

Mapping the Memories of “Living on Light”

Processuality with Actor-network Theory

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In this article a case study of the phenomenon of “living on light” is presented. The interlocutor “Eva” shares her memories from the period when she did not eat material food. Actor-network theory (ANT) is adopted to analyse the interview. This methodological framework sheds light on the connections between interacting human and non-human entities and thus reveals their agency. The phase of living on light appears to Eva as part of her personal spiritual progress. At the same time, relations with the family become ambivalent since Eva does not want to share her true spiritual devotion. Eva’s experiences are demonstrated and re-imagined by mapping them with ANT concepts such as “intermediary” and “centre of calculation”. Eva’s period of living on light is discussed in three different forms of processuality. Characteristic of both the phenomenon of living on light and of ANT reading is the renovative quality of the ongoing processuality.

Introduction

Actor-network theory derives from Paris of the 1970s and 1980s. However, as John Law reminds us, the elaboration of the approach continued in different locations. The best-known researchers apart from Law were Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. They applied the theory mainly to social sciences but the so-called material turn has made the approach available in all fields of research (Law 2007, 1–6). ANT analysis takes into account material culture and

conditions,¹ including in familiar settings and everyday life.

Qualitative research often goes hand in hand with the notion of “letting the data speak”. How can one know what the data might hold and how to grasp it? One possibility is to examine the interaction between different human and non-human actors to elicit questions and novel ideas on how to understand and interpret the data. This kind of mapping with actor-network theory can be a useful phase of research even if the ultimate theoretical apparatus is different. The focus here is on the interpretation of a case study of Eva² and her experience of living on light. At the same time, a methodological proposal is presented.

Living on light, also known as breatharianism, prana nutrition and source feeding, is a phenomenon where all essential needs to maintain life, including nutrition, are considered to be received from light or prana, the energy that sustains life. It is experienced as an inner spiritual way of life

- 1 Material conditions and culture in this case refer to objects and furniture as well as food, for example. The concept “material food” is used to distinguish conventional nourishment from nutrition from light or “immaterial food”.
- 2 Pseudonym given by author.

to which one must be consciously committed. The number of devotees is difficult to estimate since there is no institutional register. There are several individual entrepreneurs around the world who are engaged in it, and at least one more organized centre in Italy.³

Eva used to be a participant in so-called Lightprayer activity. Lightprayer was a new religious activity, which I conducted ethnographic fieldwork into in 2008 and 2009. Lightprayer was organized by a Finnish-German married couple, Helena and Michael Blanka, and took place from 2005 to 2012.⁴ Eva also participated in one of the retreats that formed part of my previous research, and I interviewed her for the first time in 2009 (Raunola 2018, 2017a, 2017b, 2010). Two new interviews with Eva were conducted in the autumn of 2022.⁵ They focus on Eva remembering her period of living on light and also participating in Lightprayer.

The main reason Eva took part in Lightprayer in the first place was that the couple organizing it were living on light at the time and talking about it. In the beginning, the Lightprayer activity was highly focused on this theme, since Helena Blanka had recently translated two books about prana nutrition written by the Australian Ellen Greve, better known as Jasmuheen. At that time, Jasmuheen was a popular figure in the

New Age arena and she still remains with her enterprise called “Embassy of peace” even though the focus has shifted from prana nutrition to more general topics such as health and harmony (Jasmuheen 2023).

Another article about Eva and the manner in which she ended up living on light in late 2005 before she knew the Blankas or Jasmuheen is forthcoming (Raunola forthcoming). In short, Eva did not seek to begin living on light. She maintains that the process started spontaneously as a continuation following her studies in Reiki (a Japanese healing practice), in which she had proceeded to the highest, seventh level. In this sense, Eva needed first to learn how to live on light and almost five years later to relearn how to eat material food. Eva has stated that during her light period she had an angel guiding and helping her through these dietary transitions. A light channel would open in Eva’s upper back, through which she received the nourishing light.

Previous research and questions for the article

At first, actor-network theory research focused on areas in social sciences such as the study of technology. Later, it was adapted to other fields, for example the anthropology of food (Paxson 2016; Tsing 2010). In the field of the study of religion, Mika Lassander has conducted ANT-based research on pagan religiosity. He writes: “The ANT approach does not aim to explain or define religion, but instead it works toward tracing the network of objects that play an active role in the process of the creation of vernacular religion” (Lassander 2012, 247). ANT reveals the actants that are involved in our everyday life and thought.

