities* (understood in a Western way) is a gift where the meaning and soul has been removed and reduced to only be defined as an object. In a gift the producer have parts of their own soul, something one can say are being lost in today's modern society's where effectivity and mass-production alienates the producers from the product (Marx 1927). Gerard expressed how working "in the system", as a part of a bigger industrial system where one for example sits behind a computer all day long, is part of not being grounded. This creates a mind out of balance; an active mind disconnected from one's acts. He describes the big society as having a folder over people's eyes, and that they cannot comprehend what is happening around them, because the work they are set out to do is not helping them clear their mind or heal them in any way, but are trying to control them and not letting any creative and new thoughts get through. Gerard expressed this explicitly, referring to a Marxian thought about labour, while many of the volunteers were influenced by this thought and expressed it more implicitly.

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[40] The practice to *ground* oneself is in spiritual a practice understood as getting the body back to balance by balancing the chakras (energy fields in the body), where the last chakra is the one that keep you feets grounded and in connection to the physical material world. This often becomes an issue while practicing spirituality because one is working a lot on the reality *within;* one *transcend* out of the body. It can also be understood through the common expression "to bring someone back down to earth" or "remind oneself of reality".

This understanding turned work as an essential practice in one's life to be about doing the 'right kind of action', which meant one should choose consciously around what one should spend one's time, energy and motivation on. One started talking about how work was understood at home reflecting on the practice from the outside. It made a turnaround where work seemed like a modern form for slavery. Most individuals did not actually have a choice to work or not. In many countries there are rules for how to behave out in nature, as one often could not just walk in to the woods and build oneself a house or a capsule without first pay someone for the property. Nature is everywhere utilized and owned, and places that are not owned there is not allowed to settle down, like in Norway; because it is conservation projects to ensure culture landscapes there are fixed rules around not camping on *one* place for more than two nights. This makes it not become a choice if one wants to be a part of the work-machinery. One need money; that is the ticket for almost anything if one wants to be able to buy oneself some freedom. This is quite a paradox when thinking about it; The liberalization came in the wake of a yearning for individual freedom, and now when one are free from one's origin (as family, place, livelihood) one starts yearning for the past where one were 'actually' free and were bound to one's origin.

The people who acknowledged the new concept around work and karmayoga looked for solutions of becoming free from the fear of not succeeding in a Western oriented way. They wanted to find alternative ways to live, where living more simple and sustainably with nature seemed to be the most practical and nurturing way. Money was in Auroville often associated to fear and the ego (lower self), which was explained in a way that by letting this fear of not having any security go, one could realize oneself and follow one's aspiration, because there would always come solutions if one just dared following the heart. One had to dare to swim in the opposite direction of the stream.

The Turnaround: Social Sanctions and Stigma

> You have to give up everything. If you do that in Germany, more aggressive response. Nobody kills you if you give up. This is a big step to understand. It's an unspoken rule to not give up. You have to work in the system.

This was something Nina realized after staying in Auroville for a while. The response one got from people around one's own work habits was for her disturbing for her own creativity and self growth. In Auroville she got inspired by the problems as much as the possibilities, like the possibility to have a space like she had in Nilatangam- To live deep inside the forest in a capsule and not having to speak. Then she was sick for a long time, something she said she learned a lot from. Nina described the episode that made her realize that one have to dare to give up sometimes;

> I want to go to Buddha garden [to work], I want to *function*, yes? (…)I think this was the point the body or the mind, or the spirit, or whatever, were waiting to have. Calm, deeply rest. Nothing will happen, and safe, be completely safe. Noo disturbance. And then it was coming by itself. I was crying crying crying and realizing something, and then I thought, I am soo exhausted about so many things, I think it's better to give up everything.

I understand it as her need for rest both mentally and physically was quite extreme when arriving in Auroville, something that she felt might made her sick. Her plan was to calm down when coming to Auroville, and focus on her art and inner work. But instead, she continued the tempo she was leading in Germany, complaining about other people not being effective and productive enough in the gardens. As a result of not feeling the work in Buddha Garden was enough, she also worked on other farms right after breakfast and until late noon.

