Karen Swartz

Management Matters

Organizational Storytelling within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden

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Acknowledgements

I imagine that every person who has conducted fieldwork as part of a study finds themselves, years later, still haunted by one particular turn of phrase spun by a half-stranger.

"I am made up of the people I have met in my life," said one of my informants to me one chilly morning when we sat outside her home and sipped coffee. "Indeed," I thought to myself in a tone far less innocent than the six letters typed on this page would make it appear. It was far too early to unravel what seemed to me in my sleep-deprived state a puzzling philosophical nugget after I had spent a nearly sleepless night worried that I would somehow miss the 6:30 a.m. train to Järna I needed to take in order to make it to our meeting on time.

"I am made up of the people I have met in my life." Years later, those words still ring through my head periodically, although my initial snarkiness subsided when I began to see that I, too, am made of the people I have met in my life and that the same is true of this dissertation.

The list of those to whom I am indebted is indeed a long one. First and foremost, however, I would like to thank my supervisors, Måns Broo and Stefan Arvidsson. To say that I could not have done this without the immense amount of help the two of you have given me over what turned out to be quite a few years would be an understatement, and I am so grateful that, even after innumerable, lengthy periods of radio silence, neither of you – especially Måns, who got to be on this rickety roller coaster from the very beginning – ever gave up on me (even though the prospect of doing so must have seemed tempting now and again).

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the many people who guided me through Anthroposophical Sweden. Although I am not able for reasons related to research ethics to name all of you here, I cannot thank you enough for the time and energy each and every one of you gave to me.

As so many others know, having a job and doing research when one is free can easily turn into a bit of a juggling act. I was fortunate enough to have received generous grants for my work from both the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation and the Donner Institute, and these periods of time allowed me much freedom and peace of mind for which I am most grateful. I would also like to express my gratitude to the (previous and current) staff of the latter for their hospitality and kindness. Tore Ahlbäck, Joakim Alander, Björn Dahla, Malin Fredriksson, Ruth Illman, and Sofia Sjö: thank you, thank you, thank you.

Throughout the years, I have received much feedback on various drafts in varying states of chaos presented at seminars, symposiums, and a handful of less formal meetings in Finland and Sweden. In connection with these events, I would like to name: Ann af Burén, Linda Annunen, Nina Björkman, Nanna Blomqvist, Karoliina Dahl, Sara Duppils, Per Faxneld, Peik Ingman, Robin Isomaa, Jakob Löfgren, Torsten Löfstedt, Susanna Lönnqvist, Tiina Mahlamäki, Michael Marlow, Tuomas Martikainen, Jessica Moberg, Marcus Moberg, Anoo Niskanen, Peter

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There are many others – from strangers on planes who probably found themselves wishing that they never asked me anything about my life or what I did, to colleagues I've hurriedly had coffee with at conferences – who deserve my gratitude. Like Winnie-the-Pooh, I am rather rotund and love honey, but I am also a bear of very little brain; if you discover your name left out, the fault is all mine.

In the personal realm, I would like to thank my soul sister, Kerry Killian, for always making me laugh even through the tears and for being there to remind me of what is truly important. I would also like to express my gratitude to my friend Maria Bergbäck. Every project needs a cheer leader, and you have definitely been mine. I am also forever indebted to my husband, Olav Hammer: thank you for always thinking I am wonderful and brilliant even when I am at my worst and am so obviously neither of those things. I love you and look forward to finding you in my next life, and the next one, and the one after that, and…[1]

I would like to dedicate this work to two people. Firstly, I dedicate it to my dear friend Nicklas Larsson, the one person who believed in me throughout this entire process, even (and perhaps especially) when I did not believe in myself. Without your support and encouragement, I never would have gotten to write one word of this let alone finish it. Estoy tan feliz de que hayas encontrado la felicidad que mereces.

I also dedicate this work to Rudolf Steiner. You will always be my answer to that silly ice-breaker question: "If you could have dinner with one celebrity, living or dead, who would it be?"

Odense, April 2022

Karen Swartz

[1] Olav does not believe in reincarnation, and he insists that he didn't in his past life either.

Abstract

The Anthroposophical Society, founded by the Austrian polymath Rudolf Steiner, came to Sweden in 1913, but for the generation of present-day Swedish Anthroposophists whose voices are heard in this study, the great flowering of the movement occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. The movement had by then expanded into a large milieu with many largely independent enterprises and institutions, from the formal organization itself, to various schools, farms, shops, medical facilities, etc., all based on interpretations of Steiner's legacy. Since then, many members of the movement feel, there has been a decline.

A movement of this size and complexity can be seen as a large organization with a corporate-like structure. Taking its point of departure in ideas from the vast field of organization studies, and specifically in the study of storytelling as part of the creation of a corporate culture where many voices and many perspectives co-exist, this study investigates how Anthroposophists in Sweden, both rank-and-file members and some who served in leadership positions, tell the story of the putative Golden Age, decline, and projected future of Anthroposophy in Sweden. Twenty-eight interviews were collected, recurrent themes identified, and the plots of the various individual stories analyzed by means of a version of the actantial model developed by the semioticist Algirdas Greimas.

The basic storyline, of which the interviewees' individual stories constitute variations, is that the Golden Age, when charismatic leaders could draw crowds of enthusiastic young people and a vibrant Anthroposophical milieu was built up, came to an end with the demise of those leaders. The present, i.e., the time at which the interviews were conducted, is narratively framed as a period of sharp decline. The vistas for the future come across in most stories as quite bleak. An actantial analysis reveals that the past, an epoch that is on one hand held up as a shining example is on the other hand also described as a time characterized by innumerable problems and conflicts. Disagreement is rampant regarding the reasons for the current decline, and a vast number of problems are identified in the individual narratives. The future is for some interviewees impossible to speculate about, whereas others have specific suggestions for change. These suggestions, when held up against each other, show that there is no unified vision of what the necessary changes might be or who must bring them about.

The interviewees agree that Anthroposophy plays a vital role as a spiritual path. When asked how they would describe Anthroposophy and what it more specifically can offer, answers diverge, but substantive descriptions of core concepts or practices are rarely alluded to. Rather, their explanations of what

Anthroposophy is are in almost all cases metaphorical or negative, i.e., they represent Anthroposophy as elusive or undefinable. Interviewees can suggest that the lack of a clear Anthroposophical “brand” is a major reason for its current perceived crisis. An analysis of the ways in which Rudolf Steiner is portrayed in the interview material shows that there are a variety of descriptions of him rather than a unified representation of a charismatic leader that members can rally around. This, the study suggests, is because four different forms of charisma can be distinguished on theoretical grounds, and the particular form that permeates the narratives collected for this study does not readily support the dissemination of a centralized, dominant narrative.

Keywords: Anthroposophy, Anthroposophical Society, Antroposofiska Sällskapet i Sverige, organization theory, organizational storytelling, Algirdas Greimas, actantial model

Sammanfattning på svenska

Antroposofiska Sällskapet, grundat av österrikaren Rudolf Steiner, kom till Sverige redan i 1913, men för den generation av nutida svenska antroposofer vars röster hörs i denna studie inträffade rörelsens stora blomstringstid först under nittonhundratalets andra hälft. Vid det laget hade rörelsen expanderat och blivit till en omfattande miljö med många stort sett oberoende institutioner och verksamheter, från själva det Antroposofiska Sällskapet i strikt mening till olika skolor, lantbruk, butiker, kliniker, osv., som alla byggde på tolkningar av arvet efter Steiner. Många medlemmar i rörelsen menar att det sedan dess har skett en nedgång.

En rörelse med den storlek och komplexitet som det rör sig om i det aktuella fallet kan betraktas som en organisation med en företagsliknande struktur. Denna studie tar därför sin utgångspunkt i ett organisationsteoretiskt perspektiv, i synnerhet i den gren av organisationsteorin som studerar berättande som ett led i hur en organisationskultur med många samexisterande röster skapas. I det aktuella fallet handlar det om berättelser som antroposofer i Sverige, både vanliga medlemmar och personer i ledarställning, framför om den blomstringstid de menar rörelsen en gång hade, den nedgång de säger sig uppleva och den framtid de föreställer sig att antroposofin i Sverige kommer att möta. Tjugoåtta intervjuer genomfördes och de berättelser som förmedlas i dessa intervjuer analyserades med hjälp av en variant av den aktantmodell som utvecklats av semiotikern Algirdas Greimas.

Den grundläggande handling man återfinner i intervjupersonernas olika berättelser är att blomstringstiden var en guldålder då karismatiska ledare kunde samla stora grupper av entusiastiska ungdomar och en levande antroposofisk miljö byggdes upp, men att denna guldålder upphörde när ledarna gick ur tiden. Nuet, alltså den tid då intervjuerna genomfördes, beskrivs i berättelserna som en tid av förfall. Framtidsutsikterna som målas upp i de flesta berättelser är dystra. Aktantanalysen visar att berättelserna om det förflutna både beskriver denna tid i mycket positiva termer och nämner otaliga problem och konflikter. Nuets påstådda förfall återkommer i de flesta berättelser, men åsikterna går vitt isär när det gäller vad nutidens problem är och vad som orsakat dem. Framtiden beskrivs av vissa intervjupersoner som omöjlig att spekulera närmare om, medan andra har specifika förslag till förändringar. Sammantaget visar analysen att det saknas en enhetlig föreställning om vad som behöver göras för att lösa rörelsens problem och vem som ska ta ansvar för dessa förändringar.

Intervjupersonerna är eniga om att antroposofin spelar en viktig roll. Frågan hur de skulle beskriva antroposofin och vad den har att erbjuda besvaras på olika sätt, men sällan i termer av konkreta beskrivningar av för antroposofin centrala föreställningar eller praktiker. Tendensen är snarare att svara i metaforiska eller

negativa termer, alltså genom att berätta att de menar att antroposofin inte går att definiera. Samtidigt kan intervjupersonerna förklara att bristen på en tydlig antroposofisk identitet är ett huvudskäl till vad de ser som rörelsens nuvarande kris. En analys av de sätt på vilka Rudolf Steiner beskrivs i intervjumaterialet visar att det också finns en rad divergerande uppfattningar av honom snarare än en sammanhållen beskrivning av en karismatisk ledare som medlemmarna kan samlas kring. Studien konkluderar att karisma på teoretiska grunder kan delas in i fyra olika typer, och att den specifika form av karisma som intervjuerna återspeglar inte harmonierar särskilt väl med spridandet av en centralt utformad dominerande berättelse.

Table of Contents

Part I

1. Introduction

Although they differ in significant ways, religious organizations often resemble their secular counterparts. Both, for instance, offer products on markets often oversaturated with alternatives. At times these wares are invisible to the naked eye or provide consumers with something intangible. As the examples of a life insurance policy or the promise of a better life in the hereafter demonstrate, this is true of both secular and religious organizations. Both types of organizations come into existence as the result of work initiated by an innovative entrepreneur. The efforts necessary in bringing them about are frequently carried out with the assistance of numerous associates, the names of whom occasionally, or even often, fade into obscurity.

Furthermore, if they are to survive challenges, whether they be large or small or are of an internal or external nature, both types of organizations need to be able to operate in such a way so as to allow for a degree of flexibility that makes change possible. Here, the interests of various stakeholders, both present and potential ones, must be taken into account when decisions are made. Certain events can pose particular challenges for organizations. The death of a leader or the departure of a central figure of authority, for instance, might trigger a crisis. The records of the history of humankind are rich in examples of religious organizations that have vanished and of secular organizations that, failing to overcome such difficulties, have either dissolved or gone bankrupt.

Although some have done so more easily than others, in particular those having sufficient resources, many secular organizations have succeeded in changing direction and offering a different line of products when the prevailing conditions made doing so a necessity. For religious organizations, however, even those having resources enough to fund large-scale overhauls or re-launchings, this option might not be perceived by those having the authority to initiate such measures as desirable or even possible. While some of course have done so, and occasionally with great success, others, for one reason or another, either do not try at all or do try but in a way that ends in failure. One factor that may inform the outcome is a shared (at least by some) notion that certain features are indispensable and thus non-negotiable. Examples of movements hampered by such factors include those where the insistence on celibacy as an absolute value has led to a shortage of new members (e.g., the Shaker movement[2]); apocalyptic groups that have predicted a date for the millennium and have been unable to renegotiate their doctrines when prophecy failed (e.g., the Danish UFO-based Orthon movement[3]); and movements based on an anti-Semitic and racist

[2] On the Shakers, see in particular Morgan 2002. For a brief overview, see Foster 1987.
[3] Very little academic literature has been devoted to the Orthon movement. Rothstein 2016: 634-6 provides basic information.

ideology that remain marginal in a social context where overt racism is vilified (e.g., various groups lumped under the Christian Identity label[4]).

The births of new religions and the trajectories of the paths they traverse on their way to becoming institutionalized entities are well-studied phenomena. In contrast, the matter of what happens when they slip into a period of decline, a course that may even lead to institutional death, has received much less scholarly attention.[5] It is this latter phase of the lifecycles of new religious movements that is of interest for what follows.

1.1 Aim of study

As its case, this study focuses on Antroposofiska Sällskapet i Sverige, the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society,[6] hereafter the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, an organization that has faced significant challenges in recent decades. Following a period of expansion subsequent to its establishment in Sweden in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the recent history of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden bears the marks of an aging membership base, a decrease in activity, increasing competition from spiritual and secular alternatives offering similar products, the closing of a number of institutions having had great significance for the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu, and repeated bouts of negative media attention.

The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden is a division of the international Allgemeine Anthroposophische Gesellschaft, the General Anthroposophical Society. As a thoroughly institutionalized organization, the structure of which will be discussed in depth below, the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden consists of further subdivisions. It also has various more or less flexible relationships with enterprises, e.g., schools and facilities for individuals with special needs, informed in differing ways by interpretations of teachings formulated by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the founder of the General Anthroposophical Society, and a number of his collaborators. These institutions in turn have dealings with other organizations, e.g., various governmental agencies concerned with public health and education. In this nebulous

[4] On the various groups collectively labeled Christian Identity, see in particular Barkun 1997.
[5] Among the surprisingly few studies in this particular field, two seminal contributions are Robbins 2014 and de Jong 2016. The study of the decline and death of religions was in very recent years felt to be so underdeveloped that a research project was formed to chart a number of cases of this phenomenon and led to the publication of an edited volume, i.e., Stausberg, Cusack, & Wright 2020. Secularization theory, it should perhaps be noted, is only tangentially relevant since it deals with the putative general decline of religion, not the decline of specific religions.
[6] Formally, the Anthroposophical Society is divided into national societies. For stylistic reasons, i.e., to avoid countless instances of the term *society* or derivatives thereof, the term *division* is here occasionally used as a synonym for a national society. National societies are in turn divided into branches, and *branches* is the term that will be used throughout so as to avoid unnecessary confusion.

constellation, we find engaged numerous individuals with varying degrees of affiliation with institutionalized Anthroposophy.

People are storytellers. An important element of any organization's culture is the stories those involved in its operations tell others – and themselves – about it. The focus of this study is the organizational stories[7] (a concept elaborated upon below) people involved in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu tell about it during a time pregnant with challenges.

The research question it seeks to answer, here pared down to its absolute basics and to be unpacked in subsequent sections, is this: What stories do stakeholders in the Anthroposophical milieu tell about the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and about the situation of Anthroposophy in Sweden more broadly? As constituent parts of this question, this study seeks to address the issues of how these stories present the nature of the movement that they are stakeholders in and why these accounts take the shape they do: what stories do they tell about the past; how do they, in narrative form, reflect upon what the situation is today; how do they, in their stories, speculate on what the future might hold for Anthroposophy in Sweden; and, again, why do these stories take the specific form they do?

The Swedish Anthroposophical milieu can be seen as a specific, local instance of a broader category, namely that of new religions[8] more generally. A detailed analysis of organizational storytelling in that specific milieu hence functions as a case study that can shed light upon the ways in which new religions more generally function. An in-depth investigation of this question requires a comparative approach that (with few exceptions) falls outside the bounds of this study, but some pointers will be provided along the way in order to show how an analysis of the organizational storytelling that members of this particular organization engage in can shed light on mechanisms that are found in new religions more generally.

At an even higher level of generality, the study aims to illustrate the usefulness of a theoretical approach that is at present underdeveloped in the study of religions and to demonstrate by means of a specific case that the study of organizational storytelling offers a valuable component to the toolkit of the study of religions as an academic discipline.

1.2 Composition of the study

Chapter 2 provides the necessary sociohistorical background for understanding the nature and development of the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden. Chapter 3 has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it explains the main theoretical framework used

[7] Throughout this text, I use the terms *story* and *narrative* as interchangeable synonyms to avoid repetition.

[8] The terms *new religion* and *new religious movement* will be used interchangeably throughout this text.

to analyze organizational storytelling in this study. Secondly, it provides details regarding the methods employed to collect the source materials that are analyzed according to the theoretical approach outlined below. In particular, it presents the sources upon which my study is based, i.e., interview materials supported by extensive fieldwork experience. The considerations that have underpinned my interview methodology and fieldwork practice are discussed as part of that presentation. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constitute the largest part of my study and together comprise an extended analysis of the stories that my interviewees shared with me. Since these narratives concern changes they perceive the Anthroposophical milieu to have undergone over a period of time, these three chapters are organized chronologically into stories about the past, present, and future, respectively. Chapter 7 presents and discusses the ways in which two key elements of the stories – Anthroposophy and its founder, Rudolf Steiner – are understood by my interviewees. Chapter 8 weaves together the various threads of the rich tapestry of stories, presents the main analytical results that one can draw from the materials, and summarizes how my analysis answers the research question posed at the outset. The final section of that chapter also presents some suggestions for further research that would expand upon the present study.

2. Historical and Cultural Context

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden in order to 1) present a milieu that may be unfamiliar to some readers and 2) make it clear why the theoretical perspective presented in chapter 3 fits the specific perspective on that milieu adopted in this study. The first part of what follows will be devoted to the broader, international occult milieu in which Anthroposophy was born. Thereafter, the Theosophical Society, the "mother organization" from which Anthroposophy directly derived, will be briefly presented. A third section focuses on the founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, and on some of the fundamental concepts he formulated. As all of these topics have been researched by others to varying degrees only brief summaries will be given in order to provide the necessary background information. A fourth section presents the Swedish religious landscape from a historical perspective and recounts the introduction of Anthroposophy in Sweden. In this case as well, there is existing scholarship that can be summarized, although the literature is dominated by materials in Swedish and is thus not readily accessible for an international readership. Finally, a near-ubiquitous scholarly habitus in previous research on Anthroposophy will briefly be summarized, not least in order to thereafter provide a picture of how Anthroposophy is conceptualized here and to thereby make clear the nature of the present contribution in terms of that conceptualization. The particular approach taken to Anthroposophy, it will be shown, fits the particular theoretical approach described in chapter 3.

2.1 The "mystical revival"

At the turn of the twentieth century Western urban centers like London and New York had much to offer in terms of modern currents of alternative spirituality to explore for those who had the time and money to do so. For example, individuals hesitant to abandon Christian frames of reference entirely could acquaint themselves with any one of the many versions of Spiritualism that purported to dovetail neatly with the Biblical message, while women and men wishing for something more "exotic" could turn to the teachings of disembodied Himalayan "Masters". Names like Hermes Trismegistus and Christian Rosenkreutz tantalized appetites hungry for esoteric secrets, and the writings of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) offered a signposted journey the underbelly of Victorian morality.[9]

[9] The literature on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occultism is vast. Although Hermes Trismegistus, the "thrice great Hermes," was a mythological figure whose impact was greatest in the early modern period, references could still be found in the period under consideration here; see Faivre 2005a, Faivre 2005b: 540–541 and Goodrick-Clarke 2005. The Rosicrucian myth was *en vogue* during this period, and new organizations that found legitimacy in referring to the figure of Christian Rosenkreutz were created; the first of these was the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, founded in 1865–6 (Introvigne 2005: 1018–1020). Crowley is the topic of several biographical works, the best of which is arguably Kaczynski 2010.

These were but a few of the alternatives (which often became intertwined in various ways) made available in a bustling marketplace stocked with such diverse offerings as discarnate souls providing advice or solace to loved ones left behind;[10] complex amalgamations of disparate religious traditions having origins thousands of miles and years apart; a returned Christ back to serve as a World Teacher in the form of a young Indian boy;[11] elaborately tiered organizations comprised of a selection of extravagantly named degrees;[12] and colorful charismatic leaders with personalities as volatile as the forces they sought to understand or control.

In *The Place of Enchantment*, historian Alex Owen uses the term 'mystical revival' to refer to this *fin de siècle* widespread interest in esoteric ideas and points out that it was already in use in the 1890s, which indicates that a sense of self-awareness permeated the milieu.[13] Although Owen focuses on British culture, much of what she describes as signaling such a fascination is also observable in relation to other parts of the Western world, including Sweden. Shaped by a number of prominent intellectual trends and fashionable interests that were commonplace during the late nineteenth century, e.g., philosophical idealism, an enthusiasm for science, vitalism, and a dislike of materialism, the mystical revival was also informed by contemporary scholarship in budding fields of study like folklore, Egyptology, philology, anthropology, and comparative religion. These conditions created an additional context in which romanticized imaginings of the East and West could be constructed, the Orientalist essentialism informed by European interests[14] with the latter receiving similar treatment.[15] The very European occult tradition so dear to many of the organizations in question was, as Owen points out, similarly constructed.[16]

One factor that aided the continued life and further development of the mystical revival was the production and distribution of periodicals. Journals such as W.T. Stead's (1849–1912) *Borderland* (1893–1897) and Ralph Shirley's (1865–1946) *The Occult Review* (1905–1951) provided the general public with reading material on a wide range of topics including alchemy, Buddhism, and hypnotism. Some contributions were authored by now familiar names like Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942).[17] Beckoned by the promise of tapping into ancient wisdom and acquiring the tools that would allow for esoteric readings of the sacred literatures of the world that had only recently been made accessible, scores of

[10] Spiritualism is the topic of a sizeable amount of literature; see the chapters in the edited volume Gutierrez 2015 for an example of recent scholarship.
[11] Mary Lutyens is the author of several books on Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), including the (to some extent insiderish) biographical volumes Lutyens 1975; 1983; 1990.
[12] The most influential of these nineteenth-century multi-tiered organizations was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; see Howe 1972; and Gilbert 1983, 1997.
[13] Owen 2004: 4
[14] Owen 2004: 28. Cf. discussions of the "Oriental renaissance" in Schwab 1984 and Clarke 1997.
[15] King 1999: 3
[16] Owen 2004: 28
[17] Owen 2004: 28

seekers from the educated middle classes heeded the call.[18] As historian Joy Dixon maintains, it was ultimately "social class and its associated cultural capital [that] regulated access to the mysteries".[19]

The movement attracted both women and men. Some who became involved in it were renowned: poet W.B. Yeats (1865–1939) and author Edith Bland (1858–1924) (who found fame writing children's books under the name E. Nesbit) were active members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organization that could also count many doctors, lawyers and other "respectable types" in its ranks. Others were notorious: a young Crowley made a pit stop in the Golden Dawn's sphere of activity before embarking upon a very different path.[20] The names of countless others have slipped through the cracks of recorded history but one thing all of these individuals had in common is that they no longer could identify with "formal Christian observance".[21] Another interesting aspect of the social aspects of the mystical revival is the apparent ease with which members could flit from one group to the next (or belong to several simultaneously). This indicates the interrelatedness of these organizations, and it also indicates a close structural similarity with the 1960s cultic milieu as described in a seminal text by sociologist of religion Colin Campbell (1972).

What differentiates the occult milieu of the late nineteenth century from its much later counterpart is its upper middle-class and upper-class appeal, which made it a "somewhat elitist counterpoint," as Owen phrases it, to the enormously successful spiritualist movement which had been hugely popular on both sides of the Atlantic.[22] This notion of an exclusive alternative is also shared by Dixon:

> The late nineteenth-century occult revival came in many guises. Some, such as certain forms of astrology or fairground fortunetelling, were relatively popular and democratic. Others, like the magical Order of the Golden Dawn or the Theosophical Society itself, were more self-consciously elitist. The TS deliberately constructed itself as a religion for the "thinking classes." It appealed above all to an elite, educated, middle- and upper-middle-class constituency.[23]

It is to the Theosophical Society that we will now turn. The largest and most influential of the organizations that came into existence as part of the mystical revival, it was from this institution that Anthroposophy would later stem.

[18] Owen 2004: 4
[19] Dixon 2001: 8
[20] On Crowley's involvement with the Golden Dawn, see Kaczynski 2010: 58–80.
[21] Owen 2004: 4
[22] Owen 2004: 5
[23] Dixon 2001: 8

2.2 Theosophy

Largely the result of the efforts of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in 1875.[24] After Blavatsky's death, the organization splintered. The discord that led to this development was in part due to incessant infighting. The conflicts concerned such things as administrative matters and even the authenticity of some of its teachings. Its influence on other organizations and on the global religious landscape from the late nineteenth century to our own time cannot, however, be overestimated.[25] The reasons for its significance have been summed up neatly in several points by scholar of the study of religions Kocku von Stuckrad. These include Blavatsky's charisma; the model her "Esoteric School" provided for other initiatory societies and magical orders that also strove to follow (purported) Rosicrucian or Masonic traditions; and the dialogue Theosophists had with contemporary philologists and scholars studying religions, exchanges that in turn resulted in the popularization of Theosophical teachings.[26]

Blavatsky claimed to have received her inspiration and authority from spiritually advanced beings variously referred to in Theosophical literature as the "Masters" or "Mahatmas". While communication with them initially occurred during séances, it eventually took the form of written correspondence. Accounts vary regarding their identities, but Blavatsky claimed to have continuous contact with two individuals she called Mahatma Morya ("Master M") and Mahatma Koot Hoomi ("Master KH"), respectively. While they are sometimes described as being able materialize or incarnate at various places, they are in other instances characterized as subtle forces of energy that must assume a concrete form to become visible.[27]

Regardless of whoever, or whatever, the Masters might have been,[28] or whether they even existed at all, Blavatsky's life and times, and thus the history of the Theosophical Society, pose challenges for those wanting to learn more. This is in part due to her knack for creative obfuscation, which shaped her own accounts of events. Those offered by admirers and critics are also problematic. However, one perhaps ought to bear in mind, as journalist Peter Washington points out in his popularizing account of Theosophical history *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*, that the nineteenth century was rife with "extraordinary lives and remarkable travels", and, moreover, the most important thing is that she succeeded in getting

[24] For general surveys of Theosophical history, see Campbell 1980, Godwin 2013, and Wessinger 2013. Godwin 1994 is the indispensable introduction to Blavatsky's occultist predecessors.
[25] See the contributions in Hammer & Rothstein 2013 and Rudbøg & Sand 2020.
[26] von Stuckrad 2005: 122–128
[27] von Stuckrad 2005: 123
[28] Regarding the theory that the Masters were modeled on real people that Blavatsky knew, see Johnson 1994.

people to believe her.[29] What follows is a brief summary of her life and the development of the Theosophical Society during its early years.

In 1831, HPB, as she called herself, was born into an aristocratic family in Yekaterinoslav in what is now Ukraine. Her life eventually took on a more bohemian character, however, after she abandoned a significantly older husband and embarked upon what was, according to her own reports, a remarkable journey through exotic locations such as the Middle East, Tibet, and India.[30] Her adventures eventually brought her to New York City in 1874, where she met Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), who at the time was investigating purported supernatural events then occurring at a Vermont farm. Their acquaintanceship eventually transitioned into a long-term, and very close, association. It was their shared interest in various aspects of mysticism, topics they discussed at meetings with a group of like-minded individuals in Blavatsky's lodgings, that led to the inauguration of the Theosophical Society in 1875.[31]

Blavatsky's spiritual abilities, which were central to the growth of the Theosophical Society during its earliest years, had reportedly first been exhibited when she was a child. Prior to her arrival in the U.S., she had been active as a medium in spiritualist groups for some time.[32] She had also by that point developed a keen interest in occultism and Eastern religions.[33] While much of her success at various points in her career as a public figure was dependent upon her aptitude for manifesting "phenomena", she later came to vehemently emphasize the differences between "true" occultism and spiritualism.[34]

Isis Unveiled, the first substantial account of the Theosophical Society's teachings, appeared in 1877. The contents of these two volumes, according to historian of religions Olav Hammer, reveal the enormity of the project Blavatsky had sought to undertake:

> namely to integrate Atlantis, Reichenbach's odic force, mesmerism, Tibet, Paracelsus' archaeus, spirit apparitions, magic, alchemy, India, rosicrucianism, the kabbala and much more into one single edifice, by processing all these topics through a hermeneutics that made them relevant in an age of religious doubt and

[29] Washington 1996: 32
[30] Owen 2004: 20. Biographies of Blavatsky range from the hagiographic (Cranston 1993) to more scholarly accounts (Goodrick-Clarke 2004), but a fully satisfactory account may never be written. Her journey to the Middle East, Cairo in particular, is well documented; see Godwin 1994: 278–281. Many other segments of her life on the road, however, may consist of legends that Blavatsky fabricated about herself, and it must unfortunately be said that she was so successful at covering her tracks that we will presumably never get to the bottom of things.
[31] Owen 2004: 29
[32] Owen 2004: 29.
[33] Hammer 2003: 81.
[34] Hanegraaff 1998: 449

> scientific materialism. It is as if Blavatsky had taken on the challenge to incorporate the totality of the 1870s cultic milieu.[35]

While the organization had at least in part been founded as an effort to reform American spiritualism, it soon became more closely associated with "Oriental" mysticism as Blavatsky wove an array of minutiae from various Western esoteric traditions together with her own strain of "Eastern" metaphysics. This turn, together with the addition of several new key concepts, such as reincarnation, took shape in a series of letters that in the period 1880–1884 were purportedly sent by paranormal means from her Masters to leading members of the Theosophical Society.[36] These partly novel teachings were first compiled by Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921) in his book *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) and were later reworked by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), a work that can be seen not only as one of the key collections of teachings of the Theosophical current but also as one of the foundational texts for modern post-Christian religiosity in the West. The result was an alluring synthesis that made available a fresh and exciting form of spirituality, one that fit nicely with late-Victorian Orientalist tendencies and interests.[37] The abundance of ideas she drew upon from such places as Egypt, India, and Tibet also served to legitimize the organization's criticism of contemporary European and North American society, which were perceived as having grown increasingly materialistic.[38]

The desire to learn more about Eastern religions led Blavatsky and Olcott to relocate to (what is now) Mumbai in 1879.[39] They eventually settled in Adyar, on the outskirts of the city of Madras (since then renamed Chennai) where they established the Theosophical Society's world headquarters.[40] Once rooted in India, the organization attracted both Indians and European transplants as members. Although largely successful in the first years after its move, controversy followed. For example, arguments ensued about the concept of a Universal Brotherhood in relation to indigenous ideas of caste distinction. Furthermore, some were troubled by the fact that correspondence from the Masters was sent solely through Europeans.[41] On the other hand, many responded positively to the organization's more anti-Christian and anti-Western positions. Moreover, its presence served to help strengthen Indian reform movements that attempted to revive or reconstruct what they deemed to be orthodox Hinduism.[42]

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[35] Hammer 2003: 83. For details of how Blavatsky wrote *Isis Unveiled*, see Hanegraaff 2017.
[36] For a detailed study of reincarnation in Theosophy, see Chajes 2019. The so-called Mahatma Letters were subsequently published; see Barker 1926.
[37] Owen 2004: 29
[38] Owen 2004: 38
[39] Owen 2004: 31
[40] Dixon 2001: 3
[41] Jones 1990: 170
[42] Jones 1990: 179

As the years passed, the Theosophical Society's development became increasingly complex. This was due in part to Blavatsky and Olcott's crumbling relationship and in part to the former's 1887 move to London. Her engagement with the organization continued, however, and the second installment of its teachings, *The Secret Doctrine*, appeared in 1888. Spanning 1,500 pages, it elaborated upon Theosophical ideas (to which we will briefly return) concerning the structure of the universe, the creation of mankind, and the truth behind the world's religions.[43]

Inner conflict had beleaguered the operations of the Theosophical Society since its early days, and, as the end of Blavatsky's life drew near, it continued to do so. Following her death in 1891, the disputes became focused on the matter of succession. The turmoil – in part due to a power struggle with Olcott – had already started while Blavatsky was still alive but was initially calmed by the establishment of an Esoteric Section in London; Blavatsky was to reign over it while Olcott was left in charge of the Indian Section in Adyar. Parallels to this tension can be seen in the letters from the Masters that appeared during this time wherein they lash out at each another and gripe about such things as a lack of paper.[44]

Once set into motion, the downward spiral continued, and many individuals such as Katherine Tingley (1847–1929), Annie Besant (1847–1933), and Rudolf Steiner both influenced and were influenced by its trajectory.[45] Following Olcott's death, Besant, a social reformer interested in issues such as women's rights and Indian Home Rule, took over as president of the organization in India. During its first years under her leadership, the Theosophical Society grew dramatically, and at its peak in 1928 it had over 45,000 members.[46] A sharp decline occurred in the 1930s, however, and between 1929 and 1938 the membership dropped by 33.8%.[47] One factor contributing to this dip was the actions of certain key figures, including Besant and her longtime associate C.W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), in connection with their "discovery" of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), a young Indian boy the two introduced as the earthly vehicle of the next World Teacher.[48] Leadbeater would further contribute to the controversy by becoming embroiled in a number of sex scandals involving prepubescent boys.[49] Krishnamurti ultimately broke his ties with the Theosophical Society in 1930 and went on to offer his own brand of spiritual teachings to an interested public. Besant passed away three years after his departure.

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[43] von Stuckrad 2005: 128
[44] von Stuckrad 2005: 128
[45] von Stuckrad 2005: 129
[46] Historical membership statistics have been helpfully summarized by Gregory Tillett in his Ph.D. thesis, see Tillett 1986: 942-7. See also Jones 1990: 176, 126.
[47] Jones 1990: 126
[48] Owen 2004: 228
[49] Owen 2004: 106

The further development of the Theosophical Society and its various offshoots is largely beyond the scope of this work, but its history includes not just that of the original organization itself but also a significant number of other groups that in one way or another are connected to Blavatsky's teachings, such as the United Lodge of Theosophists, the Arcane School, and the Rosicrucian Fellowship. In his "Madame Blavatsky's Children: Theosophy and Its Heirs" (2002), historian of religions Kevin Tingay provides a taxonomy of modern groups having ties to Blavatsky's movement.[50] *Controlled movements* may have their own organizational structures, but they have a membership wholly drawn from the parent society. *Schismatic movements* make use of the term "Theosophy" or claim to present Blavatsky's teachings but have separated themselves from the parent society. *Derivative movements* have been formed by one-time members of the parent society and embody some aspect of Theosophical teaching; members, however, may disavow or downplay the importance of this connection. Lastly, *influenced movements* have memberships and leaderships that are largely drawn from the parent society, but they are also open to others.[51] The Anthroposophical Society could, according to this model, thus be called a derivative movement. In order to demonstrate this point, a bare-bones account of Theosophical teachings is provided here. The information section 2.3.2, i.e., the one on Steiner's cosmology and anthropology, can then be compared with the often strikingly similar Theosophical doctrines.

In Theosophical cosmology, the planet we live on is merely one stage in a succession of evolutionary stages. In a very distant past, the present incarnation of our planet was preceded by less dense and more spiritual globes. Our physical Earth is the fourth of a total of seven successive stages. On this fourth globe, usually only referred to by a letter code as Globe D, humanity is also on its own evolutionary journey. This panorama of human evolution is structured in a sevenfold pattern, in which seven "root races" succeed each other. These are identified as the Polar, Hyperborean, Lemurian, Atlantean, and Aryan root races, the latter of which will be followed by unnamed sixth and seventh root races in the future. Each root race is further subdivided into seven races which Theosophical writers (in a rather Eurocentric fashion) link to cultures that were understood as having been instrumental in the development of nineteenth-century European intellectual culture. Currently, we live in the fifth subrace of the Aryan root race.

The evolutionism that permeates Theosophical cosmology implies that we will, as time passes, reach ever higher levels of spiritual realization. This journey is one that involves us all in the sense that the twin mechanisms of karma and reincarnation ensure that each of us will ultimately attain those exalted evolutionary levels. The speed of our individual ascent towards those heights,

[50] Numerous new religious movements have their origins in the Theosophical worldview. See the chapters in Hammer & Rothstein 2013.
[51] Tingay 2000: 40

however, differs from one soul to another, and some privileged individuals have a much higher level of understanding than others. Over time, a succession of such carriers of the torch of wisdom have passed on a universal spiritual tradition through the ages. If interpreted with the correct hermeneutical lens, all major religious traditions are, from this perspective, reflexes of the same inner core of truth, and it is this core that Theosophical luminaries such as Blavatsky could present in their books.

The generation after Blavatsky, and in particular Besant and Leadbeater, introduced shifts in emphasis and new conceptions into the message propounded by HPB. This modified version of Theosophical doctrine is sometimes called neo-Theosophy, although the term has a history as a derogatory label created to unmask the doctrines propounded by Besant and Leadbeater as deviations from Blavatsky's "authentic" Theosophical tradition.[52] Presenting these differences is a task that goes well beyond the confines of this short presentation, but two particular aspects are of relevance to a study of Anthroposophy. Firstly, the evolutionary message that Blavatsky had formulated gained a somewhat messianic element in the belief that humanity was poised to take an evolutionary leap under the guidance of a World Teacher. Secondly, Leadbeater in particular democratized access to the purported higher wisdom of Theosophy by claiming that there exists a path of spiritual self-cultivation that can lead any sincere and studious seeker to the attainment of clairvoyant perception.[53] As will become clear below, Steiner's innovative bricolage of Theosophical and other elements in the shape of Anthroposophy was not least based upon a vehement rejection of the first of these innovations and an equally insistent adoption of the second. It is to this movement, the ideas upon which it is based, and the life of its founder that we will now turn.

2.3 Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy

Academic studies of the life and work of Rudolf Steiner are few in number. The character of much of the literature about Steiner and Anthroposophy, including its various offshoots, can be categorized as sailing near either the Scylla of

[52] The term neo-Theosophy was coined in the early 1910s and appeared in several works written with the express aim of documenting the many supposed errors that Besant and Leadbeater had introduced. As an example of this genre, Theosophical author Margaret Thomas compiled a volume of this kind with the title "Theosophy versus Neo-Theosophy" that discusses such differences at length (Thomas 1924, available online at https://www.blavatskyarchives.com/thomas/). For a scholarly discussion of the term, its history, and the doctrinal differences between Blavatsky's version of Theosophy and the one crafted by Besant and Leadbeater, see Poller 2017.

[53] Leadbeater 1899

apologetic tomes[54] or the Charybdis of polemic rants,[55] a situation that has long existed but which, due to the explosion of interest in the study of the various historically related currents generally referred to as Western esotericism, has started to change, a process that has not been entirely painless for the Anthroposophical community itself. The most substantial scholarship on the Anthroposophical Society in its various forms and on the biography of its founder, Steiner, is the work of historian of religions Helmut Zander, who has produced a massive, two-volume study of the history of Anthroposophy,[56] a biography of Steiner,[57] a thematically organized overview of many of the concepts and practices associated with this movement,[58] and numerous articles and book chapters dealing with Anthroposophy. Since Zander's 2011 volume remains the only full-length biography that is written by an academic rather than an Anthroposophical insider (or a polemical debunker), the following short sketch of the life of Rudolf Steiner is heavily dependent upon Zander's account. It is included here to provide a brief orientation as background because of his historical significance and continuing importance for the Anthroposophical movement. Further sections briefly summarize the history of the General Anthroposophical Society after Steiner's death and survey the ways in which the Theosophical and Anthroposophical movements developed in Sweden.

2.3.1 Rudolf Steiner: A biographical sketch

> Born a stranger in a strange land, Rudolf Steiner grew up a as stranger both at home and in his surroundings. This experience colored both his childhood and his youth. Homelessness…sculpted his destiny. With the exception of the ten years he spent in Neudörfl and the seven spent in Weimar, Rudolf Steiner spent his life traveling. His domiciles (Kraljevec, Mödling, Pottschach, Neudörfl, Oberlaa, Brunn, Vienna, Weimar, Berlin, Stuttgart, and finally, Dornach) were but stops along the way. Never did he own his own house. From 1904, when he began to lecture widely, his wandering intensified. The lecture tours took him first through Germany, then Switzerland, Austria, Scandinavia, England, Italy, Hungary, France, and Holland. In some years, he was on the road more than at home.[59]

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[54] Several biographies of Steiner have been written by insiders, including Wachsmuth 1951, Shepherd 1954, and Lindenberg 1997. Among such insider biographies, Lindenberg is the most detailed and well-documented. Given the ideological context of the book and the author, the usual historical-critical caution should be exercised in reading this work.

[55] Texts by authors who represent skeptical organizations tend to be particularly characterized by such a debunking approach. The titles of these publications are often instructive in this regard, e.g., "The Insidious Pervasiveness of the Cult of Rudolf Steiner" (http://www.quackometer.net/blog/2012/07/the-insidious-pervasiveness-of-the-cult-of-rudolf-steiner.html?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_Le__rnWD9ERDrnr2RhMygJuutHgCm9VgCWsrVRpkfJ0-1632647395-0-gqNtZGzNAxCjcnBszQt9) and "Rudolf Steiner's Quackery" (https://quackwatch.org/11Ind/steiner/).

[56] Zander 2002

[57] Zander 2011

[58] Zander 2019

[59] Lindenberg 2012: 1

Born on February 25, 1861, in what is now northern Croatia, his childhood was divided up between a number of largely rural places in the Austro-Hungarian Empire due to a series of moves connected with the posts his father had with the Austrian Southern Railway. In addition to the natural beauty of his surroundings and the advances in technology he encountered through his father's profession, his early years were also marked, according to insider accounts and his own (incomplete) biography *Mein Lebensgang* (1925), by various spiritual experiences. Reluctant to share them with others, he withdrew into what would become a very rich inner life.[60]

Boredom and frustration dogged his years at school. Moreover, the combination of working as a private tutor in order to supplement his father's wages and having a long commute further complicated student life for him. Despite being underwhelmed by uninspiring educators, subjects like mathematics, the natural sciences, and philosophy brought him much joy, in particular, in regard to the latter, the thought of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854). Several mentors also helped broaden his horizons by introducing him to other areas that would become life-long interests, namely music, drawing, and literature.

Intending to become a qualified teacher, Steiner started studying at the *Technische Hochschule* in Vienna in 1879.[61] Scholarships and tutoring jobs allowed him to take courses in a number of areas, such as the humanities, mathematics, and several branches of science. Two people he met during his years there had great significance for how his life would turn out: Felix Kogutzki (1833–1909), a seller of medicinal herbs, himself no stranger to spiritual experiences, and Karl Julius Schröer (1825–1900), a professor of German language and literature and a specialist on the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

A new chapter began for the then twenty-one-year-old Steiner in 1882 when he, based on Schröer's recommendation, was offered a position editing Goethe's work on the natural sciences for Joseph Kürchner's (1853–1902) critical collection *Deutsche Nationalliteratur*.[62] His time in Vienna was multifaceted: while there he established relationships with some of the city's cultural elite, and he came into contact with Theosophical literature like Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) and Mabel Collins' *Light on the Path* (1885) as well as with

[60] It can be noted that stories of spiritual experiences in early childhood are well-known tropes in the hagiographical literature depicting the lives of important religious personages. Anthroposophical hagiographies and autohagiographies share this trait with traditions ranging from Medieval Christianity (Heffernan 1988) and Sufism (Renard 2008) to Scientology (Christensen 2015). Regarding Steiner's childhood, see Zander 2011: 13–28.

[61] See Zander 2011: 29–41 for details on Steiner's years as a student and his significant meetings with others.

[62] Regarding Steiner the Goethe researcher, see Zander 2011: 43–60.

subjects that would occupy him for years to come, such as alchemy and Rosicrucianism.

His next stop was Weimar, where he worked at the Schiller-Goethe archives.[63] Although he found the job to be dull and poorly paid, his Weimar years were productive ones. For example, he managed during this time there to finish his doctoral dissertation, which concerned Fichte's concept of the ego, and he also wrote *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (1894), a volume he (on rather dubious retrospective grounds) later described as encompassing the totality of Anthroposophy. Moreover, Steiner, as he had done in Vienna, immersed himself in the city's literary and cultural life and made many acquaintances there. In 1897, he left the city for Berlin where the next significant period of his life unfolded.

Steiner's Berlin years were certainly no less active than those belonging to previous phases of his life.[64] Here he also made contact with many then-prominent writers and artists, and he joined several literary and philosophical clubs. As he had not managed to achieve his goal of obtaining a professorship somewhere, he supported himself by other means, such as working for a time as chief editor of the periodical *Magazin für Literatur*. As the nineteenth century became the twentieth, a turning point in Steiner's life came as well, the result of a lifestyle overhaul that seems at least partially to have concerned his consumption of alcohol.[65] It was also around this time that he began teaching at the Arbeiterbildungsschule, a social-democratic educational institution for the working classes. He even got married. Steiner met his first wife, Anne Eunike (1853–1911), when he moved in with her and her five children as a boarder in Weimar. They would, however, divorce some years later.

It was also during this period that his relationship to Christianity underwent a change at the same time that he, following an invitation to give a lecture on Nietzsche, became active in Theosophical circles.[66] Further requests for speaking engagements came, and he took on subjects ranging from the esoteric nature of Goethe's *Märchen* (1795) to the compatibility of modern science with the inner mystical path to themes related to his notion of "the Mystery of Golgotha" (i.e., Christ's death and resurrection seen as redemptive, world-transformative acts). In 1902, after having been a member of the Theosophical Society for less than one year, Steiner became the general secretary of its German national division. It was in this context that he came to know and work with Marie von Sivers (1867–1948), who would become life-long collaborator. In 1914, she became his second wife.

[63] Zander 2011: 77–100 provides information on the Weimar years.
[64] See Zander 2011: 101–120 on the Berlin years.
[65] Lindenberg 2012: 208–9
[66] Steiner's "conversion" to Theosophy is discussed in Zander 2011: 143–158.

In 1904, in addition to his other responsibilities within the Theosophical Society, then-leader Annie Besant appointed Steiner to be head of its *Esoterische Schule* for Germany and Austria, an institution comprised of different levels, each one called a 'class'.[67] Once his ties with the Theosophical Society were firmly established, his career as a writer and teacher picked up speed. Together with Marie von Sivers, he established a publishing company in 1908 (Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, as it would come to be known), a move that allowed him to disseminate a great deal of literature. A number of his central writings, such as *Theosophie* (1904), *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (1904/1905), and *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (1910), were produced during this period. Here, we encounter some of his ideas concerning, e.g., spiritual psychology, planetary evolution, the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, and the nature of evil in its dual character of Ahriman and Lucifer.

Although Rudolf Steiner had established a secure position in the top echelon of the Theosophical Society and the Esoteric School, he soon began to dissociate from the Theosophical Society. In 1907, the recurrent conference of the European sections of the Theosophical Society was held in Germany for the first time. In connection with it, Steiner and von Sivers presented a message that went against one of the core tenets of Theosophy, namely that the universal wisdom tradition had been best preserved in "Oriental" cultures. Instead, Steiner branded his message as a contemporary manifestation of a European, esoteric Christian tradition and increasingly referred to this Western path as Rosicrucian.[68] This gradually deepening schism intensified significantly when Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater introduced a new doctrine in 1909, namely that a young boy from India, Jiddu Krishnamurti, was being groomed for the position as the coming World Teacher who would usher in a major evolutionary spiritual leap for humanity. In 1911 the disagreements had progressed to a point that prompted Steiner and von Sivers to begin setting up their own organizational structures, and at the end of 1912 Steiner officially left the Theosophical Society and founded his own organization.[69]

Steiner led an intensely itinerant life and held roughly 6,000 lectures in which he developed his ideas. A textual corpus was formed that eventually grew to immense proportions since many of the lectures were transcribed by his followers.[70] It was also during these final years that most of the practical

[67] Regarding Steiner's meteoric career in the Theosophical Society and his central writings and doctrines from those years, see Zander 2011: 165–196.
[68] Zander 2007: 842
[69] When Besant founded the (organizationally independent) association the Order of the Star in the East in 1911 in order to promote Krishnamurti, Steiner responded by founding the Johannesbauverein, an equally independent organization. Somewhat later, on December 16, 1911, he founded an association for people "who want to cultivate a Rosicrucian human discipline." According to rumors, this association was already to be renamed the Anthroposophical Society in September 1912; cf. Zander 2007: 150–4.
[70] These lectures were not recorded verbatim, e.g., on wax rolls, but were preserved for posterity through the efforts of stenographers, whose renditions of his speeches were not subsequently

manifestations of Anthroposophy were created, often in a collaboration with others. A few of these will be mentioned in the following section. His ideas on topics such as education and farming are for many people their points of contact with Anthroposophy, whereas Steiner's esoteric doctrines are no doubt less widely known to the general public. With Steiner as charismatic leader, the organization grew, and plans were made to construct a building in Dornach, Switzerland, to serve as its headquarters. The structure would also function as a venue for conferences and various creative endeavors. The Goetheanum, as it came to be known, was the child of Anthroposophy's artistic impulses. Construction began in 1913. One of the first examples of organic architecture, it was designed by Steiner and was built by workers from all over Europe, including individuals from countries on opposing sides of the First World War. Made of wood, it reflected Steiner's view of the Goetheanist ideal of a new synthesis of religion, art, and science, domains he felt had become detached from one another in a secularized, materialist West. In his final years, he was faced with the necessity of planning for a second Goetheanum, as the first one tragically caught fire on New Year's Eve, 1922-23. Work was immediately begun on a new building, this time made of concrete, but it would not be completed in his lifetime. Rudolf Steiner gave his last lecture in late September of 1924, but he continued to work on his autobiography during the last months of his life when he was bedridden. He passed away on March 30, 1925.