Examples of ANT research in the field of new religion are still sparse, however. The relevant points of reference for ANT-based research regarding the phenomenon

3 Eden Pranic Center (Pranicenter).

4 I participated in their activities, such as retreats and evening gatherings. The activity took place in different parts of Finland and a few countries in Europe: Germany, Estonia and Italy.

5 The interviews were conducted in Finnish. The examples in the article are translated by the author. Since the new interviews were rather loosely structured, the speech flows and characterized by free association. My role as a researcher was conversational, although I was also asking questions.

of living on light are studies about new religious movements, esotericism and ANT. However, this combination is rare, and my research is an attempt to fill the gap.⁶

Lassander focused more on processes “related to what people do with religions or what religions do for them” (2014, 149). He distinguished between two types of religiosity: the first type is a secure and norm-oriented “template” whereas the second type, “trellis”, offers a platform for individuals to fulfil their explorations when “the meaning of ‘religions’ can be found in these ‘habits of action’ they produce” (2014, 149).

On the basis of Lassander’s ideas, I have operationalized the concept of “spiritual process” in my previous research to understand and explain Lightprayer activity (Raunola 2017b). Spiritual process was activated in the retreats as a way of not only participating in the practices but also surrendering and interacting with the inmost and the higher self. I argue that spiritual process is a useful expression to describe the interaction in the practices confronted in the new religious arena. In other words, new religiosity demands processuality. Here I will examine the question of exactly what kind of processuality is required.

6 I familiarized myself with actor-network theory while analysing the complex and multiform data for my Ph.D. research on Lightprayer activity (Raunola 2018). The research material consisted of interviews, field notes and photographs. ANT fitted well and helped to articulate the interaction that Lightprayer carried. For example, ANT enabled me to take material surroundings into account when analysing the meaning of a picture of Mary or light-agency. However, the theme of living on light was only a grace note I wished to examine more closely later on. The possibilities of ANT also needed closer scrutiny, which is why I have chosen to approach the interview speech with ANT.

The dictionary definition of “process” is “a continuous action, operation, or series of changes taking place in a definite manner”. In this article, “processuality” refers more to the idea of Lassander’s “habits of action” and to a situation in which a process takes place in the interaction with oneself and others.

The memories that were revealed in the interviews seem to function as vehicles that carry Eva’s experiences. I argue that the memories are an important way to process the phase of living on light after the event. I will analyse what kind of processuality Eva’s memories carry. The questions to be asked are the following: 1. how does the phase of living on light in Eva’s life appear in her memories? and 2. what kind of processuality is evident in her memories? The more methodological questions are: 3. how should the interaction in Eva’s memories be interpreted? and 4. does ANT constitute a sufficient framework for a satisfactory interpretation?

Overall, three different kinds of processualities are presented in this article. The first type will be called “the practice”. By this I mean both the singular exercises and more encompassing traditions such as living on light. Living on light was an important phase in Eva’s life that she can reflect on through her memories. Processuality of practice is revealed in the narration as Eva constructs her relationship with her mentors and her own body, for example setting her weight to adjust to the conditions of living on prana. Processuality of practice also includes the spiritual process within the practices even though the spiritual process as such is not analysed in this article.

The second type of processuality, “the surroundings”, was activated when Eva faced others who did not share the same view of living on light as she did. In particular, this type of processuality comes

across through the material conditions and negotiations with family members yet also through the experience of otherness. These are the ones she confronted in trying to negotiate a suitable way of being with others without telling them about her true devotion.

The third type of processuality accompanies the actor-network theory since the methodology encourages and emphasizes attention to the interaction and making it visible. Writing the article follows the same idea: I will explain how I proceed with the ANT reading.

Actor-network theory

Actor-network theory is also called the sociology of translation (Callon 1986, 1; Law 1992: 379). Michel Callon has proposed four stages for the translation (Callon 1986; Raunola Forthcoming). In this article, I focus on the concepts that are most familiar from the writings of Bruno Latour. John Law defines ANT as a family of material-semiotic tools of the webs of relations. Actor-network theory can be seen as a “particular empirical translation of post-structuralism” (Law 2007, 6). Everything is relational even in the text about the theory. That is why there is no absolute truth about ANT (pp. 2, 6).

In this sense, actor-network theory can be thought as game or play. The relations and quality of interaction will be interpreted with the help of analytical concepts. An essential feature of the theory is that both human and non-human actants act but in different ways in the meaning-making process. With the help of ANT, it is possible to consider the material conditions of everyday life within spirituality. ANT concepts help us appreciate how the material world surrounding us interacts with us. This happens perhaps not with speech or shared language but by being present with

us in every situation and taking part in our lives and *vice versa*.