After she was sick for a long time and let her emotions finally get in touch with her again she realized that what other Aurovillians had told her about having to dare to give up really made sense. She found this difficult in Germany, where it was understood as being *lazy* if you do not work inside the frames of a good worker. Nina felt people in Germany did not ask themselves why they did what they did. She felt they in Germany did not have any contact with themselves, asking themselves what they really wanted to do. She worked in the system because she was an alone mother with a son to support. She was quite aware that she worked too much, but she did not have a choice. She really wanted to have more time for her art. When her son turned 18, she saw this as a possibility to leave Germany. She felt her responsibility of supporting him was over, and she could finally go and do what she really wanted for herself.

The Way for Success

Several people I met mentioned this pressure for success, pressure of earning enough money.

Jade mentioned debt, and how one is working to pay down your debt;

> People with mortgage don't feel they can do what their heart wishes, because they have debt, and they have to have a job to pay the debt. You're trapped! That fear is just perpetuated by media and by society back home. People feel they have to work really hard, 42 hours a week. You have to stay in the cycle, and if you don't do that, you – they have a name for that – you are *lazy*, you are a *hippie*. There are labels. Part of what I wanted to do was to live debt free, but don't know how. Things cost a lot of money."

Jade had already experienced taking debt, after he bought a house several years back. When his previous relationship ended he also sold the house and became debt free again. This made him realize that being debt free made him more open for dreaming, and to think outside the society's frame of ways to realize himself. He wanted to feel free, but he was also painfully aware of this not being possible forever. He wanted children and a family, and that cost a lot of money.

David was most stressed about how his thoughts had changed so drastically after coming to Auroville, and he started getting stressed about what would happen when he had to go back to Istanbul:

> Maybe stress isn't the right word. What I really mean to say is that I was deeply unfulfilled in the work I was doing in Istanbul and I really worked hard and I really made a lot of sacrifices to be able to do this type of work, and comparatively to other people on my age I have a really exceptional range of opportunities (…) I think it's all, like, ego-driven (he says enthusiastically). I've learned that it will always be strive. It will always be unfulfillment. There is nothing there, you know? And this is why I have lost so much faith in this context. I think we go around saying that we need things to be more sophisticated, more sophisticated, more sophisticated. This came up on the first day of that course with Ganesh. He said people don't take things seriously if they are *simple*. People need things to be *complex*. They want things to be *sophisticated*, and this is totally, yeah something that I have been taking great joy [in]; Ganesh's approach that was, really… and living in Buddha Garden, living in a place that is quite simple. I'm taking great joy in that, and it was something that I didn't pursue *at all* in my life. In New York, and my life in Istanbul, or when I was living in Paris, or living in Berlin, or anything… Ever! I always pursued the most confusing, perplexing, sophisticated, intellectual approach I can possibly find, you know?

These thoughts about creating another life for himself that could fulfill him personally felt quite radical and extreme for him. He was used to having a lot of expectations on himself created by other people around, telling him how lucky he was and not to let the possibilities slip away. But what he realized was that it was not really his dream to pursue; "What I'm thinking now is that I just go to Haiti and… fuck it all, you know?" He wanted to continue and work on different ecological conservation projects:

(…) why do we feel this is really, like, taking a big big step? Why do we feel this is extreme? Because of anything, the life I lived in Istanbul was way more precarious and insane, you know? I poisoned my body on a regular base, I live in an apartment building that I just despise, I live in a neighborhood where I'm the only person who speaks English and non-turkish, the social life is totally unfulfilling, it's overwhelming. But I'm *supposedly* living this really ridiculously great lifestyle, you know (he grins).Why is that extreme to just, like, go and do something that is so apparently and obviously fulfilling – physically and emotionally. Why is that extreme? Why do I feel like I'm *running away* or *escaping* or *withdrawing*? Why do I wanna make it seem like it's a big deal. And maybe that's my own complex, because for some people I saw, especially in Sadhana, you know, you see these kids and they just, they look like they have already *left*. They look like the lost boys, you know? (He laughs) They look like they have *escaped* for long ago! And they are just at home or something. But I can't really judge, who knows where their mind is. (…) I have no *thing* I'm working for. So it's kind of an illusion, to pretend like I'm in a trap when I'm really not. So I'm very glad that I learned all this stuff in Buddha Garden (…)

It was quite interesting to have the opportunity to observe and talk with David through his process of acknowledging that it could be OK to want to do something else than what society and people around you tell you that you should want to do. I think he himself was also surprised to see how much he was controlled by his own fear of failure and what other people thought about him. He wanted to be acknowledged as successful, because that is what one is told to be. He realized while having success that he would never reach any fulfillment through this recipe for success. He loved art, but did not find any inspiration in the people he worked with. He could no longer see the real point in the work he was doing, because he did not feel he helped anyone by showing art: "art don't feed hunger. It doesn't create world peace!"