2.3.2 Anthroposophy as worldview, practice, and organization

As briefly sketched in the preceding section, Steiner, on his own or in close collaboration with others, produced a vast body of texts on an astronomical range of topics; a series of practical applications that includes education, medicine, and agriculture; and successive organizational forms for the movement he created, forms that have furthermore morphed to respond to changing circumstances. Summarizing the fruits of his labors in a short space will inevitably amount to painting with broad strokes. Steiner's textual corpus, consisting of the relatively few books he authored and the much more voluminous collection of transcribed lectures, together referred to as the *Gesamtausgabe*, at the moment of writing (2021) comprises 354 volumes. In them, a gigantic array of topics is described in nearly baroque and (despite recurrent claims by Anthroposophists to the contrary) often contradictory detail. A very incomplete account of these teachings includes a number of claims that from an outsider's point of view are clearly rooted in Steiner's acquaintance

checked by Steiner himself. The relationship between the printed volumes containing these reproductions of his speeches and what Steiner actually said is of course impossible to judge. However, since present-day Anthroposophists refer to these volumes without such source-critical misgivings, the doctrinal foundation of Anthroposophy – besides the books he wrote and revised numerous times – consists of interpretations made by the editors of the *Gesamtausgabe* of more or less legible stenographic texts and not *sensu stricto* whatever Steiner may have said on any given topic.

with Theosophical teachings but that from an "orthodox" Anthroposophical perspective are the result of his clairvoyant investigations of a spiritual reality.[71]

Just as in Theosophical cosmology, Steiner posits that the present-day planet Earth was preceded by earlier, less dense incarnations. Like his Theosophical predecessors, he understood the present stage of our planet to be the third, but the rather lackluster designations as A, B, C, etc., were replaced in his descriptions with names such as "old Saturn," "old Sun," and "old Moon", although he informed his readers that there is no direct connection between those designations and the heavenly bodies today known as Saturn, the sun, and the moon. Steiner furthermore predicted that the Earth would continue to incarnate and that at some point in the distant future, stages that he referred to as the future Jupiter, Venus, and Vulcan would follow.[72] The present Earth stage is further divided into seven epochs according to a scheme with distinct echoes of similar conceptions in Theosophy but not normally referred to in this case as "races". In agreement with Theosophical conceptions of history, these are listed as the Polar, Hyperborean, Lemuric, Atlantic, and Aryan epochs, and, again, there are two future epochs lacking specific names. Each epoch is further divided into seven periods conceived of as cultural stages rather than as "subraces".[73] We are, according to Steiners model, presently in the fifth post-Atlantean stage of the Aryan epoch. [74] An innovation in respect to Theosophical historiographic schemata is that various spiritual beings govern successive epochs of history. Currently, we live in an age where the influence of a being by the name of Michael is said to be particularly important. More generally, events in the empirical, material world are often seen as the reflexes of spiritual forces. The concepts of Ahriman and Lucifer are particularly prominent in his discussion of how this correspondence between the spiritual and mundane realms plays out. A minimal summary of Steiner's many detailed discussions of these two entities, one making no attempt to summarize how his ideas about them gradually developed, would be that Lucifer is the epitome of the mystical but also of the illusory and superstitious, whereas Ahrimanic forces are associated with rationality but also in (for Steiner) excessively rigid forms. The challenge for human development is to balance these forces and succumb to neither.

History, from Steiner's perspective, is a story of gradual evolution, and, as in the Theosophical view, we incarnate over many lifetimes, which means that we are all part of this long evolutionary path. Steiner provides detailed accounts of how reincarnation works and gives numerous examples of who particular individuals were in the past. The most fundamental mechanism that determines how we are

[71] The most in-depth presentation of Steiner's teachings remains Helmut Zander's two-volume work (2007). A useful summary that highlights core elements of his doctrines rather than the many practical applications can be found in Brandt & Hammer (2013); the brief presentation here is based on these studies.
[72] Steiner 1986: 142 (GA 11)
[73] Steiner 1986: 32–3 (GA 11)
[74] See Zander 2007: 624ff. for a summary of this system of periodization.

reincarnated is identified as karma. Over time, the process of karma-directed reincarnation has a goal, i.e., a stage where the human being is able to fully gain knowledge of the spiritual world. Future epochs will see even higher stages of evolution, both planetary and human, in a process that Steiner describes in utopian terms: "ultimately spiritual knowledge transforms itself into love".[75]

Finally, Steiner created a gradually changing, complex, and in part quite innovative Christology. Helmut Zander provides a detailed account of how Steiner's understanding of Jesus and Christ (who are differentiated by Steiner) changed from 1902 to approximately 1912, the decade when Christology was a key theme in his work.[76] In *Der Christentum als mystische Tatsache* (1902), Steiner's first extended reflection on this topic, he describes Jesus as one of several initiated spiritual Masters. Jesus is purported to have presented the same spiritual insights that other enlightened individuals have also disseminated. The idea that different religious figures are bearers of the same underlying message reflects the Theosophical understanding that all religions have the same esoteric core, and Besant had in her book *Esoteric Christianity* (1901) argued for this ídea very shortly before Steiner published his reflections on the matter. In his later lectures and publications, beginning in 1906, Steiner fundamentally altered his views. Christianity was from that point no longer described as one of several essentially identical traditions and instead framed it as a unique impulse in human history. The precise nature of the Christian tradition, according to Steiner, only becomes clear when viewed through his clairvoyant perception. His claim to possess such a higher interpretive vantage point resulted in many innovative interpretations of Christian concepts and texts. A series of lectures given in September 1909 on the Gospel of Luke can serve as a particularly striking example.[77] The two genealogies of Jesus presented in two of the synoptic gospels, Matthew and Luke, are very different from each other. Steiner's explanation for this seeming contradiction, outlined in the lecture cycle, is that the two genealogies are actually those of two different boys, both of whom were called Jesus.

Such detailed cosmological, anthropological, and Christological descriptions coexist in an uneasy symbiosis with another set of foundational claims, namely that Steiner's pronouncements on such topics are the result of a method of spiritual investigation that can be pursued by others. Like Leadbeater had done before him, Steiner insisted that there is a path consisting of various steps – imagination, inspiration, and intuition – that, in theory, will lead to the development of clairvoyant cognition. Although Steiner and proponents of his work insist upon the full freedom of any individual to embark upon this particular path of exploration, it is nonetheless implied that the end result of such

[75] Steiner 1997: 397
[76] Zander 2007: 781–924
[77] Summarized in Zander 2007: 808. Steiner's lectures on Luke have been published as volume 114 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (Steiner 2001).

a journey will be a first-hand realization of the complete accuracy of Steiner's depictions of the cosmos, the constitution of the human body, reincarnation, and the true nature of Christ. In practice, few individuals have claimed to have attained such an exalted state, and the reaction of Anthroposophical leaders to, and the subsequent treatment of, such self-professed clairvoyants has been distinctly negative.[78]

Based on the cosmological and anthropological foundation laid down in his textual corpus, Steiner, as mentioned above, together with various associates, formulated a range of practical applications, often referred to in Anthroposophical parlance as "initiatives". For instance, a school based upon Steiner's ideas about education was established in Stuttgart in 1919 at the request of Emil Molt (1876–1936), a Theosophist and the director of a cigarette factory, who wished to provide schooling for the children of his employees.[79] According to Steiner's theory of personal development, we pass through seven-year stages, and teaching methods that suit the particular stage a child is in must be used.[80] The youngest children, for instance, need to learn through practical experience rather than abstract instruction. This perhaps somewhat commonsensical idea about the capability of pre-schoolers is linked to Steiner's postulated clairvoyant insights. He thus states that the fundamental shift that takes place at the age of seven involves an invisible etheric body becoming (in a sense) activated and a corresponding physical manifestation of this process occurring in the form of the loss of their milk teeth.

Another practical result of Steiner's collaboration with others is Anthroposophical medicine, the foundations of which were developed together with Ita Wegman (1876–1943), a medical doctor. During Steiner's lifetime, biomedicine became increasingly professionalized and ever more successful in curing various diseases, but alternative forms of treatment ranging from homeopathy to hydrotherapy remained relatively popular amongst the general public. Steiner positioned his ideas on medicine as founded on a strictly empirical investigation of spiritual realities, thus both rhetorically aligning himself with and transcending an empirically based biomedicine and distancing himself from "alternative" medical systems. Anthroposophical medicine nevertheless departs radically from biomedical principles and builds upon a complex synthesis of, amongst other things, Steiner's ideas about karma; his conception of an occult physiology, including the notion that there are various normally invisible components of the human body; a theory of correspondences; and a pharmaceutical practice inspired by homeopathy. Steiner, who had no medical training, produced statements that according to Helmut Zander's assessment[81] are unsystematic and contradictory and only became the

[78] Hammer & Swartz 2020
[79] Zander 2007: 1369–1380. The elements of a theory of education had been formulated in "Erziehung des Kindes vom Standpunkt der Geisteswissenschaft" (1907).
[80] For details, see Steiner 2007.
[81] Zander 2007: 1455

foundation of a medical practice through a long course of selective interpretation and additions created by others in a historical process that has been occluded by the insistence of insiders that Steiner personally enabled the development of every facet of Anthroposophical medicine. The collectively negotiated nature of Anthroposophical medicine is illustrated by Zander,[82] who describes a situation in which Steiner's personal contribution to the elaboration and empirical testing of one of his clairvoyantly perceived tenets consisted of him visiting a laboratory where Lili Kolisko, one of his followers, was working, looking into a microscope for roughly two minutes, and later returning to the laboratory for a three-hour visit.

The outlines of the third practical application to be mentioned here, biodynamic agriculture, were presented by Steiner in a series of eight lectures that he held just months before his death in 1925.[83] The theoretical preliminaries, published as *Geisteswissenschaftliche Grundlagen zum Gedeihen der Landwirtschaft. Landwirtschaftlicher Kurs*, were transformed into a practical method of agriculture by individuals such as the agronomist Erhard Bartsch (1895–1960). Biodynamic agriculture superficially resembles organic farming in, e.g., their shared avoidance of pesticides and their use of organic fertilizers. Biodynamic agriculture, however, differs fundamentally from organic farming by being based upon Steiner's alleged clairvoyant insights. The methods used include preparing the soil with substances that are said to strengthen vital forces. Based on Steiner's claim that cows receive astral impulses through their horns, one such substance is prepared by putting manure into a horn and leaving it in the ground over the winter. The timing of sowing and harvesting is calculated in accordance with astrological principles and the cycles of the moon.

As for the organizing principles of Anthroposophy, these changed drastically during Steiner's lifetime and have continued to develop since then. The schism between the Theosophical Society and the emergent Anthroposophical Society that occurred around the turning of 1912 into 1913 marked the beginning of an organized Anthroposophical movement. At a late stage in his life, Steiner decided to create an entirely new social formation. He perceived the original organization as a splintered entity lacking direction. He felt, for example, that Anthroposophical initiatives had come to overshadow it. Moreover, the efforts he had made to attract younger members resulted in a clash with those who had been part of the organization for a longer period of time, a development he found both frustrating and threatening. In part as a response to this conflict, he, during the organization's Christmas Conference of 1923, appointed a new executive council, made himself president, and re-founded the entire institution as the General Anthroposophical Society. It was also in connection with the Christmas Conference of 1923 that he established what he positioned as core of the organization, the *Freie Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft,* the School of Spiritual

[82] Zander 2007: 1468
[83] Zander 2007: 1579–1607

Science, whose structure is similar to the Theosophical Esoteric School mentioned above. Its purpose would be to conduct what he conceived of as spiritual research according to his instructions.

2.4 The Swedish context

The processes involved in the establishment and development of Anthroposophy in Sweden is characterized by the specific sociohistorical conditions of the country and by the role its immediate predecessor, Theosophy, played in presenting a religious alternative to the mainstream, dominant Lutheran Church. With the aim of providing a necessary background for understanding the social forces that enabled the emergence of a Swedish branch of Anthroposophy, this section will summarize some of the most salient facts about that context.

2.4.1 Background

The Sweden of today – a highly urbanized and technologized postindustrial country – differs greatly from its agrarian former self.[84] This drastic transformation was in part informed by two parallel yet seemingly contradictory processes: increasing secularization and increasing religious pluralism.[85] Regarding the former, in a relatively short span of time, the Church of Sweden, the Evangelical-Lutheran state church established in the sixteenth century, lost its position of dominance, a chain of events that ultimately culminated in its disestablishment in the year 2000.[86] The Reformation in Sweden was enforced by King Gustav Vasa (1496–1560), who established a single state Church for all of Sweden and thus a religious monopoly.[87] By 1593, all citizens of Sweden were under legal obligation to be members of the Lutheran state church. Religious hegemony persisted for almost three centuries, and only a small number of immigrants were allowed to belong to other Churches. These laws were finally changed, and first in 1860 and then in 1873 more liberal legislation allowed people to belong to the religious organization of their choice. The final step, allowing a Swedish citizen the freedom to have no religious affiliation at all, was established as late as 1952.

The fact that the Church of Sweden lost its hegemony over time has led in the contemporary period to generally low levels of professed belief and reported church attendance, and Sweden is not infrequently regarded by scholars as one of the most secularized countries in the world.[88] For instance, according to the International Social Survey Program's 2008 data on religion, only 3.2% of those

[84] Bäckström et al. 2004: 23–24, 27–31
[85] Svanberg & Westerlund 2008: 25–26
[86] [86] Bäckström et al. 2004: 9–10; af Burén 2015: 82
[87] For a basic introduction to Swedish Church history of the period, see *Sveriges kyrkohistoria,* in particular vols. 3 (on the Reformation), 4 (on the establishment of a Lutheran orthodoxy), and 5 (on the beginnings of religious, and especially radical Pietist, dissent).
[88] Ingelhart & Baker 2000; Zuckerman 2008; Hagevi 2017

surveyed who identified with the Church of Sweden reported attending services regularly, while 26.5% responded that they never do.[89] Its declining membership is also evident: from having had 7,754,784 members out of a total population of roughly 8,1 million people in 1972, numbers dropped in 2020 to 5,728,748 out of a population that had by then risen to over 10 million.[90] Studies also indicate that the free churches are facing a similar situation of shrinking membership rosters and dwindling attendance rates.[91]

Research looking into secularization in modern Sweden has, however, in part through revealing identities with blurred boundaries, demonstrated that the matter is far from uncomplicated.[92] The gradual relaxation of the religious monopoly described above has also led to the second process to be mentioned here, namely religious pluralism. The groups that originated in the wake of the Protestant revival movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, e.g., the Missionary Covenant Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Sweden, and other *frikyrkor* (known as "free churches" for having broken free from the state church), were amongst the first organizations to contribute to what would become a diverse religious landscape.[93] Processes of migration have also contributed to unprecedented levels of ethnic and religious diversity in Sweden.[94] Due to immigration, the presence of such religious traditions as Islam has increased at a time ostensibly characterized by secularization.[95] Moreover, as Frisk and Åkerbäck point out, while engagement in traditional organizations is steadily declining, engagement in other activities that, depending on one's definition of religion, are religious without necessarily being institutionalized, e.g., various "New Age" activities, courses, and wellness fairs, is on the rise, a process which is at first more difficult to detect precisely due to the lack of affiliation with organizations in the traditional sense.[96]

To summarize, amongst the forms of religiosity represented in this altered landscape, one finds the so-called world religions; a largely unorganized variety of beliefs and practices often grouped together under the umbrella term New Age; and a number of new charismatic Christian groups, some of which have emerged as the products of international influences.[97] It is in the light of this changed – and constantly changing – religious landscape, with its twin forces of increasing secularization and pluralism, that we can see the situation of the

[89] Kasselstrand 2015: 289
[90] Svenska kyrkans medlemsutveckling år 1972–2020. https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik. Accessed Sept. 28, 2021.
[91] Skog 2010
[92] af Burén 2015; Thurfjell 2015
[93] Bergsten 1995: 15
[94] Svanberg & Westerlund 2008: 26–27
[95] Sorgenfrei 2018
[96] Frisk & Åkerbäck 2013
[97] Frisk 2007; Hammer 2004a; Hornborg 2012

organization that is the focus of this project, i.e., the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden.

2.4.2 Anthroposophy comes to Sweden

2.4.2.1 Theosophy prepares the way

Sweden was a place of significance for the international Theosophical movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many of those who would become the first generation of Swedish Anthroposophists initially came to know Steiner as a Theosophical lecturer and writer of note. Before briefly discussing the establishment and development of an Anthroposophical movement in Sweden, a few words about the role played by Theosophy in Sweden are therefore in order.

The gradual secularization of Swedish society in the second half of the nineteenth century led many intellectuals to reject mainstream Christian beliefs. A major conduit of liberal, free thought was the journal *Sanningssökaren* ("The Seeker after Truth"), published from 1877 to 1893.[98] It was in the circles associated with this journal that occultism, in the form of Theosophy, reached Sweden. The celebrated writer Victor Rydberg (1828–1895) in particular was both highly critical of Christianity and instrumental in enabling a sympathetic reception of Theosophy in Sweden. The Swedish national division of the Theosophical Society was formally established in 1889 and found a receptive audience amongst people who felt that answers to the challenges of the times could be found in an amalgam of Eastern wisdom, science, and faith in progress. Courses were offered, lectures were held, and in 1890 a translation of Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy* appeared. It became the first book in Swedish to be studied in the country's Theosophical lodges. The following years witnessed an increase in the Theosophical Society's activity, with events for the general public being organized in different parts of the country and international Theosophical celebrities coming to visit. By 1895, lodges were found in 15 places, largely in southern Sweden.[99]

When the international Theosophical Society splintered, the Swedish one did as well, and on September 13, 1896, the *Svenska Teosofiska Samfundet*, the Swedish Theosophical Society, was founded. This division resulted in a polarization. American Theosophy, in particular when under the leadership of Katherine Tingley, mentioned above as one who became embroiled in the dramatic events that followed Blavatsky's death, emphasized decentralization and an ideal of Theosophical brotherhood. Anglo-Indian Theosophy, associated with Besant and Leadbeater, on the other hand, focused on esotericism and transpersonal psychology. In Sweden, the American-influenced current was similarly more open for societal engagement, while the Anglo-Indian-influenced one retained its

[98] Petander 2016
[99] Lejon 1997: 127–128

esoteric character by operating partially closed lodges. Both maintained a significant presence in Sweden.

Beginning in the late 1920s and the 1930s, Theosophy in Sweden went into a period of decline. Swedish Theosophists became enmeshed in the scandal involving Leadbeater and the Anglo-Indian division, a situation that attracted negative attention in the local media. The American division under Tingley had plans to establish a major center in Sweden on the island of Visingsö, but in 1929 the then 77-year-old Tingley died as the result of injuries sustained in a car accident, and with her out of the picture, interest in the project ground to a halt. At the time of the schism that arose between Steiner and Besant, however, the Theosophical movement still had a strong presence in the Swedish cultural landscape, a factor that no doubt facilitated the emergence of a vital Anthroposophical movement there.[100]

2.4.2.2 Anthroposophy enters the Swedish religious landscape

Although this study deals with the *stories* people tell about the period of expansion, discussed below, up to when the interviews were held, and thus not with any historically accurate rendering of actual past events, a brief summary of the main developments that took place during these crucial decades, summarized from the work of historian of ideas Håkan Lejon,[101] can serve as a useful backdrop for contextualization.

According to Lejon, one can discern four historical stages in how Anthroposophy has been received by, and integrated with, the Swedish cultural landscape. Firstly, he maintains, we can see what he terms *the period of reception*, which lasted from 1890 to 1930. It was during this period that the split between Theosophy and Anthroposophy took place and reached Sweden. Very shortly after Rudolf Steiner broke ties with the Theosophical mother organization, a group of thirty-nine Swedish Theosophists followed his lead and, in a meeting held in Stockholm on January 31, 1913, founded the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society (Antroposofiska Sällskapet Svenska Avdelning, abbreviated A.S.S.A.).[102] A second Anthroposophical group was established in the city of Norrköping only four weeks later.

During the period of reception, Steiner's teachings were presented as a reformed version of Christianity, a way of framing Anthroposophy that meshed with the critical views of the established churches that at the time were a prominent theme in Swedish cultural debates.[103] Texts by Steiner were translated into Swedish, and the selection of texts rendered into the local language reinforced

[100] Lejon 1996: 129–136
[101] For the period up to ca. 1980, see the detailed account in Lejon 1997: 172–230; or, more succinctly but also more up to date, Lejon 2016: 61–63.
[102] Lejon 1997: 137
[103] On the period of introduction, see Lejon 1997: 137-151.

the impression of Anthroposophy as a Christian movement. Lejon notes that Steiner, in the last years of his life, distanced himself from the label "esoteric Christianity", which had come to be used to characterize his teachings, but he also writes that Swedish Anthroposophists were unaffected by this ideological turn and continued to view Steiner's teachings in this light until the late 1940s.[104]

The period of reception ended with the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society following on the sidelines and adapting to new circumstances as the central organization was racked with conflicts that ended with the expulsion of several key members and the ideological unification of an organizationally restructured movement governed by individuals who led the organization in top-down fashion. Much of the activity focused on cultivating the doctrinal contents of Anthroposophy. The 1930s and, to an even greater extent, the 1940s – roughly, Lejon's *period of conversion* – were characterized by an increasing dominance of the practical applications that were based on Steiner's directives. The first Waldorf school in Sweden had opened in the previous period in Lejon's periodization, in 1931, but attracted only six pupils to its first-grade class and was so poorly funded that its first teacher worked for nearly no pay.[105] A broader interest in this form of education arose in the 1940s, a decade that also saw the establishment of an organization whose aim it was to support the interests of biodynamic farmers (*Föreningen för främjandet av Biologiskt Dynamiska Odlingen*). The 1930s was also the decade when an Anthroposophical milieu in the area known as Järna, located south of Stockholm, was established, when the first (Swedish) curative home based on Anthroposophical principles was founded there in 1935.[106] The history of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden is intimately linked with the area known as Järna. While, as was also the case in Central Europe, Anthroposophy was at first an urban phenomenon and thus took root in Swedish cities, some of the earliest Anthroposophically influenced initiatives that developed in the country at this time did so in more rural areas, Järna being one of them. Reflections on the role of Järna will be a recurring motif in the analysis of the interview material presented in chapter 4.

During the period of conversion in Sweden, dramatic events were unfolding on the European continent. In Central Europe, the Anthroposophical movement's development was greatly impacted by the two world wars and their outcomes. Towards the end of the interwar period, it was banned in Germany. Subsequently, Anthroposophical institutions were either closed or dissolved entirely, and social networks were broken down. A number of Anthroposophists fled to Sweden in order to escape persecution. These individuals played crucial roles in the establishment and development of the Anthroposophically-inspired enterprises and institutions there. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Anthroposophical community in Sweden provided economic support to the

[104] Lejon 1997: 141
[105] Lejon 1997: 149
[106] Lejon 1997: 160

activities that were held at the Goetheanum, which, at that time, was dependent upon such outside assistance for its survival as is still the case at present. After the war, Anthroposophists in Sweden extended their help to Anthroposophical institutions in Central Europe so that they could be reestablished.[107]

Following this, we have in Lejon's historiography a *period of expansion* which lasted from 1955 to 1985. This was a period of economic boom in Sweden and of expansion for the welfare state that was made possible by these favorable circumstances. Broader cultural trends during this period also meshed with the values projected by various Anthroposophical applications: concern for the environment led to an increased interest in organic and biodynamic farming (two modes of cultivating the land that one suspects were not clearly distinguished in the minds of the general public). A call for a more holistic approach to medicine and a turbulent period of reform in the Swedish public school system similarly led to an upturn for Anthroposophical alternatives. During this phase of expansion, demand for Waldorf education, centers for curative education and therapy, and biodynamic products increased dramatically, and a large number of new anthroposophical institutions appeared. From being a few dozen in the 1950s, Lejon concludes, there were by the mid-1980s more than 600 such institutions in Sweden.

In Lejon's description of the historical development of the Anthroposophical movement in Sweden, financial realities – the economic advantage of promoting the many practical applications versus the chronic lack of funding for the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden – led to the increasing promotion of the practical aspects of Anthroposophy and a concomitant marginalization of its esoteric doctrines. The Swedish artist Arne Klingborg (1915–2005), who had during the period in question recently been elected leader of the Swedish national society, launched the idea of marketing Anthroposophy by organizing exhibitions in the late 1950s and early 1960s that were intended to highlight such applications of Anthroposophy as Waldorf education. The expansion that Lejon refers to was hence that of the practical aspects of Steiner's legacy. The more esoteric doctrinal contents of his teachings, by contrast, became less and less of a focus as expansion continued in the 1970s and 1980s. Besides being a result of economic necessity, this was also the result of an ideological orientation within the organization itself. Although Anthroposophical institutions clearly benefited from the countercultural interests of the time, the leaders of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden did not wish to be associated with the counterculture and instead attempted to stick to a more orthodox Steinerian position. Doctrinal orthodoxy, however, seems to have attracted a quite limited number of people, and during this period, the role of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden itself, credited by Lejon as being the bearer of the esoteric tradition's ideas within the Anthroposophical movement, became, according to him, increasingly limited and inconspicuous. During the 1980s, the organization

[107] Lejon 1996: 122

was restructured yet again in order to better correspond with the movement's changing emphasis: Anthroposophical applications, rather than esotericism and esoteric study groups, Lejon, writes, won an even greater influence on the form it would take, and a reorganization of the School of Spiritual Science (*Fria Högskolan för Antroposofi* or *Högskolan* in Swedish), benefited the practical applications of Anthroposophy. The area known as Järna had, as mentioned above, become the home of some Anthroposophical enterprises already in the 1930s, but it was now that it became the primary center of Anthroposophically-inspired initiatives in Sweden. An Anthroposophical hospital (Vidarkliniken) opened in 1985, and a large building dedicated to the arts (Kulturhuset) was inaugurated in 1992.[108]

Lastly comes the period of *integration*, which began in 1985 and which Lejon in 1996 asserted was still playing itself out.[109] Anthroposophically-inspired institutions and enterprises have throughout this period been integrated into Swedish social and cultural life, and functional forms of cooperation have been developed between the different institutions in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu. According to his assessment, Anthroposophy has continued to adapt to Swedish needs; esotericism is toned down, and Anthroposophical applications remain the most prominent and visible aspect of Anthroposophy. Lejon notes, however, that this expansion of Anthroposophy as a broad movement has gone hand in hand with a diversification where the links to Steiner's legacy have become less obvious and no organization has succeeded in being able to unite the many, and very diverse, manifestations of Anthroposophy.

2.4.2.3 The organization of Anthroposophy in Sweden

The innumerable twists and turns in the story of how Anthroposophy in its various manifestations has been organized and reorganized after Steiner's death, internationally and in Sweden, is a topic well beyond the confines of this study. The reason for this is, as will become apparent below (pp. 41-2), that the precise organizational structure of the Anthroposophical milieu is both mutable and – partly for legal reasons – opaque to outsiders. The key issue is that the relationship between the formal organization in the strict sense of the term and the many other entities inspired by Steiner's legacy is convoluted and contested. As many quotes in chapters 4 to 6 will show, there are voices that call for more independence in the relationship between, e.g., the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and the Waldorf movement, while others urge for more cooperation.

On a rather general level, it can be noted that in Sweden, as is also the case in other countries around the world, Anthroposophy is organizationally divided into several structures. Individuals having a general interest in Anthroposophy can come together in the AAG (Allgemeine Anthroposophische Gesellschaft, i.e., the General Anthroposophical Society), which also arranges courses and

[108] Lejon 2016: 62
[109] Lejon 1996: 231–233

disseminates information for non-members. The School of Spiritual Science, on the other hand, functions as a meeting place for Anthroposophists who wish to deepen their engagement. The interests of separate branches of activity, such as education or biodynamic agriculture, are taken up by independent organizations often organized as foundations. In Sweden, one finds, for example, Waldorfskolefederationen (the Waldorf School Federation), Riksföreningen för Waldorfpedagogik (the National Association for Waldorf Education), and Föreningen för Antroposofisk Läkekonst (FALK) (the Association for the Anthroposophical Art of Healing).

Järna, located roughly 45 kilometers southwest of Stockholm, has, as was mentioned above, served as a hub for Anthroposophical activities since the mid-1930s. One presently finds there, as one does in Dornach, a cultural center and other buildings designed in the characteristic style and color scheme of Anthroposophical architecture. In 1986, Vidarkliniken, also mentioned above, opened its doors in Järna; it closed in 2019, but during the time it operated it was the only Anthroposophical hospital in Scandinavia. Other Anthroposophically inspired activities, enterprises, and institutions are encountered throughout the country. There are over forty Waldorf schools in Sweden, for example, and biodynamic crops are produced in a number of regions.[110] The organizational, financial, and personal interrelations between these entities are, however, relatively opaque. The only published overview that addresses these questions[111] was printed in a publication produced by a skeptical organization, Vetenskap och Folkbildning (roughly, "Science and Public Education"), which has at its goal to debunk and discredit movements they consider to be "pseudoscientific" (such as Anthroposophy), but, with this source critical caveat in mind, the piece in question cites specific amounts of money and provides the names of individuals in positions of power and is backed with references to sources. Briefly, this survey shows that Anthroposophical activities in Sweden at the time it was published were organized in roughly 70 foundations (*stiftelser*), 55 associations, 120 shareholding companies, and a number of other organizational forms. Those entities that are established as foundations are largely protected from insight by outsiders (i.e., those not involved in a foundation in an official capacity) by Swedish law, which makes it even harder to map the connections between them. Whatever the organizational form, they are in most cases governed by boards. Legally, these entities are separate, but a small number of people at the time the survey was published held positions on numerous governing boards. The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden is, from this perspective, thus merely one relatively small player in a much larger field and has relatively little to do, institutionally or otherwise, with many of the other organizations functioning within it.

[110] Hammer 2008: 326
[111] Appelgren 2014

As this brief summary implies, unraveling the precise relationships existing between the countless schools, clinics, farms, banks, shops, curative institutions, etc., and the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden itself in terms of organizational structures, financial flows, and individuals in positions of power within these various entities would, for reasons having to do with Swedish law, quite simply be impossible. Importantly for the present purposes, the organizational structure also appears to be diffuse in the minds of Anthroposophists: interviewees vacillate in their terminology and are often vague about the structure of the milieu that they are part of. In this study, the terms *the General Anthroposophical Society* and *the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden* are reserved for organizations with dues-paying members and governing councils. The terms *the Anthroposophical milieu* and *the Anthroposophical movement* will be used synonymously for the broader set of entities that, whatever their formal ties may be, are linked to Steiner's ideas.

This brief sketch of the history of more than a century of Anthroposophical presence in Sweden provides a useful context for the stories that will be presented in later chapters. Nonetheless, the way in which the stories told to me correspond or do not correspond to the history of the movement as recorded by outside observers such as historians is not a concern of this study. Stories are a genre of their own that can be analyzed in the perspective of suitable theories and elicited by methods ranging from interview methodology to fieldwork. It is to these theories and methods that we shall turn in the next chapter.

3 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

3.1 Anthroposophy as esoteric current and New Religious Movement

3.1.1 A scholarly habitus in the study of Anthroposophy

How can one contextualize the Anthroposophical movement as a topic of academic study? The approaches chosen to engage with any given field within the more general discipline of the study of religions depend of course to a significant extent on the empirical materials that are available. Quite obviously, defunct religions can only be studied through written sources and material remains, whereas living traditions allow other methods, e.g., fieldwork. Besides such rather evident limitations and possibilities, various fields within the study of religions are also infused with what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, a somewhat elusive term that he defined as "dispositions to a certain practice".[112] What this implies for scholarly practice is that a certain set of approaches becomes the default mode of studying a phenomenon, not because there is any inherent logical necessity to do so (as when interviews are impossible to carry out if the last potential informant has passed away) but out of an adherence to a historically contingent mode of dealing with a topic.[113] The academic study of Anthroposophy, in many ways still a fledgling field, is clearly influenced by a particular habitus.

Major scholarly encyclopedias in the study of religions, such as the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, generally categorize Anthroposophy as a form of Western esotericism.[114] Key monographs that specifically study Anthroposophy also typically place the movement under that rubric.[115] This section will briefly survey the main definitions of the concept of Western esotericism, argue for the limited use of the concept for the purposes of the present study, and pave the way for the next section in which it will be argued that framing Anthroposophy as a new religious movement is the better pragmatic choice in the case of this study. This choice, it should be stressed, does not concern the question of whether Anthroposophy is better conceptualized as an esoteric current or a new religious movement (since it can be cogently argued that it is both) but rather that different research questions, theoretical approaches, and methods of inquiry are more naturally associated with one or the other of these labels.

Scholars who identify their field as the study of Western esotericism investigate such topics as the history of astrology, magic, alchemy, mesmerism, spiritualism, Theosophy, paganism, and New Age spiritualities. It has, however, proved to be

[112] Bourdieu 1994: 77
[113] Hammer 2004b
[114] Leijenhorst 2005
[115] See Zander 2007: 16–20.

challenging to find shared defining traits in phenomena as diverse as such a list suggests. Nevertheless, several attempts at providing substantive definitions have been made.

The arguably most influential definition was formulated by one of the founding figures of the study of Western esotericism, Antoine Faivre. In 1992, Faivre described esotericism as a "form of thought" characterized by four universally shared characteristics plus two that occur frequently but not with the same ubiquity.[116] The first of the four intrinsic characteristics is *correspondences*: all parts of the cosmos are understood to be linked by symbolic or in other ways non-empirical connections. This is, for example, the rationale behind the astrological belief that links exist between human affairs and the movements of celestial bodies. The second involves the concept of a *living nature*. According to this view, the entire natural world is alive and imbued with a soul or energy. Third, insight into this normally hidden state of affairs goes via *imagination and mediation*; images, rituals, etc., can be used as such mediating elements. Fourth, it is stressed that the person who pursues an esoteric pathway will experience an inner *transmutation*. The alchemist or the member of an initiatory esoteric order is deemed to have ascended to a radically new spiritual level. The two extrinsic characteristics are the belief that there is a fundamental *concordance* between different religious traditions and esoteric currents and a particular mode of *transmission* through initiation for those who wish to access esoteric teachings.

Other attempts at defining the field have been proposed since Faivre's seminal contribution. One alternative understanding has been formulated by historian of religions Kocku von Stuckrad, who suggests that "the esoteric" is a form of discourse claiming to have access to higher or absolute knowledge.[117] Another attempt at defining esotericism has been proposed by professor of religious studies Arthur Versluis. Western esoteric traditions in his view share the element of direct spiritual insight into otherwise hidden aspects of reality and the notion that this insight is available only to a restricted group of people.[118] A very different kind of approach has been suggested by yet another leading scholar of Western esotericism, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, who sees esotericism as a kind of wastebasket category of motley cultural elements united mainly by the fact that they have been rejected both by the theological mainstream and by Enlightenment rationalists and their successors.[119]

These definitions point in quite distinct directions, but they privilege what people say they believe in and to a lesser extent what rituals they perform, focus

[116] The definition was introduced in Faivre 1992: 13-21; for an English version, see Faivre 1994: 3-19.
[117] Von Stuckrad 2005: 9–10
[118] Versluis 2002: 1–15
[119] Hanegraaff 2012

in particular on elite producers of such beliefs, and pay little attention to such classical sociological questions as how they organize. Consequently, one can note that although the set of phenomena studied by scholars of Western esotericism is the focus of cross-disciplinary research, the disciplines represented are primarily historically oriented (e.g., history of religions, art history, the history of literature, etc.). The scholarly habitus has thus privileged certain approaches at the expense of others, and anthropologists and sociologists are, at least at present, much more infrequently represented in, e.g., edited volumes and conferences dedicated to Western esotericism. Placing any given phenomenon under the label of Western esotericism will invite a study of concepts (cosmologies, soteriologies, etc.), rituals (casting spells, interpreting horoscopes, etc.), and "high cultural" practices (art, literature, etc.). A study that only to a limited extent engages with the beliefs and rituals of Anthroposophists (as they are largely irrelevant for its purposes) has little to gain from placing its object of study in the category chosen by most scholars who have studied the movement.

3.1.2 Conceptualizing Anthroposophy as a "settled" New Religious Movement

Conceptualizing Anthroposophy as a new religious movement might at first seem like a peculiar path to pursue. The adjective "new" in new religious movement is often, whether explicitly or implicitly, understood as the post Second World War period.[120] The movements studied by the founding figures of the field – Eileen Barker, Massimo Introvigne, John Lofland, J. Gordon Melton, James R. Lewis, and others too numerous to mention – differ quite radically from Anthroposophy in that they come across as highly mutable, are led by charismatic leaders, and often live lives in a considerable degree of antagonism with the surrounding society. The issues studied by these scholars are also quite different from the ones pursued here: how such volatile and tension-filled movements recruit new members, how they could be conceptualized within an extended church/sect typology, etc. In this section, I will argue that such misgivings are in fact misplaced and that viewing Anthroposophy as a new religious movement that has passed beyond the formative stage opens up vistas both for studying Anthroposophy and for understanding a particular developmental stage of new religious movements more generally.

[120] The question of whether Anthroposophy is a *religious* movement or not is an issue of a somewhat different kind and can briefly be addressed here. Insiders consistently deny that Anthroposophy is a religion. From a scholarly perspective, however, Anthroposophy has all the elements that one typically associates with a religion, e.g., a charismatic founder whose status is based on claims of having direct insight into a normally invisible spiritual dimension of existence, a plethora of culturally postulated suprahuman beings that are said to influence our lives, concepts of an afterlife, canonical texts, and rituals. Religions whose members deny that the movement they belong to has anything to do with religion but is instead, e.g., a philosophical perspective or a form of science, are not uncommon in the modern world, but the historical and strategical reason for this is a matter that goes beyond the confines of this study.

The relatively common practice of seeing new religious movements as a post Second World War phenomenon is a convention rather than a solidly argued and theoretically grounded delimitation. The early literature on new religious movements typically dealt with such recently created (or imported) religions, but the closest one comes to an explicit suggestion that 1945 should be a starting point for the field is an article by one of the founding figures of the field, Eileen Barker.[121] However, this limit in time has not been universally accepted by scholars in the field, and Barker's article was composed as a response to, and in disagreement with, an article written by J. Gordon Melton (2004). No essential difference would seem to demarcate a movement that has its roots in the first decades of the twentieth century (or even earlier) from more recent new religions.

The focus on issues of perceived deviance and antagonism has its origins in the historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of the field. The new religions that became visible in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to challenge the values of mainstream society to such a degree that they gave rise to concerned reactions from outsiders. Much of the scholarly effort was therefore oriented towards addressing these concerns and was primarily sociologically informed. Somewhat paradoxically, much scholarly effort was spent "normalizing" these religions, e.g., by refuting widespread claims in the media that those so-called cults were inherently violent and dangerous and that those who joined were brainwashed into doing so, while at the same time identifying their deviance as shared trait.[122]

Some of the main foci of academic research was the construction of typologies of religion that could encompass the unfamiliar new movements. One problem with doing so was the obvious diversity of these new religions. A recurrent suggestion made by leading scholars of new religions was that the tension with the surrounding society that seemed to characterize many of these organizations was their uniting trait. To take a symptomatic case of this trend, in "An Introduction to New Religions", one of the most prominent scholars of the study of new religions, J. Gordon Melton, suggests a way of approaching religious groups in which each can be seen as being one of four types. The first such grouping, *churches*, includes what he refers to as "established religions", i.e., dominant religious groups that have the power to "designate the boundaries of

[121] Barker 1989: 145

[122] The claim that new religious movements are by their very nature violent and abusive was the result of widely publicized cases such as the Jonestown massacre that many concerned individuals in the media and the anticult movement believed was due to an inherent feature of such movements. A major scholarly publication that showed that Jonestown was an exception to the rule that most of the new religions were not prone to violent, abusive, or criminal behavior is Bromley & Melton 2002. The brainwashing controversy has generated a substantial body of literature. See Ashcraft 2018: 110-117 for a survey of the history of the concept and the controversy surrounding it. The seminal monograph that debunked the claim that conversion to "cults" was due to brainwashing techniques is Barker 1984.

acceptable deviation in belief and practice and to identify those groups that fall outside those boundaries".[123] The second is *ethnic religions* and here he counts (within a Western context) those (non-Christian) groups that "serve a particular ethnic constituency". The third is made up of *sects*, which are in this case described as groups that resemble the larger churches but which are perceived as being "stricter on matters of belief, more diligent in practice, and more fervent in worship". Studding a continuum on the way to churchhood, new sects arise continuously in order to protest older sects' tendencies to adopt churchlike qualities (e.g., being less strict). Lastly, *new religions* are what is left over after one has set aside the other three types.[124]

Although these movements do not, according to Melton, share a "particular set of attributes", what they do have in common is that they all have been consigned to a "relatively contested space within society" on "the fringe of the dominant religious culture".[125] In sum, and in the words of Melton, "[n]ew religions are thus primarily defined not by any characteristic(s) that they share, but by their relationship to the other forms of religious life represented by the dominant churches, the ethnic religious, and the sects".[126] While the outsider status bestowed upon them by both the dominant religious culture and elements of the surrounding secular culture is not awarded due to the presence of any single characteristic, there are a number of things a group can do that will result in it being regarded as unacceptable.[127] Examples listed by Melton include:

> the adoption of a different sexual ethic (which might include arranged marriages, polygamy, pedophilia, free love, or other minority sexual behavior); violent (homicide, suicide, brutality) or otherwise illegal (fraud, drug use) behavior; separatism; a communal life (which often includes separatism); a distinctive diet (veganism, macrobiotics) or medical restrictions (no doctors, no blood transfusions), and the espousing of apocalyptic beliefs about the end of the world.[128]

Other objections raised by outsiders may have to do with "conservative approaches to the role of women, a perceived foreignness, or racial exclusiveness, or authoritarian leadership".[129] The greater the number of "questionable attributes" a group possesses, the more unacceptable it will be regarded as being.[130]

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[123] Melton 2008: 26
[124] Melton 2008: 27
[125] Melton 2004:73, 2008: 27
[126] Melton 2008: 27
[127] Melton 2008: 28
[128] Melton 2008: 29
[129] Melton 2008: 29
[130] Melton 2008: 28

Melton's emphasis on deviance and tension is echoed in much of the then developing research on new religious movements. Sociologist of religion David G. Bromley, for instance, discussed the new religions in terms of their alignment or "degree of congruence with the dominant culture and dominant institutions".[131] New religious movements are young religions that differ in significant ways from the structures and what he designates as the "symbolic patterns" of mainstream society. Although the concepts and rituals of a religious movement are encompassed in the definition of alignment, it is for Bromley, as for Melton, the distance of these concepts and rituals from the dominant ones that is characteristic of new religious movements and not their substantive contents.[132] Eileen Barker similarly stresses that the newness of new religious movements gives them certain characteristics and that as a social scientist she insists that these characteristics can be understood in terms of "the actions of believers, their life style, leadership patterns and organization."[133] Newness results in such characteristics as new institutional structures, a large proportion of converts in relation to members who have grown up in the movement, a reliance on charismatic authority, a rapid rate of change, and, again, a degree of antagonism in relation to surrounding society.[134] It can be noted that the distance between the new religious movement and the broader social context is one of perception and needs not be symmetrical: movements that view the goals and aspirations of majority culture as something positive can be shunned by the same majority. Roy Wallis' 1984 volume *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* demarcates world-rejecting movements that dismiss the goals of dominant society as fundamentally flawed and world-accommodating movements that emphasize the inner, spiritual life of its members from world-affirming movements that hold out the promise of becoming more successful at achieving those goals. Scientology claims to have tools that will enable a person to unlock their true potential and is in this sense a world-affirming religion, but that has not prevented Scientology from being one of the most controversial new religions in the eyes of outsiders.

An explanation for why people would want to join a group that is antagonistic to many of the values of mainstream society was sought for, and social deprivation theory was of the main avenues explored.[135] According to a widely cited model of conversion to new religious movements crafted by two prominent scholars of the field, John Lofland and Rodney Stark, and formulated along such lines, a person needs to experience severe and enduring "tensions", see religion as a solution, and identify as a seeker in order to be predisposed to convert to what they characteristically called a "deviant perspective". Phrased somewhat differently, new religious movements were perceived as being so radically alien

[131] Bromley 2004: 92
[132] Bromley 2004: 83–97
[133] Barker 2004: 91
[134] Barker 2004: 92–99
[135] Lofland & Stark 1965

to run-of-the-mill social values that a personal feeling of suffering from enduring, significant problems was needed in order to make becoming a member seem like an attractive prospect.

The fact that much scholarship was devoted to the earliest, emergent phase of various movements created a particular habitus in the field dedicated to the study of new religious movements. Several decades have passed both since the creation of the high-profile movements that provided the primary empirical materials and since the development of a scholarly discipline aiming to understand these movements. The questions raised and the answers provided by much of the early literature on new religious movements seem more suited to studying the vibrant and dynamic nature and the oppositional stance of a relatively small-scale movement that focuses on the life and teachings of a charismatic leader than the operations of a post-charismatic organization that has grown in size, has a global presence, consists of many different branches and sub-organizations, has a complex managerial structure, and attracts people with vastly differing levels of commitment. The emergent movements of the 1960s and 1970s have since then transitioned into this post-charismatic phase, and although some research into this new stage has been carried out, the habitus that arose as the field emerged has largely remained in place.[136]

An early contribution to studying more settled new religions was undertaken by Timothy Miller,[137] who focused on the generation or generations following the death of the initial leader when a still relatively new movement changes its organizational structure and attempts to come to grips with a different style of leadership, an aging membership base, a less marked sense of marginalization in relation to the rest of society, and so forth. Studies of how ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or the "Hare Krishna movement") has fared over the decades since its introduction in the West have constituted welcome additions to understanding post-charismatic, large-scale organizations.[138] Numerous other movements that have passed from a young, charismatic stage to a more settled mode of operating have experienced an analogous shift in structure, but this settled phase of such religions remains understudied. David Bromley insists that the process of "maturation and settling" is one that "presents scholars with promising issues for further development of the area of research."[139] Ashcraft concurs, concluding his study of the history of the study of new religious movements by suggesting that a way forward for the field would be to follow the lead of the minority of scholars who have moved away from the dominant paradigm of seeing new religious movements through their otherness and as a problem that needs to be explained and addressed. The approach proposed here and fleshed out below is one that

[136] Ashcraft 2018: 238-241
[137] Miller 1991
[138] Bryant & Ekstrand 2004; Rochford 2007
[139] Bromley 2012:26

contributes to this move: rather than focusing on the deviance, tension, and sheer otherness of new religions, it instead looks at one particular movement that, in Bromley's terminology, has matured and settled.

3.2 "Settled new religions" as corporations

The question naturally arises: why do movements change as they enter the settled phase? The broadest explanation for the changes exhibited by religions as they go from the emergent stage to the mature and settled one is that religions form part of the general cultural context and have to adapt to it. In order to survive and thrive, they need to pass from a stage at which they in the terminology of David Bromley and Douglas Cowan (2015: 197-8) are still "experimental faiths" and adjust successfully to the demands of the surrounding culture. This cultural context can at present be roughly characterized in terms of having a capitalist economy and being informed by neoliberalism. As sociologist Susan Braedley and gender studies scholar Meg Luxton observe, neoliberalism remains a prominent political philosophy for many governments and international institutions around the world and is an inescapable force that confronts most people in the world.[140] This implies, regardless of whether a particular organization that is embedded in this context is a religious or secular one, *inter alia* a need to generate revenue and manage a cash flow by offering and successfully marketing an appealing product, to organize day-to-day activities within the framework of an often quite complex administrative system, and to find a space within various national legal systems that regulate such matters as valid organizational forms, tax benefits, and so forth.