Latour (2005, 46) outlines the actor-network as “the moving target” around which many kinds of entities will gather. In other words, a network is a context or a cluster in which the movement is considered. I will look at the clusters “mould” and “vegetarian diet”. As Latour puts it: “Stretch any given interaction and ... it becomes an actor-network” (p. 202).

An actor in the network can be understood in various ways. On the one hand, it is about agency, something that is to be done. On the other, Latour writes about acting as a role-taking. The actor in the means of agency is about moving. The actor has something to do in the network: it transports and makes a difference (Latour 2005, 46, 130, 71). According to Law (1992, 384), an actor in actor-network is always a network of heterogeneous relations itself. Networks are nested inside one another.

Because of the human connotation, Latour often uses *actant* as an unbiased concept to encompass non-human actors/actants (Latour 1999, 303). All the entities can be many things at the same time. Nonetheless, they will be actors/actants, and from that division they will play the part of mediator or intermediary as well as that of black box and quasi-object. These concepts will be examined more closely in the analysis. As Latour puts it: “A network is not what is represented in the text, but what readies the text to take the relay of actors as mediators” (Latour 2005, 131).

One of Latour’s most fundamental approaches is to follow the actants since they make the social visible (Latour 2005, 12). This kind of holistic description that takes both human and non-human actants into account has been characteristic of ethnographical research, for example in anthropology and ethno-methodology,

which Latour approves of (pp. 68–69). Nonetheless, the need for methodological innovation in sociology⁷ made ANT important in its own field. Latour suggests that the “notion of power should be abandoned”. This is his argument for the study of associations as an alternative way to approach sociology (Latour 1986, 278, 277). Rather than take institutionalized concepts as given one should just trace the actants and see “what is held together” (p. 276).

Mapping the memories

I start the analysis by first reading the interviews and trying to be open to what interests or disturbs me in the transcript. After this I choose a scene where I consider something to be happening, and can recognize the actors. Eva is recalling the past events in 2007 from her apartment when she had been living on light for over a year.⁸

Quotation I

Eva: ... I was living in [a town in Finland] at the time and there was a refrigerator in my apartment. But I had a period of time when I took the plug out of the wall because I did not need the refrigerator because I did not have any food.

- 7 According to Callon the asymmetry among sociologists was that nature was seen as subordinate to society. Through his article Callon wanted to state that not only nature but also society is considered to be uncertain and disputable when taking account of the diverse actors (Callon 1986, 197–201).
- 8 The ideal would be an ethnographic description where the researcher takes field notes and observations about the material conditions. I did not have the opportunity to visit Eva’s apartment at the time she was not using the refrigerator over ten years ago. That is why I rely on her memories and narrative account.

And then at some point my mother would visit me and she was like, she had this look that how come you don’t have the light on in your refrigerator and there’s nothing in there? And I can’t recall it any more, the conversations we had about that and how I explained it. I think, I suppose ... I don’t want to speculate, because I don’t remember.

But ever since there has been light in the refrigerator. And I suppose there was, I was drinking, anyhow. I did drink. I had learned that from Jasmuheen, suppose I had heard it, or I can’t recall if I had sent her a question or something. Jasmuheen said that liquid, that the body will accept fluid nourishment well.

So if you want to be social you don’t have to go to the restaurant with others and say you don’t eat anything, you just order soup. And when it’s as liquid as possible it is ok, because the body will receive it all right. And that is what I started to do a lot then that I was always having, if I was somewhere [with others] I was drinking tea or ate liquid [food].

And for example when I was visiting my parents, I told them I had become vegetarian. This is how I expressed it to them. And then my mother started to make vegetable soups and whenever I was there I had vegetable soup when we were eating together with my parents. And it had this wonderful effect that my mother’s cholesterol levels decreased [laughter]. The doctors were wondering what’s going on, but it was all about mother making the vegetable soups.

But the refrigerator, the light came on, the one at my home, but there wasn't any food yet. So my mother started to bring me food every time she visited me. I just noticed that when she came food appeared in the refrigerator. And then I remember my mother's panic when all the food was going mouldy. And at that stage I did not realize it. I did not understand what kind of panic she was having about what's wrong with my daughter when a) she did not have the light on in her refrigerator, b) when the light is switched on and I bring her food, the food goes mouldy. There was that. I remember my mother's concern about what's going on.

I begin with the things Eva says she remembers or does not remember. She explains that she could not remember the conversations she had had with her mother about why she did not have the light on in her refrigerator or any food in there. She also does not recall if she had sent a message to Jasmuheen or how she got the knowledge about the body accepting solid food. What Eva does remember is the panic and concern of her mother when her mother realizes that even though there is light and food in the refrigerator, the food is going mouldy. This is because Eva is not eating material food.