It was obvious that many of the volunteers, visitors and citizens coming to Auroville were well-read people. They were conscious about subjects from history, geography, social theory and alternative living; Marxism, anarchism, communism, counter-cultural movements, environmentalism were not unfamiliar terms, and they knew about how people lived in other parts of the world and about other forms of governments. Coming from a world where information is easy accessible one do not have to travel and explore to know about other living alternatives. What became interesting when one talked about labor and alternative ways of organizing oneself was how they would use references from things they had read through an academic career, magazines, newspapers, books, or by browsing on the World Wide Web. Even David commented this, where he had read a lot of literature on alternative living, intentional communities and social theory based on this. He thought that when coming to Sadhana Forest, which he knew were a community based on a gift-economy, people would just be 'doing it', without reflecting around the act. He himself was used to analyze every move he did and every situation he was in, but did not expect people there to be that analytical

and theoretical around the organizational aspect of living in a gift-based community. A lot of them were like him; critical and curious about the man-created world, and wanted to investigate other living options, other human inventions, and not only the dominant one that was controlled by the hegemony of modern Western society.

People who did farming in Auroville uttered how the work they did there felt healing. Bella described the joyful feeling of seeing the plants and trees in Buddha Garden grow. With just some help from her hands; by watering and nurturing the soil the plants and trees grew and produced fruits and vegetables that ended up on her plate later on. She described the acknowledgement of knowing how much time and effort it took to produce a plate of food, and this was something she told me she often thought about while eating meals in Buddha Garden. She liked how she could experience the different processes; how one needed to make compost, nurture the soil, plant seedlings, watering, weeding and observing, and then harvesting, preserving, cooking, consuming and enjoying. It was an experience she got a lot back from, by being a part of all the processes that needed to be taken care of, instead of just going to a supermarket buying the food she needed for a meal. People said they felt connected, not only to nature, but to the plants they were growing in Buddha Garden. I see this as a result of what Gerard and Bella described. As a way of seeing with own eyes what your time and energy can create. By taking money out of the equation this relationship became stronger and one became more conscious about it. The result was not money, but the *actual product* you helped to *create*. In classical Marxian theory Marx (1959) are mentioning how labour in the capitalistic system alienates the labourer from the product one is producing; it commodifies it, and the end result becomes money measured in time and labour. You do not get the connection to your creation.

This can be related to the Marxian thought of alienation from the mode of production, and it is not unlikely that many of the visitors and citizens in Auroville were well informed and conscious about the message in Marx's theory, that therefore makes it highly viable in the context. The theory of alienation from the mode of production is by Marx (1959) described as the separation of things that naturally belong together. Most often referred to as the social alienation of people from aspects of their human nature. The alienation is the systemic result of living in a socially stratified society, because being a mechanistic part of a social class alienates a person from their humanity. The point is, although the worker is an autonomous and self-realized individual, as an economic entity, one is directed to goals and diverted to

activities that are dictated by the *bourgeoisie*, who own the means of production. This happens in order to extract from the worker the maximal amount of surplus value, in the course of business competition among industrialists.

The relationship of exchange being presupposed, labour becomes directly labour to earn a living (Marx 1959). This relationship of alienated labour reaches its highest point only when 1) on one side labour to earn a living and the product of the worker have no direct relation to his need or his function as worker, but both aspects are determined by social combinations alien to the worker; 2) he who buys the product is not himself a producer, but gives in exchange what someone else has produced. In the crude form of alienated private property, barter, each of the property owners has produced what his immediate need, his talents and the available raw material have impelled him to make. Each, therefore, exchanges with the other only the surplus of his production.