The adaptation of religions to the socioeconomic realities of contemporary capitalist and neoliberal culture has been identified and examined by several other scholars. For instance, in *Church, Market, and Media* (2017), scholar of the study of religions Marcus Moberg examines the ways in which marketization and mediatization, which he positions as being "accompanied by the spread of a set of powerful discourses and discursive formations that have proliferated throughout ever more social and cultural domains and increasingly come to underpin contemporary criteria of effective institutional and organizational life, agency, practice, and communication",[141] have affected how traditional institutional churches have come to view and react to the broader social and cultural environment in which they presently find themselves.[142] Touching upon the fact that the overall character of the institutions with which his study is concerned, i.e., Christian Protestant churches, is undergoing changes, as is also the case with their organizational culture and communication practices, he points out that this situation is neither arbitrary nor coincidental since these changes have occurred as "a consequence of a particular set of broader social changes that have followed in the wake of the rise and spread of neoliberalism

[140] Braedley & Luxton 2010: 3
[141] Moberg 2017: 9.
[142] Moberg 2017: 11

since the early 1980s and rapid advances in new media technologies since the early 1990s."[143] Neoliberalism has spawned "a range of thoroughgoing restructurings of the global political economy"[144] and it has:

> facilitated the emergence of transnational corporations, furthered the increasing financialization of the global economy and greatly aided the definitive establishment of consumerism as the principal cultural ethos of late-modernity. These developments have gone hand in hand with and been further propelled by continuous advances in new digital media and information and communication technologies (ICTs).[145]

For many religions, this adaptation has been perceived as quite traumatic. In *Church, Market, and Media*, Moberg points out how the churches of interest to his study share this sentiment when facing these sweeping modern-era processes of religious change:

> Since they 1960s, they have all experienced continued, and indeed accelerating, decline on virtually all fronts, ranging from dwindling membership figures to a general loss in social and cultural position and influence. As a consequence, the discourse of these churches has increasingly become marked by a general language of crisis, survival, and need for thoroughgoing structural and organizational change.[146]

The context and the process of adaptation described above is naturally also the one in which the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden is embedded. The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, like other settled religions, has had to come to grips with and adapt to the prevailing cultural conditions. Like the organizations Moberg has studied, the transition has not been easy, and as will become apparent in subsequent chapters, the "language of crisis" he refers to is pervasive also in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu.

That the general character of religion, religious life, and religious practice has undergone significant changes and transformation in wake of the developments described above is a matter regarding which sociologists of religion can largely agree.[147] However, there is far less agreement concerning how one could best approach these changes. Since settled religious movements adapt to the same socioeconomic context as large-scale secular organizations, they are amenable to being studied by means of some of the various methods belonging to an academic field that was formed with the purpose of understanding the functioning of such corporation-like entities, namely organization studies. This is a path less commonly taken by scholars of religions, and the next section will therefore be devoted, firstly, to presenting a very broad outline of the field of organization studies, then to giving an overview of one particular subfield,

[143] Moberg 2017: 1–2
[144] Moberg 2017: 2
[145] Moberg 2017: 2.
[146] Moberg 2017: 13
[147] Moberg 2017: 2

namely the study of organizational culture, and finally to focusing on one point of entry into understanding organizational culture, namely corporate storytelling. In pursuing such an approach, this study contributes to a growing literature on what nevertheless is still an underexplored avenue in the study of religions.[148]

3.3 Organization theory

3.3.1 An introduction to organization theory

In a succinct formulation, social scientists Dag Ingvar Jacobsen and Jan Thorsvik write that "[a] central aim of organization theory is to understand what happens in organizations and how they function".[149] Management theorist Gareth R. Jones similarly defines it as "the study of how organizations function and how they affect and are affected by the environment in which they operate".[150] As Jeffrey Pfeffer, a leading scholar of organization theory, points out, just over a century ago organizations in general were less ubiquitous, and, moreover, the public bureaucracies and businesses that did exist were both fewer and smaller.[151] This situation, however, has changed drastically. As Pfeffer writes:

> We live in an organizational world. Virtually all of us are born in an organization—a hospital—with our very existence ratified by a state agency that issues a certificate documenting our birth. […] When we die, a death certificate will be issued by another public bureaucracy and our passing may be announced by a newspaper organization. An organization will see to the disposition of our bodies, and other organizations will see to the disposition of our bodies, and other organizations will concern themselves with the disposition of our assets. And during the time in between, more than 90 percent of individuals living in the United States will earn their livelihoods working for an organization (as contrasted with being self-employed), having been prepared for employment by being schooled in educational organizations.[152]

[148] The fact that the administration of settled new religious movements tends to adopt a corporate structure in such a way that resembles the bureaucracy of large institutions was already discussed in a seminal article by Thomas O'Dea as far back as in 1961. For work that studies religion from an organization studies perspective, see Tracey, Phillips & Lounsbury 2014 (contributions by specialists on organization theory who wish to expand the field to include religious organizations). A useful literature review of the interconnections between organization theory and religion can be found in Hinings & Raynard 2014. Contextualizing religious social formations as corporate-like organizations that operate within a neoliberal, capitalist economy connects with such topics as the study of religious markets (see Moberg 2017: 39–71 and Moberg 2020 for an overview and a discussion of the relevant literature), the branding of religious goods and services (Einstein 2008; Stolz & Usunier 2014), religion in the neoliberal economic and political context (Gauthier & Martikainen 2016; Brekke 2017), and religion in consumer society (Gauthier & Martikainen 2013; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead 2013). For a more general introduction to the relevance of economics to religion, see Seele & Zapf 2016.

[149] Jacobsen & Thorsvik 2008: 12. My translation.

[150] Jones 2007: 7

[151] Pfeffer 1997: 3

[152] Pfeffer 1997: 3

It is often so that an individual's contact with an organization occurs solely via the product or service it provides, which makes it in some sense an intangible entity. Most people tend therefore to have a casual attitude towards organizations even though, as Pfeffer points out, the vast majority of them were born, have worked, and will eventually die within their bounds.[153] The inner workings of an organization, including its motivations and the ways in which it influences and controls its members are in general largely unknown to those on the outside.[154] Organizations studies was developed to understand these social entities and thus, in Pfeffer's words:

> comprises an interdisciplinary focus on (a) the effect of social organizations on the behavior and attitudes of individuals within them, (b) the effects of individual characteristic and actions on organizations, with a particular emphasis on the efficacy and, indeed, the possibility of potent individual performance (e.g., through leadership) in organizational systems, (c) the performance, success, and survival of organizations, (d) the mutual effects of environments, including resource and task, political, and cultural environments on organizations and vice versa, and (e) concerns with both the epistemology and methodology that undergird research on each of these topics. As such, the study of organizations is broad in both its theoretical scope and empirical focus.[155]

As may be expected, a fundamental question addressed by organization theory is quite simply this: what is an organization? As is the case with key terms in many other fields within the social sciences and humanities, there is no consensus on how to define the concept of organization. According to sociologist David Jaffe, "[a] single widely accepted definition of organization is difficult to establish because of the complex nature of the object of study and the multiple perspectives that inform organizational analysis".[156] In a definition offered by Jones, an organization is explained as being "a tool used by people to coordinate their actions to obtain something they desire or value—that is, to achieve their goals" and, further, as "a response to and a means of satisfying some human need".[157] Organizations come into existence, according to Jones, when new technologies become available and new needs are discovered, and they either die or are transformed when the needs they at one point in time satisfied are no longer considered important or have been replaced by other needs.[158] Pfeffer, however, writes that it is problematic to define organizations in terms of "goal pursuit".[159] For instance, many organizations have members who may be unaware of the organization's goal, or, even if they do have knowledge of it, do not necessarily support it.[160] A further factor here concerns the fact that, even

[153] Jones 2007: 2
[154] Jones 2007: 2
[155] Pfeffer 1997: 4
[156] Jaffee 2001: 18
[157] Jones 2007: 2
[158] Jones 2007: 2
[159] Pfeffer 1997: 7
[160] Pfeffer 1997: 7

when a goal is identified, if it is attained, organizations often develop new ones, "as if", in the words of Jeffrey Pfeffer, "the goal of an organization, once created, was simply its own continued survival and perpetuation".[161] Pfeffer offers a number of other distinctions that can be used to demarcate organizations from other social entities, e.g., the fact that many (though not all) are formally recognized by some kind of governmental entity and that inclusion in them is granted by the organization itself.[162]

Although the passages quoted are, in a sense, defenses of the impossibility of providing a definition of an organization, they – perhaps somewhat paradoxically – fit the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden well. An association for people interested in Anthroposophy was founded in Sweden as a tool to establish a reformed, esoteric Christian movement. The goal has changed radically since this formative period, and the ascendance of the many practical applications of Anthroposophy over the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden in the strict sense has meant that a variety of different goals can exist amongst the members (an alternative to state-run schools, holistic care for the ill, a spiritual path that can counteract materialistic tendencies in society, and much else). The Anthroposophical milieu is vast and organized in inscrutable ways, but as noted above, the organizational forms are nevertheless those that the legal system of Sweden imposes, from shareholding companies to funds.

The next fundamental question is then: how can organizations be studied? One of the leading researchers within the field of organization theory, Mary Jo Hatch, writes that "[w]hile the name suggests that there is only one—a single, integrated, overarching explanation for organizations and organizing—in fact there are many organization theories and they do not always fit neatly together."[163] It is, as Jaffee calls it, a "multiperspective or multiparadigmatic field of study",[164] and, as Hatch points out, it "draws inspiration from a wide variety of other fields of study".[165] Organization theory thus subsumes a wide variety of topics and approaches. Different authors approach the issue of precisely which elements these are in a variety of ways. Jaffee, for instance, provides a lengthy (and hence perhaps somewhat unwieldy) list that includes organizational language and culture; the decision-making processes involved in initiating organizational behavior; power and influence amongst organization members; the dehumanizing aspects of bureaucratic organization; the interdependent relationships that exist between organizations; and the various forms of human interaction and communication that transpire within the organization in question.[166] A systematization that brings conceptual order to the field is

[161] Pfeffer 1997: 7.
[162] Pfeffer 1997: 20–21.
[163] Hatch 2007: 5.
[164] Jaffee 2001: 1
[165] Hatch 2007: 5.
[166] Jaffee 2001: 1

provided by Hatch,[167] who lists five core areas of research (organization-environment relations, organizational social structure, organizational technology, organizational culture, and the physical structure of built space in organizations) and three sets of theoretical perspectives (modern, symbolic, and postmodern) through which these core areas can be understood.

Since settled religions function as organizations, a selective and creative adaptation of various aspects of organizational theory can provide a welcome addition to the toolbox of the academic field of the study of religions. The qualifiers "selective and creative" are of key importance here: Much of what is encompassed by the term organization theory is devoted not only to understanding complex organizations but also to providing practical advice on how to improve the functioning of corporations. In the study of religions, a field characterized by non-normative ideals, this practice-oriented aspect is, of course, of little immediate relevance. The present study deals with stories that are told by people within the Anthroposophical milieu, and as organizational storytelling is in Hatch's presentation an element of organizational culture, it is to ways of understanding these two concepts within a study of religions-oriented context that we will now turn.

3.3.2 Organizational culture

Just as there exist any number of definitions of the term organization, the same holds true for the concept of organizational culture. One reason for the difficulty in reaching a consensus about one single way in which the term could be defined is due to the presence of the word "culture", itself the carrier of a broad range of meanings. When the concept of culture entered organization theory with the publication of *The Changing Culture of a Factory* by sociologist Jacques Ellul in 1952, culture had already for decades been central to the fields of anthropology and folklore and had been intensely debated as an analytical term.[168] Although it may in hindsight seem obvious that, to quote organizational theorist Joanne Martin's understanding of culture, organizations are infused with notions of "how things are done around here", the idea of studying the culture of corporations and other large organizations caught on remarkably late in the field of organization studies.[169] Organizations continued to be studied mainly in terms of their bureaucratic structures, and Hatch notes that, although studies of organizational culture started to appear around the early 1970s, the concept of culture was not widely accepted by management scholars until the 1980s.[170] Three books from that period stand out as works that ushered in a widespread interest in this perspective on organizations: *Theory Z* by William Ouchi (1981), which was a product of the sentiment prominent at the time that Asian companies were outperforming their U.S. counterparts and described a

[167] Hatch 2013: 10
[168] Hatch 1993: 657
[169] Martin 2002: 3
[170] Hatch 1993: 657

"Japanese management style"; *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Richard H. Waterman (1982), a book that argued that what made companies successful was not primarily their organizational structures or strategies but instead the values that infused them; and *Corporate Cultures* by Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy (1982), in which the authors argue that corporations have distinctive cultures based on six elements, namely a shared narrative of the organization's history, shared values, a set of ritualized events, stories that embody the values of the corporation, a shared sense of which individuals play the most important roles for the company, and an informal "cultural network". As will become apparent later, what is of immediate relevance to the perspective adopted here is the first element in the work of Deal and Kennedy, namely the ways in which a particular organizational culture is characterized and affected by challenges in formulating a shared narrative of its history.

Before resuming the story of how culture has been studied in organization theory, a glance at the vicissitudes of the concept in anthropology is in order.[171] In the same year that Ellul published his work on culture in a London factory, two prominent American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, formulated a highly influential definition of the concept, explaining that "culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups."[172] By the 1980s, this view of culture had come under critical scrutiny. Numerous scholars, including Roy Wagner,[173] Tim Ingold,[174] and George Marcus and James Clifford,[175] suggested that "culture", seen from this perspective, was misrepresented and reified as a monolithic entity that a group "has" rather than being regarded as something its members actively produce, thereby masking the different interests and competences that create diversity but also conflict.[176] Rather than constituting a shared set of "patterns […] of and for behavior", culture can be seen as a *pool of cultural resources* that individual people, alliances, groups, and so forth can draw upon to the extent that their ideological interest, their position in networks of power, and their personal degree of agency allow.[177]

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[171] The shift in anthropological circles of how to best understand the core concept of religion is usefully summarized in Hammer (2009: 9-11). The discussion here is an updated and modified version of the account found there.
[172] Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 357
[173] Wagner 1981
[174] Ingold 1994: 329-349
[175] Clifford & Marcus 1986
[176] The genealogy of the term "culture" is complex. For a background to the classic statement by Kroeber and Kluckhohn and to the debate of the 1980s and 1990s, see Kuper 1999. For a recent review of the issue that concludes that the criticism was directed at a caricature and that classic views of culture were never as monolithic and reified as critics later suggested, see Schweder & Beldo (2015).
[177] The specific term "pool of cultural resources" for this concept has been borrowed from Eickelman & Piscatori 2004: 29.

The contrast between these two fundamental concepts of how to understand "culture" permeates the literature on organizational culture.[178] Early works within this genre, e.g., the volume by Deal and Kennedy, imply that an organization possesses a certain type of culture that managers can learn to influence and that staff internalize as the values of a company. The ideological agenda implicit in this way of reasoning can be detected in the suggestion that, with the appropriate adjustments to organizational culture, productivity can rise significantly.[179] More recent examples of literature that emphasizes the view of culture as a framework that an organization is endowed with and that members of the organization share are easy to find. Jones, for instance, refers to organizational culture as a set of shared values shaped by the people who work within the organization itself and by such factors as the organization's ethics and the structure that both informs and regulates behavior within the organization. Organizational culture, according to his perspective, influences how people respond to situations and how they perceive the environment in which the organization is embedded.[180] Smollan and Sayers point out that it shapes behavior in both overt and covert ways.[181] Schein offers a definition along similar lines in his influential work on organizational culture and leadership:

> Culture is both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behaviors, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior. When one brings culture to the level of the organization and even down to groups within the organization, one can see clearly how culture is created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated, and, at the same time, how *culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the group members*.[182]

The other main approach to culture, i.e., that it is something that is actively created, heterogenous, and reflects various interests, can also be found in the literature on organizational culture and has over time taken on a kind of collective identity as *critical management studies* after the publication of the 1992 edited volume of that name compiled by Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott. As in the more recent anthropological approaches outlined above, organizational culture is presented as processual and as something created as people and groups interact. Alvesson describes culture not as something existing "'inside' people's heads" but rather "somewhere 'between' the heads of a group of people

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[178] Within the field of organization studies itself, the difference has been captured by Smircich 1983, who distinguishes those approaches to organizational culture that see it as a variable (culture as something an organization "has" and that affects staff) from those that view culture as a root metaphor (culture as variable, produced, and reproduced by actors within the organization). These two very different ways of understanding the concept were described in a survey of the field published in 2015 as a "chronic issue" (Schein 2015: 923).

[179] Deal & Kennedy 1982: 15

[180] Jones 2007: 8

[181] Smollan & Sayers 2009: 3

[182] Schein 2004: 1. Emphasis added.

where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed, e.g. in work group interactions, in board meetings but also in material objects".[183] Moreover, organizational culture, seen from this perspective, is not universally shared within the organization. Alvesson, for instance, writes that "Culture is best understood as referring to deep-level, partly non-conscious sets of meanings, ideas and symbolism that may be contradictory and run across different social groupings".[184] Smollan and Sayers point out the fact that subcultures based upon such categories as hierarchy, department, ethnicity, gender, hierarchy, and professional identity exist in organizations and they suggest that these may be seen as "differing value systems".[185] Responses employees have to change are often informed by the ways in which they view or are engaged within the subculture, and memberships within these various groups may, through group discourses, serve to polarize the members' attitudes, beliefs, and intentions, which might result in difficulties instituting organizational change. While acts of managerial intervention can explicitly mold organizational cultures, they are also thus influenced by subcultures and multiple discourses.[186]

A way of understanding the concept of corporate culture, based on the ideas hitherto discussed, can now be offered. Adopting the variable and fragmented anthropological view outlined above, corporate culture can be defined as the constantly evolving shared pool of resources that members of an organization can draw upon in order to find meaning in, express, and act upon issues that arise as the organization adapts to external circumstances and meets internal challenges. Given the broad range of ways in which this can be done, it is clearly the case that, from this perspective, organizational culture pervades every aspect of an organization, and types of data that potentially could be used to study organizational culture vary widely. To take just a few examples that such a view entails, organizational culture manifests itself in seating arrangements at meetings; in office furniture; in dress codes and uniforms; in body language; and in memos, advertisements, and gossip. One entry point into understanding organizational culture has provoked particular interest in the scholarly community: stories. It is to this multitude of voices in the form of organizational storytelling that we will now turn.

3.3.3 Organizational storytelling

In *The Uses of Narrative in Organization Research* (2000), professor of management studies Barbara Czarniawska writes that:

> [a] so-called literary turn in social sciences in general and in organization studies in particular has resulted in re-discovering the narrative knowledge in organization theory and practice. Organization researchers watching the stories

[183] Alvesson 2002: 4
[184] Alvesson 2002: 14–15
[185] Smollan & Sayers 2009: 3
[186] Smoller & Sayers 2009

> being made and distributed collect organizational stories and provoke story telling in their contacts with the field of practice.[187]

It is not difficult, she states, to detect the ubiquity of narrative knowledge in "everyday efforts of organizing":

> Managers and their subordinates tell stories and write stories, to one another and to interviewers, be they researchers or journalists. Organizational histories and managerial biographies tell the past stories of organizing, and the media feed us the present stories of that kind. A student of organizations naturally retells organizational narratives and constructs them herself.[188]

The term narrative has been defined in different and sometimes conflicting ways.[189] I have here adopted a modified version of a characterization of narrative as involving a chronology, a plot, retrospective interpretation, the audience as co-authors, and an element of identity construction.[190] The modification of this definition concerns the suggestion that narratives are necessarily retrospective. Inspired by David Boje's concept of "antenarrative",[191] I expand the concept of narrative to include interpretations of the present as well as of potential futures – a decision that stems from the partial goal of this study to understand how my interviewees speak about an envisaged state of affairs for the movement of which they are part to come about at some later point in time.

Narratives in organizations come in many forms and serve many purposes, from

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[187] Czarniawska 2000: iii
[188] Czarniawska 2000: 3–4
[189] cf. Bryan & Cox 2012: 376–378
[190] Søderberg 2006. Given that this study deals with stories told by people who are connected with a milieu that is informed by religious concepts, it can be noted that narratives as understood here constitute a different category than myths, as that term is usually understood. Myth is conceptualized in a variety of different ways in the scholarly literature. The term is often used to denote a genre that relates how the world, due to the intervention of suprahuman agents, came to resemble the place we live in today (for understandings of myth along such lines see, e.g., Bascom 1965; Honko 1984: 41-42). The idea that myths are set apart from other forms of discourse by being regarded as sacred is another recurrent defining element (e.g., Doniger 1998: 2; Bolle 2005: 6359). A quite different approach is espoused by Roland Barthes (1972), who focuses on the process of creating a discourse set apart rather than the contents of myths. Since any kind of discourse can be set apart as special, anything can be a myth (Barthes 1972: 117). Narrative, as used here, does not fit these understandings of myth particularly well. Steiner has bequeathed to Anthroposophy numerous stories about the culture-producing events of the distant past, namely the account of planetary and cultural stages briefly summarized in section 2.3.2. These could be seen as the myths, in the first sense of the word, of Anthroposophy. As for a "special" discourse in the second sense of myth, it can be noted that the narratives produced by my interviewees come across as quite ordinary. The understanding of myth that arguably comes closest to the use of narrative in the present study is that summarized by Russell McCutcheon (2000: 202) as "the ongoing process of constructing, authorizing and reconstructing social identities or social formations". One might, with Barthes, then say that anything can be used in mythmaking and that narratives and myths only overlap partially. Building the Goetheanum was a process of identity construction, but construction work is not a narrative in any sense that even remotely resembles the definition used here.
[191] Boje 2001

the carefully managed stories the publicity department of a company wishes to use to sell the products it produces, to gossip around the water cooler. As a systematizing heuristic, they can be subdivided into the following four types, a modified version of a typology put forth in Smedegaard 2011: 30.

1. Narratives directed at outsiders, i.e., customers. These narratives are typically found in promotional materials, e.g., on websites and in commercials, and deal with the products the organization wishes to market and the values it tries to project.

2. Narratives crafted by spokespersons for the organization directed at stakeholders[192] (including employees), in which attempts are made to present a particular image of the corporation's identity and its values. Large companies typically distribute magazines to its stakeholders wherein such narratives appear.

3. Narratives – usually of an informal kind – that stakeholders tell about the corporation and about people working within it. These are often counternarratives, i.e., they can question or even undermine the official message presented by the corporation's spokespersons.

4. Narratives that various outsiders, such as the media and customers, tell about the company and its products, e.g., stories that circulate about the advantages or disadvantages inherent in choosing one brand of computer, car, or soft drink over another.

In light of the minimal definition of a narrative offered above, examples of any of these categories can range from elaborate to basic, from carefully orchestrated and coherent to improvised and chronologically disjointed. For instance, a commercial spot of thirty seconds that first shows a happy family seated around a table, then has a camera zoom in on a box of cereal, lets the audience hear the joyous exclamations of the children, and ends with a logo and a jingle organizes a minimal sequence of events temporally, adds an implicit causal connection, and is part of an elaborate campaign of identity construction for that particular brand of breakfast food. Furthermore, they can be artfully crafted and elaborate, or, on the contrary, they can be disjointed and in need of careful interpretive work.

Each type of narrative can be seen as a source of information about aspects of the organizational culture. Communication that is carefully crafted by the managerial level of the organization and is directed at customers or stakeholders may not portray an "authentic" picture of what actually happens in an organization, but it does reveal the type of image of organizational culture it wishes to project. Informal narratives, the second type above, do not necessarily

[192] Here, I follow the definition of stakeholder offered by Cornelissen (2014: 284): "Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". Among them can be counted, e.g., shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, NGOs, local communities, and the media.

correspond to "facts on the ground", either, but instead may provide ways of eliciting people's opinions about the culture of the organization they belong to, and, with a suitable method of analysis, discernable patterns can begin to emerge.

3.3.4 The actantial model

How, then, can corporate narratives be analyzed? The analysis that follows is based on an approach inspired by the structuralist model developed in 1966 by the literary theorist and semiotician Algirdas Greimas. The actantial model was first developed in his 1966 book *Semantique structurale* and was subsequently revised and developed, notably in his 1973 article "Actants, Actors, and Figures". The actantial model has been very influential and has been used to study a vast range of empirical materials, from literary fiction to film. Greimas' model has also been used to study corporate narratives in (secular) business contexts.[193] As a pilot study paving the way for the full-scale deployment of Greimas' model for corporate storytelling in religious organizations, it was tested in an article-length text.[194]

Based on the work of folklorist Vladimir Propp, Greimas' model focuses on the fundamental roles played by various elements (ranging from people to abstractions) in a narrative. The model has been reworked and modified both by Greimas himself and by others, and in this study I make use of a bare-bones version that can be summarized as follows. A narrative is structured around six fundamental roles or *actants*. The *sender* is at the ultimate origin of a particular course of action but may remain behind the scenes in the world of the narrative. Instead, it is the *subject* who carries out the various actions required to obtain an *object*. These actions benefit a *receiver*, who either may be identical to the subject or instead be somebody, or something, else. The quest for the object is furthered by *helpers* and is hindered by *opponents*. This, it should be noted, is a pared-down version of the actant model. In particular, Greimas saw these six actants as connected in pairs in ways that I have not pursued in this study as I have not found this aspect of the model useful for the present purposes.

The world of religion abounds with stories that lend themselves to such an analysis. For instance, in a well-known narrative that is central to Islam, the deity (sender) sent out numerous prophets (subject) to provide guidance (object) to humanity (receiver). The last of these prophets was aided by his many disciples (helpers) and faced enemies in the form of the polytheists of Mecca and various groups of infidels (opponents). Corporate stories are also amenable to such treatment. The shareholders of Snark Hunters, Inc. (sender) have entrusted the board of directors (subject) with the task of increasing profits (object), which in this narrative is beneficial to both shareholders and the public at large

[193] See e.g., Søderberg 2003 and Robichaud 2003.

[194] Swartz & Hammer 2021. The division of tasks for that article was that I developed the theoretical approach and my co-author Olav Hammer and I joined efforts in applying it to a corpus of texts that I selected.

(receivers). They are helped by their astute managers and hard-working employees (helpers), who together have ensured that Snark Hunters, Inc. has a larger share of the snark-hunting market than is had by its competitors (opponents).

The actantial model entails a method of sorting the themes identified in the interviews upon which this study is based into the relevant categories. In order to illustrate this process, I quote a section of connected speech from an interview I conducted (a passage that does not recur in the analysis presented and discussed in subsequent chapters). Since the stories analyzed in the chapters that follow are structurally similar to the following excerpt, it can serve as an example of how actantial analysis can be carried out:

> When Burger King opened in Järna about two years ago, they made a very nice gesture: they sent an artist to Järna. Unlike McDonald's, which uses the same sign and images everywhere, Burger King created its own design based on different motifs from this place, and so they had an entire wall with a huge picture of Antroposofins Hus, Kulturhuset in Ytterjärna, on it. It was a bit blurry because it was so big – the picture of Kulturhuset. It was fantastic that the artist discovered it. He has to get credit for that. Then, over [the picture it said] "Burger King", with a few splashes of color and red specks, and then "Järna", in a sloppy style, as if written by hand. It was very attractive, if we find ourselves in an Andy Warhol tradition of looking at art. In my opinion, it was an excellent work of art done in postmodern style. And what happens then? An Anthroposophist, or several Anthroposophists, actually, go into Burger King two years ago and stage a protest. If Steiner had been born one hundred years later than he actually was, he would have been enchanted by this postmodern collage. Burger King was forced to remove it. They then put up the same type of postmodern collage, but with Järna Kyrka as a background picture this time. It was kind of sad and a little narrow-minded. It was good publicity for Rudolf Steinerseminariet. But one understands this young generation, these green, socially engaged citizens of Järna. They are the children of the older Anthroposophists belonging to my generation, or the grandchildren of the first ones in Järna, and they want to be good, environmentally conscious people, so they went into Burger King with a big bowl of soup, and they ate soup as a demonstration of sorts. The restaurant manager then approached them and asked: "What do you want?" "We are protesting your hamburgers and all the trash you produce with plastic or paper or whatever." I don't know what they said. And then she made a proposal: "Why don't you work on a project with me for finding an organic way of dealing with trash?" Or maybe not an organic way, but an innovative way to recycle it, because Burger King and other fast-food chains produce way too much waste. But to go in there and protest by eating soup? I don't know. We live in interesting times." (May 19, 2014, from an interview with Felicia)

The passage quoted here fulfils the criteria that for the purposes of the present study constitute a narrative. It relates a temporally quite coherent sequence of events that took place "two years ago". There is clearly a plot involving a generous gesture by a local fast-food restaurant and the ensuing, perhaps

somewhat surprising, chain of events. As an example of a (very articulate) verbal utterance, it also presents the ruptures in the chronology and plot that one can expect from the genre, with digressions about the artistic style of the mural, the interviewee's opinion of Burger King's waste management policy, and a counterfactual comment about Rudolf Steiner suddenly appearing in the narrative present. There is also a retrospective interpretation, summed up in the lapidary formulation "We live in interesting times". In my role as interviewer, I was invited in as a kind of co-author, in the sense that the narrator's clear evaluation of who were the good guys and who were the villains in the story called for, if not confirmation, at least a sympathetic ear. Finally, the very fact that there is an unfolding drama that pits various people and factions against each other shows that this narrative has to do with establishing various identities.

Besides its broad applicability, the utility of the actantial model lies in its ability to pry apart the narrative flow of a story such as this by focusing on its internal logic and thereby opening up a set of questions about the actants and their interrelations for investigation. In the excerpt quoted above, an object is revealed when one asks oneself what purpose the mural might have served, from the perspective of the teller, had its existence not been terminated by the chain of events described: it would have been "good publicity for Rudolf Steinerseminariet". Once one has identified an object that the narrative presents as worth striving for, one can begin to ask questions such as: Why is this particular object deemed important? What background knowledge does the narrator assume that the addressee has in terms of being able to understand its value? What terminology is used to describe this prized object? Rudolf Steinerseminariet was generally understood by the people I encountered in the Anthroposophical milieu in Järna as having been a key institution in establishing the presence of the movement in the area. The fact that it was named after the founder of the movement further emphasizes this crucial role. The background knowledge that is presupposed is thus that the large mural at the local Burger King would have been free publicity for Rudolf Steinerseminariet. Implicit here is the idea that the Anthroposophical movement itself has a vital mission to fulfil, so that – in addition to Rudolf Steinerseminariet itself – the Anthroposophical movement and (by implication) those who are benefitted by its presence are all receivers.

Rudolf Steiner appears in two guises in this story. Once again, understanding his role in the narrative depends upon possessing background knowledge of what he represents. As the name of the institution implies, he functions as sender. His mission is so important that he, in a thought experiment, returns to Järna in 2012 and visits Burger King, where he approves of the artwork. His imagined endorsement divides up the other dramatis personae into helpers and opponents. The startling fact about these two groups of actants is that Burger King comes across as a helper, an entity that fights the same struggle as the narrator and his generation. The opponents are a younger group of "narrow-minded" Anthroposophists, individuals whose motives, in the narrator's way of

relating the events, are understandable yet deplorable. The balance of power is uneven and, ultimately, the opponents win the battle. The local Burger King removes the collage, and symbolically, a building representing the Church of Sweden replaces it.

Two final points need to be raised about the actantial model. Firstly, the position of the narrator and the background knowledge of the person interpreting the story are crucial in identifying the actants. The narrative about the mural at the fast-food restaurant in Järna was told to me by a person who, for the purposes of the interview, related a story relevant for the Anthroposophical milieu to an interviewer who was explicitly interested in the vicissitudes of that milieu. A story with the same plot and outcome told by the owner of the local Burger King franchise to an interviewer asking questions about the marketing strategies of the fast-food chain would identify a different set of actants: a restaurant chain as sender, the owner of the local franchise as subject, and so forth. In the terminology of literary critic Stanley Fish, interviewer and interviewee for a short period of time come to form an interpretive community of sorts.[195] Secondly, as is the case in very many, perhaps even most, other areas of the humanities, e.g., literary criticism, the actantial model does not come with a rigid method of interpretation that can only yield one single result. On the other hand, it is sufficiently constrained to make some interpretations reasonable to work with and ask questions of, whereas others come across as implausible or nonsensical. For instance, I contend that no reader of the story above who is willing to enter into an interpretive community with the narrator could see Burger King as an object and Andy Warhol and Rudolf Steiner as opponents.[196]

3.3.5 Storytelling, sensemaking, and identity construction

The three chapters that follow will amply illustrate the chronology, plot, and retrospective interpretation that were included in the list of characteristic traits of a narrative. My role as "co-author" follows from the discussion of the interview as qualitative method in section 3.4.1 and will be a tacit presupposition in what follows. The last element in the list of defining traits, i.e., identity construction, will be highlighted in the discussion in chapter 8; the present section is devoted to a presentation of the theoretical underpinning that more specifically links narrative and identity construction.

The work of Karl E. Weick has been instrumental in launching the concept of sensemaking in the study of organizations. [197] Although Weick embedded the concept in a larger framework that operates at a high level of abstraction and

[195] Fish 1980, esp. pp. 338-355

[196] To formalize this intuition somewhat: a person who did attempt to arrive at such an understanding of what the interviewee is attempting to get across in the narrative would violate the conversational implicatures identified by philosopher Paul Grice (1989) as the very basis for a meaningful exchange to take place. A speaker supplies as much information as is necessary, assuming that the recipient of the message can infer what is meant based on the pragmatics of the situation and shared background knowledge.

[197] Among the key references are Weick 1979 and 1995.

involves a range of other concepts that are not of immediate relevance for the present purposes, a definition that will guide the use of the term here states simply that it is "the basic idea […] that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs".[198] It is thus on an organizational level an equivalent to what autobiographical reflection constitutes on an individual level, i.e., a perspective on one's life that is constructed in retrospective so that one's past, when seen from the vantage point of the present, comes across as having a direction with its component parts integrated into a whole.[199] In short, sensemaking, like autobiographical reflection, creates a sense of identity, albeit collective rather than individual.

Organizational and individual sensemaking have parallels also in that a set of presuppositions and explanatory mechanisms are used to order and make sense of events. These range from whatever is in the broader culture considered "common sense" to presuppositions that are drawn from a pool of resources that is more specifically tied to a particular group or organization. An autobiographical example could be a statement made by a Christian pastor who suggests that he already as a young adult had felt that God had given him a purpose in life and that he therefore decided to enroll in a Bible school program. The wider cultural presupposition that events happen because of one's personal agency (rather than, say, fate or external circumstances) is seamlessly combined with the Chrisian notion that such a decision can be prompted by a calling from God.

Both autobiographical and organizational sensemaking are in a sense collective endeavors. The person telling their story may, of course, feel that the narrative is their own, but the retrospective attempt to create coherence takes the norms and values of the group to which one belongs into consideration. Conversion stories are characteristic examples of this realignment of the narrative with a new, collectively shared perception of how life should be lived. Organizational sensemaking is similarly collective, the result of a process of reflection that can with varying degrees of flexibility be renegotiated into new shared understandings of what their collective identity might be.[200] As in the case with the conversion narrative, radical changes in the organization itself, in its relationship to its environment, or both, will typically provoke members to construct a new sense of collective identity that is expressed in new narratives.[201]

One of Weick's points in introducing the concept in organization theory is thus to emphasize that much of what goes on in an organization is the result of a flow of activities undertaken as the occasion for them arises and that meaning and

[198] Weick 1993: 635
[199] Freeman 1993; Linde 1993
[200] Cf. Gioia et al. 2000
[201] Fiol 2002; Corley & Gioia 2004

purpose are only attributed to events retrospectively as a kind of plausible story.[202] That meaning is imposed retrospectively has been characterized as a counterintuitive feature of Weick's approach.[203] This counterintuitive nature of the process, by implication, means that sensemaking is largely invisible to those who tell stories about themselves or the organizations they are part of. Not all collective identities emerge in this nearly unconscious way: within an organization there will be people who intentionally produce narratives about the organization. To complement the concept of sensemaking, the term sensegiving was coined by David A. Whetten and theorized more substantially by Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi as a label for this deliberate process.[204] To take a simple case, a video that promotes the values of an organization and in and with a carefully managed style and content praises the many purported benefits of its products to its customers is an example of sensegiving.

These two aspects of how collective identities are shaped interact.[205] Sensemaking does not take place in a vacuum but can draw on the pool of resources made available within the organizational culture by past and present leaders. For a religious organization, this pool of resources can range from concepts that are meaningful within the cosmology of the organization, to a particular way of speaking, to references to people, places, events, buildings, and so forth, that are familiar to members. Conversely, people in positions of power who attempt to engage in processes of deliberate sensegiving cannot construct collective identities at random but are instead constrained by, e.g., the perception that the members have of what it is realistic to claim.[206] For instance, a company that has its customer base in one remote region of a country and finds it hard to break even would be hard pressed to construct a collective identity around an institutional claim that it is poised to become a leading player on the global market. The narratives that emerge from the processes of sensegiving and sensemaking can overlap to various extents (as when members of a church organization tell a story about their church couched in terms taken from their sacred texts and preached by the clergy), constitute nearly unrelated parallel accounts (e.g., was the success of the church organization due to divine will or the result of a series of mundane, lucky circumstances?) or stand in direct opposition to each other (e.g., when a merger of departments at a university is promoted by its leaders as a great opportunity but is resented by the faculty and is subsequently narratively framed as a pointless waste of time and resources).

3.3.6 Further theoretical perspectives on corporate stories

The understanding of corporate stories that will emerge in the chapters that follow is consistently structured around an actantial analysis of interview materials. A small number of other theoretical approaches will be used where

[202] Weick et al. 2005: 409
[203] Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015: 8
[204] Whetten 1984; Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991
[205] Ravasi & Schultz 2006
[206] Gioia et al. 2000: 73

useful, and the details of these perspectives will be presented *in situ*. A few short remarks will suffice to alert the reader to what is to come.

Although a settled new religious movement in the sense intended here has entered a post-charismatic phase, the memory and legacy of its founder remains a core component of most if not all such movements. In the narratives presented to me, as in the world of Anthroposophy more generally, references to Rudolf Steiner are ubiquitous. Weberian theorizing about authority and Weber's concept of charismatic authority in particular are thus important for an analysis for the role Steiner has roughly a century after his death. As a contribution to Weberian sociology, the discussion in section 8.8 of the ways in which Steiner is narratively framed will introduce a distinction between various forms of charisma.

More tangentially, approaches inspired by the cognitive study of religion will occasionally be introduced, e.g., in section 7.2.1 as a way to come to grips with an initially puzzling element of Anthroposophical storytelling, namely that nearly all of my interviewees reflected on the nature of Anthroposophy, not by offering their suggestion regarding what it *is* in terms of concepts or rituals, but rather what it metaphorically *is like*.

An analysis along the lines presented above requires the collection of a substantial set of empirical materials: the stories that people in the Anthroposophical milieu tell. The section that follows presents the basic modalities of how these stories were collected and of the fieldwork that was carried out in order to obtain a solid understanding of the context within which these stories were related to me.

3.4 Material and sources

The material upon which this study is based consists of three categories: 1) semi-structured interviews, 2) material generated and collected while carrying out participant observation, and 3) various media related to Anthroposophy in Sweden and Anthroposophy in general. Each will be described in detail below.

3.4.1 Interviews

In order to achieve the aim of this study, I conducted twenty-eight semi-structured interviews with individuals active in one way or another within the Swedish Anthoposophical milieu. More detailed information about their identities and the conditions under which the interviews were conducted is provided below. I determined this to be a suitable method because I wished to, 1) in the words of professor of educational psychology Steinar Kvale, "gather descriptions of the life-world"[207] of each of my interlocutors so that I could try to see my research topic form their point of view and thus attempt to understand

[207] Kvale 1983: 174

how and why they came to have that particular perspective,[208] and 2) collect a body of material that would be nuanced and complex.[209]

Every research method has its share of advantages and disadvantages. Regarding the former, conducting qualitative interviews allows for some flexibility regarding whether the questions to be asked are quite focused or, instead, are about broader issues. Further, as professor of applied psychology Nigel King states, participants are generally familiar with interviewing as a method and often enjoy the experience because they get to share their views with interested parties and might even gain clarity for themselves regarding a particular issue.[210] In the case of my study, several of my interlocutors told me, either immediately afterwards or at a later time, that our discussions had a positive effect on their lives.

One disadvantage with interviews is that they can be time-consuming. As King writes, even a small-scale study can produce a staggering amount of material, and the interview situation itself can be draining because of the level of concentration required.[211] I found both points to be true. A further disadvantage concerns the degree of generalization it is possible to reach using qualitative methods. However, as sociologist of religions Anna Davidsson Bremborg points out, inferring that the results would be valid for a group larger than one's sample is possible if theoretical saturation is reached.[212] In the case of my study, after reaching the point of saturation and subsequently carrying out the initial analysis of my material, I conducted a smaller-scale study and found parallels in the recent history of the General Anthroposophical Society.[213] On a more anecdotal level, I also recognized a similar pattern in stories told to me by representatives of national divisions (in South America and Oceania) of the General Anthroposophical Society.[214]

Methodological features of semi-structured interviews (e.g., length, number of interviewees, whether they are conducted in person or via email, etc.) vary.[215] In this section, I will provide structure to my discussion by following King in breaking down the interview process into the following steps: defining the research question; creating the interview guide; recruiting participants; and carrying out the interviews.[216] The first will only be discussed superficially, as it has already been treated above, and I will therefore do so when I touch upon the subject of the interview guide. Furthermore, the issue of how to go about analyzing the interviews will be dealt with later, in section 3.2.4, since a

[208] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 311
[209] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 312
[210] King 2004: 20–21
[211] King 2004: 21
[212] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 319
[213] Swartz & Hammer 2021
[214] These occurred as parts of discussions had at a conference at the Goetheanum in 2016.
[215] King 2004: 12
[216] King 2004: 14

discussion of this matter requires a substantial discussion of the theoretical apparatus used here.

3.4.1.1 Interview guide

As my research question concerns how people describe and make sense of particular events and processes, I strove when planning and carrying out my interviews to maintain a structure loose enough to accommodate a number of open questions I formulated in advance as well as any new ones that arose during our discussions.[217] I did, however, put together an interview guide[218] (see Appendix I) consisting of the main questions I wished to address plus suitable follow-up ones and suggested probes for when I wished to elicit greater detail from my interlocutors. Amongst other sources of inspiration for its construction, e.g., primary and secondary sources plus my own knowledge of the area and topic, were a number of preliminary visits to places and conversations with people of relevance for my research so I could get a better idea of precisely which individuals, locations, and events would best help me answer my research questions.

I viewed my interview guide as a living document and periodically altered it as I learned more. I did so by rephrasing some of the questions or adding prompts when I discovered that they proved to be difficult to answer. Regarding this tool and the flexibility using it requires, Davidsson Bremborg writes:

> The interview guide can be compared to a tree with many branches. The large limbs are the main questions. They force the interview into different directions that ought to be covered. The smaller twigs are different themes and ideas that just come up and might develop. You do not know when and how far they will grow, but they might change the interview. It is not easy to find the right questions, and often the questions have to be reformulated after having been tested on some respondents. Since semi-structured interviews tend to go their own way, with sidesteps and new questions, it is not possible to prepare all questions in advance.[219]

3.4.1.2 Recruiting participants

Seeking suitable candidates involves a number of factors, e.g., the study's aims, its theoretical positioning, and available resources. The same is true of determining the number interviews one needs to do. As King states, inexperience may result in underestimating the time necessary for transcription, analysis, etc.[220] I first became aware of this fact when I had reached the point of saturation and could see that I had managed to collect an enormous amount of material.

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[217] King 2004: 11, 14; Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 310
[218] Davidsson Bremborg 312
[219] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 315
[220] King 2004: 16

I used various methods to find people to interview. For instance, I made use of Facebook groups having to do with Anthroposophy in Sweden or Järna, where the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden has its institutional home. I asked people I had already interviewed for recommendations. Moreover, I asked people I met while in the field if they would be interested in being interviewed. Additionally, I contacted specific people I determined to be of interest for the purposes of my study.

As diversity is key when seeking to investigate the range of ways a phenomenon is experienced in a given context,[221] I set out with a basic idea of which characteristics might constitute such a range. It developed with time, however, as I learned more about the contours of Anthroposophical Sweden. For instance, I took into consideration such factors as level (then-current leaders, former leaders, "ordinary members", non-members, etc.) and length of engagement in the milieu, gender, location (to see if there were discernable regional differences), and age. Finding interviewees who represent a broad spectrum of ages proved to be a challenge because the average age of both passive and active members is over forty.[222]

To better orient myself in the milieu, I arranged for my first interviews to be of the type Davidsson Bremborg calls the "expert interview", i.e., ones done with key people in the field who have an overview of it and who can serve as gatekeepers.[223] Although Davidsson Bremborg points out that one might want to view these interviews as background material and not include them in the analysis because individuals in such positions tend to speak for others and want to tell the interviewer "how things are,"[224] I came to view these accounts as extremely valuable for those very reasons: they offered what could be regarded as "official" stories about the past, present, and future of Anthroposophy in Sweden.

In order to construct a suitable sampling frame, [225] I then focused on selecting interlocutors based upon what I believed they could contribute to my study. I did not decide upon a fixed number in advance and instead aimed to systematically test my ideas as they started to take form because, as anthropologist Michael Agar states:

> If you only check what you have learned against the people who taught you, there is a good chance of success, unless you have truly misunderstood. But if you check what you have learned among that group *and* among others who have not talked

[221] King 2004: 16–17
[222] While access to detailed information about members was not granted to me, I was told repeatedly by people who do have access to it that this is the case.
[223] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 312
[224] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 312
[225] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 104; Agar 1996: 172

> to you that much, you build the credibility of your statements as representative of the entire group.[226]

In tandem with these initial analytical steps, I selected additional interlocutors.[227] When I got to a point when nothing new emerged during my interviews, I determined that theoretical saturation had been reached.[228]

The majority of my interlocutors, according to their own reports, were at the time of my discussions with them members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and had been so for substantial periods of time, some even for several decades. Two had broken their formal ties with the organization.[229] One did so because he, following a dramatic incident, found he no longer believed in Rudolf Steiner's teachings; the other, due to his displeasure with the operations of the Sweden division, left to join another national society. One of my interviewees had recently rejoined the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden because she, after having decided to take a break after a period of intense engagement, wished to assume a leadership position within a local branch and therefore needed to reestablish formal ties with the national society. Many of my interviewees were also members of the School of Spiritual Science,[230] although the level of their participation varied. Some instance, rarely attended meetings, while others, at the time of my discussions with them, occupied central roles in its organizational structure.

3.4.1.3 Carrying out the interviews

I conducted my interviews in a variety of places, e.g., cafés, homes, offices, and gardens. All were done in-person, and they ranged from forty-five minutes to three hours in length. I strove, as mentioned above, to be as flexible as possible, and I worked to develop my active listening skills and to my ability to detect when remaining silent was a better strategy.[231] I always brought a notepad and a recording device with me and found, as scholar of religion Graham Harvey writes, that they were soon were forgotten about by my interlocutors and thus did not serve as distractions.[232]

I opened interviews with neutral questions asking for factual or descriptive information and saved more sensitive and complicated ones until I felt my interlocutors were comfortable with me and the interview situation. Although I brought, as stated above, a list of questions with me, I did not ask them in a predetermined order and instead introduced them at points where they

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[226] Agar 1996: 168
[227] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 314
[228] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 313–314
[229] I have chosen to not identify these two individuals with names here based upon their wishes for complete anonymity.
[230] The term is explained below, see pp. 53-4.
[231] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 314
[232] Harvey 2011: 238

naturally fit in.[233] Some I could skip altogether because my interlocutors brought up the topics on their own. On a few occasions, I only needed to say "tell me about your life" and no further prompt was needed to elicit the information I was seeking. I strove to end each meeting on a positive note and, circumstances permitting, tried to allow my interviewees time to add anything they felt was important that we did not cover.[234]

3.4.1.4 "Difficult" interviews

Not all interviews progress as one might wish. King lists a number of types of individuals encountered in challenging situations. These are the *uncommunicative interviewee*, the *over-communicative respondent*, and the *would-be interviewer*.[235] I did not encounter the first-named, but I did have several experiences with the latter two. In the case of the *over-communicative respondent*, I found that some straying from the topic at hand could, as Agar states, lead to new, unanticipated areas of relevance:

> If you just stop asking people questions framed in terms of the way you already see things, if you just listen and struggle with what patterns and passions drive their talk, you get a glimmer of a different kind of life. And that glimmer, brief and fragmentary though it might have been, hints that what you thought you knew was way off base.[236]

Regarding the *would-be-interviewer*, i.e., an interviewee who asks the interviewer about their own opinions, King writes that these interactions may signal that rapport has been established but answering them may bias the interviewee's subsequent responses in a way similar to how a leading question might.[237] An interesting point about leading questions is made by Agar, who argues for their occasional use as a sensible strategy to keep informants talking and even encourage them to disagree, which might help falsify preliminary conclusions taking shape.[238] My way of thinking followed similar lines. When asked for my own opinion, I often (but not always) gave it, in particular when I felt that not doing so might negatively impact the rapport that had been established and also when I saw an opportunity to increase my own understanding of an event or phenomenon.