To better understand the interaction between the actors by means of ANT, I start by picking out the human and non-human entities as they appear in the text. For example: Eva (narrator)/human, refrigerator/non-human, apartment/non-human and so on.

After this I begin to situate the ANT concepts and seek the movement they make possible.

Cluster/network "mould"
 apartment = centre of calculation
 refrigerator = centre of calculation
 Eva = mediator
 mother = mediator
 light nutrition = quasi-object
 conversations = way/protocol
 power plug (detached) = intermediary
 light in fridge (off/on) = intermediary

The apartment and the refrigerator are centres of calculations, settings where this scene takes place. A centre of calculation is the place where planning occurs and the actants encounter each other. Latour (1999, 304) points out that the centre of calculation can be an actual place such as a laboratory rather than a mental or notional location. Mika Lassander and Peik Ingman argue that centres of calculations are "locations that are by some various means densely connected to a number of other locations, and through which a significant number of actants travel" (Lassander and Ingman 2012, 215). In this case, both the apartment and the refrigerator function as a meeting place and crossroads for several actors. The function of the centres of calculations appears to be to anchor the events to certain locations and frames.

Eva and her mother are mediators since they translate and modify the meanings they carry. In contrast, intermediaries such as the power plug or the light in the refrigerator transport meaning but do not change the meanings (Latour 2005, 39). For example, the plug or the light in the refrigerator are actants that make Eva and her mother act, but they do not take part in the meaning-making process. Michel Callon emphasizes that "an intermediary is anything passing between actors which defines the relationship between them" (Callon 1991, 134). This argument highlights again how the concept of actor/

actant is a hypernym before the nature of the interaction is defined.

In the cluster of “mould” I have named light nutrition as a quasi-object. According to Latour, the quasi-object is something that circulates in the collective where it is found. They are allied; a quasi-object does not exist without a collective and *vice versa* (Latour 2006, 218–19). According to Mika Lassander, religion is a quasi-object by nature. Lassander notes that even though the quasi-object appears to be immutable, in the case of vernacular religion there is an ongoing negotiation in the actor-network to keep it functioning (Lassander 2014, 23–30). In other words, the quasi-object is also transformative and situational.

Latour emphasizes that “the quasi-object should be thought of as a moving actant that transforms those which do the moving because they transform the moving object” (Latour 1996, 381). In this case, the quasi-object exists for Eva and affects her behaviour but it is not uttered out loud. It also affects Eva’s mother in a way that evokes her panic.

The conversations Eva and her mother have are a “way”. The way, or “protocol” as I prefer to call it, denotes interaction in a certain sphere of thought. For example, politics associates entities in a political way, science in a scientific way and religion in a religious way. They express the manner or direction (Latour 2005, 239–41). The conversations that Eva refers to in her interview can be interpreted as serious and important family matters that could be called “the family way” or “the family protocol” even though religious substance is also present, of which Eva’s mother is not aware.

In this first part, I have focused on the conditions that Eva has been describing. It also illustrates the processuality of “surroundings” in which Eva must confront the circumstances of her choice not to talk

about living on light. The conversations with her mother seem to be a turning point in this scene in Eva’s recollection. Even though Eva does not remember what was discussed exactly, she attaches the power plug and the light is put on again.

question = intermediary
Jasmuheen = action at distance
drinks/beverages = black box
body = mediator

Because Eva does not remember for certain if she had sent Jasmuheen a question I consider the question an intermediary. Had there been a concrete question, I would have named it as a mediator. In any case Eva knows that Jasmuheen has taught that the body accepts liquid and fluid nourishment well. In this case the body is a mediator, an independent entity accepting or denying, reacting to light nutrition.

Jasmuheen, who Eva refers to, performs action at a distance since she is not present or presented to Eva’s mother yet her attendance for Eva is truly meaningful. Latour separates three ways that action at a distance can take place. One possibility is to invent means that can move distant values back. The other strategy is to keep the distant things stable so that they can be moved easily. The third option is to make the remote realm combinable so that it is resilient. These three principles can make any place or anything “become centres dominating at a distance” (Latour 1987, 223). For Eva, Jasmuheen fulfils all these requirements without Jasmuheen needing to be aware. An actant at a distance often seems to be an authority and can therefore function at an individual or global level.