Marx describes how labour became a manifestation of man's individual existence; through 'exchange his labour has also become partly a source of income and differs now from one's mode of existence (Marx 1959). The product is produced as value, as exchange-value, as an equivalent, and no longer because of its direct, personal relation to the producer. The more diverse production becomes, and therefore the more diverse the needs become, on the one hand, and the more one-sided the activities of the producer become, on the other hand, the more does his labour fall into the category of 'labour to earn a living', until finally it has only this significance and it becomes quite accidental and inessential whether the relation of the producer to his product is that of immediate enjoyment and personal need, and also whether his activity – the act of labour itself – is for him the enjoyment of his personality and the realization of his natural abilities and spiritual aims.

This classical theory by Marx fits well with the people in Auroville's description of both modern labour and the motivation behind the alternative contribution systems they are experimenting with in Auroville, as much as the wish to work more with farming; as a direct connection between producer and the end-product. In this view I find the volunteers and citizens of Auroville's uttering to have a clear resonance with this theory by Marx about alienation from the mode of production, and therefore also mode of existence. In Marxian theory the employers do not get the satisfaction of seeing the result of one's actions – said production – because one is often just a small puzzle in the bigger machinery. In Marxian

thought the worker experienced an alienation from the product they contributed in producing. In Auroville and in doing volunteering service one got the chance to not look at the action as work, but seeing it as your service to the community and as an outcome one can experience a great intimacy with through self development. This is what one can observe in more small-scale and self sustaining groups, where they do not separate action from work. The way we are grasping work and have separated these spheres is a result of industrialization and modernization of society, and this separation between work and action became clearer for people while doing service in Buddha Garden, amongst other places in Auroville. David made this quite clear when describing the new experiment in Sadhana Forest where they wanted to start referring to work as *Seva*, which would separate people's pre-reflexive feeling around work as something one have to do, and not for own personal enjoyment.

People staying in Auroville seemed to have a certain idea of how a small-scale society should be like: intimate, natural, awe and respect to one's surroundings, simplicity, egalitarian and communal structure. This they understood as the 'authentic way of man'. Somewhere on the way man lost its way. This narrative being about modern man seduced by liberal and individualistic ways and how money and commodities became important factors to maintain this freedom. One was not longer defined through one's origin and home ('life-as' status), but could as a modern worker become an active participator of the creation of one's own destiny and place in the world (subjective life). One were not longer bound to one's social statuses and roles, and needed to stay one place the rest of one's life and follow a traditional recipe. But along the way modern man became trapped in a cage, by debt and expensive commodified habits, now being a slave for one's own consumption and livelihood. Not being free at all, but realizing one has lost contact with one's origin in the pursuit for individual gain. This can of course be discussed, where this is a narrative created by modern individual on a quest to become more themselves, thinking this is to be found in what is already lost; one's origin. Just by looking at the discourse of being on a quest for ones identity and true self one finds a lot of metaphors for freedom. Having a freedom to choose to go on a spiritual journey is a privilege and a symptom and a yearning found in modern Western culture.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this thesis has been to show how Western travelers, by visiting Auroville, found themselves on a spiritual quest. By living in an intentional community like Auroville, the quest for alternative ways of living became central after experiencing new and alternative surroundings. I investigated how this quest was being pursued together with other visitors, where spiritual experiences became articulated and given meaning through the use of shared metaphors and discourses. A part of the discussion has also been what a community like Auroville has to offer that individuals do not find in their own home sphere or society.

As a phenomenon Auroville can in a wider context be categorized within New Age, where there is a common understanding that man and the world's status quo is not a 'lasting place'; it exists with a general need for change. This new worldview seemed to make the visitors support and lead each other through the reflexive project of the self many went through there. Being in Auroville the message of a 'need to change' was quite dominant; for the world to change, man needs to change. One therefore had to start by looking 'within' oneself and 'beneath the surface'. This was the way experiences in Auroville were being pursued, as well as trying to observe one's own patterns of thinking and acting, and in this way attempt to transform and become a better version of oneself. New Age, and alternative spirituality, is by Helaas (2005) understood as a therapeutic tool people use to find out what is wrong in life. In New Age the self is open to change, and gives the individual the power and empowerment needed to actively create this change by themselves. The volunteers who lived in Buddha Garden seemed to do this together, by articulating the experiences one had while trying to look inside, into the self. This created a shared journey and a worldview where the need for common metaphors and discourses helped people understand each other's experiences. Goodman (1978) argues that man can create worlds through words, and by creating concepts and metaphors, as was done in Auroville, people fashioned a shared foundation and a shared discourse.