3.4.1.5 Working with the interviews

Reflecting upon how I, in my role as a researcher, shaped the knowledge produced through designing and conducting my study was a recurrent theme in my work. I kept a research diary and reviewed at regular intervals. I also listened

[233] King 2004: 17
[234] King 2004: 18
[235] King 2004: 18
[236] Agar 1996: 38
[237] King 2004: 19
[238] Agar 1996: 142–144

to several of my interview recordings so I could take stock of my performance as an interviewer.

As has been touched upon above, it is impossible to know how many interviews will have to be done before new themes stop emerging,[239] and one never be certain that nothing new would have come up if only a few more had been conducted. Around the time of my twenty-fifth interview, I began to suspect I was reaching that point. I did three more, reaching a total of twenty-eight, and decided it was time to stop and to start carrying out the analysis.

I did not transcribe all of my interviews in their entirety. Instead, I followed Harvey's suggestion of putting together a synopsis of each recording, including the time at which different themes were taken up.[240] I did, however, transcribe parts that seemed especially relevant for answering my research question. When I first reviewed the synopses together with the transcribed portions, my ambition was to get an overall impression of my material. I then started to look for recurring themes within the interviews in the form of stories about the past, present, and future to compare in terms of consistency and variation, which I then color-coded and later worked into separate documents organized by theme. As time went on, in the light of additional readings and listening sessions, these categories became increasingly complex, with new sub-categories becoming apparent to me. Another challenge emerged when I started to detect stories within stories, discoveries requiring further analysis so as to determine whether the emphasis of the story was temporal. Thus, ever higher-order categories crystalized as I toggled back and forth between the material in its original form and my coded documents in the interest of discovering new patterns and relationships.[241]

Those parts of the interview material that illustrate the themes that emerged in my analysis needed to be transformed into quotes to be used for the purposes of this study. All interviews with the exception of one were conducted in Swedish[242] and in their "raw" form bear the marks of spoken language, i.e., pauses, hesitations, false starts, etc. The nature of the analysis fundamentally determines how such utterances are to be represented. For some forms of, e.g., linguistic analysis, making note of pauses and spontaneously produced grammatical errors would be essential. For the present purposes, i.e., the analysis of themes in stories told by my interviewees, I opted to quote their responses in English in my own translation and in a very lightly edited form that – as faithfully as the process of translation allows – renders the vernacular of my interviewees without attempting to indicate pauses, stutters, or the syntactic or grammatical oddities that are naturally produced as a matter of course in spontaneous utterances. One might add that many if not most of my interviewees came across as very

[239] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 314
[240] Harvey 2011: 238
[241] Agar 1996: 31, 153–154, 163; Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 317–318; Harvey 2011: 219–220
[242] I conducted one of my interviews in English as per my interviewee's request.

articulate speakers of "educated" sociolects of standard colloquial Swedish, so the editing referred to here has been minimal.

While translating, one can come across words that, although they can be rendered into English, require some unpacking. It is typical for groups to develop linguistic habits that contribute to reinforcing a shared identity. Through a process of interpretive drift, newcomers who enter this milieu are gradually socialized into referring to events in terms that demonstrate that they are part of this collective.[243] Carrying out participant observation in the Anthroposophical milieu as well as becoming acquainted with written sources soon reveals that such linguistic habits can also be found there. Often these concern subtle differences compared to the speech habits of non-Anthroposophists and therefore have no bearing on the analysis, nor do they cause problems for translation or understanding. Nonetheless, the interviews that serve as the basis for this study contain two or three terms that require elucidation. Many interviewees referred to the concept of *impuls*, the Swedish equivalent of the English *impulse*. An element of Steiner's sometimes rather idiosyncratic German, one finds the term in, e.g., the title of one of the many collections of his lectures: *Der Christus-Impuls und die Entwicklung des Ich-Bewusstseins*. When used by my interviewees, it has a range of meanings, from "a spiritual influence that creates an effect in the material world" to "a desire to do something good for humanity that is awakened in somebody". Transforming this influence or desire into a concrete result is often referred to as manifesting the impulse (Swedish: *manifestera impulsen*). Another common term is *initiativ*, which is Swedish for *initiative*. Enterprises and practical projects, e.g., the establishment of a Waldorf school, would be referred to as such. Less common in my materials is the term *döttrar*, daughters, for what I have here called the practical applications based to varying degrees on Steiner's ideas.

Once a corpus of transcribed and translated passages had been created, it soon became apparent that it was characterized by contradictory reports and discrepancies. Agar writes of the distress researchers who are confronted by such inconsistencies sometimes experience and emphasizes the many reasons for them: people forget things; they may leave things out because they do not see them as being important; they may wish to deceive the interviewer; they may have to, due to social rules, explain it the way they do; or they might simply wish to tell the story they believe their listener wants to hear.[244] Rather than being troubled by them, I viewed alternative accounts and contradictions as reflecting the complexity of the Anthroposophical milieu and as opportunities to learn more.[245] As will become apparent in the analysis of the interviews, getting a sense of the contradictory statements and multiplicity of accounts is an important element in understanding the nature and role of these narratives.

[243] Luhrmann 1989: 307-323
[244] Agar 1996: 157
[245] Agar 1996: 129, 159, 164

Once 1) themes and subthemes had emerged and been noted, 2) any seeming contradictory accounts had been flagged, and 3) relevant sections of the interviews had been transcribed and translated, the materials were ready to be analyzed using the theoretically-informed model that lies at the heart of this study; the results are presented in chapters 4 and 5 below. In order to introduce this particular way of analyzing the materials, i.e., an adaptation of semiotician Algirdas Greimas' actantial model, a substantial introduction to the underlying theoretical framework and to the empirical setting, i.e., the milieu that I have studied, is needed. I will therefore return to the question of how the analysis was carried out in section 3.3.4.

3.4.1.6 Ethical considerations in connection with the interviews

I ensured that each of my interlocutors understood before we started that the interview was for research purposes and that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time. I informed them of the aim of the study and how the material would be used. Further, I obtained verbal consent to 1) record the interviews (including their consent) and 2) store the resulting sound files for the purposes of analyzing the content. My interviewees were not given the opportunity to take part of the results prior to my manuscript being finalized and submitted for review.[246] All conclusions reached are thus my own and I bear the responsibility for them.

Although complete anonymity can be difficult to achieve if the group in question is small,[247] I decided to anonymize all of my informants since two of them explicitly requested that I do so in their cases. I have therefore assigned all of them new names and have altered certain details (such as gender) that otherwise might have added an additional dimension for theoretical analysis. As the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu is largely populated by people who know each other either personally or professionally, I regarded this as a necessary step to take. A list of participants (using the names I have assigned them) and the corresponding interview dates is found in Appendix II. I have indicated whether the individuals served as leaders when I carried out fieldwork, but I have omitted additional information, e.g., then-current membership status and if any of the others were ever leaders. I am aware that these decisions have limited the number of analytical levels that could shed light on the ways in which my interviewees' gender, age, or status within the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu are reflected in my materials. However, this degree of anonymization was an absolute prerequisite for being able to carry out my study, since several of my interlocutors, although they did not explicitly ask me to anonymize them,

[246] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 319–320
[247] Davidsson Bremborg 2011: 320

expressed discomfort at the thought of their contributions being traced back to them by others in the movement.[248]

Interview files, transcripts, and any other materials that could potentially connect interviews with specific individuals must be treated with care and with consideration taken to applicable data security rules. All electronically housed materials have therefore been stored on a separate password-protected hard drive kept in a locked cabinet to which I have the only existing key. No access to this material has been granted to any third party. Written materials such as transcripts have been anonymized through the process of working with this study so that no paper trail leads back to the individuals who were interviewed. In order to keep track of the various pseudonyms used in this study, it has been necessary for me to keep a list linking interviewees and the names I have given them. In order to safeguard the anonymity of these individuals, only one copy of this list exists, and this copy is stored in a locked cabinet in a different location than where the hard drive is kept. After the completion of this study, data will continue to be stored under these conditions for two years, after which they will be safely deleted by reformatting the hard drive and shredding the list.

3.4.2 Fieldwork

3.4.2.1 The fundamentals of fieldwork

As one dimension of my focus concerns what could be considered as the day-to-day activities of individuals involved in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu, I chose to complement my interview material with fieldwork, specifically participant observation.[249] My interviewees repeatedly referred to events, people, places, buildings, objects, daily habits, organizational structures, etc., in ways that might have remained opaque to me if I had not done so. I therefore carried out participant observation, e.g., in connection with various meetings and events related to Anthroposophy in Sweden, and I also spent several months volunteering at a small center maintained by a branch of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. The overall steps I followed largely resemble the ones outlined by Harvey, e.g., deciding who/where to research; conducting a pilot study; doing fieldwork, including documentation; developing notes and diaries into drafts; checking ideas with others in the field, which I did when carrying out interviews I conducted concurrently, and refining these notions afterwards; and polishing the written output.[250]

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[248] The reticence of some of my interviewees will be familiar to many researchers working with field-based methods in minority religions. It can be noted that several Swedish scholars of new religious movements published a piece in which they expressed the concern that such studies would become impossible to carry out if there was any risk of interview materials that could identify specific informants became public. See Frisk et al. 2020.
[249] Davidsson Bermborg 2011: 310; Harvey 2011: 219, 240
[250] Harvey 2011: 220

For Agar and for Harvey, gaining access to the day-to-day activities of a group requires establishing relationships with members, taking part in what they do, and observing what happens in these contexts.[251] Harvey suggests a set of skills to continuously practice and work to improve while in the field. The first, gaining rapport, involves establishing and maintaining friendly relationships based on, e.g., trust and even some level of shared commitment to the project's success. Another skill suggested by Harvey is maintaining empathy. A third is practicing *epoché*, i.e., suspending thoughts and beliefs about the phenomena one is investigating. Here, Harvey questions the degree to which it is possible to set aside preconceived notions and stresses therefore the importance of being aware of them and how they might influence one's analysis;[252] the topic of reflexivity will be discussed at length in a later section below. In addition to the qualities and skills listed here, Harvey also points out the benefits of entering the field with a sense of humor. [253] I worked to develop all of them and was indeed grateful that I could laugh (out loud or silently to myself) when faced with events I assume other fieldworkers frequently encounter, e.g., delayed trains, malfunctioning equipment, and awkward social situations.

For a researcher unfamiliar with a particular field site setting, gaining entry to it can be challenging.[254] According to anthropologists Kathleen and Billie DeWalt, one difficulty might be having to confront what initially seems like an overwhelming amount of detail to observe, record, and try to make sense of. On the other hand, researchers who enter fields they have experienced as "natives" and those who have been in the field for some time and have repeatedly observed the same occurrence may have other problems. For instance, they risk missing new insights, contradictory material, and potential new explanations for the phenomena they see.[255] However, if one turns here to the commonly drawn distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', we can, like Harvey, wonder how helpful it really is. We may conclude, then, as he does that "[t]here are…no 'insiders' who are not sometimes 'outside' to some degree in relation to those they observe" and, further, that "[t]here are no 'outsiders' who are not sometimes 'inside' the event in which they participate".[256] Ultimately, he maintains, it is difficult to conceive of an ethnographic statement that is not a combination of emic and etic points of view.[257]

Beyond divisions like native and newcomer, an additional matter of relevance when discussing participant observation as a method is how researchers may affect what they observe. Here, one could argue that, prior to an investigator's arrival, a group will of course already be quite diverse, e.g., in terms of how

[251] Agar 1996: 31; 2011: 219
[252] Harvey 2011: 224; 231–232
[253] Harvey 2011: 240
[254] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 35
[255] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 74–75
[256] Harvey 2011: 227
[257] Harvey 2011: 239

flexible members are regarding core values and teachings.[258] As DeWalt and DeWalt maintain, such differences naturally exist because a community is made up of people who have various social standings within that context and who share some understandings of the world but who also, based on personal experiences, have their own perspectives and interpretations as well. Understanding this is necessary, they state, in order to surpass the level of superficial generalizations.[259] A further argument raised against participant observation as a method might concern how questions asked by a researcher might influence how people think, act, and answer (i.e., "reactivity"). Harvey suggests, however, that academic engagement is hardly the sole cause of reactivity since both individuals and religions themselves are continuously adjusting and developing due to their complex contexts and wider relationships.[260] Harvey also touches upon a further commonly voiced matter of potential concern regarding time in the field: the prospect being invited, or expected, to "convert".[261] I did not encounter anything of the sort, and there may be several explanations for this, one being that I worked at a Waldorf school. This fact was known to most of my informants prior to our meetings. They might have therefore assumed that I have a personal interest in Anthroposophy. On the other hand, no such attempts were made by people who did not know this.

One's personal position aside, DeWalt and DeWalt suggest finding "local gatekeepers" upon entering a field, and, in the interests of conducting research overtly, they also stress the importance of explaining the project's purpose and of securing permission to the degree that the latter is possible.[262] While I did explain my intentions as often as I could to people I met at various events, for instance, notifying all attendees was generally impossible. Although I was familiar to a certain extent with the Anthroposophical milieu, a topic I discuss more fully below, I sought gatekeepers at different points during my time in the field, e.g., when exploring a branch of it that was largely unknown to me. The majority of these figures were people in leadership positions. On a few occasions, they approached me first, but, most often, I took the initiative and sought contact with people I believed would be of interest for – and who would be interested in – my study. Regarding gatekeepers, Agar lists several problematic types, e.g., those he terms *professional stranger-handlers*, *deviants*, and *opportunists*.[263] Harvey touches upon the importance of paying attention to those who seem to "tell" the most – either while being observed or when serving as informants – and to consider how representative they are of the group in question.[264] I found the majority of my initial contacts, to borrow a phrasing from DeWalt and

[258] Harvey 2011: 234
[259] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 103
[260] Harvey 2011: 234
[261] Harvey 2011: 223
[262] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 36–37
[263] Agar 1996: 135–137
[264] Harvey 2011: 227

DeWalt, to be "knowledgeable insiders" and excellent informants.[265] Further, a suitably neutral and respected "sponsor", once found, can be greatly helpful in gaining entrance to a field, not least because they can make necessary introductions and vouch for one. Here, I found, and as DeWalt and DeWalt point out, rapport based upon truthfulness and reciprocity to be key.[266] Harvey writes that it is becoming increasingly common for fieldworkers to act on the understanding that hosts ought to benefit in some way from the presence of a researcher,[267] and in order to show my gratitude for the time and energy my informants gave to my study, I occasionally offered my services as a translator and proofreader.

Harvey suggests viewing the whole process spanning from gaining access to a particular group to eventually obtaining knowledge and understanding of a culture in terms of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (also discussed above on p. 43), which he describes as "taken for granted everyday or casual behaviors or demeanor".[268] Therefore, fieldwork, for Harvey, also involves reflection, dialogue, and further reflection in order to test one's interpretations.[269] Such exchanges, he writes, might take place in the form of conversations had while doing mundane tasks together with those one encounters in the field, e.g., washing dishes.[270] In my case, long trips on trains and in cars sometimes granted me opportunities for more informal chats as did doing chores together with others at the center where I served as a volunteer. Concerning the types of activities that are of central importance to the particular aims of a study, DeWalt and DeWalt note that researchers tend to move on after having taken part in it one or two times. They suggest that one should instead try to observe how regular events unfold over time in order to see and compare how similar events play out on different days and under different circumstances or even at different times of the year.[271] I tried to do so to the extent that it was possible. The commute to Järna from Stockholm, where I was living for much of the time I devoted to this study, often made this difficult due to what could be characterized as an inconvenient public transportation situation that often provided few if any options. As will be taken up in a later chapter, some of my interlocutors made similar complaints.

While in the field, my course of action followed steps outlined by DeWalt and DeWalt, e.g., observing the activity and studying the "story line"; identifying "the component segments of action"; sorting out regular components from more variable ones; and looking for variations in the "story line", as well as their recommendations for observing such details as the arrangement of physical

[265] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 38
[266] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 41–45
[267] Harvey 2011: 222
[268] Harvey 2011: 232
[269] Harvey 2011: 240
[270] Harvey 2011: 231
[271] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 77

space and the people within it, (verbal and non-verbal) interaction between people present (including the researcher), and number of participants present.[272] As touched upon in the above section on interviewing, the process of figuring out the people, places, activities, and events that will be of interest is fluid and is dependent upon how the researcher's understanding develops and the new questions that arise as a result. In the case of my study, I initially thought I would be spending more time in Stockholm and other parts of Sweden, but, after a number of trips and interviews, I decided to narrow my focus because of the large amount of material my investigations had already started to generate by that time.

Agar's notion of "rich points", i.e., problems in understanding that arise while observing actions or events that do not seem to make sense, was also of use to me while doing fieldwork. He suggests that, firstly, upon encountering such a problem, coherence must be assumed. Then, one ought to strive to construct, and subsequently validate, a frame that would link the seemingly incomprehensible elements. Agar describes these processes as occurring continuously and on different levels and in different ways as the various frames one constructs are conflated into ever greater "schemes of understanding".[273] The theories that one puts together, over time in this way should, he suggests, "serve as a resource" when talking to members of the group being studied about, in his words, "what's going on".[274] In the case of this study, my time serving as a volunteer at the above-mentioned center operated by a branch of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden provided me with the opportunity to, over a period of several months, get a general idea of what things were like there, e.g., number of visitors; frequency of incoming phone calls; the types of questions asked; events hosted, etc. I could then check with others to see if my observations resembled their own experiences as volunteers. To aid in this period of developing my reflections, I recorded field notes, the topic of the following section.

3.4.2.2 Field notes

An observation remains just that unless a researcher makes a record of it by some means for the purposes of further analysis; at that point, it becomes data.[275] As human memory can be fickle and unreliable, impressions must be captured as soon as possible. While interviews and more formal events can be recorded with various devices to be worked with later, keeping field notes, as Dewalt and Dewalt point out, is more or less the only way to ensure that observations of the various events of day-to-day life, behaviors discerned, conversations overheard,

[272] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 69; 72–73
[273] Agar 1996: 32–33
[274] Agar 1996: 164
[275] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142

and informal interviews do not slip away.[276] These records, of course, the primary materials of participant observation.[277]

The different types of, and formats for, field notes that could at least in theory exist are as numerous as the ways in which one might handle them. Some researchers, for example, jot down words, phrases, or whole sentences during the course of a day or an event; a more detailed version may be written up later when they get an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences.[278] One might write notes about their notes or keep a journal or maintain a calendar of events they have attended. Some things, however, will only ever remain in the mind of the observer and never receive a concrete form. Research diaries, for Harvey, are places for reworking notes and adding such things as initial interpretations and additional questions to be asked and are thus valuable tools that for stimulating reflexive and analytical processes.[279]

Field notes are, of course, not just a record of what was observed. As DeWalt and DeWalt point out, they cannot be separated from analysis work because the person writing them down makes decisions about what to include, the level of detail used, degree of contextualization, and whether or not conversations, for example, are recorded in their entirety or are instead summarized.[280] Further, the interests of the observer in general ultimately shape what is observed in a particular situation.[281] As Agar states, "[f]ieldwork presupposes an interpretive framework; and an interpretive framework cuts into the world like a jigsaw, leaving much of the wood behind."[282]

In light of the above, one benefit of field notes is that they can be used to reconstruct the development of the researcher's understanding of and relationship to those they study, thus allowing for reflexivity.[283] Self-observation is also a necessary component of participant observation wherein awareness is directed to the ways in which the fieldworker experiences the setting as a participant, the values and biases they have with them, and how their presence impacts what they observe.[284] Here, meta-notes, including, e.g., summaries of the evidence for the argument that has taken form up to that point, further reflections on events attended, and questions to follow up on, can be of service.[285] The process of analyzing one's notes, which entails reviewing, summarizing, cross-checking, identifying patterns, and drawing conclusions, then, is an

[276] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142
[277] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142
[278] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142
[279] Harvey 2011: 238
[280] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142–144
[281] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 76
[282] Agar 1996: 99
[283] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 142
[284] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 68
[285] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 153

iterative one following a pattern of reading, thinking, writing, rereading, rethinking, and rewriting.[286]

On the other hand, recording field notes may in some ways be more of a hinder than a help. Agar, when discussing their traditional role in ethnographic research, calls them "the most overrated thing since the Edsel."[287] He writes:

> In their worst form, they are an attempt to vacuum up everything possible, either interrupting your observation to do so or distorting the results when retrieving them from long-term memory. Not that you shouldn't keep notes, but they should be more focused in topic, and they should eventually be made obsolete…When something interesting appears, *note* it. But don't lose the focus of the topics currently under consideration.[288]

He does, however, advocate maintaining a personal diary, as doing so helps the researcher reflect upon their own process.[289]

My own position is somewhat in the middle: while I view recording field notes as an indispensable part of doing participant observation for some of the reasons mentioned above, e.g., they can facilitate reflection and help one to remember things, I have often felt them to be a wedge separating me from what I was observing and the people with whom I was interacting. In simple terms, I found it distracting to have to toggle my attention back and forth from event to notebook, and I could sense that some of my interlocutors were made nervous by the presence of a pen and paper. However, that being said, the function of field notes as a way of capturing information, reflections, and the phases of analysis, according to my view, outweighs the their less positive sides. Moreover, acknowledging as Harvey does that such products of fieldwork are not to be treated or viewed as "a 'pure', unmediated record of what happened"[290] or "complete, exhaustive final statements about a discrete entity ('religion' or 'Buddhism', for example), without remainders or exceptions,"[291] I regard them as invaluable for making explicit the selectivity that is central to the approach taken by the researcher.[292]

3.4.3 Written sources

The analysis in chapters 4 to 6 is based entirely upon interview material, the understanding of which is supported by my knowledge of the Anthroposophical milieu derived from the fieldwork I carried out. The discussion that follows in subsequent chapters supplements this material with references to written sources. The references are intended to be illustrative, as the material was not

[286] DeWalt & DeWalt 2002: 163
[287] Agar 1996: 161
[288] Agar 1996: 162
[289] Agar 1996: 163
[290] Harvey 2011: 237
[291] Harvey 2011: 221
[292] Harvey 2011: 221

collected systematically and is thus not necessarily representative. Examples of such sources referred to are books published by Anthroposophical authors, newsletters produced by the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, and texts found on websites. The purpose of introducing such materials in the last part of the study is to support my contention that the tendencies that characterize the stories that I have identified in the interview materials are not exceptional, nor are they an artefact of the interview as oral genre. The selective nature of these sources opens the field for future research that can in a more systematic fashion link the way storytelling frames the nature and historical trajectory of the Anthroposophical movement with written materials serving a similar purpose.

3.5 A reflexive note on self-positioning

Participant observation, one of the methods used is this study, is based on the idea that grasping the full richness of people's lives and cultures requires more than just watching from the sidelines.[293] One may wonder, however, how deeply one should get involved and whether or not it is possible to go too far.[294] These questions invite a discussion of the matter of reflexivity.

During the latter quarter of the last century, and in particular as a result of the work of anthropologists James Clifford and George Marcus, a shift occurred involving how the relationship between ethnographic fieldwork and writing was perceived. As a result, interest in reflexivity, i.e., reflecting upon how the data collected may have been affected by, e.g., the researcher's own identity and interactions with those they study, increased.[295] As anthropologist Michael Agar points out, "[t]he problem is not whether the ethnographer is biased; the problem is what kinds of biases exist".[296] While a researcher can hardly be regarded as a passive observer who collects objective data, field workers can try to deal with their biases and preconditioned modes of operating methodologically by being aware of as many of them as possible when, e.g., drawing conclusions about what they have seen, heard, or experienced.[297]

Researchers and non-researchers alike grow up in contexts informed by particular sets of assumptions about how the world works. Additional biases are acquired through schooling and professional training and, for researchers, these influence choices made about which aspects of the human situation to focus upon.[298] Fieldwork requires such decisions and other ideas concerning what is worthy of attention and how to interpreted what is observed are thus rejected.[299]

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[293] Harvey 2011: 219–220
[294] Harvey 2011: 240
[295] The seminal work associated with the start of this reflexive turn is the edited volume Clifford & Marcus 1986. For brief summaries of the issues involved, see Harvey 2011: 220–221 and Waddington 2004: 157.
[296] Agar 1996: 92
[297] Agar 1996: 92, 98, 99
[298] Agar 1996: 91
[299] Agar 1996: 98

As social scientist David Waddington points out, although the participant observer may find their experiences in the field to be exciting and rewarding, they may run into "any one of a host of practical pitfalls and emotional or ethical predicaments".[300] Researchers, while trying to gain (and maintain) awareness of the influences that have steered their investigations, therefore ought to assess how things could have been different.[301] In the following brief passages, I attempt to do just that.

Collections of Rudolf Steiner's lectures crowded the bookshelves in my childhood home, and when I, as a young adult, moved to Sweden, I was accompanied by an interest in Anthroposophy that had started to develop early in life. Once overseas, it prompted me to seek out places in Sweden where I could deepen my knowledge of its practical applications, and, upon completing a master's program in education, I applied for a job teaching English at a Swedish Waldorf school. I also decided to apply to a doctoral program in the study of religions, my primary area of academic interest. As I was puzzled by the relative lack of academic studies of the General Anthroposophical Society (and even of its founder, Rudolf Steiner), I decided to investigate the history and development of the movement in Sweden, where enterprises and institutions founded upon various interpretations of Anthroposophy have had a presence for over a century.

In *The Professional Stranger*, Agar quotes one of his informants, Jack, who said that "it is hard to 'do science' with people you like; it is also hard to 'do science' with people you do not like; if you do not care one way or the other, it is hard to 'do science' because you do not understand enough about the people you are doing science with".[302] In the case of this study, I did science with people I like and did so as a member of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. For a period of two years which commenced after I finished conducting the fieldwork and carrying out the interviews upon which this study is based, I served as a member of its governing council. After my term ended, I remained a member of the larger organization itself, and, at the time of writing, I still am.

Considering the above, it could be argued that my engagement within the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu may have influenced the design and execution of my project to too great an extent or that it may have caused me to overlook aspects that a person less familiar with it would have found relevant. However, I argue that it was more of a benefit than a liability. For instance, it gave me access to people, places, and materials that otherwise might have been more difficult to approach, visit, acquire, or even discover in the first place. One could also wonder if my personal involvement might have posed challenges when it was necessary to settle into the position of being a researcher while out collecting data at an event relevant for my study. While this was admittedly not entirely without its

[300] Waddington 2004: 155
[301] Agar 1996: 99
[302] Agar 1996: 71

difficulties, on the other hand, my presence on these occasions was, it may be assumed, non-disruptive as I was not a "stranger". In regard to any potential risk of having missed important details due to my familiarity with what could be termed "the way things are done", one could instead argue that my knowledge of them gave me enough mental space to focus on things I might not have seen if I was in a position of having to worry about the basics.

In *The New Spirituality* (2007), theologian Gordon Lynch touches upon the difficulties of being personally engaged in one's object of study. Discussing his own situation, he states:

> In many respects, [my] background has been an asset for me in writing this book. When conducting interviews with people in the progressive milieu, some were already aware of my work and some were not. Either way, my background – and fundamental sympathy for many of the ideas and initiatives I was encountering – was helpful in building open, collaborative research relationships with these participants. I have also, I will confess, been very touched or deeply inspired by some of the books I have read and people I have met whilst conducting this research.[303]

In such circumstances, he adds, it can be a complex task to negotiate one's position as a researcher.[304] As I have described above, I found this to be true. Echoing his words, my hope is that my work will be "judged on how adequately it describes and analyses the specific social and cultural phenomena" I have studied.[305]

The following four chapters, numbers 4 to 7, will be devoted to a detailed actantial analysis of the stories that emerged in my interviews. In chapter 8, we will return to such issues as what this analysis reveals about the pool of cultural resources that my interviewees draw upon and the mechanisms of sensemaking and collective identity construction that these stories reveal. In that chapter, the question for the broader study of religions of some of the key theoretical advances of this study will also be addressed.

[303] Lynch 2007: 9
[304] Lynch 2007: 9
[305] Lynch 2007: 8–9

Part II

4. Narrating the Past

4.1 Introducing the story

My interviewees narrate events as they see them, and, as will become apparent in this and the following two chapters, each of their individual stories has its own content and structure. Nevertheless, there is a very basic outline about which there is a near-consensus, and the various parts of this chapter are organized in such a way as to reflect this basic outline which I summarize thusly, where the first segment captures the past; the second, the present; and the final one, the future:

There once was a Golden Age, followed by a period of decline. Things aren't what they used to be. If Anthroposophy in Sweden is to survive, something needs to change.

An interview can follow conversational tangents, interrupt a flow of thought with a flashback or a reflection about the future, or in a myriad of other ways be structured by the more or less spontaneous train of thought of the interviewee, punctuated by my own intervention. Once the themes are identified, the stories nevertheless have a clear chronological structure, and the three chapters that follow mirror that structure. Interviewees reminisced about the past and about their own first encounters with Anthroposophy in ways that both reproduce an overall sentiment that everything was better in those days and a more hidden subtext that subverts this positive message. They have seemingly endless complaints about the present, a fact that can be gauged by the sheer volume and level of detail of that section. Finally, they speak about possible futures in a wide variety of ways, often in far vaguer ways than seen in their accounts of the woes of the present.

In this chapter, I focus upon my interlocutors' stories about the past. These are usually extended accounts of how they view the history of Anthroposophy. They have a discernable chronological development and are amenable to a discussion in the light of Greimas' actantial model.

4.2 The Golden Age and its decline: an actantial analysis

As will become apparent as I begin to unpack my interviewees' stories about the past, they represent a multitude of voices. Despite the diversity of the individual narratives, my interlocutors nevertheless agree upon the broad strokes of their stories. Again and again, the Swedish word *blomstringstid* was used to characterize the past, a compound noun that can be rendered literally as "a time of flowering" but which in the context of these stories, with their implied sense of a bygone time followed by a period of decline, corresponds closely to the English expression "a Golden Age".[306] As we now proceed to analyze these

[306] Rendering the term *blomstringstid* into English illustrates the difficulties inherent in translating a concept from one language to another in a way that conveys the semantic scope and

narratives by means of the theoretical model introduced in chapter 3, it will become clear that this rosy portrayal of the past in reality masks a much more complex and ambiguous picture.

Strictly speaking, the history of Anthroposophy in the Järna area starts in the 1930s. However, that is not the point at which the narratives of my interviewees start, although references to earlier times are sometimes made. In the stories that are the focus of this section, "the past" is essentially a period of time that started decades later and was when the construction of Rudolf Steinerseminariet and other Anthroposophical enterprises located nearby was undertaken and completed, a period that spanned several decades prior to the closing of the twentieth century. My interviewees characterize the colossal efforts that were needed to execute these projects as a campaign initiated and led by a handful of "great men", i.e., various charismatic leaders who were fundamental to the development of Anthroposophy in Sweden. These individuals succeeded in recruiting large numbers of enthusiastic young people to come and work for the shared cause. Their qualities and efforts are sometimes described in the stories in distinctly religious terms. Several conditions are cited as factors contributing to Anthroposophy's growth in Sweden during the time in question. In addition to the qualities possessed by the leaders, general trends in society at large also helped create the opportunity for something unique and vibrant to emerge in Järna. Over time, the narratives contend, things changed, and a period of decline started to fold. This turn of events led to the present situation, which, as we shall see as the chronology of the stories told to me unfolds, is described quite negatively by most of my interviewees. Although the narratives at first glance tell of an exciting time full of possibilities, when one begins to analyze them in detail, it turns out that the past was not such a Golden Age after all.

As explained in section 3.3.4, Greimas' model analyzes stories in terms of six fundamental roles, called actants, that various people, groups, and even abstractions can fill. To summarize again very briefly, these actants are the *object*, which is the mission that is to be accomplished; the *sender*, which is the person or entity that defines and initiates the mission; the *subject*, which is the one or ones entrusted with accomplishing the mission; the *receiver*, who benefits from the mission; the various *helpers*, who offer assistance; and the *opponent* or opponents, who stand in the way. These actants, as they can be discerned in the narratives of the past told to me, will now be presented in the order listed above. They will be illustrated by referring to quotes from various individual narratives. It can be noted that the narratives of the past devote much more space to some

connotations of the term in original language. The expression *blomstringstid* does not necessarily refer to the past: used in a different narrative context it could refer to a bright future that the narrator envisages as lying ahead. Moreover, calling a particular period in time a *blomstringstid* does not necessarily imply an emphasis on a subsequent decline. My interviewees, however, consistently used the word to refer to the purportedly glorious past which they contrast with a far less fortunate present. The translation "Golden Age" thus seems appropriate in this particular context.

actants than to others. For instance, as we shall see, my interlocutors have many, and sometimes quite detailed, opinions about the opponents in their narratives but, in contrast, say very little about the sender.

4.2.1 The Object

Since the questions I posed to my interlocutors concern the development of Anthroposophy in Sweden, they were primed to present the object as what they, as Olivia did when she talked about her time at Rudolf Steinerseminariet, in Anthroposophical terminology called *manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society*. Converted into a different kind of prose, the object in the narratives of the past is to make Anthroposophy in Sweden flourish. In some of them, the object is presented as self-explanatory, i.e., the person telling the story does not appear to feel any need to make the matter of why it is a good thing for Anthroposophy to have a strong foothold in Swedish society explicit. In others, it is, by extension, a way to "have an effect on society" (Anne-Marie) and even to "change the world" (Anna) because "[w]e are needed everywhere" (Karl). Even in those stories, the link between the local task of improving the conditions under which Anthroposophy operates and the lofty, global goal is not spelled out. One can of course only speculate about why the object was presented in this way. Perhaps the people I interviewed felt it was obvious and therefore did not need to be stated more clearly. Perhaps they saw me as enough of an insider to understand the connection. Perhaps it was a bit of both, or perhaps it had to do with something else entirely.[307]

The object in these narratives, i.e., manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse, is realized concretely by creating and expanding enterprises and institutions, e.g., Rudolf Steinerseminariet and Kulturhuset, by making Anthroposophy accessible for "outsiders", for instance by popularizing aspects of Steiner's legacy such as Waldorf education (as we will see in section 4.2.6.2 when we take part of Oskar's story about an important exhibition on Anthroposophy held at Liljevalchs gallery in Stockholm), and, in one of the few ways in which a distinctly religious language entered the stories about Anthroposophy in Sweden, missionizing. Sonja, for example, spoke about something happening that she characterized as a kind of religious awakening taking place in Järna and referred to Arne Klingborg as "a preacher". Even in the instances when my interviewees employed religious language it was kept within clear boundaries, however, as if it was important to avoid the impression that what was happening was "too religious". For example, when Peter described Klingborg's talent for presenting Anthroposophy in a way that was easy to comprehend, he emphasized that, while it was clear that Arne was talking about something that could be called spiritual, he did so in such a way that highlighted its experiential basis and did not require blind belief in what Peter called "strange theories". Nevertheless, even when explicitly religious

[307] It can be noted that written materials can be equally vague or silent about this issue. See Swartz & Hammer (2021). This of course makes it less plausible that my interviewees' vagueness on this point is a result of the interview situation.

references are lacking in the stories about the past, the accounts of Klingborg's zeal when addressing interested youth (as in Oskar's narrative, for instance) come across as descriptions of a missionizing effort.

4.2.2 Subjects

The subject entrusted with the mission of manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse might at first seem to be the powerful and charismatic leaders who were active a few decades ago. However, for reasons that will become clear in the analysis and discussion of the helper and opponent actants, the leaders are best not seen as subjects. Instead, the entity or entities that manifest the impulse in the world of the stories are the *Anthroposophical movement* and the *Anthroposophical Society*, two analytically distinct social formations (see pp. 41-2) that most of the narratives conflate. As is also the case with their assessments of the present and their narratives of the future, my interlocutors drew little distinction between various organizational structures within the Anthroposophical milieu. They would, for instance, refer to "the Anthroposophical Society (in Sweden)" and "the Anthroposophical movement" as interchangeable concepts and would do the same regarding the General Anthroposophical Society (i.e., the worldwide organization with its headquarters in Switzerland) and the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden (i.e., as mentioned above, the Swedish division of this larger organization).

Sometimes my interviewees would inject themselves into the stories, but, when they did so, they did not foreground themselves as the heroes who got the job done. Rather, they most often inserted themselves as minor details in what can be regarded as an organizational story and not an autobiographical narrative. Interestingly, even when I asked them explicitly about their own experiences, they most often framed their own role in modest terms and foregrounded the Anthroposophical movement to which they belonged. This occurred also in the cases of individuals who eventually took on leadership positions themselves when they told stories about the past (a past during which they held those leadership positions). Therefore, they, too, are best seen in the helper role.

4.2.3 The Sender

Precisely who or what has entrusted the subject with the task of "manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse" largely remains unstated in the narratives of the past. The few times that a sender can be intuited occur in connection with mentions of *Rudolf Steiner* (e.g., in the cases of Anna, Anne-Marie, and Peter). In a formal sense, Steiner is the initiator of the quest described in the stories since he is the one who founded the Anthroposophical Society in its various institutional forms. At the same time, it is remarkable that he alone is given the role. In Steiner's voluminous writings, readers are offered glimpses of a vast and complex spiritual world (the outlines of which were presented above in section 2.3.2) that one could have imagined figuring as the sender. More specifically, a being by the name of Michael is given in Steiner's body of work the role of ruler over our present epoch. Various spiritual impulses that purportedly affect our

mundane world are also described over the course of innumerable pages. However, none of these cosmological elements or beings are alluded to in the narratives of the past. At most, what emerges are vague references to something spiritual. The many efforts of the charismatic leaders are highlighted again and again, but we are given little if any clue as to why these individuals felt impelled to take on the gargantuan task of manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse.

One can only speculate about why so little is said about these aspects, and two hypotheses can be formulated. The first is that secular language permeates the narratives in general and therefore also those parts of the narrative that deal with the sender. This means that a secular vocabulary is adopted to describe the vicissitudes of (from an etic perspective) a religious organization. The neoliberal social context, as mentioned in section 3.2, has made it natural for people to use a quasi-managerial language when referring to their organization as if this were a corporation structured like any other large corporation. The second has to do with my own role as interviewer. Any conversation is characterized by tacit assumptions about what one's conversation partner already knows. A reflection about the status of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden told to a person one believes knows next to nothing about the subject will likely, but of course not always, include a host of details one simply assumes to be shared background knowledge when speaking with an insider to the tradition. As mentioned in the methodology section, my contact with Anthroposophy went beyond merely conducting interviews, and my interlocutors, who either knew that I have a fair amount of background knowledge regarding Anthroposophy or knew that I have experience of working in an Anthroposophical institution, or both, felt that the outlines of Anthroposophical cosmology were familiar to me and assumed that these matters did not need to be spelled out.

4.2.4 Receivers

The receivers who ultimately benefit from the task carried out are seldom mentioned explicitly in the narratives of the past. It is clear, as seen above, that Anthroposophy is perceived by at least some of those with whom I spoke as beneficial to, or even vital for, *the entire world*. One could then, based upon this view, trace a chain of receivers from those in a local context to the world at large. For example, the various institutions established in places such as Järna benefit their customers and clients by providing various services. A Waldorf school, for instance, benefits its students and their parents. Children (and parents) who thrive benefit the surrounding society. A society that is comprised of happy and healthy citizens benefits the world on a larger scale. This train of reasoning presumably underlies references, such as the ones we saw above, to benefiting the world and being needed everywhere. In a spiritual worldview that includes the concept of karma, the employees of an institution are also benefited by working in it. The effort and time expended affect the karmic burden that one carries from one lifetime to the next in a positive way. This point was touched upon by Anna, for example, when she discussed the relationship between teacher and student as one that is karmically transformative for the former since the

latter is in fact the real teacher in the situation. The chain of receivers also has a secular component. Anne-Marie, for instance, talked about how the local community benefits because the institutions generate employment opportunities and attract attention from curious individuals who then contribute in various ways to the economic growth of the area.

4.2.5 Helpers

Broadly stated, the narratives of the past concentrate on identifying helpers and opponents. While a narrative can be, as we have seen above, nearly silent about the nature of the other four actants or merely hint at them in vague terms, my interlocutors often had very much to say about who, or what, helped and who, or what, stood in the way of doing the work that was necessary to obtain the object. The narrative style becomes more vivid and the level of drama increases once my interlocutors begin to speak about these helpers and opponents.

Helpers, in short, are various people, abstractions, and narrative elements in general that my interlocutors describe in favorable terms and identify as having contributed to the past successes of Anthroposophy in Sweden. They often serve as reasons explaining why the number of Anthroposophical enterprises increased and, once established, grew to the extent that they did during what was, as mentioned above, often described to me as a Golden Age. I have grouped the elements that filled the role of helper into four broad categories. The first concerns *past leaders*, the second has to do with *the youthful enthusiasm* of something that was then novel, and the third is connected to *the spirit of the times* in general. The fourth has to do with *the unique product on offer*. To each category, I have assigned further groupings when relevant. Past leaders, for instance, figure prominently in these narratives, and I therefore could categorize mentions of them in a more detailed way. In contrast, talk about the spirit of the times and how it was beneficial to the growth of the Anthroposophy in Sweden was more uniform and therefore can be presented without further categorization.

4.2.5.1 Past leaders

In narratives about earlier times, as well as those concerning the present and the future, figures having had some position of authority within the Anthroposophical milieu repeatedly emerge as dynamic individuals possessing extraordinary abilities, e.g., a great aptitude for persuading and inspiring others, and in these descriptions their disappearance from the scene is often what prefaces a perceived period of decline. As a first approximation – to be refined below – we could see these leaders as crucially placed helpers in the narratives I collected. For instance, while we were discussing their significance, Linn said the following:

> Lots of people miss Arne Klingborg and Jörgen Smit, but we could also look at it from a different point of view and say that we were lucky enough to have

> experienced this [at all]. Maybe we thought it was the normal state of things when it perhaps was something quite unique instead.

In narratives that take up these figures, several factors are discussed as reasons for the development and expansion of Anthroposophy in Sweden. These include the ways in which they reached out to young people in particular; their ability to secure funds to finance a period of expansion; their marketing skills in terms of being able to capture the interest of the general public; and the efforts they made to unify a complex movement. Each of these aspects will be treated separately below.

Contact with young people

For reasons that will become apparent later, I view various attributes of the past leaders, rather than the leaders themselves, as fulfilling helper roles. The past leaders' abilities to forge relationships with young people, for example, were repeatedly placed in the position of helper in the interviews I conducted. Several of my interviewees mentioned their knack for knowing how to make people feel as though they were unique individuals capable of contributing something important to Anthroposophy. Oskar, for instance, described an occasion upon which Arne Klingborg successfully recruited a group of people:

> He seized the moment. He could sense that they were interested. [He said,] "join us," "you can lend a hand," "think about the future," and all sorts of similar encouragements. I think he succeeded in getting around 15 to 20 young people to become members of the Anthroposophical Society then. It was absolutely amazing.

This theme of people joining *en masse* was also touched upon by Charlotte, who said, "It was a wave. I was part of a wave that came here."

Several of my interlocutors, as mentioned above, used terms such as "salvation" and "mission" when talking about these figures. Sonja, for example, said that "They saw their work as teachers as a mission based on Anthroposophy" and added the following:

> [O]ne could of course say that Järna was a place of ideological indoctrination, but I don't see that in such a negative light. It was a place where you learned about Anthroposophy and you got to hear what Rudolf Steiner had said and you got to experience things and paint and do this and that in this Anthroposophical sphere for a year, and for many people it was a kind of religious awakening. In those days, Rudolf Steinerseminariet definitely had the characteristics of a religious awakening. Arne was a preacher, but he had great personal warmth, and he was of course a leader, a tremendously strong leader, but he was a leader with great warmth and was also a role model in many ways. He of course was a leader, but he absolutely was a preacher.

Some reported having thought that the leaders possessed special abilities. Felicia told me that she, in younger years, believed one of her teachers at Rudolf

Steinerseminariet had contact with the spiritual world and thus had access to a higher kind of wisdom. In some of the narratives told to me, the emphasis was on the transgenerational bond that was established. Alexander's account of spending time doing translation work with an older member, for example, gives us a glimpse into how profoundly such relationships could affect people:

> She was always interested in young people but was of the older tribe. At the same time, she was the most radical of an older tribe, which was paradoxical. We didn't always see eye to eye, but I regard it as having been an interesting period of learning for me – to partake of something from the older generation, to feel it all the way down in the marrow of my bones because of the intensity of the discussions we had. And it left a mark on the very core of my being that I never got rid of; instead, I have to find a way to relate to it. This, I think, is a very good thing, because I have a piece of history with me.

Marketing skills and a knack for generating funds

Another perceived helper was the ability of the leaders to secure the financing that would enable Anthroposophy to grow. When discussing the Golden Age and what made it possible, Emma talked about the matter of available resources, saying that:

> [W]e shouldn't forget that there was actually money in the picture that could make everything possible. The whole area around Rudolf Steinerseminariet was built up. There was land available. There were initiatives [that had been established], but, just like when Steiner was alive, there were people who provided the funds so that all of this could become a reality.

The topic of economy came up again at a later point in our conversation:

> I've also sometimes thought that people perhaps believed that there was so much interest [in Anthroposophy] and that this was the reason why the whole area blossomed, but it was also maybe because Järna and the area around Rudolf Steinerseminariet had the means to be able pop up so that people could then come to it.

As a prerequisite for generating funds, i.e., the knack some of them had for marketing both themselves and Anthroposophy as sources of inspiration, is a helper in some stories about the past. This quality was framed as a reason for why the early leaders contributed to development and expansion during a Golden Age. Although a number of the figures who embody this quality reappear in the narratives shared with me, Arne Klingborg does so most frequently and is often afforded the greatest significance both for my interlocutors personally and for what they sometimes refer to as the movement in general. Oskar, for instance, called him "the greatest Anthroposophical luminary in Sweden" and said that "Without him, we wouldn't have come close to accomplishing everything we did. His significance cannot be overestimated." Anna recalled him as "an incredibly inspirational person" to whom people were "enormously devoted". His ability to awaken enthusiasm in others was also touched upon by Marcus, who said that

"He was the greatest artist of them all, not because of his art – I'm not particularly impressed by it – but because he used his creativity to inspire others."

When telling me about a number of large-scale exhibitions having to do with Anthroposophy that Arne Klingborg arranged in mainstream forums, Oskar referred to him as "one of Sweden's most skilled marketers". The exhibitions Oskar mentioned were also brought up by others with whom I spoke as an example of successful marketing. One motivating factor behind his efforts to promote various aspects of Anthroposophy was pointed out by Peter. He said that it had always been his ambition to reach out to a larger audience and not just focus on catering to Anthroposophists. According to Charlotte, Klingborg succeeded in making the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, an organization she said had previously been viewed by outsiders with suspicion, relevant for the times in which he lived.

Peter attributed Arne Klingborg's success in this area to his capacity for making Anthroposophy accessible:

> He worked with Anthroposophy in such a way that he could communicate the parts of it that he himself stood for, what he experienced as true for him. He could do it in such a way that got people really enthusiastic about it, because it wasn't any of those strange theories, Rudolf Steiner said this or that, that you have to believe in things you don't understand, and stuff like that. You can sense that there must be something spiritual about it – but not more than what you can actually experience. That's important. Otherwise, it gets very sect-like.

As mentioned above, Klingborg's significance for the growth of Anthroposophy in Sweden in general and for the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden as an organization was repeatedly discussed by my interviewees. This is also the case for challenges both faced when he retired. Daniel, for example, said the following when discussing the topic of his disappearance from the scene:

> A great paradigm shift occurred when Arne Klingborg died and [his successors] took over. Things changed a lot then. Arne Klingborg had led the Anthroposophical Society in a way that was very inspiring, or at least I thought he did, but there were also many people who felt that they had been trampled down by him. He was, however, exceptionally spiritual and intellectual and cultured, a spectacular individual of great character, and when he died or, rather, left his post as president or general secretary, the Anthroposophical Society changed a great deal.

He continued his narrative by enumerating some of the consequences of Klingborg's disappearance. These will be discussed later in this section.

They endeavored to unite a complex organization

An additional helper that a number of my interlocutors brought up when discussing former leaders' contributions is the unifying effect they were perceived as having on what can be regarded as a complex organizational structure. An example of efforts made in this direction was given by Oskar, who

spoke of Arne Klingborg's aim to institute concrete changes in the structure of the School of Spiritual Science, an organization which he characterized in my conversation with him as resembling a "secret club" whose members "didn't really know what they were doing in that secret club". Klingborg, Oskar told me, had established a special division within it for the purpose of providing opportunities for people from different professional fields who otherwise had very little to do with one another to meet several times each year and present what they had been working with in their particular areas.

4.2.5.2 Youthful enthusiasm

A second positive element that frequently turned up in my conversation partners' narratives of the past and thus fills the role of helper concerns what could be referred to as the enthusiasm generated by what was then something novel. In general, these mentions took the form of stories about an exciting time and goals that were accomplished because people were willing to make an extra effort.