Lassander and Ingman argue that when distant agencies influence the translations they can also influence the centres of calculation. In Eva’s case action at a distance

has something to do with the empty refrigerator, the very centre of calculation in this scene. Besides distant agencies and centres of calculation combining, they also have this special effect of showing significant connections (Lassander and Ingman 2012, 215–16).

Eva relates that drinking is something important she has learned from Jasmuheen. The interview also indicates that she is storing the beverages in the refrigerator. The drinks I consider to be Eva's "black box".

The concept of the black box originates in cybernetics to describe an overly complex system. They are needed and their existence is essential but their logic is hardly ever understood or opened (Latour 1987, 2–3). Latour summarizes: "the more science and technology succeed the more opaque and obscure they become" (Latour 1999, 304). Latour gives an example of a black box with 1990s technology: a projector. When a projector is functioning properly everyone is pleased and the black box is taken for granted. AI technology might be a better metaphor for the 2020s, but the idea remains the same. When a projector or an AI language model breaks down it becomes the centre of attention and reveals several other technological black boxes that are related to the functioning one (Latour 1999, 183–85).

Latour compares opening the black box to opening Pandora's box. Scientific facts for Latour such as taking social science from objective-subjective debate to network-based thinking is about opening Pandora's box and finding hope through curiosity at the bottom (Latour 1999, 22–23, 300). In my opinion, the concept of the black box can be applied in other spheres too. When reading text with ANT concepts, the black box is something obscure. In Eva's case the meaning of drinks is hidden rather than revealed; drinks and liquid nourishment

carry multi-layered purposes and guidelines that only Eva understands. This is also something that Eva tries to take forward. Callon and Latour (1981, 284–85) have written that a black box establishes itself by connecting and attaching different elements within it. In this manner, the black box may influence others to do the things you want them to do in much the same way as action from a distance.

This latter part demonstrates the processuality in "the practice" of living on light. Eva explains the interaction within the process of prana nutrition when she has committed to nourishing herself without material food as instructed by her mentors.

In the structure of her narrative Eva's associations turn next to an anecdote about eating with others, either in a restaurant or with her parents, before she returns to the refrigerator and her mother's concern. Since we live in a world where food is an essential way of being together in social interaction, I would like to make a separate illustration of "vegetarian diet".

Cluster/network "vegetarian diet"
social = way/protocol
restaurant = centre of calculations
parents' [house] = centre of calculations
others = mediator
body = mediator
tea = intermediary/black box
liquid = intermediary/black box
soup = intermediary/black box

The "social" Eva mentions what I consider a way and protocol of spending time together. The soup servings become a central mediator in Eva's and her parents' eating habits. Ingesting liquid food provides an adequate way to socialize with others.

The restaurant and Eva's parents's house are parallel centres of calculations, meeting points for several actants to take part

in eating. The body and others I consider as mediators since they also represent Eva and her parents, who are exchanging meanings and therefore hold the roles of mediators. Tea, soup and liquid nutrition I have named as intermediaries since they do not make a difference in this citation. Yet they also carry the meaning of the black box since they influence Eva's thinking about material food.

Eva = mediator
mother = mediator
parents = mediator
vegetarian = way/protocol
vegetable soup = mediator
mother's body = centre of calculations
cholesterol levels = mediator
doctors = action at a distance
light nutrition = quasi-object

Vegetarian diet represents the way and protocol in the same way as the social and the conversations mentioned earlier. Vegetarian diet is something Eva and her mother can both engage in. As a compromise, Eva's mother makes vegetable soups, as she thinks Eva is a vegetarian and she witnesses Eva eating something. At the same time Eva can sustain her fluid nutrition black box as long as the soup is as liquid as possible.

I consider the doctors as actants at a distance. In this situation the influence of the act at a distance on centres of calculation can be traced to the mother's body. Jasmuheen, named earlier as an actant at a distance, influences Eva both in her parents' house and in the restaurant. The vegetable soup as well as the pleasant side effect of Eva's mother's decreased cholesterol levels seem to be mediators. They carry and change the meaning by succeeding and connecting, making turns between the actants. They make a difference.

In this cluster of "vegetarian diet" both processualities, "the practice" and "the surroundings", are present. Eva is negotiating her interaction in both ways. The processuality of practice is her inner and invisible discussion, whereas the interaction with surroundings is visible and is shown through material negotiations.

food that mother brought = black box
mould = mediator

At the beginning of the narrative Eva recounts how her mother gets worried because there is no light or food in the fridge. After the conversations, the refrigerator is switched on and Eva takes part in eating with the parents by having liquid soups and saying she is a vegetarian, but she is secretly maintaining light nutrition. In the last episode of the example Eva describes how her mother keeps taking food to the empty fridge that at least has the light on.