I asked what communities like Auroville could offer that people did not find at home or outside Auroville. The obvious answer might be spirituality, but it is more complex than that. Auroville seems to have both (post) modernist values *and* traditional values. It both expresses a yearning for the past at the same time as it expresses the liberal individualistic yearning for self-fulfillment. These are elements from both traditional values and modern innovative

thinking. They look both backwards and forwards and fuse the two into an experiment in human living. Helaas (1999:155) refers to Geertz who argues that the modern self-powered, definable self is a new invention. Giddens (1991) points out that Western society increasingly becomes characterized by this self-reflexive and self-powered individual, who does not live by an external moral any more, but a more self-reflexive 'inner moral' justified within own meaning systems and worldview. In other words, the civilization process is related to how people attribute a relation to the self, each other, and the worldviews that are presented to us. New Age can be understood not only as a counter-culture but is in itself a manifestation of modernity and many of the central individualistic values (Helaas 1999). It is essential to ask why people seek resonance with a spiritual tradition from another culture, India. It seemed that many of my informants found a sharper focus on the individual's subjective presence in the world compared to the secularized West, where spirituality disappeared with religion, the primary institution which took care of the individual's subjective and spiritual presence in the world. It is in religion people often find support when in a spiritual crisis or when they seek spiritual guidance. Rather than seeing New Age as an antidote to secularization, it might make more sense to see it as a style and form of religion well-suited to the secular world (Bruce 2005; Helaas 1999; Puttick 2005). The spiritual alternative replaces the sacred which disappeared with religion; the self is made holy instead of a figure outside us. We instead find this inside us when we acknowledge ourselves as highly subjective individuals.

Auroville as a spiritual place therefore seems to become important for my informants' spiritual quest and self-transformation. Auroville can be described as a place where utopia is the aim and where the tool is a shared vision about a better world. Individuals yearning for utopia might feel something is lacking in own society. A feeling of alienation and lack og fulfillment as spiritual beings was seen as a defining experience by my informants. This feeling was related to the notion that materialism reduced man to producers and consumers. Many are critical of the (modern Western-oriented) system, where spirituality, authenticity and community seem to be absent. Auroville can be a place where one can share this worldview. But the outside society looms large as a great empire. Many Aurovillians and their visitors seem to understand themselves as part of an informal resistance movement embracing various environmental movements, protection of peasant people world over, and those who share their experience of suppression in a system that is trying to make everything and everyone fit in to one big system. Helaas (2005) and Kraft (2011) both argue that spirituality makes up a more important part of people's lives in contemporary society. Auroville became

founded at a time when spirituality, peace and freedom were popular discourses and when Mother Nature became the focus for followers of the counter-culture.

By having a shared aim and vision, people felt they lived more intimately and communally in Auroville, something I think many of the visitors were attracted to. They shared a goal and a dream, and the practice of karmayoga which helped construct a collective life. For the visitors the feeling of intimacy and community-living seemed the right way to organize a community and society at large. The feeling of living in a 'brotherhood' made them reflect on life at home as asocial and destructive, where a sense of alienation was dominant. The thought about authentic living was central, where Auroville tried to (re-)create customs and practices from the past, as primitive economy, different living arrangements and spirituality. What seems to be authentic will often be something we have left behind, and we construe as authentic practices and beliefs that we reflect upon in hindsight (cf Larsen 2009). Utopian dreaming is found in all man's eras, where it keeps changing as society changes, and is a dream that represents a society mirroring the features that are lacking in the Western world.

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Illustrations

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Figure 1: The Mother and Sri Aurobindo: http://breathedreamgo.com/2009/12/sri-aurobindo-all-life-is-yoga/

Figure 2: The Galaxy: http://heleneve.travellerspoint.com/6/