It was an exciting time

There are many ways of narratively framing the enthusiasm of the time and place as a helper. Many of those I interviewed talked fondly of the area around Rudolf Steinerseminariet as a bustling center of activity. Oskar, for example, spoke of Ytterjärna during its prime as "something out of a storybook – a paradise". While not all of my interlocutors included themselves in their narratives about the past as helpers, some of them, like Oskar, did. His own relationship with Anthroposophy began when he lived in Stockholm, and it was there where he first heard about what was happening a short distance from the nation's capital:

> I had been interested in Anthroposophy for a long time. At first, I went to Rådmansgatan [where the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden used to maintain a locale], and it was there that I realized that the light came from Järna. They talked about Järna constantly in that little place, and I thought, "What in the world is going on there?" So, I went and settled down there, built a family, and worked.

The motif of light recurred in my interview with Oskar when he talked about Järna's significance in an international context:

> At the height of Anthroposophy's heyday in Järna, many people, primarily in Germany, said that the Anthroposophical world's eyes were on Järna. There [in Germany], they've said several times that the light comes from the North. There was an idea in the Anthroposophical world that Järna was very important. The Goetheanum and Switzerland stood for tradition. They had a legacy to maintain. They were forced to do things a certain way. You never got the impression that any kind of renewal came from there but that it instead came from Järna.

The summer courses organized at Rudolf Steinerseminariet were particularly popular and drew both Swedish and international participants. Charlotte, who

had prior to being an attendee studied Anthroposophy as a solitary pastime, found meeting others who shared this interest to be profoundly transformative. In her words, the experience of coming to Järna was "like coming to an ashram in India or something like that – an ashram 50 kilometers outside of Stockholm." Emphasizing the sense of relief one experienced as a result of being isolated and insulated ("Forget about the outside world! This is enough. How nice! You can actually concentrate."), Oskar used the term "monastic" in his description of the place. A similar distinction between inside and outside was also drawn by several of my interlocutors when we talked about differences they saw when comparing the Anthroposophical and non-Anthroposophical communities in Järna. In these discussions, the term "yllefolket" [the wool people] occasionally surfaced for one reason or another and was on several occasions presented to me as a pejorative coined by non-Anthroposophists, the "wool" part being a reference to the garments made of this material that were often worn by people having some connection to Anthroposophy. A sense of pride in being, or having been, part of a countercultural movement could, however, sometimes be detected when it was used. This topic will be discussed below in a later section that deals with the matter of conflicts.

People were willing to make an extra effort

An additional factor having to do with the youthful enthusiasm of the early years touched upon in the narratives about the past is a, held by some of my interlocutors, shared belief that people worked harder, which thus enabled a great many things to be accomplished. For instance, according to Viktor, solutions were found even in desperate situations because people were committed and were willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Moreover, many who were involved in the various activities and enterprises that originated or took form during the period in question were, according to Anna, either volunteers or worked for very little pay:

> There was no money. Very much was done on a volunteer basis. People did stuff for free. People did things of their own goodwill. People worked late. People got by without receiving any payment for what they did. They wanted to achieve something. They wanted to change the world.

One way in which the development of the Anthroposophical movement is characterized in the narratives of the past, in particular that of Rudolf Steinerseminariet and the institutions and enterprises in its vicinity, is as a product resulting from the interplay of specific personal dynamics. In the words of Nils, "it wasn't anything that someone organized". Instead, he added, "it grew out of relationships [that developed] between people."

Although enthusiasm and hard work might seem ideally placed in the role of a helper in a story about a glorious past, this is an issue that provoked a measure of meta-reflection in the cases of some of my interviewees. In other words, they could refer to what they perceived as being a widespread

tendency amongst Swedish Anthroposophists to see the past, and especially all the work done in Järna, through rose-colored glasses. This can be seen in an excerpt from Han's narrative, which also touches upon themes discussed above, e.g., past leaders' abilities to attract large numbers of young people:

> Järna was bustling with activity when Arne Klingborg was head of Rudolf Steinerseminariet as it was called back then, [a place where you could study] Anthroposophy, education, and eurythmy. There were a great many young people here then that he had drawn to himself, and Jörgen Smit was here, and it was so very intensely alive. At that time, there were, compared to the situation today, far fewer [Anthroposophical] institutions in Sweden, so, in that sense, you could say that it was a bustling center of activity that inspired people to establish new things everywhere. When I came here, Vidarkliniken and Kulturhuset did not yet exist, but I got to experience precisely the things that I love – the actualization of Anthroposophy as an art of living of sorts, not just as art to hang on the wall, but as an art of living. That's what it was like then. A lot of people lived here and most likely had very little space for themselves, so one probably shouldn't idealize things too much. Everyone ate in the cafeteria. You didn't get paid for what you did. Instead, you got food and a place to live, but the leaders had such power, and lots of young people were drawn to that.

4.2.5.3 It suited the spirit of the times

A third recurring positive element in the narratives about the past is a belief that the time and place were right. This elusive "spirit of the times" can thus be seen as a helper in these narratives. An example of this line of thinking can be found in the following excerpt from Charlotte's narrative:

> It was the end of the '60s, the beginning of the '70s. It was still during the time of the youth culture explosion. Young people existed before that of course, but it was all Elvis Presley and stuff like that. That was the beginning of something, but a social aspect came later. In the U.S., the impulse was really strong. All the drop-outs from the middle classes. People discovered Eastern philosophy. It was precisely these kinds of people who came here [to Järna] for the summer course. They came directly from India. They were hippies, om mani padme hum, and did yoga on the lawn. It was that time – a mix of civic engagement, socialism – and at the same time, you discovered that there was a kind of spirituality you had never heard about before, and you could in some way recognize these factors and live in an unconventional way here. It was a bit like a commune. People sought new lifestyles and something meaningful to do with their lives in general while at the same time having some kind of spiritual perspective on things, so it coincided perfectly with the spirit of the times for a lot of people, those who came here at any rate, and it did for me as well.

Mattias also took up the broader context of a concurrent trend in society:

> When I was young in the '70s, we had the back-to-the-land movement, young people who wanted to move to the countryside, radically out in the countryside, and in Järna you lived in some kind of intentional community and you were to

> break all ties with conventional Western civilization. You were to bake you own bread and make you own clothes.

Johan similarly remarked that the general, widespread interest in such things as alternative ways of thinking, peacekeeping efforts, and raising levels of consciousness that characterized the times influenced the growth of Anthroposophy in Sweden in a beneficial way. Not all of my interlocutors agreed, however, about exactly when these positive times were. Emma's view expands the timeframe of the period of interest in countercultural tendencies that eventually lost their alternative edge beyond the 1970s that most others mention: "In part, I think that it was just the way the times were [in general]. We're talking about the 1970s here, and the 1980s in Järna were like a continuation of the 1970s." Ultimately, what my interlocutors described to me is a positive epoch in the past, but they occasionally disagreed about the specifics of precisely when that time was.

Once again, we find a (rare) instance of meta-reflection when Anders suggested that much of the story about the spirit of the times could be attributed to a tendency to romanticize the past:

> I think people also glorify the past: it was so cozy, and it was so nice, and it was so fantastic, and all of that. Yes, I can see that, but if you look at the hard facts, and the bigger context also internationally, then, yeah, I think we are living in different times [now]. But why didn't people bother so much about the structure back then? Because the key people, especially Arne Klingborg, were sort of the center of everything, and then, in Sweden, if things are moving forward, it doesn't matter so much what kind of structure there actually is, which is also typical for a pioneer phase.

In the above, he also alludes to a development that will be addressed at length in a later section, i.e., perceived difficulties inherent in finding a structure that suits the situation as it is today.

4.2.5.4 It had a unique product to offer

Yet another positive element that appears in narratives about the past is that the enterprises established in Järna had something unique to offer, since it was described by several of my interlocutors as the only place in the Nordic countries that offered training at that time in such fields as Waldorf education and curative therapy. The helper role is here filled by the notion of an untapped market. In the words of Emma, "the initiative of having a Nordic learning center was quite new" and "[y]oung people who had longed for just such a thing came from all over Scandinavia." Anne-Marie touched upon the same topic in my conversation with her and cited a change in precisely those circumstances as one of the reasons for the decline of the Golden Age. Anthroposophical lines of education started to be established in neighboring countries, which led to a situation where "Finns stay in Finland, Danes stay in Denmark, Norwegians stay in Norway" which ultimately meant that "they stopped coming to Järna".

4.2.6 Opponents

Although the story of the past is consistently framed by my interviewees as if it had been some kind of Golden Age, and one might therefore expect the helpers to completely dominate the narrative and the opponents to be nearly absent from it, this turns out not to be the case. In a way that may initially seem surprising, although elements that fill the helper role dominate the narratives, it was not at all uncommon for my interlocutors to stress how positive the past had been before launching into an often-lengthy description of various negative aspects of those times. In other words, there are quite a few elements that function as opponents. I have divided them into two categories, and each will be treated in turn below. The first concerns *leaders*. The same individuals whose many positive qualities function as helpers turn out, in these stories, to have other, less positive traits as well. The second concerns *conflicts and schisms* that at least in the world of the narratives make the Anthroposophical milieu come across as consisting of innumerable fault lines. For the purposes of enabling a more in-depth analysis, each category is in the following broken down into further divisions based upon discernable themes. As is also the case with the elements discussed above as well as with the narratives about the present status and the future prospects of Anthroposophy in Sweden presented elsewhere in this study, a strictly articulated distinction between the Anthroposophical movement and the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden (as well as its mother organization) was seldom made in the stories told by the people I interviewed.

4.2.6.1 Negative qualities of past leaders

Although individuals formerly having had a leadership position within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden or the broader Anthroposophical milieu were most often, as seen above, described in positive terms by my interlocutors and hence function as helpers, they were also sometimes talked about in less favorable ones. Sometimes the same person would touch upon both aspects in their narrative, i.e., discussing, often at length, a positive quality before moving on to condemn a negative trait. For this reason, it seems most natural to identify specific characteristics of the leaders as filling helper or opponent functions rather than perceiving the leaders themselves as doing so. I have divided the opponent characteristics of the leaders into the following three categories: *lack of appreciation of the work of others*, *inability to deal with finances*, and *failure to institute or facilitate organizational change*. These are exactly the same problems as those any manager would encounter, whether of religious organization or a secular one. As the mentions of negative qualities were more infrequent than instances of praise, the examples of opponents given below are consequently fewer.

Lack of appreciation for others

One area of criticism concerned what was described as a lack of appreciation shown to people who made various contributions to Anthroposophy in Sweden.

Robin, for instance, told me about courses that he had arranged about topics, although not strictly Anthroposophical, he imagined would nonetheless be of interest to Anthroposophists. His initiative, however, was, he explained, met by what he felt was an underwhelming response from people in leadership positions. "I really didn't like that," he said, adding "When you do something new, it's always nice to get a little feedback." He mentioned having had a similar experience as an employee of an Anthroposophical institution for curative education. At this particular workplace, he felt that "you were only a tool" and were "never validated".

Lack of financial acumen

An additional form of criticism portrayed leaders of the Golden Age as visionaries who had little understanding of finances. For instance, Nils, a former council member, told me of the difficulties that arose once Kulturhuset was finished and was "no longer just a thought and a vision". When it came to the financial side of things, he said that "the strength of the Anthroposophical Society" did not lie there. This view was also expressed in connection with mentions of others involved in management positions within Anthroposophical enterprises. For example, Oskar, when discussing the situation of a business in whose services he had previously been employed, said that this particular establishment faced many challenges since those in charge of its operations were ill-equipped to deal with its financial reality.

Failure to work for renewal

Another critical point voiced by my interlocutors about the leaders suggests that their efforts for renewal were insufficient. These comments mostly concern Rudolf Steinerseminariet as an institution and the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden as an organization. Recurring issues touched upon in the narratives are a perceived failure to facilitate a transition to new leadership and what is regarded as a lack of success in generating enough public interest in Anthroposophy to ensure its survival in Sweden.

While the process by which new council members are selected is regulated by the organization's bylaws, the ways in which my interviewees understood this process varied. For example, I was informed by some that the leaders themselves selected their own colleagues. For instance, Nils told me while talking about his own time as a council member that the underlying belief then was that the council itself was best suited to choose its additions because those already serving were the ones who really knew what was needed and who were familiar with the individuals with whom they would best collaborate. The notion of being called upon in an Anthroposophical context to assume a position of authority and its particular responsibilities was also taken up by Linn. When discussing the School of Spiritual Science and those who serve as what are known as class holders, she mentioned that these individuals are "called" to take on that post, a tradition that she said could be traced back to Steiner's time.

Some of the negative traits attributed to former leaders and the ways in which they handled the matters of the transferal of power and working for renewal emerged in connection with discussing why the perceived Golden Age came to an end. For example, when we talked about when and how Rudolf Steinerseminariet ceased to be a Nordic center for Anthroposophical education and training, Anders said that its decline could in part be attributed to the leadership's failure to change and redefine its role. Similar ideas about neglecting to sufficiently engage in processes of renewal can be discerned in the following excerpt from Olivia's reply to the question of when the decline started:

> It's hard to say. I studied in '95, '96. During the spring term, the students talked about how the older generation had borne a powerful impulse and that they had manifested it. This was obvious, and we thought a lot about it. They had borne an impulse, but what's new? It of course wasn't their mission to create something new for us, but their inspirational powers had started to run dry. Arne Klingborg was still a vital force. He turned 80 that year. He still had a vitality about him and a general curiosity in things, but, at the same time, some kind of substance was on the verge of being lost. But [Rudolf Steinerseminariet] kept on going for another 5 or 6 years. It was, however, in the process of dying. We felt that there was some kind of vitality left but that it was on its last legs. We could feel that already then.

Another view that was expressed by several of my interviewees is that former leaders refused to retire and held on to their positions for far too long. Several of their relatives told me that they had often prioritized their duties over the needs of their own families. An example can be found in the following excerpt of a conversation I had with Sonja. When I asked her if she believed that an institution like Rudolf Steinerseminariet could exist today, she said "I don't believe so" and continued by giving a number of reasons for its downfall:

> Those who [had] been the driving forces, they clung on and didn't make room for a new generation, and this was largely the result of them operating under the impression that there is no such thing as an age of retirement. Instead, you work until you drop dead. My uncle, even on his deathbed, was extremely worried about Rudolf Steinerseminariet's future, and he wanted me to get involved, something I absolutely did not want to do. […] Those years from the middle of the '90s into the first years of the 2000s, it was then that they started to disappear. Arne disappears as well. He retires. And they didn't really have any replacements who had that capacity [to take over]. They invested a bit in a few people, but [these individuals] never really had the capacity to take on a leadership role and develop Rudolf Steinerseminariet in a way that suits our times. Instead, they tried to maintain something and keep it going, but it went under.

An additional form of criticism suggests that past leaders failed to attract enough interested parties or make a deep enough impression on society at large to ensure the continued growth and survival of Anthroposophy in Sweden. Anne-Marie, for instance, made a comparison with Coco Chanel's famous quote that "fashion changes, but style endures" and said that efforts that had been made for these purposes had only succeeded on a superficial level. Blame, she said, is put

on external factors, but she does not believe this to be an accurate assessment "because the Goetheanum was built during the First World War and the external factors weren't particularly great then either".

4.2.6.2 Conflicts and schisms

Another type of element that is recurrently cast in the role of opponent in the narratives about the past has to do with conflicts. These are so many and so diverse in my interviews that the picture that emerges from these reports is one of a fragmented movement plagued by various quarrels. In general, there is sufficient agreement amongst these accounts to allow for categorization. However, significant differences exist in views about, e.g., how the conflicts started, whether or not they are still ongoing, their intensity, and their influence on the movement's development. I have first broadly divided them into two groups: *conflicts with outsiders* and *internal conflicts*. Both are further divided into subcategories in order to show the variety of conflicts described by my interlocutors.

Conflicts with outsiders

Some of my interviewees mentioned disputes that arose between people having some connection to Anthroposophy living in and around Järna and residents of the same area who did not. The aforementioned epithet "the wool people" was taken up frequently by the individuals I interviewed as a marker representing this tension. Oskar, for instance, described the stereotypical image of just such a person as a "broke" Anthroposophist who drove around in a "junky", old car. Anna provided a similar portrait: "Those wool people, they just smoke weed and walk around dressed in wool caftans ["yllekaftaner"]. They're really weird." According to her report, young people became embroiled in these conflicts as well, and the children of Anthroposophists were sometimes bullied. Anne-Marie also mentioned woolen garments and old cars (in this case, the Volvo Duett) in her narrative and said that the differences between the two groups were vast:

> When you went into a store in Järna, you could immediately see who was an Anthroposophist and who wasn't. It was very obvious, so things were very divided, but it's not like that nowadays. What's visible, recognizable – you don't see too much of that nowadays, but back then you did. But it was also a remnant [from the hippie movement]. Today, people dress the way they want to, and so it doesn't really matter, but back then it was obvious. Typical Swedes didn't dress like Anthroposophists. There was also a great deal of suspicion, on both sides in fact.

As stated above, my interlocutors sometimes disagreed about whether certain of these conflicts solely belong to the past. As we can see, for Anne-Marie, while the situation slowly changed over the years, it is mentioned almost as an afterthought that the tension between insiders and outsiders lingers on and can still be detected.

> We lived in an apartment complex in Järna for a while, and the relationships between Anthroposophists and non-Anthroposophists were very frigid there. It wasn't that way everywhere, but [the divide] was very palpable. And – things were so different back then – at that time, it wasn't particularly easy to buy organic milk, and Saltå produced milk, and we had these milk jugs, and you'd transport your milk in one, and it was quite obvious then that you had just milked a cow. And then in '78 or '79 there was that big fight about pharmaceutical products when the police showed up and closed down the old Weleda pharmacy at Åsgatan 2. It was located there then. Certain medications were illegal in Sweden at that time. It was quite intense, one could say. I left in '84 and came back at the end of '88, and it seemed to me that a lot had happened during the years that I was away. Things weren't nearly as tense as they had been. And it's also the case that a lot of people today, if you think about those who own companies like Järnaträ – they know that this [i.e., the presence of Anthroposophical enterprises and institutions] is a good thing, if for no other reason than the fact that it creates jobs. And it's still interesting. I meet a lot of people who live in Järna who have never been to Kulturhuset, and I think "Seriously? It's only 5 kilometers away". That's interesting.

Robin also brought up this change in the relationships between insiders and outsiders in the Järna area. When we discussed an article he had written about about how Järna had become a hub for Anthroposophy-related activity, he told me that he had been thanked by a number of local taxi drivers because reading it had helped them understand the people "out there" better. It made him happy, he said, that people could see that they were not so strange after all.

Although many narratives about such conflicts cast the negative opinions that outsiders had about "the wool people" in the role of opponents, some of my interviewees mentioned that Anthroposophists could have equally hostile views of non-Anthroposophists. Anne-Marie, for example, talked about the frequent derogatory usage of the term "the outside world" in the past. The narrative ends with a reflection about the, for her, misguidedness of this notion:

> To me, it was an odd expression. The outside world was [seen as being] hostile. The general consensus was that society naturally was a good thing because it financed stuff, but it should have very little insight [into how the institutions operate]. When I talk about it like this, I'm of course being reductive, but that was the basic feeling back then, and what hit me was that in order for an Anthroposophical institution really to have an effect on society, which I also think was Steiner's intention, it must be right in the middle of society and public and esoteric at the same time. You don't hide what you do.

Internal conflicts

Other disputes discussed by my interviewees are conflicts within the milieu. Here, as was the case with the previous grouping, further categorizations can be made. For instance, some of the narratives concerned disharmony between Anthroposophical circles in Stockholm and Järna. The event that triggered these difficulties is pinpointed by a number of my interlocutors as the relocation of

what is described as the main center of Anthroposophical activity from Stockholm to Järna. Descriptions vary, however, in terms of, e.g., the severity of the conflict and views regarding whether or not it is still ongoing.

The move to Järna is sometimes portrayed as a betrayal. At other times, it is described in more ideological terms, i.e., as a moving away (or even liberation) from outmoded ways of operating. An example of the latter can be found in Charlotte's narrative about how a past leader compared the life of Anthroposophy in the nation's capital to descending into a catacomb: "And [he] said 'we have to get out of here.' He was an entrepreneur, and [from his point of view] there were things to be built. We can't be down here in the catacombs. We have to get out. Out of the catacombs. That was a recurring theme."

Another instance can be found in Oskar's narrative, which contrasts Järna as a place of innovation with perceived conservative tendencies in Stockholm:

> I came here [i.e., the Stockholm location maintained by the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden at that time] and thought, "Well, I guess everything happens in Järna, then." Everything that was alive, new, and exciting started in Järna. Here [in Stockholm], things were exactly as they always had been. There were quiet, refined study groups. You had your eurhythmy evenings. Things were done in the old way that Steiner had described, and no outward-facing initiatives were ever set into motion.

Next, Oskar provided an example of such an effort:

> Arne, together with his collaborators, organized an exhibition on Waldorf education at Liljevalchs. It was quite a sensation. There had been an exhibit on pornography there [i.e., Liljevalchs] earlier, and the line to get in went all the way down the street, but the line for the one on Waldorf education went on for several blocks. Nothing like that would ever happen [at the Anthroposophical center in Stockholm]. No one there would ever have come up with such a crazy idea.

Charlotte also touched upon Arne Klingborg's role in the conflict. She listed a number of factors that contributed to the discord, one of which she described as a fundamental difference between the dominant way in which Anthroposophy was perceived in Stockholm and Klingborg's "impulse", the latter of which became deeply rooted in Järna and in particular in the workings of Rudolf Steinerseminariet. According to her point of view, the Anthroposophical movement at the time in question was strongly attached to certain personalities, Klingborg being one of them. Here, the matter of the move also becomes more pragmatic: the gradual relocation of the main sphere of Anthroposophical activity to Järna thus occured due to the fact that Arne Klingborg himself had moved there. Another practical reason was offered by Felicia, who referred to a donation of land and money made by a wealthy Anthroposophist. "There, one had the space, and there, one had the money," she said.

According to some of the narratives of the past I was told, the move gave rise to negative feelings in Stockholm's Anthroposophical community. Oskar, for instance, said the following:

> [They] felt pushed aside. Järna was the only thing that mattered [anymore]. "No one cares about us." They felt as though they'd been left behind in some way, so there was a bit of irritation. A certain amount of friction existed between Stockholm and Järna, but it was very mild.

My interlocutors' evaluations of the strength of the opponent, i.e., the severity of the conflict, vary. As we saw in the above, Oskar called it mild. Sonja had a similar opinion and mentioned the involvement of "very strong unifying forces" as well. Karl, in contrast, described the period during which the relocation took place as dramatic and marked by strained relationships and strife. He recalled the bemusement of some in the Stockholm community over the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden being moved "out to the boondocks". The situation has, however, calmed down since then, he said, the reason being that one the most vehement opponents of the move has since died. Despite the favorable aspects of the reduced tension, Karl sees the newer attitude as problematic in its own way because "now no one cares at all" and he does not know whether that is "better or worse". He concluded his narrative by attributing these shifts between positions to human nature, saying "that's how it is with people" (effectively casting "people" as opponents in the story of Anthroposophy). When discussing his own views on the Stockholm-Järna split, Karl said that he merely regards each side as a separate current and sees the advantages of the diversity. What is necessary, he said, is finding ways of cooperating and realizing that having Anthroposophical centers in both places is beneficial. "The fact that there are differences can only be a good thing," he said. "We are needed everywhere." In contrast to Karl's view that the conflict has calmed down, Alexander described it as still very much alive. For him, Stockholm and Järna are two separate institutions that do not cooperate in a functional manner. The sources of the problems, he told me, are a failure to communicate and an imbalance in power relations. This topic is discussed in further detail in the section that concerns how my interviewees see the present time but has been brought up here to show that there are differences in opinions about the intensity and longevity of certain conflicts having arisen in the past.

Most of those who mentioned this particular conflict identified two relatively homogenous factions, i.e., one in Stockholm and one in Järna. This is perhaps only to be expected in a story where quarrels and strife are opponents: boundaries are drawn up clearly, and parties are painted as distinct groups to which one unambiguously either does or does not belong. That tales of conflict can be told differently, i.e., in a way that emphasizes blurred borders and messy details, can be demonstrated by turning to a narrative told by Sonja that warrants being quoted extensively:

> I remember it clearly from when I was a kid because there were students from Järna Waldorfskola that came to Kristofferskolan. There was a lot of talk about the "wool people" at that time, even in the beginning of the '80s, and there were even newspaper articles about "the wool people in Järna". This was a bit of an exaggeration of course because not everyone walked around in wool caftans. Some did, however, and they stuck out. My understanding of Bromma Anthroposophy, if you can call it that, the kind of Anthroposophy found around Stockholm and Kristofferskolan, is that, if you look at it historically, the contours weren't really so sharply drawn. Arne Klingborg, for example, came from Stockholm. He grew up there, had his roots there, had a large social network there, and was in some way a Stockholmite who moved to Järna. The same was true for Åke Kumlander [another former leader] who also had ties to Stockholm. In spite of this, I believe that some kind of us-and-them mentality popped up between Järna and Stockholm in the '70s, that Stockholm Anthroposophy, if you can call it that, which I think has always been partly centered around the Stockholm branch of the Anthroposophical Society, but not so much as people believe, but instead primarily around Kristofferskolan, which has been the leading [Anthroposophical] institution in Stockholm since the '60s. […] So I believe that there has always been, at least since the '60s and extending into the '90s, a Kristofferskolan sphere and a Järna sphere that have somewhat overlapped and where some people were very active in Järna, but never set a foot in Stockholm or the Kristofferskolan sphere, and where others moved between them more freely.

While the Stockholm-Järna conflict is one example of discord within the movement in the past, another is conflicts within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden's governing council. A couple of stories of such conflicts reveal that conflict can (perhaps somewhat counterintuitively) occasionally be cast in the role of helper. A recurring theme that can be seen in my interview material is a belief in the necessity of drama and strife for growth and development. Charlotte, for instance, told me that Arne Klingborg, when asked to speak about the history of the Anthroposophical movement, had once said that "nothing great or valuable comes into being without drama." An elaboration followed:

> Interactions between people always involve drama. It's also part of the process, and processes, of the Anthroposophical Society. Drama is an element in it. And one might ask if the drama that moves things forward is a necessary sort of drama, a kind of developmental crisis. If you can't handle the drama, then it becomes destructive drama. And you can't know [if you can] in advance. You can only know the consequences later on.

She then shared the story of a dramatic conflict that she witnessed during a council meeting that had taken place many years before. For reasons having to do with maintaining anonymity for several of the individuals involved, the details cannot be summarized here, but the titanic clash of wills portrayed in the narrative, wherein bitter accusations are voiced in a tone of high drama, provides a striking contrast with the general portrayal of the past as a Golden Age. The subject of dynamic discord also came up in my conversation with Nils. For instance, when I asked him what his most significant contribution to the

Anthroposophical Society in Sweden was during his time as a council member, he said "constant unrest."

A further type of internal conflicts in the narratives I was told about the past are ones involving people working in different professional fields within the Anthroposophical milieu. These fields were described by my interlocutors as working largely independently of one another since an official entity responsible for establishing and maintaining some kind of organizational unity does not exist. The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden tries to position itself as such, but, interestingly, the narratives I have collected do not afford it this role.[308] Some of these groupings were more isolated than others, one of them being those who worked within the field of curative education in Järna. According to Sonja, although they did have a certain degree of contact with people at Rudolf Steinerseminariet, they operated to some extent in a world of their own.

An additional inner schism mentioned by Sonja centered around Anthroposophists who had been influenced by an Anthroposophical current stemming from Central Europe. According to Sonja, this tendency was more strongly rooted in Stockholm than it was in Järna. At Kristofferskolan, she said, one found a number of teachers who had studied at German universities where they had perhaps been members of local Anthroposophical youth organizations. In Järna, by contrast, the focus was less on the intellect and more on concrete "doing". Also in Järna, music and art were prioritized, and Arne Klingborg, in his role as "the great artist" and with Järna being seen as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, was the primary source of inspiration. Kristofferskolan, in comparison, lacked this impulse. Instead, the ambition was to be an academic environment. For these reasons, Sonja, rather than seeing a division between Stockholm and Järna, instead described "a more academic tendency" and "a more radical tendency", the latter of which was "a little more left of center, closer to the environmental movement, [and] closer to the alternative movement in general". It was also, according to Sonja, this particular collection of individuals that was given the label "the wool people".

An additional conflict that was brought up by some of those I interviewed concerned a split that led to the establishment of two separate Waldorf schools in the Järna area, i.e., the institutions presently known as Örjanskolan and Solvikskolan. In short, this division, according to the stories I was told about it, was the result of infighting that started due to fundamental differences in opinion regarding how Waldorf methods ought to be put into practice. Sonja called it "[t]he most dramatic event in Järna's history":

> I think it happened around 1980 or so. Örjanskolan and Solvikskolan were established then, and that can be seen as symbolic of the two different tendencies

[308] Websites hosted by the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden use terms such as "mötesplats" (meeting place) to describe itself. See, for instance, https://www.antroposofi.nu/antroposofiska-saellskapet/om-foereningen/

> that have shaped Järna, where one was more freethinking and artistic […] while the other tendency was more academic and intellectual.

The division was also described by Viktor as an incident of great magnitude. "It was a very deep-running conflict", he said. "For several years, people would cross the street so they didn't run into the wrong person. Many things fell apart." Nina, in contrast, expressed a different view and described the event as "not particularly exciting" and said that the discord ended a long time ago. While we discussed the clashes, the subject of drama, touched upon in the above, also came up as Nina said that "in Anthroposophy, it's quite common for catastrophes to beget institutions".

Another category of internal conflicts taken up by my interlocutors consists of ones that arose between people belonging to Anthroposophical networks in and around Järna and people belonging to Anthroposophical networks in other parts of Sweden, i.e., not just Stockholm. Järna, which in other narratives is cast as a shining beacon of light, is in these stories often described as insular, both by those of my interviewees who had never belonged to its community at any time and by those who either had done so at one point or still did. When Fredrik, for example, talked about the early period of his engagement with Anthroposophy, he spoke of how the notion of Järna being something separate and unique was commonly encountered inside and outside of the area. He characterized it as being "a little bit closed off" and called it "an isolated project". "At that time," he said, "there was a need for people to come together there […] to do their own thing". He also said that people described it as being "a little sect-like", adding that "it wasn't like that at all." Emma described Anthroposophy in Järna as a lifestyle choice that dominated all aspects of one's existence. This distinction, according to her point of view, still holds true of the present:

> During the '70s and '80s in Järna, you studied Anthroposophy, and it became part of your life. You lived there, and you worked there. This tendency still exists. However, for everyone who doesn't happen to be in Järna, it's never been that way. Instead, it's something you studied on the side in addition to having a career and a family life or whatever else you chose to do.

Besides such conflicts between various factions as those presented above, there are also stories that relate the everyday quarrels and interpersonal conflicts that can arise in any organization or network. For instance, in my conversations with Robin, a number of such issues were mentioned. In connection with talking about criticism he received for not mentioning various people in an article he had published, he remarked that issues regarding power and jealousy have always been present in Anthroposophical circles. Another had to do with rigid ideas about what is "correct" Anthroposophy. Robin told me about a new course he had planned and said that he felt that the council had disapproved of his, from his point of view, innovative move. He further reported feeling that he had never been accepted in Anthroposophical circles because of his radical ways of

thinking. He said that the same was true for his grandmother, one of the early pioneers in the history of Anthroposophy in Sweden.

5. Narrating the Present

5.1 The story of the present

5.1.1 Introduction

In this section, I examine my interlocutors' stories that focus on the present. As stated above, they, when taken together, can be summarized thusly: "Things aren't what they used to be". While these narratives consist of my interlocutors' descriptions of a general situation as they perceive it to be at a particular moment in time, these reports nonetheless have discernable chronological elements that can, for instance, be seen in connection with attempts to account for why things are the way they are (e.g., the result of someone, or something, either acting or failing to act in a particular way) or predictions for future consequences resulting from things happening now. They therefore can also, like the narratives that focus on the Golden Age of the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden, be usefully discussed in the light of Greimas' actantial model. Before taking a look at the various individuals, groups, and abstractions assigned roles as actants in these stories, I will first provide a summary of the general picture of the present that emerges in them when taken together and then, in order to better contextualize the analysis and discussion that follow, provide examples of recurring themes in my interlocutors' descriptions. The intense preoccupation that my interviewees had with the perceived problems of the present and their very diverse ways of narratively coming to grips with those problems is reflected in the sheer length, complexity, and level of detail of the present section.

Although a few of my interviewees describe the current state of the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu in positive or neutral tones (e.g., Hans and Mattias), the vast majority paint a negative picture of it and often do so markedly by comparing it unfavorably to how they perceived things as having been in previous years. In contrast to the ways in which they talked about the past, my interlocutors' accounts of the present are of a more singular tone, i.e., their evaluations are in most cases uniformly positive or negative. Generally speaking, when taken together, the stories that focus on the present tell of an unsatisfactory situation, which, in Greimasian terms, is the case because, as we shall see below, the subject is unable to obtain the object because helpers are few and opponents are numerous. First, however, we will examine in detail some of these general assessments and themes that can be discerned within them.

5.1.2 Using the past narratively

My interlocutors often set the stage for their stories concerning the present by talking about the past. Despite the space allotted to previous events, what allows these narratives to be classified as ones having to do with the present is that the primary focus is upon what is perceived to be happening now. Touching upon the past can arguably serve (one or more of) several possible functions. One such function could be providing enough background information so that what follows this introductory element (i.e., a reference to the past) is, for the sake of

the imagined audience (which, in the case of the interviews conducted for the purposes of this study, would be me and anyone my interlocutors believed would later partake of the results) is suitably embedded in a larger context. Another could be its use as a rhetorical strategy whereby the present is contrasted with the past, the latter of which is generally positioned as a much more favorable time with better circumstances.

The ways in which these references to the past are constructed differ. Many are simply seamless transitions from a description of an ideal past to an appended sentence or two that casts the present in a rather unfavorable light. These are minimalistic contrasts, such as this remark by Oskar (with emphasis added):

> In years past, during the spring and autumn, there were always busloads of retirees and tourists coming there [i.e., Järna] to look around. And there was always stuff going on, and I remember that I got time off from working at the store to show people around the area. And they were good customers. *But nothing like that ever happens there now.*

Another instance can be seen in the following extract from a conversation I had with Sonja (with emphasis added):

> And Rudolf Steinerseminariet was a place where you lived and discussed Anthroposophy around the clock during the '70s and a bit into the '80s. *And when the lines of study disappeared, you could say that the ideological goods did the same.*

Some are more elaborate in their narrative framing, for instance in the way that they include a brief synopsis of historical developments in the Anthroposophical milieu, as can be seen in the following extract from my interview with Mattias, who provided in general a relatively neutral description of both the past and the present:

> The only way to understand [the situation] is to look at it from a historical perspective, but that would make this a long story, but you could say that biodynamic agriculture came to Järna already in the '30s. Then Mikaelgården [was founded] in 1935. Out of Mikaelgården came Solberga and eventually Saltå as well. Rudolf Steinerseminariet was established in 1961. Nibblegård was acquired in 1964. Antroposofins hus was built for the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science and was intended to be a public [space]. It is now owned by a foundation. There are a number of businesses and activities, and there are human relationships, but there is no governing organ that steers everything from the top. They are self-governing organisms that try to cooperate in different ways and which in part have their own destinies.

Moa structured her telling in a similar fashion but did so in less neutral terms:

> When I joined the council, it was the end of an era. At that time, it was very dominated by Järna. Kulturhuset had been built. A lot had taken form around that [project]. Those people [who were involved in it] stopped being active, one after the other. The council had a lot of responsibility back then for much of the

> commercial activity that has since then turned into a separate enterprise. It's not like that today. Today, we are responsible for an organization and, in the best-case scenario, some kind of esoteric consciousness that we try to understand and keep alive.

Hans, who, in contrast to the majority of my interviewees, described the present situation in overwhelmingly positive terms and who, moreover, disagrees with the amongst my interlocutors commonly held view that things have changed for the worse, also introduced his description by making a comparison to the past. What is different in Han's case is that he does not present what is happening now as the negative "other" of the past. Although he does take up positive aspects of the milieu's history, e.g., people could come to Järna for various kinds of training that would enable them to go back out into the world and do something concrete with what they had learned (and thus disseminate Anthroposophy more widely), he said that having the same family-like conditions that constituted everyday life back then is no longer desirable, or even realistic, nowadays.

While the majority of the general assessments of the present are negative in tone, some were more neutral. Nils, for example, made a comparison with the lifecycle of a plant: "I came [here], and it started to blossom, and it was absolutely magnificent, and then [it] withered, and that is a law of nature. It's nothing new. It's part of life, isn't it? One radiates out, and then, suddenly, one withers. It's completely normal. We have in fact withered."

Similar to Hans' comments, he continued by saying that "the fruit and the seeds" that were produced through this development are now "out there" in the world, adding that it is in this way that "Anthroposophy lives". At a later point in his narrative, he returned to the subject of the past and touched upon another aspect that was spoken about in nostalgic terms by some of my interlocutors (e.g., Oskar, Rut, and Sonja), i.e., the high level of productivity characteristic of that period, which resulted in the establishment of institutions like Vidarkliniken and Kulturhuset. "Yes, it was wonderful," he said, "but I don't think it was best back then. I think it's interesting all the time."

5.1.3 The story of the present in broad strokes – recurring themes

In these general descriptions of the present situation of Anthroposophy in Sweden, a number of recurring themes are detectable. These vignettes, when taken as a whole, can be summarized as follows: the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden has, subsequent to the waning of more auspicious times for Anthroposophy in Sweden in general, lost its footing and now finds itself in a precarious position. In part this is because a shift in power has occurred as the result of many of the Anthroposophical institutions and enterprises (entities whose operations often enjoy a better economic situation than that of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden) that have come into existence distancing themselves, for one reason or another, from "organized" Anthroposophy. This development has led to a decrease in financial contributions made by them to the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden; such decisions to refrain from sending

money are detrimental to the latter and play a key role in its increasing marginalization. One explanation provided for the ever-slowing stream of money trickling in is that the benefits of making such contributions are, according the stories told, not made clear. This perceived lack of clarity regarding what one gets in exchange for financial support given is also attributed with causing a decrease in the overall number of the organization's dues-paying members as is a general feeling that the Anthroposophical Society (both the Swedish division and the worldwide organization of which it is a part) no longer has any purpose. Furthermore, the lack of young people involved in the Anthroposophical milieu is also brought up. An additional development discernable in the present state of the Anthroposophical milieu is a gradual process of opening up to society at large what had previously been more closed and insular areas of activity. As a result of this change, Järna, the place so central to the growth of Anthroposophy in Sweden, has, according to some of my interlocutors, lost its soul. The various changes enumerated above were described in negative terms by a number of my interlocutors, while others, as we shall see below, had positive things to say about them, but, as we shall also see, these instances were in the minority.

After having examined these general assessments of the present situation and a number of the primary themes around which they are structured, we can now move on to address the topic of how the narratives focusing on the present can be approached in terms of Greimas' actantial model.

5.2 Narratives of the present: an actantial analysis

5.2.1 The Object

While, as we saw above, the narratives that focus on the past are about *manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society*, the object of the stories my interviewees told me about the present, accounts largely concerning various struggles, is *keeping the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society alive*. As will be exemplified below, despite their overall predominately negative tone, the stories I collected give voice to a host of differing and sometimes contradictory ideas about such factors as the circumstances of the present situation, how work aiming to keep the impulse alive ought to be carried out nowadays, the party or parties who bear the ultimate responsibility for the various tasks that need to be done as part of these efforts, and why the whole affair is apparently so difficult. For some of my interviewees, like Rut, the challenges of the present are largely institutional in nature and concern matters such as being able to evolve in ways that suit how the times have changed, including how to effectively communicate to outsiders what Anthroposophy is. Others were more conservative in their assessments, an example being Emma, who described the challenges of the present as being the result of something wrong with the times we live in and therefore not the fault of Anthroposophy itself. However, as we shall see, many of the stories focusing on the present are reports explicating how poorly the person doing the telling thinks the situation is being handled. Most often, the blame is directed towards people in

management positions, either in a local, i.e., Swedish, context, the individuals most often held responsible, or at the organization's headquarters in Switzerland, the Goetheanum, the name often being used as a synecdoche.

5.2.2 Subjects

As was also the case with the narratives that focus on the past, the parties entrusted with the task of keeping the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society alive are the *Anthroposophical movement* and the *Anthroposophical Society*, again terms my interlocutors frequently used interchangeably, but which, as previously stated, refer to two analytically distinct social formations. Here, too, as we saw above in the chapter on the past, some of my interviewees inserted themselves as helpers into the stories they told. In contrast to the narratives focusing on the past, however, a number of those with whom I spoke described the degree to which they were (at the time of our meeting for the interview) involved in activities related to Anthroposophy in negative terms by stating that they felt they should make greater efforts to contribute in some way but were prohibited from doing so by various factors, e.g., lack of time.

Another way in which the stories that focus on the present differ from those that focus on the past is that the latter largely concern people (e.g., leaders and other members) and what are presented as being either their constructive or obstructive actions in regard to obtaining the desired object, i.e., manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society, while the former, as we shall see below, are often concerned with organizational matters (e.g., institutional structures established or instituted for the purposes of helping to keep the impulse alive).

5.2.3 The Sender

Precisely who, or what, has entrusted the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden or the Anthroposophical movement with the mission of keeping the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society alive is not made entirely clear in the stories that focus on the present. As was discussed above in section 4.2.3, one could assume that the role of sender is implicitly assigned to Rudolf Steiner as the founder of the Anthroposophical Society or even the spiritual world from which Steiner, from an Anthroposophical perspective, obtained his knowledge or, further, any of its numerous denizens. This was made explicit by Oskar in a remark that also implied that the people who had been entrusted with Steiner's – the sender's – mission had not been very successful in carrying it out:

> Steiner gave us the whole of Anthroposophy. He did so through thousands of lectures. He didn't have the opportunity to write a lot of books. He wrote the foundational texts, which, according to him, were the most important ones. He didn't want the lectures to be published because he didn't feel that they contain what is most essential. What is essential is found in those foundational texts. Then people are supposed to carry out the work on their own. But he noticed that these [lectures] started to circulate and he was forced to give his approval to everything. […] One can't expect Steiner to be pedagogical and say "this is the first book" or

> "this one is for a general audience". He set forth the whole of Anthroposophy, and those who come after him are the ones who get to present it to a wider audience.

Steiner also surfaces in these stories in other ways, e.g., in the form of such framings as "Steiner said," which served to introduce statements presumably intended to bolster an argument, one generally aimed at the organization's (then-current) leaders, either those stationed in Sweden or Switzerland or both groupings. Another instance that can be interpreted as an invocation of Steiner as sender can be seen in Oskar's observation that "If Steiner came back, he would be furious [when he saw] what we have done".

In regard to the spiritual world (including its various hierarchies and officers) as sender, one could interpret the absence of references to it as signifying that my interviewees, as was also suggested above in regard to the stories that focus on the past, saw this matter as so obvious that it did not need to be articulated.

In terms of what could here be called "new" senders, i.e., new in the sense that they are not cast as such in the stories focusing on the past, one could say that, if the stories concerning the present are viewed in the light of the events recounted in descriptions of the past and are therefore seen as having a causal relationship, it would follow, then, that the charismatic leaders of the Golden Age have entrusted individuals active in the Anthroposophical milieu today with the task of ensuring that the various enterprises they played fundamental roles in initiating or establishing survive.

5.2.4 Receivers

Similar to what we saw above in relation to the stories focusing on the past, my interviewees were largely silent about the matter of precisely who, or what, benefits from the Anthroposophical impulse being kept alive and, furthermore, in which ways. One possible reason for this is that if one views Anthroposophy as "the truth" or, expressed in other words, "the way things are," which it is arguable that at least some of my interlocutors did when they told me their stories, it is obvious that its manifestation in the world needs to be kept alive, so obvious that it did not need to be stated. Implicit beneficiaries could include such individuals as, e.g., present (and even future) customers interested in the services offered by Anthroposophical enterprises, who, in turn, as was also argued above in connection with the role of receiver in the stories focusing on the past, confer the benefits they receive upon others, who then transmit them further until all of Swedish society – and then the entire world, perhaps (if one follows this line of thinking) – is touched in a positive way.

In the same category of implicit beneficiaries could be counted those who are employed by these institutions. Some of the rewards reaped by these individuals – consumers and employees alike – are in one sense material, e.g., financial for those receiving a salary, but others are less tangible and have to do with such factors as wellbeing and, as we saw above, karma. Another possible group of receivers includes people who in one way or another were instrumental in

establishing these institutions; the legacy of those who are now deceased lives on in reified form in, e.g., stories such as the ones I collected, and this, arguably, benefits these individuals (albeit posthumously)[309] as it also does their living relatives, and those who are still alive are, one could posit, awarded some kind of prestige as a result of having been part of these pioneering efforts.

Local communities, from both an emic and an etic perspective, also benefit from the survival of the Anthroposophical impulse. New jobs are created, for instance, and an influx of curious visitors to, e.g., Järna, further contributes to the economic growth of the area. An additional receiver is the Goetheanum itself (in the sense that its material structure can be given the costly repairs and renovations it periodically requires) and those for whom it is a workplace as well as those who visit it as consumers of various experiences. This is the case because a percentage of the annual membership dues received by the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden is sent there. If one traces the benefits out in concentric circles beginning with the people who travel to Dornach to, e.g., take part in a conference for Waldorf teachers, we could also map out a path that flows from those individuals out into the world at large by way of the community in which they put into practice what they learned at the Goetheanum.

5.2.5 Helpers

Since the present is portrayed by most of my interviewees in decidedly gloomy terms, few helpers who in one way or another assist the subjects, i.e., the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and/or the Anthroposophical movement, in their task of keeping the Anthroposophical impulse alive in Swedish society are discernable in the stories focusing on the present. While some human beings, as we shall see, are either consciously or even in some cases unconsciously involved in these processes, the other helpers can be classed as impersonal agents. I have categorized these helpers as follows: *structural changes in society, changes in the surrounding culture, karma,* and *a vaguely described force*. Each will be dealt with in turn below.

5.2.5.1 Structural changes in society

In the case of the stories focusing on the past discussed above, we saw that a number of my interlocutors spoke of the outside world in negative terms, i.e., as something either hostile or, at best, something to be tolerated while one conducted their business in, ideally, relative isolation. In the case of the present, Rut touched upon what she described as a positive impact that changing policies issued by governmental agencies have on the Anthroposophical milieu. In particular, she discussed the matter of how this has affected the leadership structure of Waldorf schools. According to her account, these institutions were regarded by outside parties as "an interesting experiment" in the early days of

[309] It might seem odd to posit that deceased individuals could be receivers, but cross-culturally this is of course quite common. The dead are often perceived as an integral part of the community.

the Waldorf movement in Sweden. One unique feature they had was an organizational structure that did not include the role of principal. Even after a new law came into effect requiring private schools to have principals, an exception was made for Waldorf schools; instead, Rut stated, they were to have "leadership teams". This situation changed, she continued, when yet another law was passed. The exception was then removed, since it, according to Rut, seemed that the situation with leadership teams did not work very well because the matter of precisely who ultimately bore the responsibility for the institution was ambiguous.[310]

Rut described this development as being of potential benefit for the schools. In contrast to a number of my other interlocutors (e.g., Anne-Marie and Anna) who described in negative terms an increasingly common situation in which more and more employees who know very little about Anthroposophy are employed by institutions such as Waldorf schools or centers for curative education, he expressed the view that possessing such knowledge, in particular in the case of people in leadership positions, does not guarantee quality. After addressing the benefits of having someone come in from the outside (e.g., different skillsets and a fresh perspective), he added that the important thing is that one is receptive: "One must be open to it, have a desire to understand it, and think that it [i.e., Waldorf pedagogics] – as well as Anthroposophy, which is behind it – is exciting, even if it can seem surprising and strange. It's not about buying a package deal – it's about being curious and interested."

5.2.5.2 Changes in the surrounding culture

The spirit of the times, here exemplified by a widespread interest in such things as wellbeing and alternative forms of spirituality, also figured as a helper assisting in keeping the Anthroposophical impulse alive in my interviewees' stories that focus on the present. An example can be found in Mattias' narrative when he discusses what he perceives as being a growing public interest in Järna. "Many people find it beautiful, exciting, and peaceful," he said and added that "more and more people feel this way [about it]." One particular category of such individuals is comprised of those he calls "neo-hippies" or "rasta hippies": long-haired ("lots of them have dreadlocks"), baggy-pants wearing young people who, except for the dreadlocks, "look like hippies did in my times". Their interest, he told me, is motivated by a desire to combine an alternative lifestyle in the countryside with the convenience of being close to the city. Combined with the other groups living in or around Järna, segments of the population Mattias classified as a bourgeois, somewhat conservative group having a longer history in the area; a group consisting of second- and third-generation Anthroposophists with varying levels of interest in Anthroposophy; and a group made up of wealthy people whose sole motivation for being there is seemingly a desire to

[310] The details in Rut's account are unclear and difficult to follow, but their correspondence with what actually happened is not of interest for the purposes of this study; it is her perception of them that is relevant here.

build large homes in a rural area, this, he said, makes for a "rather special sociological situation".