I consider that the food Eva's mother keeps bringing is the mother's black box. This black box is packed with knowledge about healthy lifestyle and physical laws, the common idea of surviving. Since Eva does not tell her mother about light nutrition and does not eat the food she brings, the mother's black box fails and the food goes mouldy. The mould is an opened black box that has transformed not only into other black boxes but also into a mediator or intermediary, depending on what happens next.

As a result, for Eva the mould is a consequence of light nutrition because she does not need the food, whereas for her mother, the mould presents proof that her daughter is not eating and something is wrong. This is what makes her so worried. This evokes also some kind of compassion towards the mother since obviously food also represents

her affection. The mother has nurtured Eva since she was a newborn and now Eva is rejecting her attempt to take care and help her daughter as an adult.

So far, the analysis has mapped the data with ANT concepts and interpreted the interaction between multiple actors, and has shown the processualities that can be found in Eva's memories. Apart from naming the entities involved with past events, something seems to be missing. The part of the narrative where Eva describes her family relations and eating soup together – the social side of eating with those who are nourishing themselves with material food – appears a distraction. I read the interview again and tried to fill the gaps to understand Eva and her mother more profoundly.

The interview framework

The fragment of the example I interpreted earlier is a part of Eva's longer consideration, in which she goes through the experience of the transition to living on light. What follows is her account of how she knew in her body that she does not need to worry about the new situation. However, her mind could not figure it out at all.

Quotation II

Eva: I realized later on that I was a bit afraid in my body about death, because it's not normal for someone to live on light. It wasn't in my body but I thought my mind was going through the experience all the time, that this isn't normal, and that's why I took part three times a year in the [Lightprayer] retreats. That I could ... see two people [the Blankas] in front of me who were living on light and they were not dead. ... On the other hand it was an impressive experience to go to Jasmuheen's retreat ... when

there were so many of those who were living on light. ... Meeting other people who were taking it as part of their everyday life was a very significant part of the journey. Because I still don't talk about it openly. Even though I've experienced it myself, it's still not easy to understand.

IR: Sure. I can't judge, perhaps it's not about trauma, but it must have been shocking to end up in a totally different situation from other people around you.

Eva: ... It goes beyond the physical laws we have in our world. And I did cry out, what if I end up like this and I'm not accepted? [laugh] What if I'm to be looked at like a weird person who lives on light. That's when I realized what a deep experience I have of belonging. ... I couldn't tell my parents, I thought they could never understand this. ... It was only later I realized my mother's anguish. I was living in [a town in Finland] at that time ...

Quotation I above follows on from Quotation II (and Quotation III below concludes the sequence), as if Eva in II is grounding her example of the relationship with her mother and parents of why she had not been telling about living on light to her family.

fear of death = mediator
body = centre of calculations / mediator
mind = centre of calculations
retreats = centre of calculations
two persons / the Blankas = mediator
Jasmuheen = mediator

Eva raises several contradictions in her narrative, which will shape the processuality of “the practice”. The most fundamental of these is the dissonance between body and mind. The fear of death affects her body but mostly it disturbs her mind. The body seems to receive the experience of living on light more easily while her mind is set on persistent alert. I have called both mind and body centres of calculations where evaluation occurs.

The retreats where Eva seeks inner conciliation by attending Lightprayer events to meet the Blankas and receive their support are also centres of calculations. Eva feels she is not able to talk about the matter to others outside the spiritual circles she attends since she herself does not understand what is happening. Choosing not to tell has an effect throughout the period of living on light.

Both body and mind are also mediators in Eva’s process of orientation towards the new situation in which she did not eat material food whilst almost everyone around did. Eva had a strong preconception about what is normal, and she was very aware that others might think she was not normal because she considered eating material food as the only way to stay alive.

I have picked out expressions that represent Eva’s emotions since these are part of Eva’s agency and might be considered as actants as well. Ultimately, the practice of ethnographic close reading guides the choice of the segments analysed. This also represents Eva’s shift to processualizing “the surroundings” more deeply. On the other hand both processualities are activated here. Eva’s anguish at not being able to talk about the matter and her fear of not being accepted and of being considered a weird person in front of her parents are matters that might benefit from sociological or anthropological discussion. Eva’s reaction

could be termed otherness or alterity. It could also be reviewed with regard to the concepts of insider and outsider, even conversion or belonging as part of identity. All these concepts address the boundaries and change in finding familiarity without abandoning one’s way of life.