As a result (at least in part) of the influx of newcomers, in particular those belonging to the first-named category above, a development has, according to Mattias, started to take place in which the area has become enriched by activities and enterprises inspired by alternative currents having no overt connection to Anthroposophy, e.g., raw food options in cafés and restaurants, yoga lessons, courses teaching various methods for altering one's state of consciousness, and classes promoting non-traditional child-rearing practices. Astrid touched upon something similar when she talked about the situation of the present. Her overall positive description of how things are nowadays included the efforts of what she characterizes as a large group of people who "don't know they are Anthroposophists". These are people who share a similar interest and engagement in what she called "deeper things". A difference between Mattias' story and Astrid's story is that, in the case of the former, the individuals mentioned are people who just happen to be interested in things related to Anthroposophy, i.e., he does not call them Anthroposophists. In the latter case, Astrid explicitly refers to them as Anthroposophists (although they themselves are not aware of the fact that they are, at least from her point of view, Anthroposophists). This sentiment that changes in the surrounding culture have been a boon for Anthroposophy was summed up by Anne-Marie, who said, "in regard to [the way that Anthroposophy has developed in Sweden], one could say that the upside is that many of the ideas we have had are now commonplace [in society at large]."

5.2.5.3 Karma

Karma as an agent helping to keep the Anthroposophical impulse alive was touched upon by a number of my interviewees (e.g., Emma and Astrid). One topic that came up in my interview with Astrid, for instance, was the then-current number of members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. While several of my other interlocutors, e.g., Alexander, Oskar, Mattias, and Sonja, spoke about the subject in negative terms as a sign that did not bode well for future developments, she remarked that, according to Rudolf Steiner, whether or not one embraces Anthroposophy is karmically determined. From her point of view, it is therefore pointless to get upset when people do not automatically develop an interest in it, and, what is more, the bottom line, from her perspective, is that, since karma is a factor in determining the contours of the bigger picture, things are exactly as they should be at this point in time.

5.2.5.4 A force

In the stories focusing on the present that my interlocutors told me, an unspecified "force" also figured as an agent assisting in keeping the Anthroposophical impulse alive (e.g., ones shared by Emma, Anna, and Hans). For example, when Hans and I talked about a widespread tendency within the

Anthroposophical milieu for people to compare the present unfavorably to the past, he said that he would not want things to still be like they were back then. He described the events of the present as being the result of a "completely different force" being in play. This force, according to his description, enables a new capacity for people to understand, and subsequently be inspired by, Anthroposophy in their own unique ways. This shift towards a more individualized approach, one that requires people to pay attention to the possibilities and skillsets afforded by resources available in the present, is, he stated, necessary for the development of Anthroposophy in general as it moves forward into the future.

5.2.6 Opponents

As stated above, the stories my interlocutors told about the present feature, when compared to the number and range of helpers and other actants involved, a great many opponents who in one way or another impede the processes required to keep the impulse alive. Since there is a remarkable number and variety of opponents, I have for heuristic purposes first grouped them as internal and external opponents, respectively, each of which comes in three types. Internal opponents have been grouped into *leadership problems*, *member-related problems*, and various *conflicts and schisms*. The external opponents in turn consist of *structural changes in society*, *changes in the surrounding culture*, and – perhaps somewhat surprisingly in a role as opponent – a more *porous border* between the Anthroposophical milieu and surrounding society.

Opponents are of course actants who impede the object from being realized, but it should be noted that one and the same object-impeding problem can be attributed to different opponents. Although my interviewees voiced many different reasons for why these opponents were to blame for the present state of the Anthroposophical milieu, one issue in particular permeates many of the narratives: financial troubles. The inability of leaders to secure the necessary cash flow for keeping operations running smoothly or their tendency to allocate funds in idiosyncratic ways, the unwillingness of members to pay, and the siphoning off of funds by the opposing party in a conflict are, as we shall see below, all mentioned as reasons for the current pecuniary woes.

5.2.6.1 Leadership problems

One group of opponents that figures prominently in the narratives focusing on the past are the leaders of the various segments of the Anthroposophical milieu (e.g., heads of institutions, members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden's council, and board members of various foundations). The list of complaints is long, with various interviewees suggesting, e.g., that they have too much power or do not keep the movement sufficiently tightly knit or are too conservative or lack charisma. The subsections that follow will exemplify these recurrent claims.

Leaders show little appreciation for the work of others

Olivia, a long-time resident of Järna, spoke of how she worked with and taught courses in the area for ten years but never received any recognition for her work. "A perceiving organ is missing," she said. Daniel similarly remarked that "It's also the case that people don't take advantage of the skillsets that members have. At a Waldorf school, for example, people take advantage of the parents' skillsets. People don't think that way in the Anthroposophical Society. It's very strange. There's something really amateurish about it."

Leaders exhibit inertia and resist change

A particularly common version of the theme that leaders show little appreciation for the initiatives of others is that initiatives that my interviewees attempted to implement and felt were necessary were often met with inertia or resistance from people who held leadership positions. The story told by Ellen is a case in point. She explained to me how she started giving courses in business management in the area because there are, from her perspective, many good institutions and enterprises in Ytterjärna that have much to offer the general public. Her attempts to educate their owners or managers about ways in which they could reach out to prospective customers and clients by using various strategies were, however, met with, in her estimation, a lukewarm response. While she in part attributed their reaction to lack of resources for financing such efforts, she also felt that the resistance she met was the result of an ingrained attitude based upon a shared belief that one actually has to come to the place itself and experience it as it is.

Daniel reported from his time on the council that it was taken for granted by its members that "this is how we do things and this is how we think about stuff", a stance he found to be problematic because he often felt that his way of thinking differed from the way the others thought. He was, together with others, brought into the council as part of an explicitly formulated strategy for renewal within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. However, according to his account, the remaining members from the previous administration that had retained their positions despite the proclaimed aim to initiate change within the organization wanted to continue working in the same way as before. He characterized these individuals as being complacent and self-important (in the sense that they felt they were irreplaceable), and he described the council's work as a constant struggle in which all his efforts were held in check by "a massive wall." A further issue he touched upon was what he described as the insular nature of the activities of the council; in such a bubble, he found it "very problematic" that, according to his point of view, there was no one to turn to for advice when challenges arose.

In Daniel's account, the inertia is so massive that it results in the leaders not doing their jobs. When I asked him what people on the council actually do, he said, "That's a good question." He then went on to say that they discuss finances,

plan various meetings, and talk about the kinds of activities that should be organized for members. "Based on my experience," he continued, "it's just a bunch of talk. Nothing else. There's no strategy." He continued by saying that those of his colleagues who had already by then served multiple terms felt that they belonged to "the elite of Anthroposophy in Sweden and should in some way live in the spiritual world", which, from his point of view, "is not the [purpose] of the council." For Daniel, the council exists to cater to members' interests and needs.

In Oskar's narrative, leadership inertia extends even to neglecting such basic tasks as answering emails. After I told Oskar about my experiences with a particular key figure within the Anthroposophical milieu who never answered my emails, he related his own similar experiences with that individual:

> We even worked on the same project, and you couldn't get a hold of him, and there are a few people there [i.e., in Järna] like that, and it's a kind of, I don't know what it is, a kind of mental laxity. […] A kind of sluggishness has developed in Järna for some reason. It's fatalistic, like everything is fine just as it is, so you don't need to get hung up on every little detail.

Similar sentiments are echoed in numerous narratives. Alexander, for instance, expressed the view that people within the milieu do not understand that things change. He described this as being problematic because, according to his point of view, no one tries to develop things. Instead, he said, they keep everything the same ("so the buildings in Järna don't fall apart") and only plan activities so they can "pat each other on the back". Anna felt that those (then) currently in power were primarily concerned with "preserving a memory". "People are so busy with preserving where they have been and what they have learned", she said. Nils spoke of his time on the council as a tense period filled with conflicting interests. For instance, while he felt that it was obvious that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden should be engaged in societal developments, his colleagues, he reported, did not. He then decided to initiate several projects he felt would help accomplish what he saw as a vital activity and felt utterly alone in these efforts. Echoing Daniels's sentiments, he found the isolated nature of the council's work to be problematic, and the resulting stasis, wherein no fresh perspectives were permitted, caused him a great deal of frustration. When he came to the realization that his colleagues were never going to change, he left his position and moved on to other areas in the Anthroposophical milieu.

Lack of skills in promoting the Anthroposophy "brand"

What is it, according to my interviewees, that the supposedly inertia-ridden leadership of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden should accomplish, but which they ultimately fail to do? One recurrent view is that they should market and brand the Anthroposophical Society and make its purpose clearer. Sonja, for example, stated that, instead of making a valid argument motivating precisely why various Anthroposophical institutions should send donations to the

Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, it merely tried to guilt them into doing so. When I visited her at her place of employment, she showed me an invitation sent out by the Swedish division to a meeting about the future of the organization. She read portions of it out loud to me, commenting upon how it was rhetorically constructed. Part of her complaints about the letter had to do with what she described as an underlying suggestion that the institutions receive something in exchange for their donations and that they would cease to be enriched by it if the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden ceased to exist. She interpreted this as a technique employed to make the organization seem more important than it really is:

> I think they could have just sent a letter saying "You guys, we could use a bit more money here in Järna. Would you mind sending some our way? We won't do anything for it, but…" Can't you just come out and say it? I would send them 10,000 crowns if they did. I refuse to go to a meeting like that. Never, ever, would I go. I know exactly what that meeting is going to be about. It's a meeting to try and get the institutions to pay. "Okay, we can't send a bill. What do we do now? Let's try guilt." That's the logic behind it: pay, or suffer from a guilty conscience. It's a bit Calvinistic. It's just a variation on the theme of guilt. "If you like Steiner, you have to be loyal to us since we take care of his intellectual property, right? We are the Anthroposophical Society. Steiner entrusted Anthroposophy to the Anthroposophical Society, right? We are thus Steiner's representatives 100 years later, right?" That's what they say. And you're supposed to nod. That's the line of reasoning behind it, and the conclusion is that "if you value Steiner, you have to donate money to the Anthroposophical Society because we are Steiner's legal heirs and we take care of Steiner's legacy. Otherwise, all of it will be eradicated." And then you feel guilty if you don't pay. And we'll go to yet another meeting with a bunch of blahblahblah. That's where we are right now.

The complaint that the benefits of being a member are unclear, i.e., that leaders fail to explain the raison d'être of the Anthroposophical Society, is a recurrent one in my interviews. For instance, Anna told me the following:

> I didn't join because I didn't understand [the purpose of doing so]. Someone needed to tell me why I should be a member, and no one did that. Everyone in Järna just complained [about the Anthroposophical Society]. A lot of people complained, but it doesn't matter anymore what it was all about, but it was at any rate the case that people felt the Anthroposophical Society was quite invisible in some way.

Oskar also remarked upon this lack of visibility, especially in terms of the public eye. Again, this, is attributed to the perceived failure of those who represent the movement today to make the necessary efforts to brand Anthroposophy effectively. In the following extract, he exemplifies the situation by referring to biodynamic agriculture:

> One, single experiment involving biodynamic agriculture has been carried out in Sweden, and this is what [people] constantly refer to. But thousands have been done regarding conventional methods of agriculture. Money isn't spent on things

> that would convince the world [of the efficacy of biodynamic methods], and with this kind of leadership, Anthroposophy can never be a force to be reckoned with.

Leaders fail to keep the Anthroposophical movement together

One recurring theme in the narratives that focus on the present is that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden itself, due to its failure to present a clear brand, has become marginalized and is now dwarfed by various Anthroposophical institutions and enterprises that now live increasingly independent lives. Anders, for instance, described the current situation in the following way:

> I would say that the Anthroposophical Society is now a good hidden secret. It's extremely difficult to find it. There's Järna. There's Kulturhuset. There's YIP.[311] There are the schools and everything else, but it's very difficult to find the Anthroposophical Society. They do have an office. Do you know where it is? [Here he hints at the fact that it was at the time of our interview located in a tiny and largely inaccessible room in Kulturhuset.] It didn't used to be like this.

Sonja attributed this situation to a shift in the balance of power between the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and what are sometimes described in Anthroposophical discourse as its "daughters":

> It is my opinion that the Anthroposophical Society plays a very minor role nowadays. The Anthroposophical Society has struggled from the start to have a role to play, but it hasn't [succeeded], and the problem is that all of the institutions now existing have become much stronger than the Anthroposophical Society itself and are not dependent upon it in any way.

One unfortunate outcome of this shift for the organization is a decrease in financial contributions made to it by these institutions and enterprises. As touched upon above, according to Sonja, this situation is in part due to a leadership problem: the leaders of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden need to convince the institutions in question of the existence of its important role but fail to do so:

> For the past 20 years in particular, the Anthroposophical Society has struggled to find a way to make the institutions, especially the schools, dependent upon [it]. You can see this in the expressions they use. For example, [they] talk about Anthroposophical institutions in order to emphasize that they are *Anthroposophical* institutions. If you asked around at a Waldorf school, most of the people there wouldn't at all agree [with the assertion] that it is an Anthroposophical institution but would instead say it is an institution that uses Waldorf pedagogical methods. […] This stance was especially pronounced when Kulturhuset was built because people realized that, "Okay, now we've got this huge building with a bunch of loans and operating costs. How are we going to finance it?" And the first thing they thought was, "Yeah, but this is Antroposofins

[311] YIP (Youth Initiative Program) is program in social entrepreneurship based in Järna.

> hus, the Anthroposophical Society's House. Everyone out here in Järna and all throughout Sweden who calls themselves an Anthroposophical initiative has to help pay for it." And great efforts were made to go around to everyone and say "You have to help finance Anthroposophy's House because you are very dependent upon what happens here." So, one has always inflated the significance of the Anthroposophical Society enormously.

We talked a great deal about these efforts, especially in terms of attempts to illicit donations, and at the end of the following excerpt, the international leadership of the Anthroposophical Society is introduced as an opponent precisely because of the fact that it receives a substantial part of those funds:

> You could say that, generally speaking, the [Swedish division of the] Anthroposophical Society is desperate because they have never gotten the financing or the position that they themselves [think they deserve]. They see themselves as some kind of ideological nucleus [and] the institutions [as] some kind of offspring of the Anthroposophical Society, but the problem is that the institutions don't see things that way. […] The Anthroposophical Society, then, has been marginalized for a long time […] They puff themselves up as if they were some kind of nucleus, and that's what they really want to be, but, in actuality, they aren't, in part because only a few people involved in these institutions are members of the Anthroposophical Society, and in part because, with few exceptions, those in leadership positions in these institutions don't perceive them as being Anthroposophical institutions […] There are of course some who [do], largely because they are connected to the Anthroposophical Society in some way […], but all the other ones would say, "No, no, no. Why should I help pay?" And the main problem is that they [i.e., the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society] pay 75% or whatever it is of the entire donation to Dornach.

Leaders fail to formulate a clear vision for Anthroposophy

The leadership's purported inability to provide a clear vision of the purpose and nature of the organization has according to my interviewees not only led to difficulties in keeping the movement together but has also generated a feeling among members that they do not get much out of being members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. Sonja, for instance, expressed it thusly: "I would say there is no reason for the Anthroposophical institutions or the other institutions that are in some way inspired by Anthroposophy to keep the Anthroposophical Society afloat today because they don't get enough in return."

This theme of a lack of clarity surrounding the benefits of making financial contributions also extends in the stories to the matter of membership dues paid to the organization by private individuals. For instance, Daniel, himself, as stated above, a former council member, said that members "get very little back for what they pay. No one I know outside of this movement belongs to an organization with such high membership fees. And what do they get for it? They get a newspaper."

It was not uncommon for my interlocutors to question the overall purpose and routines of institutionalized Anthroposophy either in its present state or even in general. For instance, when I asked Nina what Anthroposophy has meant to her throughout her many years of engagement with it, she answered as follows: "A great deal. It's hard to say in what way. I don't know what I would have done without it. But that doesn't mean that I'm particularly impressed by what the Anthroposophical Society does or by 'official' Anthroposophy."

Leaders try to monopolize power and have therefore established hidden power structures

Since a number of my interviewees suggested that the then-current leadership was characterized by inertia and lack of action, the question naturally arises what my interviewees feel that the leaders actually do. One recurrent answer is that they accumulate power. One way of doing so, Daniel alleged, is by leaders making decisions within the circle of people who happen to live in Järna. When talking about his time as a council member, he said that business was often conducted that way because most, but not all, of the council members lived there. Some of them even worked in the same field and met in related contexts, so, according to his account, things of importance were discussed and decisions were made without ever consulting him. From his point of view:

> [T]he Anthroposophical Society, because it is a nationwide organization, should have council members from the whole country and should hold meetings in different places throughout the year. It's way too Järna-centric. All the conferences [for members] could be held there. The building does have to live its own life, but it is too Järna-centric, and I believe that there are many members in Sweden who don't have any particular feelings about the council of the Anthroposophical Society or Järna […] And so the members' money pays for activities that take place in Järna which no one [except those who are nearby] can actually attend.

A particularly frequently made allegation is that matters are decided and funds are allocated in ways that are not transparent to those outside the circle of leaders because personal connections and multiple roles played in many Anthroposophical institutions make the actual locus of power hard to pinpoint. Sonja summed it up by flatly stating that "It's a bit of a sensitive matter, but of course there are hidden power structures". She explained what these power structures consist of (i.e., a small number of people who sit on multiple boards and control the finances):

> Power in Järna is found in the foundations, and these foundations are to a very high degree made up of a very few people who [have positions in multiple foundations simultaneously], and it's always been this way. […] The real power resides there, and that has to do with the fact that the money is there. It's not in the Anthroposophical Society. Instead, the power is to be found where the money is to be found. I have a rather crass view of power, and power very much has to do with resources – the resources to make something happen. Let's say a meeting is going to take place. Let's say a meeting about meditation or one of the mystery

> dramas or something like that. The resources [to make it happen] have to come from somewhere.

She then went on to describe a situation in which people wind up playing "double roles", i.e., they can be members of the council of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden while they at the same time are board members of "four or five other foundations". This matter becomes, according to her point of view, more problematic due to it being permissible to occupy these positions for long periods of time ("ten to fifteen years"). According to this way of working, an activity is done in the name of the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society, but the money comes from somewhere else, i.e., one of the foundations. She refers to these "twenty to thirty" individuals, i.e., those who are members of the boards of multiple organizations, as "Järna's inner sphere of power". Some, she stated, even have leadership positions in what used to be some of the more "profitable" Anthroposophical institutions, ones that today do not enjoy the same favorable financial situation. She explained that this changed economic landscape is "one of the Anthroposophical Society's big problems" as its "steady source of financing has disappeared more and more" since these once lucrative institutions can no longer support the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and other related institutions. Instead, foundations have to provide more assistance. "If you want to do a critical analysis of Järna, it's very simple," she said. "It's like it is with all journalism – follow the money." She concluded by saying that the basis for all of this behind-the-scenes work is not a desire to get rich but is instead motivated by what she termed "a kind of ideological self-interest", adding that the money has gone to things these individuals perceive as being important.[312] When she touched upon my own situation as researcher, Sonja suggested that:

> If you haven't yet gotten to the matter of power and money, you still have [a long way to go]. You have to address it if you really want to understand Anthroposophy. Otherwise, you'll only scrape the surface, and, at the same time, it's what most people want to talk about the least. […] I don't believe that you'll succeed in penetrating Järna's finances. I don't think anybody could because it's not transparent. […] You know IKEA. IKEA is the same, although on a larger scale. They have a similar structure [that no one can really penetrate].

"It's kind of like that in Järna," she added, saying that it would take an economist to sort out how all the different foundations and organizations involved are connected as well as who the individuals are who occupy positions on the boards of multiple organizations and foundations. She ended our conversation by saying that "it would be really interesting to see" the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden's role in the "intricate ownership structure", but, before wishing me luck on this suggested mission, she added that "the Anthroposophical Society no

[312] On a related note, cf. Swartz & Hammer (2021) on the way money is allocated to performances of Faust, despite a massive deficit caused by this decision, because key individuals at the Goetheanum find this play essential for spiritual purposes.

longer has any role [in it], you could say, but instead serves as some kind of ideological home".

Sonja may be the most articulate of my interviewees when it comes to describing the alleged existence of hidden power structures, but it should be stressed that this is far from being a unique point of view. Hans, for instance, expressed a similar sentiment:

> At any rate, almost everything here is owned by foundations. There are many different foundations. Independent foundations. Cooperation does not go through a shared leadership but instead occurs in the form of a loose cooperation involving many different foundations. There are also a few associations and several corporations. It's complicated – how everything is connected.

Anders said something similar, stating that:

> Järna, which, seen from the outside, looks like one place is, seen from the inside but also in a legal sense, a patchwork family. […] Anthroposophical Järna – you can give it different borders, geographically speaking or otherwise, but if you make it a little bit bigger, meaning [expanding it] 5 kilometers south and north, consists of well over 100, if not 200, organizations.

He added that, since the area has never been "legally dominated by one player", any individual interested in getting "something done" is "dependent upon all kinds of people getting enthusiastic about it" since "there are different owners and different boards that sometimes, even often, in part have the same people on them." "It's kind of a complicated structure," he added, and pointed out that this is an important aspect of looking at the past, present, and future of Järna's Anthroposophical milieu.

As a final example, we can turn to the words of Lovisa, who touched upon similar themes when she spoke of efforts made to alter the organization's image:

> Has the image of the Anthroposophical Society changed, or is it the same as it was before? A little bit closed. There are only certain people who can influence things – certain groups of people, specific individuals. […] That it's connected to money. That it's the people who have the power to influence things and who have money who get to have a say. There are many such ways of picturing the Anthroposophical Society [in Sweden].

What leadership qualities are missing?

As discussed above, the leaders of the past are often idealized. It is therefore unsurprising that, when my interviewees discuss what they perceive to be fundamentally amiss with the current generation of leaders, it is that they lack precisely the quality that made the leaders of the Golden Age so special: charisma.

For instance, according to Oskar:

> When the key people [of the Golden Age] disappeared from the scene, the same kind of dynamic individuals weren't to be found anymore. Instead, what was left was just people like me and those sorts of disciples who didn't have the same dynamic personalities or education that they had.

Felicia also mentioned not being able to find such personalities today. "People like that are not to be found today. Who could they be?"

Sonja also touched upon this matter. "You could also say that Anthroposophy in Sweden suffers from a lack of personalities that manifest Anthroposophy in some way," she said. She continued by talking about someone who had served as a leader in the Anthroposophical Society in Norway, an individual she characterized as a person who "can lecture about and outwardly represent Anthroposophy in a modern way" and who is "in some way engaged in society" rather than being an "introverted esotericist". She added:

> From what I can see, there are no personalities involved with Anthroposophy in Sweden who can in some way bring it into the future. Instead, the people who are there are administrators. There is no one there who inspires others. […] Not everyone needs to be like Arne, but back then there were like ten or twenty people [who had that quality].

Other stories focusing on the present can nevertheless insist that charismatic leadership is not a solution but instead is a thing of the past. Felicia, for instance, described the notion of charismatic leaders as being old-fashioned. Linn also talked about charismatic leaders being a thing of the past, but, according to her point of view, the difficulty lies in trying to figure out how to combine a continuity with the past with the degree of personal freedom that people now expect:

> We have had a situation where the Anthroposophical Society has, for a long time, lived on traditions and its inheritance from Rudolf Steiner and various other charismatic individuals who came after Steiner, and in some ways the time for those charismatic people is past, and one can think that this is a bad thing, but, on the other hand, one can think that there might be something good about it. As long as one has those charismatic people [in the picture], it's a little bit like the relationship between parent and child. One is taken care of. And when children grow up, they have to actively participate in society, in a network. And the problem with networks [in terms of form] is that they don't require the same level of commitment that an organization does, and, at the same time, young people see organizations as old-fashioned. They want to feel that they are free. How, then, do you unite openness with some kind of continuity? […] Tradition and continuity are important, but that's only part of it. If the Anthroposophical Society is to have relevance, and this also concerns the Anthroposophical Society's inner life, one must work with the practical applications [e.g., Waldorf schools], as well as institutions outside the Anthroposophical movement, in different ways.

5.2.6.2 Member-related problems

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the recurrent complaints by members about leaders not performing their tasks in an optimal way are mirrored by some leaders' remarks asserting or at least suggesting that members do not do their part. One leader who discussed the importance of membership engagement was Lovisa. She took up the topic of efforts made by the council to work for change and to increase visibility.

> We have tried to become more visible and change. My colleagues and I have attempted to work with this a great deal. We are trying to change the image of the Anthroposophical Society. We are constantly met with feedback saying that we are a "closed" organization and that no one really knows what we do. I don't know where this comes from today. It's something that has been left behind from earlier times, as if this notion of what the Anthroposophical Society is has lagged behind in people's consciousnesses.

She told me about a questionnaire that had been sent out to roughly 300 Anthroposophical institutions and enterprises with questions about how the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden could be of assistance to their operations. The response rate was 25%. The results indicated the existence of a desire to receive some kind of basic education about the fundamentals of Anthroposophy, but responses also included queries about the purpose of the organization and its current role. About this, she said the following:

> In this slightly fragmented landscape, there is a dilemma. Here we are, the Anthroposophical Society, represented by a council, sitting and thinking about how we can communicate with institutions, and perhaps representatives for these institutions are sitting in another room and asking where the Anthroposophical Society is […] I'm not sure what we've accomplished the past few years. Sometimes it feels like a struggle, or a bit like bouncing a rubber ball. You try and try, and then everything just goes right back [to the way it was before you started].

Leaders sometimes placed the responsibility for what the organization offered on members. For instance, when I talked to Moa, then a council member, she said the following when we discussed activities:

> [We council members] can sometimes feel that we have to organize more activities. There are so many important things that have to be done, but, ideally, it is the members who [want them to happen] and then we can help them.

I then asked if someone who was particularly passionate about turning something into a reality could come to them for help in doing so. She replied in the following way:

> This becomes a matter of having a venue. One has to advertise and do different things then. But we can confirm whether or not we think it is a good idea, and it's not always that case that one gets such validation. It can result in disappointment. The more who are engaged in it, the greater the possibility will be.

The perceived inertia of the leadership has been discussed in an earlier section. One opponent having a prominent place in the narratives of several of my interviewees can be characterized as a general inertia or conservatism of the Anthroposophical Society *as a whole*, i.e., not just that of the leadership but of its entire membership or large segments thereof, a force that keeps it from adapting successfully and, subsequently, from being able to achieve its object. Robin, for instance, felt that "There are too many old people sitting there who know how things should be done. And then nothing new gets to come in. It is not a permissive environment. And there is nothing that can grow there. And they don't see this themselves".

Oskar, alluding to the lifetime of Rudolf Steiner, likened the mentality of many Anthroposophists with a "1920s bubble" in which they are "stuck":

> My definition of an Anthroposophist is someone who is interested in Anthroposophy. [...] There are many other people who have other definitions, like you have to be a member of the Anthroposophical Society, which is in the process of disappearing or which no longer has any relevance, [but all] of Steiner's intentions should be seen in the light of his times. He was a product of his times and interacted with them in an appropriate way, but everyone who has come after him is stuck in that time. […] People still talk about Goethe and 1920s [German] idealism. You can look in the [Anthroposophical Society's] newspaper. It's full of this stuff.

In his account of the situation, Oskar included himself in the group of people who lack a vision of how to move forward and suggested that perhaps nothing can be done to improve matters: "And no one has any ideas anymore about how Anthroposophy can reach out. Now, I'm not saying that I have any ideas. What I am saying is that there are no ideas". He later continued, adding: "And what could make Anthroposophy interesting? I don't see anything that could. Instead, we live off of memories and the respect people still have for biodynamic agriculture, Vidarkliniken, curative education, and Waldorf education."

For Oskar, then, the core issue of Anthroposophical conservatism is its reliance upon the prestige of its well-established institutions. For Sonja, it is what she characterizes as the excessive allegiance of Anthroposophists to Steiner's ideas that has prevented renewal and adaptation:

> The problem has to do with developing the intellectual content of Anthroposophy. Anthroposophists haven't succeeded in doing this for the past 100 years. What is Anthroposophy all about? Ninety percent of Anthroposophy is about [trying to] understand Steiner. There are, however, a few people scattered here and there who have been able to take it a step further. [She gives Arthur Zajonc and Arne Klingborg as examples.] The vast majority are concerned with understanding Steiner 100 years later, and since the Anthroposophical Society has always been very driven by the protection of the original sources, Steiner and what Steiner said, the study of Steiner's texts and so forth, no development of the Anthroposophical intellectual content [has occurred]. Quite frankly, I think that's

> bullshit. I've never seen any kind of development. I've seen Anthroposophical institutions develop, but that is something else. I've never seen any kind of development in terms of the intellectual content. I've seen a little bit, in the sense that Anthroposophists have become more interested in Buddhism, and a little has come in from there, and a little from mindfulness has come in, and Arthur Zajonc and Peter Senge, who have done things at MIT. Here, you could say that a certain development of the Anthroposophical intellectual content has occurred, and also with a random German person thrown in here and there, but, generally speaking, it's all merely some kind of curatorship because people are still dedicated to understanding Steiner.

For Alexander, this allegiance to Steiner is actually a misunderstanding of what Steiner's intentions were. According to him, Steiner was pragmatic and thus spoke on a level that suited the audience he was addressing. The failure to see this, he continued, results in dogmatism and "blind faith" in words that were intended for a specific group of people Steiner addressed at a particular moment in time.

The fundamental problem with inertia and conservatism is that this opponent ties in with another that Alexander described as follows:

> We are in the process of a radical generational shift. I spoke with [a colleague the other day] and she said that we haven't brought up a new generation properly. That was her way of expressing it. But it still says something – that one hasn't succeeded, new generations have completely different ways [of doing things], and one hasn't understood that things change in society.

In other words, from his point of view, society has changed and Anthroposophy has not been able to find its bearings. We shall in a subsequent section turn our attention to this perceived opponent.

What is the reason for the perceived inability or unwillingness of members to step up and do what is needed to keep the impulse alive? Just as life circumstances and a lack of time were, according to some of my interviewees, two of the main culprits preventing people from joining the Anthroposophical movement nowadays, a lack of time is presented as a major obstacle preventing already existing members from committing fully to the tasks necessary to achieve the object. This fact is presented in my interlocutors' stories as one that transcends any differences separating leaders from rank-and-file members. Ultimately, it figures as a meta-opponent responsible for both leadership problems and member-related ones. Karl, who at the time of my interview with him served as leader of an Anthroposophical group in another part of the country, said "you can't do everything" when we talked about the subject of a lack of activity within the branch of the organization he represented. "You do as much as you have the energy for," he said and continued thusly:

> You could of course do a whole bunch of stuff, but you have to focus on what you really can get done. You can't do everything. You could organize a whole bunch of

> seminars or all kinds of other things. In that case, someone has to come here who has the necessary drive to get it all done and who really wants to do it.

Emma pondered her own situation as a council member and contemplated scaling back on some of her commitments:

> [M]y big question is whether I represent anybody [at all]. Who do I represent? I'm often there very much representing myself, and I'm actually going to step down as a council member because I feel that one needs to have lots of time and be very engaged in order to really be close to the members and represent the issues [that matter to them]. I'd love to do that but I'm here [at my workplace], and there's a lot to do here as well. Combining the two right now means that I don't have enough time to do the job well.

Karl brought up one of the former charismatic leaders who said that everyone in the movement expects council members to be constantly full of ideas and energy for new initiatives. "That was obviously the case in the past," he added. He continued by first repeating a point he had previously made:

> But you simply can't do everything. There are other things that need to be done as well, and that's why there aren't that many people who have the energy to get involved or to come here. People have jobs, and that's enough for a lot of them, and they might also have families, and in that case, they have plenty to do already.

The theme of older people being the only ones who have time because societal demands have changed was brought up by a number of my interviewees. Emma, for instance, described her own experiences of trying to find time for everything when one is expected as a council member to be involved in numerous projects. "You'd have a be a pensioner", she said, or be able to schedule meetings for odd hours. In light of such expectations, she added: "I'm not sure how you'd even be able to hold down a regular job [at the same time]". Karl, when reflecting upon his own numerous years of service, concluded:

> I've been part of [the council] for many years and have seen many members come and go, staying for [only] a couple years. They think all one has to do is attend a couple meetings and nothing more. They think that being a council member means that you literally just sit [there], and, once they realize it's actually a lot of work, they step down.

As presented above, one of the recurrent leadership problems identified by my interlocutors is the inability of those in positions of authority to explain precisely why members have to contribute vast sums of money to the organization. The converse member-related opponent is that the funding necessary for the operations of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and various institutions of perceived importance to the milieu as a whole is not forthcoming. In contrast with the past, which is narratively framed as a time when personal networks made it possible to generate funds and allocate them in a productive way, lack of money, according to Sonja, is a fundamental threat to the movement at present.

Insufficient contributions by members, she suggested, have forced a metaphorical sell-out of basic Anthroposophical values:

> [T]he money is largely gone, and Ytterjärna has been commercialized because they wanted to at least save the buildings. They needed to rent out the buildings as offices. They needed to host conferences and have a hotel. [The building] Ormenlånga was built to be a dorm. Now it's a hotel. In [what once was] the library, there's now an advertising firm. In the eurhythmy hall, you now find Vidarstiftelsen's administration. That's the reality of Ytterjärna nowadays. A kind of commercialization has taken place because there isn't any money coming in. […] Anthroposophists see money as something ugly – if they themselves aren't the ones getting it. But they need it, actually.

Several of my interviewees, either directly or indirectly, conceded that the cost of keeping the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden up and running is at present so high that the disparity between income and expenses is no longer just a member-related opponent but is instead a structural, and perhaps ultimately, unsolvable one. The quote above specifically singles out the buildings that have to be maintained as a financial burden that is so massive that it can be counted as an opponent in its own right. Linn described the buildings in a way that can be interpreted as empty shells. "Once [they] are finished, the spiritual impulse behind them moves on," she said. When we talked about stories she had heard about the dynamic and creative times of the 1970s, Olivia turned to the subject of when the then-leaders made the decision to focus on the construction of Kulturhuset. According to her assessment of the chain of events that followed, the building, instead of being a space for artistic and developmental experimentation became an attractive yet costly albatross where you today go to buy expensive coffee.

Marcus took up the notion that since these structures cost so much money to maintain, the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden itself suffers because resources that could have been used elsewhere have to be allocated to the buildings. He gave the example of poor customer service given to members and other interested parties because much of the work, according to his account, is done by volunteers who sometimes lack people skills.

Anna, who also touched upon this topic, summed it up thusly: "and those buildings…They need to be taken care of, for Pete's sake, you geezers [i.e., the leadership of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden]! It's become obvious that they haven't, so they're falling apart, and it's really expensive to renovate them, and there's no money [to do it with]".

5.2.6.3 Conflicts and schisms

In the chapter concerning stories focusing on the past, a number of internal conflicts that plagued the Anthroposophical milieu were discussed. Here, too, in the stories focusing on the present, views differed amongst my interlocutors concerning to what degree they were still ongoing. Karl, for instance, said "there

were some clashes before, but I think things have quieted down now. You can't even compare [it with the way things were before]. Things are so good now. And things shouldn't be that way either." When we discussed the matter of attracting visitors to the locale maintained by the local branch he represented at the time of my interview with him, he informed me that a New Age bookstore located in the same town helped advertise their events. "People see [the flyers they display] and then work up the courage to come here. It can feel a bit closed in here. In Järna, they have that big building. It's beautiful. 'Come here!' [Our place] might feel less approachable." However, he continued, their presence in another part of Sweden is necessary for "all the souls who make their way here". "Let's hope that more will do so", he added.

Alexander, at the time of my interview with him, characterized the conflict between Stockholm and Järna as still ongoing. From his perspective, while the two are separate entities, some sort of cooperation should exist between them. In reality, however, any efforts at working together are, according to his account, plagued by communication problems. Difficulties arise, he stated, when a joint project is initiated by Stockholm because Järna is slow to respond. He explained that the reason for this is because Anthroposophists in Järna regard themselves, in his words, "as representatives for the Anthroposophical movement because they happen to be out there, and the council is stationed out there, and [from their point of view] all initiatives should originate from the council."

A similar issue involving relations that was cited as posing problems for efforts made to keep the Anthroposophical impulse alive concerns the lack of cohesion in what was described by Anna as a splintered landscape. "The strange thing is that, these different institutions, they don't really have much to do with each other. There is something a bit odd about that." In general, the conflicts between the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and the various institutions with which it has relationships loom large in several of the interviews.

An opponent of this type that repeatedly emerges in the stories about the present concerns conflicts with the international headquarters of the General Anthroposophical Society, the Goetheanum. A number of my interviewees expressed a sense of resentment in regard to having to financially support an institution when the benefits of doing so were not made clear. Oskar, for instance, said "I don't believe I'm alone in thinking that it's no longer relevant". For him, the problem stems from poor management, which in part can be seen through the leadership's failure, both now and historically, to defend Anthroposophy from attacks by outside parties, e.g., critical voices or governmental agencies making it more difficult for those who practice alternative medicine:

> That's what's weird about the Anthroposophical Society. When there's a problem with [Anthroposophical] medicine or biodynamic agriculture or what have you, why doesn't the Goetheanum's leadership take action? They say that it's their

> responsibility to do something about it. The sections [of the School of Spiritual Science] don't seem to function well. There are lots of odd leadership principles. It's strange. I don't get it.

Sonja also questioned supporting the Goetheanum:

> I'd say that the Goetheanum is largely a club for mutual admiration, not something that produces anything that is useful to us in any way. If you look at the World Teachers' Conference, which is huge with one thousand teachers attending and is held every fourth year, it largely concerns talking about how Steiner was right. Yet again. And now they come from China. Fifty Chinese teachers, young Chinese people who sit there with their smartphones, fascinated by everything, and they will be told that Steiner was right – whatever you are doing, Steiner was right, and everything will work out just fine if you read Steiner. That's what they learn when they get to the Goetheanum.

Her scathing critique is worth quoting at length for the purposes of illustration:

> [W]hen you find out that 70% of the money [sent to the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden] goes to Dornach, the next question is: what do the people in Dornach do for me in this Waldorf school here [in Sweden]? Do they do anything useful? The sections [of the School of Spiritual Science] in Dornach, Dornach as a whole, the Goetheanum and so on – do they do anything useful? If you're a bit critical, like me, […] you ask yourself then, is this what I should pay for, and my answer is no, absolutely not. So, should I pay, dipping into the funds that we have for the kids here, and finance what goes on in Dornach? I would never do that. That would be a crime against my students. It would be one thing it they provided some kind of service that I felt I got something out of, like Waldorfskolefederationen does, for example. We pay a membership fee, but they lobby for our interests. They have contact with politicians. They answer our questions. They do things. They could do more, but they still do a lot. As a member, I purchase some kind of service, but if I were to pay the Anthroposophical Society, what I would get in return would be utterly unclear. It's as if the money gets sucked up by a black hole and you have no clue what actually happens to it. I've seen [what goes on at] the Goetheanum, and I'm also extremely skeptical about the way it's managed. The mere fact that it was founded in Switzerland – it's understandable if you consider the times Steiner lived in, but let's face it: it's one of the most expensive countries in the world, and there are loads of employees. The whole thing is financed by members from all over the world, and the money is used to pay the highest salaries on the planet. I have a friend, a very dedicated Anthroposophist in Germany, who says in all earnestness that he doesn't understand why they don't move the Goetheanum to the Czech Republic. It's totally absurd. But everything is located there, of course, and it's holy, and Steiner had been there. So, the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, if it is to have any chance of having its existence justified in the eyes of the institutions, will have to find some way to liberate itself from the Goetheanum, but I don't think it can do that. It would be really hard [since] it's part of the General Anthroposophical Society.

Sonja said that her perspective had been influenced by having first-hand experience of what she called the "Dornach aristocracy" and its way of managing money that she characterized as authoritarian ("We have the right to do whatever we want."). In response to my question about what they do in Dornach, she said: "They do research. They sit around and read. […] What do they do? What do they produce? A little pamphlet now and then. A teachers' meeting now and then." She summed up her opinion by stating that their primary occupation is asking for more money: "More, more, more. It's Dornach, and Dornach can swallow up everything. Gulp."

5.2.6.4 Structural changes in society

The stories focusing on the present told by my interviewees contain references to various structural changes that pose problems for efforts made to keep the Anthroposophical impulse alive, especially in regard to the development of enterprises and institutions. One such example concerns regulations imposed by the Swedish National Agency for Education, which according to a number of my interlocutors (e.g., Moa, Anna, Oskar, and Emma), make it difficult for schools to be run in an ideal, i.e., "Anthroposophical", manner in accordance with Rudolf Steiner's instructions. Anne-Marie, although positive in some regards to the structures that regulate Anthroposophical institutions, mentioned the same problem in regard to the center for curative education she led at the time of my interview with her. She described, for instance, a situation in which new laws regulating its operations resulted in an influx of applications from prospective employees who, while perhaps viewing it favorably, lack basic knowledge about Anthroposophy. She also brought up challenges concerning management-related matters. "It's becoming more and more the case that you have to have a background as a social worker in order to be allowed to run an institution like this one", she said, referring to her place of employment. "It wasn't like that before", she continued, adding that "it wasn't that way until the 80s, but there are so many new rules now". According to Anne-Marie, previous generations deliberately sought out employment within institutions related in some way to Anthroposophy, i.e., they wanted to work in a place where Steiner's ideas were put into practice. Today's situation, one in which employees – and in particular those in leadership positions – often lack the same motivation and barely know anything about Anthroposophy, is problematic, according to her point of view, because it leads to "a confusion of identities". Oskar pointed out another issue arising in the institutions as a result of new rules and regulations imposed by governmental agencies. From his perspective, trouble is created because employees find their jobs less fulfilling because they are not permitted to do their jobs properly because of these restrictions. Rut, who in general had a positive attitude towards regulations, also discussed these changes as contributing to creating a less inspiring workplace. As so much focus is put on aspects like ensuring that the requirements of the authorities are filled and balancing the budget, less time is spent on generating enthusiasm.

Anna also brought up the difficulties posed by rules and regulations and what happens when people who do not have an Anthroposophical background enter the picture. Here she used the example of a school in which a principal recruited from the "outside" attempts to introduce a top-down leadership model into what she describes as a more democratic organizational form. She also used eurhythmy as an example to illustrate additional problems that arise when an increasing number of employees unfamiliar with Anthroposophy are hired:

> Lots of people start questioning certain things, or people can't explain why things are done the way they are done. It becomes a matter of importance to explain to these people who don't have Anthroposophical backgrounds in a comprehensible way what it is they are doing, why they are doing it, and what the aim of it is. If this can't be done, keeping certain things alive becomes difficult, important things like eurhythmy. […] If a teacher has no desire to do eurhythmy, it will be impossible for them to get the message across to the kids of why it is important, and then it loses its power.

A further consequence Anna sees in this new landscape is that studying Anthroposophy together in the workplace is no longer prioritized. According to her, this results in a loss of opportunity for fostering a feeling of unity, which she characterizes as a "strong force" amongst staff members. In order to manifest it, she said, people have to take the time to do it, and this requires making these study sessions feel meaningful, and simply stating that "Rudolf Steiner said this or that" is not enough. Instead, she added, its relevance has to be made clear in another way. Another aspect that risks being lost when employees lack basic knowledge about Anthroposophy she touched upon is the underlying notion that one's work has a karmic aspect as well. Here she referred specifically to centers for curative education which, according to her perspective, are permeated by the idea that "the person you are taking care of is actually *your* teacher". Regarding this coming together as a "karmic meeting" stands, from her point of view, in stark contrast to what one often encounters in non-Anthroposophical institutions and therefore must be clearly communicated to people coming in from the outside. Rut also brought up the subject of being able to communicate with people who are unfamiliar with Anthroposophy in an effective way in what has become an increasingly challenging situation for institutions in need of new colleagues. Although she admitted that in previous times such people (i.e., prospective employees well versed in Anthroposophy) "didn't grow on trees" either, she said that the situation in the past was more conducive to being able to generate enthusiasm amongst those unfamiliar Anthroposophy because less focus needed to be put on administrative matters. In her words:

> The way to get more people who are dedicated to and interested in Anthroposophy involved in our institutions is primarily a matter of being able to effectively describe what Anthroposophy is. When people understand what it is, they become enthusiastic about it, but there is a threshold, and the threshold in primarily on [our] side – that we are not able to describe it in an adequate way. I think that this one of the biggest tasks before us.

Emma also talked about problems institutions, in particular ones outside of urban centers, face when they attempt to recruit knowledgeable employees. Describing the situation nowadays, she said, that "You wind up employing teachers who don't have that background, and in the best-case scenario you can organize a course about Anthroposophy for them, but that doesn't mean they will actually want to learn more about it."

Although she expressed the view that the methods employed in Waldorf schools are effective as just "plain" methods for teaching, the institutions themselves nonetheless, from her perspective, suffer in the current situation.

A difficulty Anthroposophy faces in confronting structural changes in society at large lies in finding an appropriate organizational structure. Nils, for instance, also touched upon this topic. When describing the process by which different institutions and enterprises in the Anthroposophical milieu took form and the challenges that had to be faced as they grew over time into separate entities resembling corporations, he remarked somewhat ambivalently that it was a situation that generated "many questions and possibilities":

> Growth is always accompanied by difficulty. That is what propels it. [The trouble] can start when it is still just a vision, but the only difficulties then are of a social nature. Everyone bears experiences with them [and this results in] differing perspectives, but when people notice that things aren't going well or that a crisis has arisen between some of those involved, things need to be developed even further then. […] One constantly needs to find new forms.

The challenges of finding suitable organizational structures for the present times also came up in my interview with Charlotte when we talked about alternative forms for Anthroposophical work:

> What kind of structure would it have? Who should be involved? What kind of work would be done? What are the prevailing conditions today compared to how things were in the 80s or in the 70s – in another time that had a different reigning spirit and pioneers and so on? Nowadays, we're here in some kind of castle – a palace – and we have institutions with a lot of money invested in their operations. The spirit of the times is totally different now, and everyone sits around with their gadgets and devices, even Anthroposophists. Time changes many things, the conditions for this kind of [Anthroposophical] work. And it's interesting. How have people changed? And how can we move on in a productive way? I don't have any kind of finished concept [in mind]. I don't have the answer. But I can have ideas about what I want, some kind of vision or something. The impulses the Anthroposophical Society was founded upon have changed, and people have changed, and the times change. What can one do in such a grand context that is realistic? That won't be some kind of a religion?

As we have seen in section 5.2.5.1, changes in society can occasionally be helpers. However, the discussion above shows that such changes are far more frequently placed in the role of opponent.

5.2.6.5 Changes in the surrounding culture

One theme that was brought up by several of my interlocutors and that is related to the many complaints about the conservatism and inertia of the movement is the suggestion that Anthroposophy is out of step with the times, i.e., with the trends that prevail in the surrounding culture. Some of the mentions of such challenges posed by cultural change are phrased in very general terms, whereas others specifically see the changed habits of people in general or a younger generation in particular as the main issue. Conceivably, changes in the organization could address these cultural changes, and as we will see, my interviewees expressed different opinions as to whether such organizational changes are possible, or even desirable, or if people in modern society should make more of an effort. Perhaps, a common complaint goes, the changes are so pervasive that Anthroposophy is now competing in what is essentially an oversaturated spiritual market.

Some examples can illustrate the many ways in which the changing times can be presented as an opponent. Anne-Marie, for instance, commented upon the present situation of activities in Järna, saying that times have changed and the ways in which things had been done in the past were no longer fashionable. Mattias, who was at the time I interviewed him was one who organized events in the area, shared his experiences regarding the increasing difficulties he had in planning things that would attract attendees because times change, he said, and so do people's interests. When Fredrik and I discussed the situation of Kulturhuset and its current function as a venue for cultural activities, he described the operations as a collaboration between different parties and contrasted this development with the past when, according to his report, everything stemmed from the same impulse and the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden played a central role in everything that happened. Nowadays, he stated, the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden has become peripheral and profit-driven interests have instead become dominant. When I asked why this became the case, he said it was because finding sponsors and institutions that are willing to, or even can, support cultural activities had become extremely difficult.

Sonja suggested that the current cultural climate was so hostile to Anthroposophy that it made sense for Waldorf schools to keep silent about any ties they had with it:

> Most Swedes, if they know anything about Anthroposophy, might connect it with Järna and think that this makes it rather fishy. Most Waldorf schools don't write much about Anthroposophy on their websites. […] Anthroposophy is seen as a liability when it comes to getting new students, not an asset.

Where does the root cause of this seeming mismatch lie? Several of my interviewees constructed their narratives around the suggestion that Anthroposophy has values that were essentially timeless and that it is the

prevailing culture of the present time that has given people the wrong values. Emma, for instance, blamed the fast pace of online communication for creating a certain degree of impatience that is out of tune with the values of Anthroposophy:

> There are many who think that Anthroposophy is outdated because it has an old-fashioned form or a form that stretches back to the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s. Its behavior doesn't reflect what is current today, but it can't be said that it is out of touch because perhaps it's the modern phenomena of today that aren't so relevant. We [council members] think sometimes, should we have actual meetings, or could we just email each other or use skype? And I myself do wonder if it would be more practical, if there really would be a difference, but something very unique happens when people meet.

She also brought up a number of additional themes, such as people wanting easy answers, which is illustrated by this excerpt from my interview with her in which she compares Anthroposophy to other spiritual offerings available today:

> Today, anybody can do yoga. People think that yoga is something spiritual, and it is. Anthroposophy is not easily accessible. It can seem old-fashioned. It certainly isn't an easy path, and this is perhaps also related to a development in society: that people want easy answers. We are also of course living in a society of consumption. And as an additional result of the process of individualization that is taking place in humanity at the moment, people want something for themselves. The last echo of a movement where people devoted themselves to others perhaps sounded in the 70s, and then when the 80s and 90s rolled around, the focus switched to self-actualization, even outwardly in the form of a career and status. Here, Anthroposophy is absolutely not a useful tool.

She then turned to the subject of it being harder to find a context for people who become interested in Anthroposophy now in a post-Golden Age Järna. Instead of being able to just show up in Järna and immediately find a place for engagement,

> you have to do a lot of searching for yourself, and that requires a great amount of determination from young people who are looking for something. You could ask yourself if this is a good thing or not. I am one of those who thinks that it should not come too easily. You can't consume Anthroposophy. You must really have actualized this interest to be able to have the energy to search for the precise place where you belong. Perhaps that is the price people must pay.

On a similar note, Alexander blamed the decline in people's willingness to read for the tough times that Anthroposophy is facing.

A very different set of challenges one faces when trying to find a place in a changed cultural environment is identified as an opponent in narratives that suggest that the values that infuse Anthroposophy have become so widely accepted that Anthroposophy, in a sense, now has to struggle to survive in an oversaturated market. Oskar, for instance, pointed out that, in a sea chock full of other spiritual alternatives, Anthroposophy no longer has anything unique

to offer: "I don't know if there's anything about it that feels new and interesting like it was in the 70s. He continued by stating that "all signals are pointing to it becoming more and more peripheral". Emma expressed something similar: "Lots of other teachings offer some of these expressions [of spirituality], so Anthroposophy isn't unique". She then stated that "many of the external expressions of Anthroposophy" that once were very characteristic have since "been taken up in other contexts". "You can be interested in vegetarian, biodynamic food today without being an Anthroposophist," she said. Anne-Marie expressed a similar view, saying quite simply that "it's not as attractive now as it was before". Felicia attributed a lack of general interest in Anthroposophy amongst society at large to oversaturation since "half of the Swedish population has been to Järna on some kind of fieldtrip".

This situation of certain aspects of Anthroposophy becoming part of mainstream society was described by some of my interviewees as undermining the very identity of the movement. Anne-Marie, for instance, touched upon issues having to do with identity, saying "when your identity has become part of the larger public identity, things get a little fuzzy". She then mentioned two of the earliest pioneers who established the institution she at the time of our interview ran, saying "if they were to come back now, they wouldn't recognize the place [and] they would probably think that it has been watered down or wasn't really [what they had envisioned]". From her point, this trend of watering down and identity problems is, however, more far-reaching:

> … it's actually characteristic of civilization as a whole, so it's not just Anthroposophists. It's the same for Social Democrats and Moderates or Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. The old concepts like socialism or liberalism – they all have identity problems, and even we as individuals do as well. So, in my opinion, the Anthroposophical Society and movement are facing an identity crisis, and I believe that it's connected to general developments in society.

No matter where the problem lies, a mismatch between Anthroposophical values and contemporary culture, and thus the very different attitudes of a younger generation, would presumably lead, if one follows the general trajectory of decline traceable in the majority of the stories focusing on the present told to me, to the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden shrinking. Several, but not all, of my interviewees included such an assessment in their narratives. According to this perspective, the median age of the membership base has increased throughout the years, and the total number of members is steadily decreasing because people are dying and the vacancies they leave behind, so to speak, are not being filled by new recruits. Mattias, when I asked him about how the School of Spiritual Science was then faring in terms of numbers, spoke of the membership situation as reflecting a global develop for Anthroposophy, as can be seen in the following excerpt from my interview with him:

> I don't know precisely [what they are], but they're not exactly increasing. I would bet that they're decreasing because people die. The situation is the same worldwide. It's also the same for the membership numbers of the Anthroposophical Society. They are stagnating or decreasing while the number of people who are inspired by anthroposophy is simultaneously increasing - in China, for example. So that is something to come to terms with – that people are getting older and not a whole lot of new people join.

Interestingly, not all of my interviewees agreed that there was in fact such a shift in demographics. For example, Karl talked about a large number of younger people coming to lectures when the topic is something of particular interest to them. Additionally, Anna mentioned the young people who come to Järna and initiate new enterprises and endeavors.

Interviewees who do deplore the lack of younger people point at different reasons for the perceived state of affairs. For some, sheer life circumstances were the cause of this situation. Although my interlocutors did not often state explicitly what precisely they meant by the term "young", a clue that sheds light on this question is that these young people were too busy raising children or trying to establish a career. Astrid, for instance, suggested that younger people do not get involved because they have children.

For other interviewees, the cultural mismatch alluded to above is the main opponent, Felicia, for instance, sees the decline of what could be characterized as "hippie" or "bohemian" ideals as the problem. In the past, she said:

> [t]here was more of a widespread interest in alternative movements and in other pedagogical approaches for schools. Environmentalism and the organic movement were in fashion. Now, so much other stuff is in fashion. Young men no longer wear their hair long, have shabby clothes, and drive rusty old cars. Now they want to look a little posh and sit with their laptops in cafés and work for trendy companies, so things have changed a bit.

Others, such as Emma, locate the problem in the character traits of a younger generation and in particular an unwillingness to commit long-term to anything. She shared with me an anecdote about having been told in Dornach that the number of Anthroposophists in the spirit world is now the same as the number of those who are still amongst the living. She predicted that, from now on, the number who will pass away will continue to exceed the number who join the Anthroposophical Society. One reason for this is, in her words, that:

> this gesture of willpower, to be a member and enter into a context that one then binds oneself to, this tendency has lessened amongst young people in society in general, this matter of long-term engagement where one binds oneself to something. Things are becoming much more transient.

Conversely, the character traits of an older generation can be identified as the reason why they do consider being an active member of the Anthroposophical

Society in Sweden to be important. Karl reflected on his own shifting attitudes over time:

> In those days [when I first joined], I thought everybody there was old, because I was your age. Now I'm one of the old people. In those days, there were young people there, too. That's the difference. A lot of young people come to lectures [now], but only when it is something that is of particular interest to them. But I wasn't particularly interested either in being an active member of an organization then either. […] When you reach a certain age, you feel that you no longer can just do what you want to do – you also need to participate in the world. And because this place is so close to my heart, this is what I chose to become engaged in, even if I could of course have done a lot more.

Still others, such as Fredrik, suggest that the leadership fail to reach out to young people in ways that are appropriate to the times. They want to take a more active role from an earlier stage than was the case in the past but find, or are given, few opportunities to do so:

> If you compare the situation to how it was when I was young and received [Swedish: *tog emot*] Anthroposophy, it was very much a [matter of] listening, receiving, and learning. But young people today aren't satisfied with sitting and receiving quite as much as we did then and instead want to contribute directly. People want to take the initiative to a much greater degree nowadays, and they want to enter into Anthroposophy by being part of things, not just by learning and listening and waiting until they are mature enough. They want to be involved from the very start [and this is] a challenge for those of us who have been around for a long time. To create possibilities, where one sees the individual directly and sees what is it that [they] want to do. How can we help you develop yourself in alignment with what you want for your future and with the world in relation to yourself?

5.2.6.6 Porous borders and a less-insular milieu

The final theme to be taken up in this chapter might initially seem like an odd candidate for the role of opponent. This is what could be termed a *general opening up* of what had previously been in some ways a relatively "closed" sphere of (Anthroposophical) activity to what was described as an invasive outside world by some of my interviewees (e.g., Oskar and Anne-Marie) in the stories they told focusing on the past.

Some, such as Anne-Marie, did describe an opening up of sorts to society at large as a neutral chain of events and not an opponent. When we turned to the subject of how things have changed since she first became involved with Anthroposophy several decades ago and what the present situation is like for her then-workplace, she said:

> I can say that the biggest change is that we have opened up [for the outside world], and that has been my [special interest]. I have always been of the opinion that society, since society foots the bill, has a right to have an insight into what we do.

> There is no aspect of our operations that society does not have a right to scrutinize. This, however, does not mean that we should sell our soul or our identity. What we do is also the business of the National Board of Health and Welfare and a whole string of other governmental agencies. This kind of institution is the sort that must have the highest degree of transparency because of the fact that we take care of children and teens, so there are always different kinds of inspections [to be carried out]. So that is the biggest change. From starting out as a relatively closed institution, we have become a very open one. And here I'm not just talking about [this place] but also curative education in general. A general opening up has occurred.

Other narratives, however, make it clear how this opening up to society can be framed as an opponent. Anna, for instance, talked about how, once the work required to build Kulturhuset was completed, the target customer base of some of the enterprises located in Järna increasingly became people from outside the local community. "Cafés popped up," she said, and the place itself became a destination where "[p]eople could stroll in the park and look around." Anna added that she imagined that Södertälje Municipality felt a sense of pride regarding these developments. When I later asked her to describe her personal feelings about these changes, she said that, although she in part regarded them in a positive light, the shift to focusing on becoming "outwardly oriented" has led to a situation where the "strong inner life that was there isn't present in the same way". This point of view, i.e., that something has gone missing, was also expressed by others with whom I spoke (e.g., Olivia and Oskar).

Sonja, in her assessment of the present situation of Anthroposophy in Sweden, similarly painted Järna as a place that has in some sense lost its soul. When she compared the Järna of today with how it was during years past, she said the following:

> [Today] you can go there to drink coffee. You couldn't do that during the 70s. You did not go there to drink coffee. No one would ever even have come up with the idea of doing such a thing. But today you can go to Järna to look at all the beautiful flowers and quirky buildings and then leave without ever having been confronted by the intellectual goods [behind it all] in any way. If I were to be crass, I would say that Järna's ideological foundation has faded dramatically over the past 10 or 15 years, and so it's become a meeting place – a beautiful place to visit with exciting artistic projects and a lovely garden and a few shops and a really nice café at Saltå and so on.

Fredrik, who also touched upon the situation of Anthroposophical enterprises being forced to open up due to imposed rules and regulations from the outside, concluded that they had adapted to such a degree that their operations were becoming increasingly superficial. "Anthroposophy is disappearing, and the only thing left is the forms," he said, adding "and forms don't last."

6. Narrating the Future

6.1 The story of the future

This chapter concerns my interlocutors' stories that focus on the future. As stated above, when taken together, they can be summarized as follows: "If Anthroposophy in Sweden is to survive, something needs to change". Although these narratives are about events that have not yet happened (and indeed may never happen) and, further, contain in some cases, as we shall see below, what can be characterized as more or less vaguely formulated predictions, I argue that they nonetheless have discernable plots informed by "if this, then that" structures having varying degrees of complexity. They therefore can also, like the stories focusing on the past and present, be discussed in the light of Greimas' actantial model. Before doing so, I will first present a condensed sketch of how the future is described in these stories. Afterwards, I will examine in detail the individuals, groups, and abstractions that are assigned roles as actants in them.

In general, in contrast to the cases of my informants' rich tapestry of stories about the past and present, ideas about the future are relatively few in number and take far less time to narrate. One way in which this difference could be understood is in terms of time, i.e., sufficient time has passed for various ways of talking about the past to have become crystalized, and, regarding the present, engagement with then-current conditions provides the teller with a detailed frame of reference. The future, on the other hand, is something looming – sometimes just a hope, a threat, or a promise. As it has not yet happened, it can be difficult to verbalize or even to imagine, a fact that is also reflected in the far fewer pages devoted to the stories about the future in this study. With that being said, the ways in which my informants described the future of Anthroposophy in Sweden are often bleak and pessimistic, and they are largely focused upon a perceived need for change. However, while there is much agreement concerning the necessity of change, there is much less so regarding the matters of what needs to happen, how it should be done, and by whom.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in light of the above, one recurrent theme in the stories about the future is uncertainty. It was expressed in various ways, e.g., as Fredrik's simple "I don't know," which was his initial reply when I asked him what the future would be like. A sense of uncertainty can also be detected in Karl's answer, although in this case it is countered by a sense of optimism. For instance, when discussing his involvement with a local division of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, he said that "this [i.e., what the future will be like] has always been a big question – how will it all continue. But then it just does". Mattias, who seemed to find my question ridiculous, also answered "I don't know" when I asked him what the future would be like, adding curtly that "no one can know what the future will be like."

Despite their initial answers reflecting a sense of uncertainty, some of my interlocutors, without being prompted by further questions for me, started to

speculate about what the future might hold. Nina, for instance, started maneuvering towards talking about the future by stating that Anthroposophy has two sides that must be taken into consideration:

> There is an "outer" Anthroposophy, and I have no idea what that's going to be like. Things could even develop so that it come to be the opposite [of what it's like today], or it'll be big or superfluous. I have no idea. But there is also surely some kind of "inner" Anthroposophy, which perhaps doesn't need to be called that, that is comprised by people who have worked with [Steiner's ideas] a great deal and who have done, or who do, something [with them]. It's not just about the schools. Hopefully, biodynamic agriculture will grow or become meaningful in some way.

She then took a more pessimistic turn. Comparing the situation of the Anthroposophical movement to a tree, she remarked that "there's a lot of things [about it that] we don't see," adding "just because it's green doesn't mean everything is okay." She continued by telling me about a time she went wandering through a "beautiful forest in Germany" and was struck by the thought that the majestic trees she was then admiring were all going to disappear eventually. "They're in full bloom now, and they look beautiful, but in 30 or 40 years they won't be because no one takes care of them," she said.

Olivia also started to speculate after initially replying with an emphatic "I have no idea what the future holds." She told me that she had been thinking about the topic of renewal within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden when she was walking to the spot where we met for the interview session:

> I thought, when I was on the way here, what kinds of activities have been organized for members? What things [that are going on within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden] have to do with renewal? Where is that happening right now? Is the council working with it [i.e., renewal]? Two new members have been voted in [to the council]. What's the purpose of the Anthroposophical Society? Who is it for, and what is it for?

Despite her initial response of having "no idea" what the situation will be like in later times, she later speculated that "other people will be here [in Järna]" but had nothing to add about what this would mean or who these people would be. It was also not uncommon for my interlocutors to include in their responses to my inquiries in general (e.g., Olivia, Emma, Oskar, Anna, Charlotte) a series of broad questions that they themselves did not answer.

While many of my interviewees' ideas regarding what the future might be like were, as I will demonstrate below, fragmentary in nature and consisted to a large degree of various notions having to do with the types of changes they deemed necessary either for ensuring the survival of Anthroposophy in Sweden or for purposes of some kind of quality control, some offered what I classify as pessimistic predictions. Oskar, for instance, explained to me that, since it has run its course, Anthroposophy is currently in the process of dying out. He contextualized this view by referring to both the past and the present:

> Development always happens the same way for all movements. We've reached our peak, and we did that at some point during the 70s, I believe. They started [their operations] out there [in Järna] in 1964, I believe. And in 1966 they had a big conference. And I came there in 1975. Those five years that led up to 1980 were the Golden Age [blomstringstid]. Then it kind of slowly started to fade, and since then it has been in a constant state of decline. [They] haven't been able to renew themselves [förnya sig]. Rudolf Steinerseminariet was on the brink of bankruptcy. They came to the realization that it wasn't working, and they tried to renew themselves, but there was always someone saying "but this is how we've always done things."

Another pessimistic view was offered by Alexander, who told me that, although – from his perspective – members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden have not come to terms with the matter, even Steiner said that Anthroposophy would eventually die out. Anne-Marie also offered a bleak prediction. She said that while she could see that Anthroposophy itself could have a chance of surviving because it has something "holistic" to offer to spiritual seekers in contrast to what she characterized as fragmentary teachings offered by other alternatives, she saw this as an unlikely scenario in the case of Sweden due to a general failure to make Anthroposophy attractive enough by being able to provide answers to the questions posed by the current times.

In addition to his in general pessimistic assessment, Oskar offered an idea of how the future could develop. Initially starting out in terms that might be seen as positive, it ultimately takes a downward turn:

> I have a personal theory that I share with a few other people, and that is that Anthroposophy is going to shrink and become a little thing like it was at Rådmansgatan earlier – there was a small office you could visit to buy a book or something and chat a bit – but very few people will go there, and there will still be people who are Anthroposophists and who read about Anthroposophy, but I don't think it will be that big, or at least not as big as it was when it was at its best. Eventually, it will go into hibernation. A few decades later, or maybe a hundred years later, young people will discover it and say "What is all this?" and they will see that really exciting things happened there [in Järna]. Stuff like what you're writing [here he is talking about me and my dissertation] might help them to remember, and then people will have a different way of relating to Anthroposophy, and then it might have a bigger impact. I don't know. But, as the situation stands now, I don't have faith in the Anthroposophical Society or the movement.

Others provided less pessimistic and at times more fleshed-out predictions. For example, Emma, who painted an ultimately more positive picture, described a future in which our living conditions on planet Earth would become increasingly permeated by materialism. This development would, according to her, make it more difficult for Anthroposophy to survive, but it would nonetheless be kept alive by what she described metaphorically as a small band of guerilla warriors:

> So, there will perhaps be some kind of guerilla group devoted to it [i.e., Anthroposophy]. This is the way I have seen it. [I see it like] one of those science fiction movies after World War III, and there's this place filled with all kinds of garbage and debris, and there's a group of people there with an oil barrel with a fire in it, and they're standing there keeping warm like in *Blade Runner*, a scenario like that, and I imagine that these people, perhaps the Goetheanum or some Anthroposophical study circle or some Waldorf school, they become places where you can go and get warm for a little while in order to feel that we are here, and I am about to go crazy, but there's someone else who understands what I think, and then you go out on your own mission as a warrior.

She continued her talk about the future by saying that one can naturally interpret the present situation as a failure of sorts because Steiner said that he had hoped Anthroposophy would spread far and wide. From her point of view, however, it is necessary that Anthroposophy be a difficult path because the way leading to something great must always be a hard one. The optimism inherent in Emma's view, despite it having aspects that one arguably might view less positively, e.g., the increasing influence of materialism and the difficulty inherent in pursing an Anthroposophical path, can be seen in the following quote: "If one thinks far, far into the future – we're talking many cultural epochs and planetary phases in the future – I truly believe that [Anthroposophy] will succeed".

In another positively tinged prediction, Felicia outlined a number of ideas about possible future developments for Anthroposophy both in Sweden and in general. She suggested, for instance, that Anthroposophy might continue its existence in a completely different form as what she described as a "post-Steiner" or "pre-Theosophical Anthroposophy". She also talked about the possibility of a schism arising between, on one side, "dogmatic Steinerites" who believe the descriptions Rudolf Steiner gave of the spiritual world and, on the other, a more pragmatic group viewing Steiner primarily as a good pedagogue and brilliant psychologist, individuals more inclined to take what they deem useful while leaving the rest behind. As the following quote demonstrates, the matter of pragmatism and its role in survival also came up at another point in our discussion about the future:

> It's [i.e., the situation in the future] very pragmatic. There are buildings, and the finances have to be taken care of. The buildings will be filled with activities of various sorts, and fifty years from now there will still be activities, and the buildings will be filled with them. It'll be different than what it is now, but what is there today is already different from what the original plans were when the buildings were constructed. Solutions will be found.

6.2 Narratives of the future: an actantial analysis

While the notions of how the future might develop presented above are occasionally vague, as we shall see in the following, some of the stories focusing on the future told by my interlocutors, due to more concretely defined actants, lend themselves to be analyzed with the help of Greimas' model. These accounts of what may happen are structurally different from the stories about the present:

the current situation is described by most of my interviewees in very bleak terms, and opponents therefore by far outnumber helpers. In a story about the future, potential helpers need to be imagined and enumerated, or the narrative will be one of terminal decay.

6.2.1 The Object

While, as we saw above, the narratives that focus on the past told by my interlocutors are about *manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society* and the ones about the present concern *keeping the Anthroposophical impulse in Swedish society alive*, the stories about the future have to do with *bringing Anthroposophy into the future*. Central to these ideas about events yet to come is the notion of renewal, a concept my interviewees described in different ways. Some of these ways of talking about renewal present it as an internal process. As such, it is sometimes described in spiritual terms, which can be seen in the following quote from Fredrik in which the assistance of impulses, here to be understood as something originating in a spiritual dimension, is described:

> Renewal [within the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden] has not had a continual development. There have been peaks, times of efflorescence. They have been connected with very strong impulses that have not just stemmed from individuals and the initiatives started by individuals, [and these impulses] are always present. Naturally, there are individuals who maintain [them] constantly. Otherwise, they would harden into dead, lifeless institutions and forms, but [they] are borne by active and creative individuals. There's a bit of opposition involved. But that is also perhaps Anthroposophy's strong side – that one isn't satisfied with merely being institutionalized, just belonging, for example, to an organization, but instead the Anthroposophical Society itself wants to be active, future-oriented, goal-oriented, and constantly preparing the way for new initiatives [and] impulses.

At other times, renewal is presented as a more mundane process or undertaking, e.g., when the suggested remedy is a change in attitude, a shift that involves something internal in the individual or individuals desiring to see something from a different perspective but not an effort that would require the intervention of the spiritual world (e.g., in the case of Alexander, who repeatedly suggested the necessity of coming to a realization regarding Anthroposophy's future and place in the world). We find an additional example in Peter's ideas about renewal. For Peter, renewal involves cooperation, i.e., people working beyond artificial borders that have been constructed in the Anthroposophical milieu between different fields of the practical application of Anthroposophy. This requires, according to his estimation, the simple act of taking an interest in the activities and accomplishments of others:

> Everyone is very busy in their own fields, but how do you get people to cooperate [across boundaries]? Arne said that we mustn't forget the Mother – the source. There must be people who really bear that impulse, who strive to not lose the Mother. No one has the time or energy to take an interest in others but instead they are very busy with what they themselves want to accomplish and bring about,

> but the most important thing is what we create together. [...] We also have to take an interest in what other people do.

In contrast to these views of renewal as an internal process, a number of my interlocutors describe it as an external one. In this latter case, as we shall see in the section on helpers below, what we find is a number of what could be called practical suggestions for instituting structural change. As an example, we can consider Astrid's explanation that "[y]ou do it [i.e., renewal] on your own by studying Anthroposophy, and you do it as an organization by making yourself visible to the outside world, by not shutting yourself in, but instead by showing that you exist, which is why we have public lectures." She continued, however, by remarking upon the difficulty inherent in trying to do so, saying "[i]t isn't easy to renew Anthroposophy or ourselves as an organization."

My interlocutors sometimes had a difficult time explaining what they meant when I asked them to specify what they imagined or intended when they used the word renewal. When I asked Daniel, for instance, he dismantled the question and turned it around by using it to bolster his criticism of an organization that he regarded as having become increasingly dysfunctional over the years of his involvement with it. "Renewal? I find it very difficult to imagine," he scoffed in response to my inquiry.

6.2.2 Subjects

Even more so than in my interlocutors' talk about the present, the stories focusing on days yet to come told to me by my interviewees are concerned with organizational matters. Here, the subject assigned the task of bringing Anthroposophy into the future is the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden itself. Stories about the future are distinct from those about the past and present in that my interviewees were more prone to placing themselves as important actants and have the role as subject. The following quote, in which Rut states that she is part of the collective of people who need to act, is but one of many:

> A few weeks ago, I was at a meeting for the pedagogical section [of the School of Spiritual Science] before the Waldorf teachers' meeting and we said that we need to enter the public debate, providing information about what we do. But if we do that, we have to describe and explain it, and then we also have to include the Anthroposophical perspective of the human being, partly because it is so inspiring, so it must be explained, and partly because, if we don't do that, we will be accused of having a false product declaration. The first part of the work is internal, so that we ourselves understand what we are doing. If we do it, we ought to be able to express it in words and not just say that "Dr. Steiner said this or that," because that is not enough. What Steiner said 100 years ago is not interesting anymore. It's a bit embarrassing if we can't explain what we're doing but instead refer to what he said 100 years ago. It's high time to convert it into our own descriptions.

In a similar vein, Mattias places himself and his close associates in the center of activity:

> Class readers [from the School of Spiritual Science] meet twice a year and take up questions like how to go about getting more members, but it fundamentally has to do with Anthroposophy and the Anthroposophical Society, marketing, that we show sides that can be of interest. My work with Anthroposophy, my courses, also have to do with showing that the Anthroposophical Society does interesting things. How would you otherwise know if you want to join something if you don't see that it exists or does interesting things?

6.2.3 The Sender

In part, one could gather that, as in the cases of the past and the present, it is Rudolf Steiner, the spiritual world from which he extracted his insights, the pioneers who were so pivotal in first manifesting the impulse in Sweden, and all the members of the movement today who for one reason or another want Anthroposophy to survive who are the senders in the stories examined in this chapter. However, in the narratives that focus on the future, the sender consistently remains implicit, and the focus lies elsewhere.

6.2.4 Receivers

As in the stories focusing on the past and present, the value of Anthroposophy is presented as its being beneficial to a diffuse set of receivers in ways that are rarely spelled out. From individuals who will one day come into direct contact with any of the many manifestations of Anthroposophy in society, to those alive today and contributing and who would benefit for karmic reasons, to a kind of "future humanity at large"-view of the beneficiary, the receivers are narratively treated as so obvious that their identities need not be spelled out.

6.2.5 Helpers

My interlocutors named many, and quite diverse, helpers who could aid in bringing Anthroposophy into the future. In order to gain a more systematic overview of what they perceive as being the means to attain the object, I have heuristically divided these helpers into *organizational restructuring*, *a more distinct identity*, *new members*, *abstract factors*, and a category that can best be characterized as "*something*". This last perhaps somewhat strangely labeled category represents the numerous comments made that Anthroposophy, in order to survive, needs some kind of change or intervention for this object to be attained, but the situation is perceived as being so critical that my interlocutors could not even begin to articulate what that intervention might be.

6.2.5.1 Organizational restructuring

Many of the suggestions for how to move forward into the future deal with what my interviewees describe as organizational changes. Since the Golden Age is connected for many of my interviewees with the idea that there were charismatic leaders who could draw enthusiastic crowds and initiate numerous projects, it is hardly surprising that a new generation of visionaries and gifted leaders fills the role of helper in several responses. As Anna formulated it:

> People don't have any new visions, so someone must come along who has them. Otherwise, the whole thing will be extinguished. This is what is happening on a small scale in all the centers for curative education and schools. The founders have gotten older. Who will take over? How will it all work out? It's hard.

Some, like Nils, saw the need for a "completely new group of people … who have to be younger" to come into the picture. When interviewees specify what characteristics these leaders should possess, two recur: charisma and business acumen. As Oskar put it:

> The only chance the movement has is if…I imagine someone coming in from the business sector or someone with a powerful personality entering into some kind of Anthroposophical context, and he thinks that it's fantastic. "Anthroposophy is wonderful. But what have they done?! They should do this and this and this." A person like that comes in, who has such charisma or such power that he commands respect, and starts doing things. That's the only chance. Because in our [Swedish Anthroposophical] context, one runs into a, according to me, false idea that "no, Steiner said there shouldn't be any leaders, so we should instead all have some kind of cooperation." It's going to take a long time for everyone to become like Arne Klingborg. Powerful people are nowhere to be found [in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu] nowadays. People with ideas and who, one sees, know what the times require. As long as such people aren't here, nothing will happen.

Closely related to the suggestion that new leadership is the needed helper is the contention that some kind of broader or more fundamental organizational change is required. The very term "organizational change" is of course itself vague. It can be conservative (a return to the putative roots of Anthroposophy) or innovative, and it can involve any number of concrete measures. This broad spectrum of possibilities is present in my interview material. Some structural changes clearly need to be implemented, many of my interlocutors state, but there seems to be little if any agreement among them regarding specifics.

For instance, the change could involve reducing the number of council members. Daniel suggested that the best solution would be to have a council consisting of very few members who then take care of very specific matters:

> There is something special about an organization that is nationwide. It is often so that there are local branches that are quite active, so one has a council that takes care of all the administrative matters, and this is where I think we need to be: a council with few members that takes care of the most central administrative matters for the organization, and then the local branches should be active. The work has to reach down to the level of the members. Why else would you want to join?

Another suggestion is to dissolve the current council and start from scratch with new members from a younger generation. Nils spoke in quite emotional terms about such a potential for structural renewal:

> Get rid of all of them! Let people who are completely new in! They will make all kinds of mistakes and they will learn. They'll form a new council with completely new forces. And they'll have to be younger. They have a capacity that I recognize from other contexts. They can do it! If some people came along and said "we want to shoulder the responsibility," I'd say, "Great!" Great! Put that confidence in someone new.

A far more radical approach could be to change the organizational form entirely, perhaps dissolving the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden as an entity and creating in its place a much looser and freer form of collaborating. The reasons for having to go to such extremes and the details of what these looser forms would entail or how any of it would be achieved are rarely spelled out in operational terms by my interviewees. Perhaps the organization is deeply flawed and needs to be jettisoned (as hinted at by Nina in her story of the two sides of Anthroposophy and where what is lurking beneath the attractive exterior may be rotten at its core). Perhaps, on the other hand, the organizational structure is not so much flawed as simply unnecessary. A positive yet equally vague vision of the future along these lines was expressed by Hans. When I asked him what the Anthroposophical movement in Sweden would be like in the future, he expressed a longing for a situation where the movement could be outwardly identified by noticing that the people engaged within it possessed the qualities of creativity, wakefulness, and dedication due to a deep-seated interest in humanity as a whole, the integrity of the human being, the wellbeing of nature, and working in ways suited to the spirit of the times. None of this, however, according to his point of view, ultimately has anything to do with being a member of an organization. He went on to describe a vision he once had while meditating upon the Goetheanum and how it would be in the future. He perceived it, in the midst of his meditation, as a receptive space ("It would receive me and my questions") – one that was social, spiritual, physical, and utterly silent – a space people could experience and that could serve as the source of healing and beneficial initiatives. Summing it up, he said: "I have no organizational ideas. I want to build upon a quality."

Nils expressed a similar vision:

> I don't really think there should be an organization. One could perhaps have an economic organization to support initiatives so that it is made clear that the Anthroposophical Society itself is nothing esoteric or anything like that. I wouldn't want it to be anything like that. That could be one possibility, at any rate. What I really want to be more public is what we call the School of Spiritual Science, which is a path of training or path of development and isn't something that I would want in the form of an organization. It should instead emphasize the individual, but an organization could be responsible for [taking care of] the initiatives, which the Anthroposophical Society actually is. But this [organizational form] is so muddy, so foggy, for young people […], so I would like to make it much clearer – an organization for supporting initiatives that we see as very human and that really contribute something, so the Anthroposophical Society doesn't need to take realize all the initiatives [brought to it] but instead sees, supports, and creates

> connections and networks. But the actual spiritual life found in a very powerful core in the possibilities offered by the School of Spiritual Science, it is almost impeded, I think. […] It should be very individual. And free. It should […] not be defined by first having to become a member of an organization.

What becomes increasingly clear as one continues to survey the calls for organizational change is that, as touched upon above, although it is a commonly recurring topic brought up by my interlocutors, there is little agreement regarding precisely what needs to be done. The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden could have a more important role as a focal point and research center (Anders) or it could be less dominant and stop attempting to present Anthroposophical ideas in a top-down fashion (Sonja) or it could even be largely be dismantled (Hans). Perhaps younger people should take on leadership roles (Nils) or it might be a bad idea to have younger people serving on the council because of their busy lives (Daniel). It might not even be the structure of the organization that is the fundamental problem but instead it is the focus of the leadership that should change: an organization that is more devoted to Anthroposophy as practice and less as a set of teachings could improve the situation of the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden (Mattias).

Despite these rather disparate suggestions, two themes seem to be visions somewhat more broadly shared by my interlocutors. *Decentralization* is a topic mentioned by several who stress that the organization should focus on facilitating the work and initiatives of individual members rather than on determining plans of action:

> We should do administrative work so that the members feel that [the organization] is functional and can manifest their ideas and wishes. It should be possible for all members to develop Anthroposophy and develop themselves as Anthroposophists. We shouldn't sit with our own plan of operation [that says that] we council members are going to do this and this and this – we should do what the members want us to do. That is renewal for me: one is much more open for members instead of having one's own agenda. We should serve the members. They shouldn't give us money in order to get us to do something. (Daniel)

> The council is made up of human beings. The council should be an organ that sees, listens, observes, and is capable of showing that we are interested in what you doing. "Show us." And an institution that also has an interest in Anthroposophy as a creative force. You don't actually have to join an organization, but that's what Anthroposophy stands for. It doesn't even need to be called Anthroposophy, but if you want to develop, it's not something that happens on its own. This force is needed, and it is here where the Anthroposophical Society should see that there are possibilities. An institution should be able to turn to the Anthroposophical Society and say "Can we have an exchange? Can we take part in the Anthroposophical work in the form of people coming here and holding a lecture or starting a project with the employees?" or something like that. In that way it becomes a stream between institutions […] and the institutions become bearers of life. But one can crystalize and become merely an institution when one is quite

> simply satisfied with, or uninterested in anything other than, one's own development. These two things often go hand in hand. (Fredrik)

A second recurring suggestion is that *cooperation and an increasing exchange* with others are important for the continued survival of the Anthroposophical milieu. Olivia, for instance, suggested that different institutions should meet and cooperate more. In the words of Peter, quoted in the previous chapter, "[w]e also have to take an interest in what other people do" and, as stated by Nils, "not just be content with [ourselves and merely] see each other". Linn suggested the need for greater interest in and cooperation with the outer world if only because a failure to undertake such efforts would result in an increase of negative attention. Specifics are hard to locate in my interview material. Precisely which outside institutions or parties outside the Anthroposophical milieu would be welcome partners? How should this cooperation be initiated and who should make the first move? An exception is Anders, whose response is also unusual in that it explicitly links the call for cooperation with an element of Anthroposophical cosmology, i.e., the concept that our time is ruled by a spiritual being, Michael:

> And so we have another buzzword here, and that is that Steiner connected the Michaelic impulse with the cosmopolitical impulse, the global, or beyond global, impulse, and then somebody asked Steiner, and this has been a highly relevant quote for me – I don't even know where to find it because I'm not really good at academic sources – but he was asked if are there any other Michaelic movements. You know that one? And Steiner answered "yes, the Red Cross when it started." I like that. I think we should endorse and appreciate other good cosmopolitical impulses – if we can and they want to have us, which maybe isn't so easy sometimes.

6.2.5.2 A distinct corporate identity

The reader will recall that one of the opponents repeatedly identified in the stories about the present are leaders who fail to "brand" or market Anthroposophy. For the future to hold any promise of survival for the Anthroposophical impulse, new leaders with the requisite marketing skills are repeatedly singled out as potential helpers. Their core task, according to these stories, is to formulate a clearer picture of what Anthroposophy is and what it can provide. The parallels with the need of secular organizations to have a clear message about their purpose are sometimes explicitly acknowledged in my material. Rut, for instance, stated:

> I think what is needed here is to describe what Anthroposophy is in a more easily accessible way, like Greenpeace or Amnesty International. We could describe, with clear points, what it is we do, and the Anthroposophical Society could do that without avoiding talking about the esoteric side of things. That's one part, and the other is to start more work with Anthroposophy so those who are members, those who work with Anthroposophy, will have places to meet. They exist, but the big task concerns the 4,000 people employed within Anthroposophical institutions –

> that Anthroposophy is presented in a clearer way there because that is where there is much outward contact with lots of parents and other interested parties. Work for renewal has to do with efforts to increase clarity about what Anthroposophy is and then making it public, in part through actively participating in societal debates and in part through the movement itself. This is what I think needs to be done. And I think that, if one would speak with the council members of the Anthrosophical Society, they would agree that these are important things, but they have no plan for how to do it.

Without such a clear corporate identity, there is little chance of attracting people to the movement. Rut, for instance, thinks that communicating more clearly to the outside world that Anthroposophy provides a form of practical occultism would separate those who are genuinely interested in such a spiritual path from those who are not. This, she concludes, would potentially serve to attract enthusiastic new members:

> Our main task [in the Anthroposophical Society] is to support the School of Spiritual Science, that is to support people in their development towards occult perception, a deeper insight into the spiritual worlds. Imagine if we had a sign on the door saying that. […] When someone asks you what the Anthroposophical Society is, that's perhaps not the first thing you'd say because you think it'll scare people off. Some people will think it's strange. They'll think that no matter what. But those who long for something like this and come across [the Anthroposophical Society] without finding out [what it really is] have nothing to get enthusiastic about because they don't find out about it, and there are a lot [of people who do].

Daniel also mentioned the need for a clear identity as a dire issue. He told me about having been part of a "bylaw committee" when it was time for the organization's bylaws to be "renewed." The meetings were spread out, he said, over a period spanning three to four years. In the beginning, there were different constellations of people involved, but, according to his report, it eventually solidified into a core group of interested parties. After their work was finished, he found himself wanting to continue, perhaps in the form of creating informational material ("What is Anthroposophy?") that could be distributed to visitors to, e.g., Järna, who wondered "What is all of this?". From his point of view, no suitable material for serving such a purpose exists in Swedish.

6.2.5.3 New members

As discussed above, the idea of having younger people join the council has both proponents and opponents. The perception that the membership base is aging leads several interviewees to place young people in general in the role of potential helpers. Anna, for instance, said that things will work out as long as there are young people in the picture and that the Anthroposophical milieu really has to change or be transformed in some way in order to attract such a younger demographic. Hans similarly suggested that the focus ought to be put on instituting changes in accordance with what people need today, e.g., young

people needing their own sphere and demanding more modern forms of leadership.

Moa presents the needed influx of younger members as a conundrum. The fact that the current membership, according to her estimation, is to a great extent composed of older members means that the younger generation that is vital to carrying Anthroposophy into the future is simply not attracted by its offerings:

> If you meet an old member, they often have strong ideas about how things should be and that there should be certain meetings and that it should be [like this]. The Anthroposophical way of life follows a special course. If you are 30 years old and are interested and want to enter into this, with the old Anthroposophists' way of looking at life, things won't click. You'll feel that this is foreign. You'll understand that this is perhaps something good but that it isnt' for [you]. And this is the transformation that we need. We have to make it possible for younger people to be able to take part in and enter into the esoteric work. That is what I mean by renewal.

6.2.5.4 Abstract factors

As can be seen in the preceding sections, several of my interviewees called for rather sweeping but vaguely formulated changes. The challenges interviewees are faced with when attempting to articulate what helpers might bring about realizing the desired object becomes even more apparent in narratives that suggest that some abstract factor, force, or entity is needed. One helper belonging to this category was named by Olivia. When she talked about the future of Järna, she described the place as being "connected with *Anthroposofia*, the spiritual impulse," something that is discernable in the ways in which the buildings there and the surrounding areas have been designed and organized. Anna discussed another such abstract helper, one she described in similarly vague terms. When I asked if she thought Anthroposophy would survive in Sweden, she replied that it is impossible to kill it, adding that its existence is independent of whether or not there is any kind of organization to join. She described it as a "powerful force" whose survival is based upon a sense of curiosity about how it lives at the present and upon finding modern ways to manifest. Robin also described something that could be likened to a force, i.e., as an "impulse" that manifests in the world regardless of how well, or how poorly, Anthroposophists manage to take care of it.

Another abstract helper named by my interlocuters could be termed *general introspection*. We can see an example of it in the following quote from my interview with Johan:

> There's a great need in the world nowadays for something, but what is it that we need? We need to ask the right question. Is it more materialism? Is it more money? What is it that we long for? Or is it more compassion? Spirituality?

Another similar view was expressed by Emma, who, after stating that it is pointless to say that things were better in the past, continued by saying the following:

> The impulse that we got to experience [in the Golden Age] – it's gone. Does that depend upon the outside world or does it have something to do with me? How can I reignite that spark? Is there something that I myself can contribute with? Is there something I myself can do?"

An additional abstract helper mentioned was the quality of *flexibility*. Alexander, for instance, said that Anthroposophy's survival was dependent upon "new relationships, new ways of taking it [i.e., Anthroposophy] up, new ways of approaching Rudolf Steiner's work altogether." Both Anna and Peter similarly emphasized the need to understand Steiner in one's own way and one's own language if Anthroposophy is to have a future in Sweden.

6.2.5.5 "Something"

The final category of narratives about the future posits that *something* needs to happen or be done if Anthroposophy is to survive, but no specifics are given. Anna, for instance, said that it is clear that Anthroposophy will survive because it is so powerful, but *modern ways will have to be found*. The formulation in the passive voice leaves such matters unstated as what those ways are, who will find them, and what course of action this person or entity should follow. Another version that falls into this category is that the whole organization needs to die out so that something, never in these cases described in any detail, new based on Steiner's thought can take its place. When Olivia, for instance, talked about what she characterized as the rampant inertia affecting the operations of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden today, she referred to how at its annual meetings references are still made to "the Christmas Conference of 1923/24 or whatever it was". She then raised the question of how relevant the ways in which Steiner organized the Anthroposophical Society during his lifetime are for the organization today. Making a comparison with life in general, she said the following: "Something is born, and then it dies. It's no big deal. And it has permission to do precisely that, and then something new arises [in its place]. Then one has to dare to let go of what has died and stop fussing over it."

When Alexander talked about Järna, he made a mythological reference, saying "I believe that all of this has to crash so that something new can come into being, like the Phoenix". He later made the same reference but this time in a broader sense: "Something new must arise out of Rudolf Steiner's work. That's the only [alternative] I believe in". He continued by stating that this process can only happen through new initiatives undertaken by individuals who join the movement. In their absence, he added, the situation resembles trying to keep something alive by hooking it up to a ventilator. "It needs to die," he said.

6.2.6 Opponents

Whether implicitly understood or explicitly stated, the logic of a narrative is such that opponents can be the structural opposites of the helpers: If better, more charismatic leaders are potential helpers, a less competent leadership would constitute opponents. If organizational change would function as a helper, conservatism and stagnation are opponents.

Rather than presenting explicit opponents, some stories include a declaration that what others might perceive as helpers are, in actuality, quite the opposite. Effective marketing features as a helper in some stories, but Emma singled it out as useless or even counterproductive:

> One often attends discussions [about topics like] "should we market Anthroposophy?", in quotation marks, "should we make Anthroposophy accessible", "should we try to attract people?", and it seems like the older the people are, the more they think people should do all that, but I really do wonder if young people would join because it was made more accessible or packaged it in a hip way because it is a difficult path. You can't package it as something else, and I am of the opinion, even though it might seem a little elitist, that it isn't for everyone. Not everyone will find it interesting, and not everyone will have the desire or the willpower to will themselves through all the hard work that it is and which, I might add, yields very few results, and the more you devote yourself to it, the harder it gets.

Emma seems to feel that "marketing Anthroposophy" to make it more appealing to outsiders will inevitably hide from view the fact that this is a difficult path that only a kind of spiritual elite will want to embark upon. Marketing thus risks getting the "wrong" people to join.

Karl was just as skeptical about marketing as a means of enticing potential new members. He mentioned that a local branch once advertised a lecture in the major Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter*. The result was a visit from two journalism students who had gotten an assignment to write about something happening in town that day. According to his account, several other attempts were made to advertise in newspapers before the idea was abandoned. The next effort to attract new faces consisted of hanging up flyers in various places around town. Karl reported that all the footwork amounted to very little because those who did show up because they saw the advertisements already had some kind of connection to Anthroposophy. The marketing itself thus comes across as an ineffective or false helper in this story.

Sometimes this parallelism between helpers and opponents is spelled out explicitly. For instance, Alexander, whose call for more flexibility was summarized above, described his own relationship to Steiner by saying "I call myself a Steinerian. I am one of the Steinerians, and that is the opposite of what I would call the Steinerists. Fundamentalists". The opponents are clearly identified here as those who read the words of Anthroposophy's founder as

gospel. When one looks at such explicit mentions of who, or what, impedes the future blossoming or even survival of Anthroposophy, the opponents that figure in these stories are quite a scattered set. Most of them can be characterized as internal factors: perceived irrelevance of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden as an organization, inertia, an excessive allegiance to the past or an excessive adaptation to the present, and a fragmentation of the movement itself. Far fewer are mentions of external factors attributable to society at large, such as a saturated spiritual marketplace that makes it difficult for Anthroposophy to attract new members, and in very few cases are references made to aspects of Anthroposophical cosmology.

Irrelevance is cited by several interviewees as a threat to Anthroposophy. According to Lovisa, the key to survival is having a function and a reason for existing. The quote ends on an open question that seems to presuppose Lovisa's doubt about the Anthroposophical Society fulfilling any useful purpose.

> What is our function? Do we even have a function? Is there any justification for our existence? All of these questions have been there as if we have gone through some kind of existential phase. And it's not just in Sweden. If you go to the Goetheanum, you can also hear it there from certain outspoken council members – that we can't just assume that we have this task or that task, that we must know – is this actually so? Do we have a function? Do we fill a need? In my opinion, I think the Anthroposophical Society can perhaps play a role in the sense that it could help establish relationships in this somewhat splintered landscape where groups are scattered here and there. To help establish relationships between individuals and groups of people. And that is something we can do only if other people want us to do it. We have to show that we can play such a role if people want that. Unite different sections so they become visible. Lots of people ask that question: Is there any justification for the Anthroposophical Society's existence today?

A similar line of thought concerning relevance was expressed by Linn, who expressed uncertainty about the future of the Anthroposophical Society:

> Change is taking place, but the question is whether or not it will be sufficiently pervasive for [the Anthroposophical Society] to be seen as just as relevant twenty-five years from now as it was yesterday...[T]oday we are experiencing a certain degree of decline in terms of membership numbers. Members are getting older. Is the Anthroposophical Society of interest for these older people? Are we going to see to it that we work with Anthroposophy in another way in the future? And I think that there is a certain degree of pessimism even among representatives for the Anthroposophical Society. I'm bit unsure whether we can pursue the matter in this way. But either the Anthroposophical Society will be transformed so that we can continue to have relevance or otherwise I think that other networks outside of it will need to be built and the Anthroposophical Society will then become a pensioners' club.

Inertia is an opponent in several stories. Peter, for instance, said that the Anthroposophical impulse will survive only if people have the energy to do the inner work:

> It depends upon how one can gain access to the Anthroposophical impulses without it being sect-like or dogmatic and if there are people who continue to work. And if new discoveries are made. And if people come to grips with things. But the big challenge of course has to do with digitalization, for better and worse. You can access texts in a completely different way now than you could before. Now you can just download all of Steiner's texts, but the question is: how do you find the energy to do the work? The inner work as well. It's not so easy. It's really hard.

Fragmentation of the Anthroposophical movement can be seen as an opponent in the following story told by Rut:

> I think that the main task of the Anthroposophical Society is to develop Anthroposophy, in part by allowing those who are already interested in it to meet, [...] but nowadays there is also this wider, external Anthroposophical movement. They are supposed to be Anthroposophical initiatives, but you can ask yourself to what extent Anthroposophy is alive in these initiatives. That's a matter of concern for the Anthroposophical Society. And now we're back where this conversation started, that there are all these organizations and is there any cooperation between them? Under the shining star of freedom these organizations are all separate and have developed individually. The Anthroposophical Society is one thing and Waldorffederationen is another. And in the name of freedom, some people think that they don't need to have anything to do with each other, and others think that they should have a lot to do with each other. There's no overarching, centralized form of leadership, there's no structure, there are [instead] various independent centers. What makes this a unified movement in any sense? They work with Anthroposophy. They do that everywhere but mostly in rather indirect ways. They work with the fruits of Anthroposophy.