The concept of otherness or alterity refers to what is other than self (see Leistle 2016). Otherness and alterity as experienced are often examined from the viewpoint of linguistic and cultural minorities. In such cases, otherness and alterity have often meant different kinds of discrimination. Katherine Swancutt writes that anthropologists seem to notice either alterity or affinity yet at the same time try to become aware of the middle ground where the roles can vary (Swancutt 2018, 95–96). In addition, insider–outsider discussion has often been academic discourse about the researchers’ relationship with the subject matter (see Naples 2003, 49–50). Eva’s experience does not quite fit these categories. Maybe otherness and alterity might be more accurate if one turns the situation around and considers the situation from the mother’s perspective.

In Eva’s situation, religious conversion is still one more concept to utilize but cannot be adopted as such. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (2003, xi) argue that conversion is an individual process that occurs in social relationships. Diane Austin-Broos highlights attributes such as learning and reorientation that the convert confronts (Austin-Broos 2003, 2). It is not evident that Eva leaves one religious group and joins another. In any case, Eva is shifting or continuing from her Reiki “room” to a living on light “room” in the “house” of religious and spiritual traditions that she has been exploring and learning. By not telling the whole truth Eva seems to somehow protect herself as well as those near

her who she knows do not share the same spiritual experience. Or if one could foresee the reaction, what would happen if Eva disclosed her real situation? In this situation the effect of not telling distances her from her “surroundings”.

“Belonging” seems the most suitable concept to approach Eva’s experience of herself as an outsider and “other”, a stranger in her own peer group. Abby Day argues that “people ‘believe in belonging’ to their significant relationships” (Day 2011, 206). Day continues that sometimes these relationships relate to religion. Eva performs her belonging to the living on light community by not eating material food. At the same time, she tries to maintain her belonging to her family by eating liquid vegetable soups.

In this holistic perspective Eva consuming the protean vegetarian soups that cross the categories of spiritual nourishment and material food together with her parents seems to be a bond and a meaningful ritual for her to maintain the feeling of belonging in her new situation (see Raunola forthcoming). Eva told her sister only recently about the light period but her mother still does not know about it. Or at least they have not talked about it. Eva describes how she felt it important to tell her sister even though her sister did not seem to care about the information as much as Eva.

I have described above the framework preceding Quotation I. What follows is a later quotation following the “mould” and “vegetarian diet” sections.

Quotation III

Eva: ...There was this. I remember my mother’s concern about what’s going on.

IR: Well certainly. And after all, common food-related problems are eating

disorders and things like that so ... have you thought about how ... how do these relate?

Eva: ... At that time when I was in transition to the light period Michael directed me that the first thing to do with the angel is to set a weight limit. At the beginning of the light period I weighed around 57, 58 kilos. When I went through what this is, I then decided that I will set the weight limit to 60 kilos. I wanted to be sure that I didn’t lose weight and it did not take long before I weighed 60 kilos and it did not go anywhere. Not even if I was sick, if I had the flu or a fever or something. The weight stayed the same, it did not go under or over until I started to eat again. ... Some fatalities have been associated [with living on light]. It is not a way to lose weight. It does not work like that. ... Once you have transitioned to light nutrition the structure of the energetic system of your body alters. Control weight with food disappears, as we are used to it. The meaning of the food for the body disappears because the body nourishes itself through light. The process of fulfilling energy needs is very different when the body is not nourishing itself through (material) food any more.

Quotation I ended with Eva’s observation that her mother was worried because Eva did not have the light on in her fridge and that after a while the food her mother brought was going mouldy. My notion about eating disorders might be something her mother had thought, even though it does not become clear in the interview. At least it is something that came into my mind. Eva relates that she gained a few

more kilos after she set the weight limit with the angel. Family members or anybody else could not notice from outside that not eating was causing a change in Eva's appearance.

Eva describes how the meaning of the material food and the control of weight by eating changed after transitioning to living on light. This is the processuality of "practice". Since the body is nourishing itself through light and the light channel that forms in the transition it was important to Eva to set the weight limit with the angel so that her physical circumstances would remain steady. Eva assumes that in the fatalities that she is aware of that are linked to living on light something has gone wrong with attuning oneself to not losing weight.

body = centre of calculations
weight limit = way/protocol
Michael = action at the distance
an angel = mediator / act at a distance

A new kind of actant emerges in the Quotation III. The angel, who is a non-human supernatural entity, interacts with Eva. Eva's body is hence a centre of calculation. In addition, Michael Blanka is an actant at a distance, who suggests that Eva be in touch with the angel about the weight limit. Also the angel can be seen as an actant at a distance, monitoring Eva's weight. In this sense, the whole living on light procedure requires the presence of a spiritual realm that one needs to engage with. In that sense it is understandable that Eva did not try to share her new situation with someone she knew would not approve. In general in 2007, almost twenty years ago, the atmosphere was very different from today – it could be said that the whole world has gone through spiritualization since.⁹

9 By this I mean the broad contextual descrip-

Conclusion

In the introduction I emphasized that new religiosity demands processuality. This article indicates that, in fact, it requires at least two processualities, relating to the self-oriented "practice" directed inwards and the "surroundings", taking others into account.

To not eat material food evokes strong emotions in one's "surroundings". It provokes contradictions both on the material level about food and how to store it, and on how to talk about it. What seemed to be not eating to others was absorbing nourishing light for Eva. This is the domain of processuality of "practice". It seems that Eva needed to have the processual knowledge ready to reflect and react, even change her behaviour according to her emotions and her inner guidance. This also calls for the ability to listen. Thereafter, new religiosity in its nature is about an ongoing process instead of stable procedures. In this sense, the processuality reflects the concept of "trellis" as defined by Lassander (2014, 149).

As a methodological processuality, ANT helped to abstract from the material the actants that are connected to the different processualities. The analysis of the interaction is a stage of research where the comprehensive meanings are understood. What is common to all three types of processuality is the temporal flexibility in Eva's recollection concerning not eating material food. Processuality takes place in the past, the time that Eva is remembering, yet processuality also crosses the decades, the ongoing processuality that emerges especially in her relationships with her sister and mother.

tion of today's spirituality and widespread practices such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness and cultural representations of angels.

The question of how the phase of living on light appears in Eva's recollection and what kind of processuality is evident in her memories I answer in a twofold manner. On the one hand, Eva raises emotions and material conditions when recalling her period of living on light more than a decade before. On the other, as the clusters of "mould" and "vegetarian diet" demonstrate, Eva was trying to adjust and process her inner and outer balance with the help of the material world. The two types of processuality, "the surroundings" and "the practice", overlap and affect each other. For example, the refrigerator stands out from the material surroundings in the same way as we are used to thinking about a bookshelf: it can tell a lot about the person. More important than if the fridge or shelf is empty or full are the reasons and meanings in the background of why it is the way it is.

Although ANT concepts can be confusing and their vagueness frustrating, they also have an ability to show important (f)actors that influence the analysis and interpretation. Actants at a distance such as Jasmuheen or doctors make things happen in Eva's and her mother's life. They affect the centres of calculation such as fridge and body in a way that causes further actions and associations. It is wise to consider the ANT concepts of the actants at a distance and centres of calculations as working pairs since they play a significant part and can open up the interaction between actants in a meaningful way. Also the essential mediators such as mould, vegetable soup or an angel carry much information and emerge as key actants in the interpretation. This is also what I consider the benefit of ANT reading – it shows how spirituality is both constructed and lived.

My other question for this article was a methodological one. Actor-network theory is not a theory of recollection or memory.

However, ANT is a precise way of reading remembered interview speech when it is not possible to go back in time and do empirical research in the field. It helps to disclose human and non-human actors that are involved as well as the interaction that leads into a new situation.

ANT also has its limits: it may bring into consideration topics that could require some other theoretical discussion to be able to facilitate comprehensive interpretations. Nonetheless, if so desired the limits of the network can be expanded. As a result, one could consider discussions and theories from other fields outside the ANT vocabulary. In such cases one can combine the methodology and enrich the interpretive contexts as I did with Eva and her identity work. The cross-disciplinary dialogue happens according to the research and its material and is no longer only about networks as such.

ANT-concepts overlap and change their status depending on the moment. This happens also within short texts such as the one discussed here. At times it is difficult to illustrate the movement and the translation. Also tracing the actants and reporting on the tracking would characteristically need more dimensions than mere flat paper. In my opinion, it is important to follow the movement of the actants to see how the outcome becomes possible. It could be said that ANT understands processuality in a way that makes the shifting interaction visible.

This article would obviously have been different with some other methodological choice. I do think that the benefits of ANT regarding this research are the findings with processualities of "practice" and "surroundings". Without ANT these categories might not have been formulated as such. That has to do with the notion that ANT itself seems to be a processual method,

since the interaction between actants produces constant movement and positioning. In this sense there are several ways to interpret Eva's memories. But to do ANT-based research is to analyse the interaction in motion. ■

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Interviews

Eva, September 13, 2022. Duration 1 h 39 min.

Eva, October 25, 2022. Duration 1 h 44 min.

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