Several of my interlocutors accused the Anthroposophical movement in general of falling prey to an excessive allegiance to the past that prevents the object from being attained. A detailed and rather long reflection along these lines comes from my interview with Anders, who suggested that the problem is so deeply rooted that the Anthroposophical Society itself has played out its role:

> The second generation, the third generation – I don't know how long a generation spans – of Anthroposophists were mainly the Anthroposophists I met when I was younger. They were second, third generation. Those were the Jorgen Smits and Arne Klingborgs and so on who never actually met Steiner but who were born in the 1910s and 20s and 30s and became very interested in Anthroposophy, and they had met the people who had worked with Steiner. For them, it was still very close. Let's call them second generation. I would be a bit young for the third generation because I got into Anthroposophy rather early. And then the second and third generation, they had, and I can understand this very well and I don't see it negatively, they had a sense of ownership related to responsibility. They felt like they were the owners of Anthroposophy, meaning also its guardians. And from these times comes the famous quote "der Doktor hat gesagt," "the Doctor has said,"

> and I considered it to be legitimate for that generation [to feel that way] because I knew those people and it was so much their inspiration for life and their everything, and for them it was a very valuable source enabling them to do very good things, so I want to see it in a positive light, but I have also seen that it definitely did not work if the third or fourth generation [had the same approach]. As soon as they would start to quote der Doktor, people didn't buy it anymore. We live in times when people are very good in critical thinking. We also live in times when, under the surface, people have an incredible organ for authenticity, so they will not buy anything that is not authentic, especially when it comes to beliefs and sayings, so it doesn't help to quote Steiner if you haven't incorporated it somehow. So, that is first generation, second generation, third generation, and fourth generation. So, if you are talking about renewal, then I think the very, very important step would be, which is an incredibly difficult step to take, to let go, even officially, of the Anthroposophical Society.

Another person who expressed this opinion is Sonja. She said, "I believe that the Anthroposophical Society as a concept is dying out. That's what I believe. And I believe that lots of people realize that, but they don't dare to admit it." She pointed out the very name of the organization as one of the problems. While she stated that changing it would not, from her point of view, result in turning the situation around, she said that it would be a step in the right direction. "This suggestion has been around for a long time. It's way too sectarian. You can't have an organization [with the word "Society" in its name] that costs 1,200 crowns to join."

Other stories, in contrast, see excessive adaptation as an opponent. Again, we can turn to Sonja, who described a Catch-22 situation in terms of where Anthroposophy is heading. In order for the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden to survive financially, the Järna area needs to attract paying customers from outside. By doing so, it, she suggested, almost certainly will succumb to an excessive commercialization, a trend touched upon in some my interlocutors' stories that focus on the present, that will ultimately eradicate what is left of the Anthroposophical impulse in the area:

> I believe that Järna will become even more commercialized. It's the only way to keep it alive, so to speak. The initiatives. All the buildings that have been built. Anthroposophists have always been great at building, they love building, and that means considerable costs. And you need to make money somehow. The only way is to make Järna more accessible to the public. They want to establish a Hilma af Klint museum and things like that to make it more commercial. Tourism, in other words. Järna is becoming more and more a tourist magnet for Södertälje municipality. You could have that as a title [for your dissertation]: "Järna: from a place of Anthroposophical indoctrination to tourist magnet". Things will probably continue that way. […] They are moving away from Anthroposophy.

Other stories see contemporary culture as an opponent. The problem, from this perspective, is not that society at large is forcing Anthroposophy to become overly commercialized but that the excess of spiritual alternatives now available, a theme also of the stories focusing on the present, offers such fierce competition

that Anthroposophy will face great difficulties in finding a place. Anne-Marie said that, for this reason, if Anthroposophy is ever to flourish again it will have to be in a different form. The following is an excerpt from her answer when I asked her for her thoughts about the future of Anthroposophy in Sweden:

> In some ways, I think that interest in spirituality has never been as strong as it is now. […] If you consider what people watch, what they are interested in, all these shows about the unknown and God-knows-what-else, all the alternative medicines, all the books on reincarnation therapy, on anything else you can think of here, there has never been as many as there are now, and those Americans, they sell their books like *The Secret*, like *Harry Potter*. Look at all those movies. Almost everything is science fiction. Everything is about spirituality in some way. Some of these movies would have been unthinkable in the 70s and 80s. Not one single copy would have been sold. Today they are great successes […], so interest in spirituality has never been as high as it is now, but, strangely enough, interest in Anthroposophy has never been as low as it is now. That's something you will have to think about, but there are most likely several reasons for it, but it's interesting, so, to answer your question, I don't know, but it is possible that it will blossom again, but I don't believe it will be in the form it once had. We will just have to wait and see.

As is so often the case in my interview material, opinions differ sharply. What one person frames as an opponent, another can see as a helper. Mattias said that the future looked bright when one considered what he called the "general public mood in Sweden":

> If we think about what's happening right now, businesses can't keep up with the demand for organic products. More and more people are finding that the usual offerings of food, buildings, schools, and medicine don't satisfy them anymore. They are looking for something else, something deeper, something more real, and here is just such a thing.

As we have also seen regarding the stories focusing on the past and present, respectively, opponents figuring in the narratives focusing on the future are discussed in almost entirely secular terms. A lone exception in this respect is Olivia, who explicitly refers to karma:

> The council of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden, when it had its Golden Age, was Arne Klingborg. It was hierarchical, but there was also something attractive about it. There was substance. And those who joined the council were asked [because of their perceived] greatness. […] You had to be asked to join. You were not to market yourself. This is the culture that exists. How do you do it in a new way? This is something that belongs to the invisible realm. There are many relationships and blockages and karmic connections and all kinds of things between people, so it's heavy to shoulder such an inheritance after everything that's taken place.

Part III

7. The Elusive Object and Sender: Anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner

7.1 Introduction

One of the striking characteristics of the stories focusing on the past, present, and future, respectively, told by my interlocutors is their emphasis on helpers and opponents. Few overt references are made to the object to be realized (the flourishing, or at least survival, of Anthroposophy in Sweden) and to the implied sender (presumably Rudolf Steiner or the spiritual world), and the descriptions of these actants are vague. Although the recipient is also left vague, there is a fundamental difference between the lack of elaboration in this case and in the few details given about the object and sender. For a religious movement with a distinctly formulated soteriological goal, the recipient will for reasons inherent in the dynamics of such a movement be the members of the movement itself, humanity at large, or both. In the case of the Anthroposophical milieu, the contours of the movement and the relationship between the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and the various "daughter" enterprises are diffuse to many Anthroposophists. "Humanity at large", on the other hand, is a generalization that does not easily lend itself to detailed elaboration. By contrast, Anthroposophy has doctrines, rituals, and a material culture that could be described in great detail, and versions of Rudolf Steiner's biography are freely available and could also be retold extensively. The fact that this is not the case in the material I collected merits further exploration. Passages in my interviews that address the questions of what Anthroposophy is and who Steiner was serve to give a deeper understanding of my interviewees' conceptions of the object and sender. Moreover, in the case of the discussion that follows in chapter 8 of this study, their understanding of these two actants will also help answer the question of why the stories are framed in the way that they are, hence the purpose of the present section.

7.2 The Object: What is Anthroposophy?

7.2.1 Issues of definition

My interlocutors described Anthroposophy in a variety of ways. While some included mentions of spiritual elements in their ways of talking about it, most did so in secular terms. In addition to this fundamental characteristic of their definitions, another striking feature of the interviews is that there seems to be so little agreement amongst my interviewees regarding what Anthroposophy actually is. Quite commonly, they insist that Anthroposophy is elusive and cannot be defined or pinned down in any way. Anders, for instance, had this to say when reflecting upon the nature of Anthroposophy: "It's the bar of soap in the bathtub, a fox in the night. It runs away. It slips out of reach." Another response couched in terms that also resist pinning down Anthroposophy with any precision is

Olivia's description of it as an "impulse", where she characterizes it as "something that must be absorbed by a person" and that "lives through them" as something "expressed".

Some gave negative definitions, i.e., they talked about what Anthroposophy is *not*. Anne-Marie, for instance, took the time to stress that it is not a religion, philosophy, or worldview:

> No, it's absolutely not [a religion]. It can be perceived as such sometimes, but it really isn't one. If there is any point about which Steiner was very clear, it is certainly this one. It's really hard to say what it is because when you say that it's a philosophy, that's not really true either, because it actually isn't a philosophy. He wanted it to be a spiritual science, but the fact is that it really isn't that either, because *that* spiritual scientist, he died in 1925, and, other than Steiner, there haven't been many others who could gain knowledge of the spiritual world in that way. So, I don't know. He really didn't want it to be seen as a worldview. That's precisely what he did not want. It isn't a worldview.

A range of more substantive descriptions is nonetheless present in my interview material. Rather than, say, presenting a basic list of teachings (for instance, something resembling the brief presentation provided in section 2.3.2 of this study) or referring explicitly to a normative definition, my interlocutors construct their reflections about Anthroposophy around various conceptual metaphors. As a heuristic way of subdividing the variety of descriptions discernable in my material, I have separated them into three categories based upon the fundamental metaphor that is used. One group of answers is framed around the notion of Anthroposophy as an *activity*. Another sees Anthroposophy as a *form of science*, i.e., a way to acquire knowledge. A third describes Anthroposophy as a *path*. Seminal discussions of metaphoric speech[313] have shown how conceptual metaphors structure thinking. For instance, viewing Anthroposophy as an activity brings up questions such as whether this is something one does on one's own or together with others and whether the activity is easy or difficult to carry out. The science metaphor can open up for questions having to do with the objectivity and intersubjectivity of the Anthroposophical enterprise. The path metaphor implies that there is some kind of destination involved. As we will see, this destination can be spelled out as a radical form of personal transformation having potential effects for all of humanity.

The metaphorical nature of these descriptions calls for an explanation. Many religions do present a basic, normative list of fundamental core tenets or practices. Actual beliefs and practices can of course differ, but bare-bone lists of beliefs or behaviors considered to be indispensable are nonetheless common. One well-known example of just such a list is the five pillars of Islam. Anthroposophy, as it was described by my respondents, seems to constitute a

[313] See, e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980.

striking exception to this otherwise common phenomenon. Only rarely does someone frame Anthroposophy as a set of teachings despite the fact that Steiner's numerous books are filled with specific pronouncements on a vast array of topics. A rare exception is Karl. From his point of view, the foundation of Anthroposophy is thought, and it is only once one has grasped its fundamental ideas, which, according to Karl, are transmitted through Steiner's books, that one ought to explore its artistic side. In our conversation, he positioned himself in contrast to others having an interest in Anthroposophy, people he described as not being official members of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden but who still consider themselves part of the movement because they have some general knowledge of Anthroposophy or have attended a course about it. However, even Karl seemed to backtrack from defining Anthroposophy in this way. After expressing views that seem to suggest that there are different kinds of Anthroposophy and that the one having to do with books is superior, he gave voice to a more inclusive perspective on Anthroposophy as something "for everyone" where "everyone is welcome as they are" and can have "their own way".

Generally speaking, there are historical reasons for why religions contain normative self-representations, and my hypothesis regarding the case of Anthroposophy is that it contains as part of its historical background a story that 1) marginalizes any idea that suggests that Anthroposophy is a set of doctrines and 2) promotes speaking of it as an activity, science, or path. Here, we find an emphasis on personal freedom, an idea that Anthroposophy is a path towards knowledge, and an insistence that Anthroposophy is not a religion, all of which are stances that can be traced back to the work of Steiner. The titles of two of his books that Anthroposophists often refer to as foundational texts point in this direction, i.e., *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1894) and *An Outline of Occult Science* (1910; some English editions translate the title as *An Outline of Esoteric Science*), as do the many times that Steiner himself declared that Anthroposophy is not a religion. His biographer Günther Wachsmut, for instance, writes of him having vehemently rejected the notion that Anthroposophy could ever be a religion because it is a spiritual science.[314] My interviewees thus describe Anthroposophy in terms that echo a Steinerian heritage of sorts.

Each of the three conceptual metaphors mentioned above will be presented in turn. When relevant, I have added subcategories. As some of my interviewees described Anthroposophy in a number of ways, their names appear in more than one category. Moreover, since many of these characterizations recur numerous times in my corpus of interviews, the quotes below can be seen as characteristic examples rather than as an exhaustive catalogue.

[314] Wachsmut 1995: 100–101

7.2.2 Anthroposophy is an activity

Some of my interviewees described Anthroposophy as *something that is done*. Anders, for instance, did so after first touching upon the difficulties of capturing its essence in words:

> When you try to describe it, you immediately come to the problem of putting things into words, which was Steiner's own lifelong theme. How do you find words for spiritual movement? Activity? For beings? The source of Anthroposophy is definitely something that moves swiftly and is difficult to grasp. It is a verb. It is an activity.

Anna described Anthroposophy as having "great power" and said that much of it is something one does rather than thinks about. A similar view was expressed by Emma, who said that Anthroposophy "isn't something you believe in but instead is something you work with".

How should this activity of doing Anthroposophy be carried out? Several of my interviewees emphasized the social side of Anthroposophy and described it as *something you do with others*. Alexander, for example, touched upon the importance of being together with people who share the same interest and spoke of his early contact with the Anthroposophical milieu as marking the first time that he felt he had "found a place". Anna also stressed the social aspects of Anthroposophy. When she reflected upon her then-recent move from Järna to Stockholm, she said:

> I miss the Anthroposophical context that was so strong [there]. You had it [with you] all the time. It's like you lived in it in some way, and I can miss that, but my husband isn't an Anthroposophist. That makes things very different for me because my first husband and I, we discovered Anthroposophy together. We were in the same class together in school and had the same experiences from it with us as well as the people we knew and so on. Now [that I've moved] I'll get a chance to see how much of it is my own and how much of it I have done because everyone else did it too.

The topic of Anthroposophy as something that is done together with others also came up when Karl and I talked about how the School of Spiritual Science operates in Sweden. Since the class lessons upon which the meetings are based have been translated into Swedish and are available to purchase in printed form, this means that people can devise ways for working with the material individually in their own homes. He described this as problematic, saying that:

> The basic idea is that something is supposed to happen in the room if people do it together. It's something that happens here and now. That's what you can't do if you do it at home on your own. There are mantras that you are supposed to use when you meditate; that is the part you are supposed to do at home.

Emma also touched upon how Anthroposophy takes on a different quality when one does it with others:

> Sitting and reading alone is, after all, entirely different than trying to explain something so that it becomes comprehensible for another person. It also becomes a social process through which I get to see what I have gotten from [what I read] when it is filtered through my being. I would recommend that people [who are interested in Anthroposophy] try to find a study group. There is of course no guarantee that they will thrive in that particular group, and there's also no guarantee that they will meet people they feel have the same sorts of questions [that they do] or the same way of asking themselves questions, but that, too, can be a learning process and a path of knowledge in and of itself: to decide to commit, even when they perhaps eventually discover that they don't have much in common with the others – that they do it as an act of goodwill in order to make this work possible. […] I've sometimes put this way: Does Anthroposophy exist? What is Anthroposophy? Or is Anthroposophy something that comes into being? If it is something that comes into being, there has to be people who dedicate themselves to it. And, yes, one of course does it in one's own little corner of the world, but it is also precisely when one tries to do it with others, or for others, that it becomes of another quality.

An activity normally has a purpose, and perceiving Anthroposophy in terms of this conceptual metaphor can invite reflection upon its goal. For instance, Mattias, who also described Anthroposophy as something that is done, discussed it as a means for changing society. This is the case because, according to his point of view, doing the meditative work that is at its core changes one's way of perceiving oneself, others, and life in general, a transformation that ultimately results in concrete actions:

> [Y]ou then ask yourself how it is done, and by what method, and how I can go from a changed kind of awareness to being able to change the world, and this is why I see Anthroposophy itself, not just the bread and the food and the schools, as highly modern because it speaks of what every human being wants, and it doesn't having anything to do with some guru, nor does it have to do with putting yourself in some strange [altered] state but rather has to do with trying to broaden your awareness. From an Anthroposophical perspective, meditation isn't just about feeling better but instead concerns consciousness itself. The way you perceive yourself and others changes, so you find new ways of seeing things, because you then have, expressed in simple terms, a holistic perspective, and that is my inspiration: that the inner and the outer are connected. That is the foundation of Anthroposophy.

This orientation towards a goal is, as we will see, even more clearly enunciated when Anthroposophy is described as a path.

Finally, my respondents' descriptions of Anthroposophy as an activity sometimes include comments about how arduous this particular activity is. Several of them characterized Anthroposophy as being difficult. This quality came up, for example, in my conversation with Karl, who also hinted at a kind of exclusivity through his evaluation of different ways of approaching Anthroposophy. He named reading as his preferred method and, as we saw in the above, contrasted this choice (initially casting it in a more positive light) with

other ways in which people, according to his experience, generally come into contact with it, e.g., the subdued hues Anthroposophical artifacts ranging from garments to buildings are typically given, or creative endeavors such as knitting with wool.

Anna also touched upon the issue of difficulty, first in terms of being able to navigate the enormous body of work Steiner left behind:

> There are many lines of thought that you can't really follow to the end. You can't possibly be interested in everything [in Anthroposophy], and Steiner has said so much. He talks about so many different things. You can't be interested in everything, but if you do develop an interest in something, and you do it in an in-depth way like you do when you read a book together with other people, you discover new things.

When we discussed the challenges of studying Anthroposophy, she then compared the situation to life itself and said that, here, as is the case with everything that happens in the world, the matter at hand ultimately has to do with faith and not belief:

> It's really hard, but it has to do with having faith in life, in progress, because something is on its way, and things have a meaning. Even if I don't "get it" or can't see it now, maybe I will later on. You hear lots of stories about how things reveal themselves eventually, that everything turns out well in the end. Have faith: that things will work out and that you don't need to do everything by yourself, that you will actually get help. This is what the Prayer of Confidence expresses. Are you familiar with it? It's a poem written by Rudolf Steiner, I believe. It's like this: There is a reason [that everything happens the way it does], and things will turn out for the best if you just have faith. It is essential today, in every way, that courage does not waver. You really must have faith in receiving constant help from the spiritual world and that you can turn to it, so to speak, to get help in some way. I have thought many times about what it would be like to not have this. How do people manage to deal with life without faith? That is something I wonder about.

7.2.3 Anthroposophy is a science

Steiner repeatedly characterized Anthroposophy as a kind of science, albeit a *Geisteswissenschaft* or spiritual science. If one followed a regimen of meditative exercises, it would, according to Steiner, be possible to obtain a clear and objective view of a suprasensible reality. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that some of my interviews referred to Anthroposophy as a science (and not, it must be noted, as a metaphorically conceptualized one, as in my analysis here). Anne-Marie, whose long statement about what Anthroposophy is not was quoted above, finally settled on a definition of Anthroposophy as a science, which she supported by referring to one of Steiner's own texts:

> It's actually a science or a path to gaining knowledge of the spiritual world. I think the very best definition is the one that he himself gave when he was asked if he could explain what Anthroposophy is using one word and said that it was impossible to do that with one word but that it could be done with a sentence and

> that is the first sentence of *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*: Anthroposophy is a path that leads to knowledge of the human being and of the world, and it is a path of knowing.

A number of associations that accompany the conceptual metaphor "Anthroposophy as science" are discernable in my interview material. For example, one way in which science can be understood is as a systematic testing of hypotheses, and Anthroposophy was described in this light in some of my interviews. Anna, for instance, first described it broadly as "a way of looking at life" but later in our conversation referred to it as "a working hypothesis":

> But according to what Steiner says, or according to one way of seeing it, it's actually a path to knowledge. It's something you can take an interest in and [then] see if it gives you anything. Try doing it this way. Try thinking this way now. Try doing this exercise every day and see if anything happens. If I don't think that death is the end, [if I assume] that I'm going to come back here again, doesn't life become different then? Wouldn't I do things differently? I would say that, for me, Anthroposophy is a working hypothesis.

A corollary of this idea that science is a gradual testing of a hypothesis is the notion that it is a method, or set of methods, rather than a body of truth claims. An example of this way of reflecting upon Anthroposophy can be found in my interview with Hans, who went into detail when describing it as a method and explicitly denied that it constituted a body of doctrines. The link to Steiner's own characterization of Anthroposophy as a form of science is also made explicit by Hans, who explains that:

> Anthroposophy offers a method more than it does a set of teachings. […] I don't believe that [Steiner] wanted at all for us to see it [as such], but he himself instead emphasized a great many times that his contribution was methodological – how one can conduct research on different planes. […] He showed new ways [of how one can develop their consciousness], and they were based upon scientific acuity in contrast to many ancient teachings that promote relaxation. Here, you should not relax. You should be switched on [instead]. You can wake up and gain greater awareness, and reality reveals another kind of depth then. I want to know, and some kinds of knowing can only be had through experience. You can't get them just by observing from a distance. Instead, you have to live in it. You have to educate yourself. You have to be strong. You have to be sensitive. And these are things that can be practiced. And that is Anthroposophy.

An additional way in which science can be understood is as a democratic process in the sense that its claims, at least in theory, can be independently verified and do not need to be accepted because they are made by an authority figure. A similar understanding of Anthroposophy is explicitly articulated by Emma in the following excerpt from my interview with her:

> For me, it was crucial that it is a science and not a religion. From the very start, I have found it appealing that it is a difficult way, that it is a path I can take if I want to, that it isn't something that has come to me in the form of revelations but instead

> I have to work with it as much as I can in a normal state of waking consciousness. For me, that's been really decisive, and that was what made me sure that this isn't something I can be duped by; instead, I have to make these concepts my own.

Hence, just as the findings of a science or of knowledge in general should be intersubjective, the characterization of Anthroposophy as science can lead to the conclusion that one can independently arrive at the insights by one's own efforts. As Robin put it, "I like to think for myself". "If Steiner is right and Anthroposophy is right", he continued, "you should be able to reach the same conclusions logically."

7.2.4 Anthroposophy is a path

Although this metaphor is discernable less frequently in my interview material than is the case with the other metaphors, some of my interlocutors described Anthroposophy as a road or a path. For instance, Hans, who said that Anthroposophy's mission is "to show us the way to the human being," characterized it as a path for everyone, one that "isn't based upon formal education but instead upon what it means to be a human being". He pointed out its inclusiveness as the "beautiful thing about it". I asked him if it is a difficult path. He responded in the following way:

> Yes, it is a difficult path and it has no end and that is wonderful. But it is so positive. It has such a positivity about it. The path is life. You don't need to get to the finish line […] but instead the path is life itself. Or life is the path.

This quality of positivity as a result of wandering this path was also touched upon by Marcus, who in his description of Anthroposophy and how it figures into his everyday life emphasized its positive sides and said, in the face of the rampant negativity so prominent in our times, that it gives him hope for the world.

Nils, who spoke of having grappled with existential questions since childhood and who joined the Anthroposophical Society at age 18, spoke of it in a similar way, i.e., by describing Anthroposophy as a way towards something. "I didn't find the answers to my questions – like, *pling*," he said when he talked about his decision to join the organization, adding "but I found a path". He also characterized Anthroposophy as "a source of inspiration" that "constantly ensures that one keeps progressing."

7.3 The Sender: Who was Rudolf Steiner?

The multiplicity of approaches and interpretations that we saw in the section on how my interviewees view Anthroposophy also extends to the founding figure of the movement, who is described in various ways by my interlocutors. There are some common traits that unite the otherwise rather disparate understandings of him. Steiner's presence is felt in these interviews: his work is referred to, and his views (e.g., on Anthoposophy as a spiritual science rather than a religion) permeate the narratives of my informants. Unsurprisingly, he is portrayed in positive terms as a truly important figure. Various interviewees focused on quite

diverse aspects of who he was and why we has had the role that he did for Anthroposophy.

One way of narratively positioning Steiner is by referring to his many professional roles and intellectual accomplishments. For instance, when I asked Anne-Marie how she would describe Steiner to someone who had never heard of him before, she said that he was:

> …a thinker. A philosopher. He had a PhD. You could say that he was a scientist, in a broader sense, and the initiator, of course, of the Anthroposophical movement. He was also a writer. That's what you could say: he was a philosopher, a writer, an author, and the initiator of the Anthroposophical movement.

Alexander called him "an infinitely deep psychologist who saw no absolute limits to what human beings can accomplish". Felicia referred to him as "an extremely sensible human being", an "outstanding journalist", and "an incredibly gifted and dedicated educator". She prefaced this description by saying that "[b]efore Rudolf Steiner met the Theosophists, he wasn't religious", the latter quality being one that Felicia characterized negatively. When we discussed the matter of why he became a Theosophist, she concluded that it was only due to the inevitable limitations of his times that he got involved with this movement:

> Steiner came into contact with Theosophists and tried to find a way to relate to them. If Steiner had access to the Internet and the critical approaches to understanding religion that exist today as well as the results of current research regarding how the human brain works, he would have seen through them [i.e., the Theosophists] immediately.

A number of my interlocutors commented upon his physical appearance and called him attractive. Mattias, for example, told me of a particular portrait of a "young, handsome" 17-year-old Rudolf Steiner who looks "immortal". He described how he hung it on the classroom wall when he was a high school student, adding that he remembered how "some of the teachers found it a little bit embarrassing". He continued to discuss his youthful enthusiasm and how it manifested during his teenage years:

> I don't remember if it was math or Swedish or some other subject. We were in the twelfth grade, and instead of listening to what the teacher said, I read, if you can imagine such a situation, Johannes Hemleben's biography of Rudolf Steiner. It was a bit odd. The teacher didn't know how to feel about it because in one sense it was a good thing but just then I was supposed to be paying attention.

Several of my informants, on the other hand, stressed his humanity and even his limitations. Despite his extraordinary gifts, he was presented by some of my interviewees as a quite human and even approachable person. One example of this tendency can be found in Sonja's statement that Steiner was "a fascinating person I would have liked to have met". She called Steiner "one of the greatest

thinkers of the twentieth century" but also described him as being "pragmatic as hell," adding that Steiner "wasn't at all as ideological as people think he was."

Other portrayals of Steiner place an even greater focus on his humanity and mortality. Hans described him as "a human being with a biography." He elaborated by saying that he "tried to accomplish a lot, but, in many ways, things didn't turn out the way that he wanted them to," a statement that he tempered by adding "but he still achieved a great deal." Johan told me when we discussed Steiner's life that seeing him as a human being who struggled with things makes him more credible. Such a way of talking about him, he stated, would have been taboo in Järna in the movement's earlier years. He accounted for the difference in attitude today by stating that younger people who become interested in Anthroposophy feel a greater need to know about and understand his life.

Although my interlocutors often touched upon a number of abilities that they described in terms that emphasize his status as an extraordinary human being, several of them stressed that he was not unique in having such capabilities. One example is to be found in part of Anne-Marie's description of what Anthroposophy is, quoted above, where her phrasing suggests that Steiner was not entirely unique even though he was one of apparently rather few individuals with the gift of spiritual insight:

> He wanted it to be a spiritual science, but the fact is that it really isn't really that either, because *that* spiritual scientist, he died in 1925, and, other than Steiner, there haven't been many others who could gain knowledge of the spiritual world in that way.

An even more "democratized" version of Steiner can be seen in the following excerpt from my discussion with Olivia, who suggested that there are "tons" of people like him:

> In my opinion, people have a different kind of access to the spiritual world today. If you look at society, you can see that human beings have changed. Any number of people do yoga. Many practice mindfulness. It's become mainstream. There are very many ways of living a meditative life nowadays. When I think about the kind of contribution Steiner's knowledge could make today, [it would be to] help orient people in things that are "way out there" – to talk about what an etheric body is, for instance. What is an astral body? Today, there are tons of people who act as mediums, who do channeling. He wasn't alone. He's not the only one. [And this concerns things] that in some way lie beyond our ability to see, and you register it in your own way. How do you do it? Where's your radar? How do you capture it? Where's my radar? How do I capture it? How can Steiner, together with others, help us get an overview of what this is? […] He isn't here now to tell us what it's like. Instead, we have to do that, we who are here now. But he can help us because he gave us extensive descriptions.

In short, Steiner was gifted in innumerable ways, but he died nearly a century ago, and Anthroposophy, this elusive entity, is the responsibility of "we who

are here now". In a sense, this narrative of inevitable change in Anthroposophy as a whole, caused by the passing of its founder, is reproduced in my interviews about the situation of Anthroposophy in Sweden. As presented above, I was told again and again that the Golden Age, when people of unique ability manifested the Anthroposophical impulse, was irretrievably gone. Despite such disclaimers formulated by some of my interviewees, the figure of Rudolf Steiner remains present in Anthroposophy in innumerable ways, in my interviews, and in the Anthroposophical milieu in general. We will in sections 8.7 and 8.8 return to this fact and provide an analytical perspective on the empirical evidence summarized above.

8. Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter begins (sections 8.2 to 8.4) by surveying some of the overarching points that can be drawn from each of the chronologically structured actantial analyses of the stories told by my interviewees. It then, in sections 8.5 to 8.9, turns to reflecting on such issues as what this analysis reveals about the pool of cultural resources my interviewees draw upon, and what mechanisms of sensemaking and collective identity construction these stories reveal. A brief conclusion, section 8.10, recapitulates the research questions and sums up the most salient results of this study.

8.2 Salient characteristics of the stories of the past

As can be inferred from the analysis in chapter 4, various stories about the past can place people, groups, or abstractions from one or several categories in the helper role. The first set of helpers are various qualities that the leaders had. These charismatic leaders, as we will see below, are portrayed as complex individuals. What is singled out for the helper role is specifically their *good leadership qualities*. Examples of this include the ability to reach out to young people (as in, e.g., Oskar's narrative), their rhetorical skills (as described by, e.g., Sonja), and their marketing skills (mentioned by, e.g., Oskar and Peter).

The many people involved in the concrete work of manifesting the Anthroposophical impulse also play ambiguous roles. Their *generosity and enthusiasm* fill the helper role in some of the narratives (e.g., those of Anna, Hans, and Nils). When my interlocutors place themselves in these narratives, they are, perhaps unsurprisingly, unambiguously helpers (e.g., Oskar, Hans, Nils, and Anne-Marie).

The last three categories of helpers are abstractions. The first, *the spirit of the times*, is exemplified by the unique cultural conditions of the 1970s, when seekership was common and countercultural currents impacted Swedish society, which led at least some people towards Anthroposophy. This view can be seen in the narratives of, e.g., Emma, Charlotte, Oskar, Anne-Marie, and Mattias. The demands that were characteristic of the times were met by Anthroposophy, which, at the time, operated on *an unsaturated market*. The latter is thus identified (by, e.g., Emma and Anne-Marie) as a helper. The perhaps least obvious helper is *conflict*. Charlotte, Nils, and Nina all seem to regard conflict as a necessary agent of change and progress. To again quote Nina, "in Anthroposophy, it's quite common for catastrophes to beget institutions".

This summary reveals a central ambiguity in the narratives of the past. Leadership, in these narratives, turns out to be an inconsistent position. The very same leaders who are extolled for their many positive qualities are also described in terms that portray them in a far less flattering light. In other words, the role of opponent is often filled by the *bad leadership qualities* of the very same

individuals whose positive qualities are cast as helpers. Despite their charisma and their ability to generate enthusiasm, they are also framed as deeply flawed people in ways that my interlocutors describe in detail. Examples abound in my interviews. Leaders are described as having put themselves on center stage and therefore are accused of not appreciating the efforts of others and sometimes even of suppressing them (e.g., Robin and Daniel). As demonstrated above, they are also criticized for their lack of financial savvy (e.g., Oskar and Nils) They are also disparaged for their rigidity and concomitant inability to promote necessary changes in the organization to ensure its survival (e.g., Sonja and Anders).

The enthusiasm of the many people involved and the countercultural context that aided the success of Anthroposophy also has a shadow side. Enthusiasm amongst strong-willed individuals with minds of their own easily leads to conflicts and schisms in the milieu. Being countercultural in the 1970s and beyond just as easily leads to conflicts with what are perhaps more conservative outsiders. It is therefore a recurrent motif in these stories that a significant category of opponents is the innumerable *conflicts* between any number of parties that so many interviews explore at length (e.g., Karl, Daniel, Anna, Anne-Marie, Sonja, Charlotte, Nils, Alexander, and Nina). One could add that these conflicts are portrayed as arising along any number of parameters ranging from ideological differences to regional groups insisting on maintaining their own separate identities. Although a less prominent opponent, it is nonetheless remarkable that narratives about a spiritual current that has its main seat at the *Goetheanum* in Switzerland can portray that very institution as an opponent because it is narratively framed as a seat of suffocating tradition (as in Oskar's story). One narrative even casts *Rudolf Steiner* in the role of opponent because of his "strange theories" which Arne Klingborg had to transform into something understandable for the benefit of his audience (as mentioned by Peter).

When one looks through the list of helpers and opponents, it is striking how most elements on one list are mirror images, i.e., structurally inverse, of elements on the other. The leaders, on the one hand, are characterized by charismatic traits and the ability to inspire enthusiasm and are on the other hand too dominant, too impractical, and too set in their ways. The many people surrounding them are hard-working and enthusiastic but also quarrelsome and mired in conflict. The times in which these activities take place are vibrant and experimental, but this also arouses suspicion amongst outsiders. The novelty that was so positive in an initial phase when Anthroposophy was being firmly established will inevitably wear off, and competitors will start to enter the same market.

Considering how ambiguous the people and the times described in these stories actually are, one can be struck by the dissonance between the recurring references to a *blomstringstid* or Golden Age and what is narrated as a time marked by strife, numerous conflicts, and a leadership style that was not always perceived as being helpful. What is at first presented in the broadest of brushstrokes as a Golden Age followed by a period of decline is by my

interlocutors often unpacked as a complex and ambivalent time where the seeds of decline seem to be in place from the very beginning.

What is framed as the cause of this decline? It is a striking characteristic of these stories that so many different opponents can be invoked. Depending upon the individual with whom one speaks, different emphases can be placed on leadership qualities or the lack thereof, the severity of the conflicts, who the involved parties were, and what the consequences have been for the purported decline. When one compares this to the much simpler identification of what the object is and how little of the story is used to outline who, or what, the sender and subject are, it is striking how much the various individual narratives disagree about the cause of the decline. In other words, if the object was to manifest the Anthroposophical impulse and if this was achieved all those years ago, why has it not remained as vibrant as it was then? Whatever the cause of this supposed decline may have been according to my interlocutors, most of them agree that the present is a troubled time for Anthroposophy. This is the topic to which we will now turn our attention.

8.3 Salient characteristics of the stories of the present

The narratives that focus on the present are almost unanimous in presenting Anthroposophy as a movement in crisis. Seen in organizational terms, a few striking characteristics of these narratives stand out.

An organization of any kind will have a self-declared purpose for existing. It could, for instance, be to produce certain goods or to offer specific services. The corporate narrative of the organization will typically provide reasons for why these goods and services are of value to others. The narratives that focus on the present discernable in my interview material are, as noted above, extremely vague about why the object of the narrative, i.e., keeping the Anthroposophical impulse alive, is important, and who the receiver is, i.e., who would benefit from what it provides. It is, of course, possible that these two actants are so obvious to the narrators of these accounts focusing on the present that they felt no need to make them explicit. One can, however, note the recurrent assertion that the leaders of the organization fail to make the scope and purpose of the organization clear. Somebody, in the view of my interviewees, needs to step up and shape a more focused corporate narrative that describes not only the benefits of Anthroposophy but even what it is. We shall return to this characteristic of the stories below.

An organization in a perceived crisis, whatever the nature of the organization, will also need to provide stakeholders with a kind of roadmap: What are the issues that need to be resolved? Who needs to be in the driver's seat ready to take the necessary measures? What is the way forward? The narratives about the present address precisely these questions but do so in very different ways.

What are the problems that need solving? For some, the main issues are internal. One example is the assertion that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden needs to free itself from a perceived excessive attachment to the ways and values of its formative period. The "1920s bubble" referred to by Oskar, for instance, is an impediment to moving fully into the contemporary period. Faced with this level of inertia, it is suggested, young people will not feel attracted to the movement and the membership base will subsequently continue to be characterized by a gradually increasing median age. For others, like Emma and Alexander, it is the outside world that has gone astray. The values of Anthroposophy are timeless, and modern people would do well to adapt to them by being in less of a hurry or by showing a greater willingness to make an effort to do the hard work that is required to become acquainted with Steiner's ideas.

Whose responsibility is it to fix these problems today and what is it that they should be doing right now? Some of my interviewees, like Oskar and Anna, primarily see the responsibility as being on the side of the leaders while others, such as Moa, place it on the shoulders of the members. Should the leaders relinquish control, as Sonja suggested, or should they be working to bring greater cohesion to the movement, as several others articulated? Many narratives see the issues that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden contends with as so deeply enmeshed in external circumstances over which the movement exerts little if any control that some of my interviewees frankly state (e.g., Felicia) that they can see no way forward, a subject that we will return to in the next section. If the cause of the movement's current difficulties is traits that characterize young people in the present age or the oversaturated market for goods and services of the kind Anthroposophy can provide, the challenge of finding new ways of operating can seem difficult to surmount. As one of the interviewees (i.e., Oskar) admitted, new ideas are needed today, but he himself had also failed to come up with any. Another (i.e., Rut) presented the current situation of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden in terms that almost preclude any realistic way forward. From her perspective, the root of the challenge faced by the organization lies in the failure of people (presumably including stakeholders at all levels, from those serving as leaders to the broader membership base) to actually use what they learn from Anthroposophy to become better and nicer individuals. Converting that particular suggestion into a plan of action is hardly an easy thing to do, arguably even for an organization with a far greater reserve of resources at its disposal.

One of the pervasive findings of this study is the lack of a single, coherent narrative about the path that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden has taken and should be pursuing now, and this lack of a single narrative comes across with particular force in regard to basic knowledge of such matters as membership demographics. It is arguably only to be expected that diagnoses of the current situation, since they deal with vast and often diffuse issues that are not immediately discernible, can differ. However, it is interesting that even basic facts such as the demographics of the membership base can be disputed. For

instance, we have seen how accounts that suggested that the lack of younger members was the source of numerous challenges were contradicted by others (e.g., Anna's narrative) that explicitly mention the continued and even increasing presence of young people in the Anthroposophical milieu.

Organizations of any kind will both face change and resist it to various degrees. The critique of a perceived inertia within the movement and the call for renewal that characterizes many of the narratives discussed in this chapter are presumably no different than what one might find in other organizations. One of my interlocutors voiced a sentiment that is also common in other parts of the social landscape: when change and renewal do take place, it can be resented. Let me conclude this section by quoting Karl, who reflected upon the changes that had taken place over the years in regard to how the meetings of the School of Spiritual Science were conducted in Sweden and voiced just such a view:

> The form has changed a bit. In the past, one read the class lessons aloud, Rudolf Steiner's words, and lots of old people sat there and listened to them. Now, they try to have freely held class lessons. [The one conducting the lesson] sums up what Steiner said in their own words. They're not really that great.

In matters of organizational renewal, apparently, the adage "damned if you do, damned if you don't" can ring painfully true.

8.4 Salient characteristics of the stories of the future

In essence, prospective narrative sensemaking deals with a number of closely related issues: What goal should we strive for? What values make that particular goal a worthy one? How do we get from the present situation to that envisaged goal? What timeframe do we have to carry out the necessary course of action? Who should take the lead in that course of action, and what agency in this process do those who tell prospective stories give themselves? What happens if we fail? Several of my interviewees' ideas about the future are so vague that they essentially leave all such questions unanswered. Whether it be in the form of Fredrik's simple "I don't know" or Mattias' curt "no one can know what the future will be like", such responses preclude the possibility of answering any of the prospective questions just mentioned. If, as has been asserted, future action requires the ability to craft rich stories about the future,[315] such responses signal having given up any attempt to actually remedy the flaws of the present.

Responses of a more concrete nature reveal much about the goals, values, and paths envisioned by my interlocutors. For a number of them, the goal to strive for is primarily phrased in terms of the survival of Anthroposophy, rather than of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. The two are by some interviewees presented as being so distinct, perhaps even opposed, that they feel that the former can only survive if any attempt to save the latter is jettisoned. Whatever value Anthroposophy has for these interviewees lies in the people and the ideals

[315] Bruner 1987

of the broader Anthroposophical movement, and there is no need for a formalized organization to embody those values.

One of the values that is prominently highlighted in the interview materials is resistance against materialism. Emma's description of "guerilla warriors" keeping Anthroposophy alive gives a decidedly apocalyptic touch to this resistance. Anthroposophy is presented as a bulwark against a materialism that permeates society at large and that has become so pervasive that even the most basic social norms have broken down. Whereas many stories about the future provide no clues regarding the time span involved, this apocalyptic scenario is phrased in an "Anthroposophese"-laden terminology that refers to a very distant imagined scenario ("many cultural epochs and planetary phases in the future"). The other value that is highlighted in several interviews is clarity of purpose. In order to attract people, survive into the future, and act as a bulwark against the perceived materialism of the times, the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden needs to be clear about what it offers.

The issue of how to get from the present to the imagined future is particularly instructive. As we have seen, there is no agreement on what needs to be done, and this lack of a unified understanding can make various stories directly contradict each other. This characteristic has been noted in chapter 6, and it will suffice to recall that, e.g., those who insist that organizational change is necessary disagree regarding whether this should involve recruiting younger people for the council or, on the contrary, people with solid business backgrounds should be involved, or if the organizational changes need to be so radical that an entirely new structure will arise from the ashes. The sentiment of crisis and pessimism, although not shared by all, is a pervasive motif in these stories, and the conflicting ideas that one hears voiced about what needs to be done suggest that there is no unified corporate narrative that my interviewees could draw upon.

Many stories about the future place agency outside the remit of the narrator. Daniel's suggestion that a clearer message about what Anthroposophy is all about is sorely needed did include an offer that he would be willing to contribute to this process, but even in his story, the form of the verb projects this task into a vaguely outlined future date. In other narratives, agency is projected onto leaders (present or future), and they are the ones charged with the task of doing what it takes to ensure the survival of Anthroposophy. The question of which kind of people would possess these imagined future capacities is answered in mutually contradictory ways, from suggestions that young albeit inexperienced people are best suited (perhaps because they are not tainted by the troubles of the present) to the idea that powerful, charismatic individuals are needed (because the past was a Golden Age precisely because there were such people) or that a more business-oriented leadership is the only way forward. Nevertheless, as noted above, stories about the future more often involve the interviewees themselves as helpers than do stories about the past and present.

In actual storytelling, questions regarding the what, who, when, and how of change and renewal are often linked in complex ways. Pessimistic predictions can naturally combine speculation about what it will take to remedy the current situation with the complaint that those who need to step up and take the lead are unwilling to or are incapable of doing so. Oskar's story eloquently connects various aspects of prospective narration in a passage where he places in the role of helper a leadership that could present a clear picture of what Anthroposophy is and a shared vision of what needs to be done to ensure the future survival and blossoming of the movement. He noted, however, that, so far, leaders have, from his point of view, failed to do what needs to be done.

To summarize, to the extent that my interviewees did not content themselves with merely expressing uncertainty or resigned pessimism, they presented a variety of suggestions for what might bring Anthroposophy into the future. What is striking about these stories is a lack of a unified vision and this can make various stories directly contradict each other ("We need better marketing!" versus "Marketing is useless!"; "We need to replace people on the council so the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden can function in a better way" versus "We should just dismantle the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden as an organization entirely") and the equally diverse sentiments regarding exactly who needs to take the initiative to save the movement from further decline.

8.5 The pool of cultural resources: a secular focus

In section 3.3.2, I referred to the concept of organizational culture as *inter alia* involving the interpretation of events, noting the important point that organizational culture is not a homogenous entity. Different actors and different subgroups within an organization can have partly or even wholly conflicting views. To refer back to a key theoretical concept from that section, culture can be seen as a shared pool of cultural resources that individual people, alliances, groups, and so forth, can draw upon. The often-considerable differences between the ways in which people in different groups act or reflect upon the world in which they live is due to the vastly different pools of cultural resources they draw upon. Variability and individual agency within bounds arise because, although the pool of cultural resources is common to the group, individuals have various interests, social positions, levels of knowledge, etc., that make them select and deploy those resources differently. To refer to an anthropological classic,[316] it may make sense for an Azande of the Sudan to understand the occurrence of a calamitous event as the result of witchcraft, whereas a Swede would be very unlikely to resort to this explanation. Culture, in this understanding, is not monolithic, and amongst the Azande, individuals can suggest that a given event was due to witchcraft or they can contest the claim. In other words, the pool of cultural resources that the Azande can draw upon includes witchcraft as a salient element that can be used to negotiate an understanding of what a chain of events

[316] Evans-Pritchard 1937

"actually means", whereas the set of resources that a Swede will have available is far more likely to include concepts such as "an accident" or "bad luck".

Religious communities typically provide their members with a rich array of cultural resources to draw upon. Events perhaps take place because it was God's will, because it was fate, or because the individual's faith is being tested by a higher power. Anthroposophy, as we saw in section 2.3.2, was founded by a man whose textual corpus spans (at present) 354 volumes and includes numerous concepts that could potentially be used in order to narratively embed a story about a Golden Age, a present day marked by decline, and a future that seems highly uncertain. As a counterfactual thought experiment, one might suggest as possible several hypothetical ways of interpreting a trajectory marked by crisis in distinctly Anthroposophical terms. Spiritual forces such as Ahriman and Lucifer could be derailing the Anthroposophical movement. Karma could be a factor impeding it from blossoming. Whatever the specifics might be in such an imagined scenario, at a minimum present-day Anthroposophists could, one imagines, follow the fundamental notion underlying much of Steiner's writing, that events in the empirical, material world are the reflexes of spiritual forces.

What the interviews reveal is that this way of interpreting events only very rarely makes itself known. When religious language enters into my interview material, which it very occasionally does, it is often quite generic rather than squarely identifiable as Anthroposophical. Arne Klingborg is by some referred to as a preacher, which is a term readily associated with the Christian vocabulary that my interviewees are familiar with through their upbringing. Interestingly, a similarly Christian vocabulary can be found in some printed sources. A book about Klingborg[317] was reviewed under the heading *Klingborgevangeliet*, "the Gospel of Klingborg",[318] a title that one should perhaps add is not at all meant ironically or in jest. It needs to be noted, however, that such terms have become part of everyday Swedish vocabulary and can be used metaphorically without there necessarily being any intention of drawing upon their Christian background. An isolated comment made by Felicia about her having believed that one of her teachers at Rudolf Steinerseminariet had supernatural abilities is more decidedly a reference to a suprahuman dimension of reality, but it is not in any obvious way tied to a specific religious tradition.

Distinctly Anthroposophical terms are remarkably rare in the material. The most common of these is the concept of karma. Some interviewees seemed to feel that the less-than-optimal situation of the Swedish division of the Anthroposophical Society was due to karmic factors and thus outside of anybody's control. One single interview presented a possible way forward for the organization in terms of the spiritual being Michael, who is said to rule our times. One single story about the future is framed in terms of the cultural epochs that are described in

[317] Klingborg & Granstedt 2015
[318] Halldén 2015

many of Steiner's books and lectures. Taken together, such links to Steiner's cosmology form a diminutive part of the narratives.

To the extent that there is a specifically Anthroposophical tone to the stories, it instead has to do, firstly, with the use of specific words and ways of formulating one's thoughts. Like any community, a sense of identity can be fostered by sharing particular linguistic habits, and here the use of such terms in Swedish as *initiativ* and *impuls* for what non-Anthroposophists might refer to as an enterprise or a decision to embark upon a particular course of action are symptomatic. It can be noted, however, that both terms also exist as non-Anthroposophical Swedish words, and their roles as identity markers only become clear once one has spent time in the field and realizes that they are pervasive examples of "Anthroposophese". Furthermore, neither term seems to be explicitly linked by my interviewees (or by Anthroposophists one meets in more informal settings) to Steinerian cosmology.

Secondly, what makes these stories Anthroposophical is that the cultural resources that are tapped into consists of a set of references to specific people, places, events, conflicts, and schisms that are widely known in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu, and widely shared understandings of what the spirit of the times were like in the past and what they have become in the present. These references are, despite their many divergent voices, part of a shared tendency to speak of the situation of the Anthroposophical Society in secular terms and to focus almost entirely on issues that the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden shares with secular organizations: institutional structures, management issues, financial matters, and so on.

In stark contrast with the recurrent focus in the literature on emergent new religious movements on their tension with surrounding society, Anthroposophical organizational culture shows that, as a settled religious movement, an almost wholesale adoption of the secular vocabulary and secular concepts associated with neoliberal, capitalist culture has occurred. A question that naturally arises at this point is whether this alignment with the broader cultural context is a specific feature of my interview material or can be detected elsewhere in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu. Although a fuller inquiry into this issue lies outside the bounds of this study, there is tentative evidence that suggests an answer.

Perusing a corpus of texts produced by Swedish Anthroposophists over the last several decades, a corpus that admittedly is not selected for its representativity but instead on a more impressionistic basis (e.g., books recommended by members of the movement, various issues of the newspaper of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden *Forum Antroposofi*, etc.), an analogous picture emerges. Certainly, there are texts that present what might be called the *ideological contents* of Anthroposophy,[319] where concepts such as the etheric

[319] See, e.g., Carlgren 1980.

body or Steiner's path to clairvoyant insight are discussed. Texts that focus on Anthroposophy as a movement or organization will often feel as if they belonged to a very different genre, where the ideological content plays a very subdued role if any at all. A recently published volume on the history of Järna written for an intended audience of individuals familiar with the Anthroposophical movement[320] reproduces in its own, more literary, form, and with a more hopeful vision of what may come, the same story of a Golden Age, a present decline, and an uncertain future that my interviewees presented. Here are some relevant extracts:[321]

> Much has happened, and very many branches [of the movement] have been established over the past several years, from the 1970s and up to today, especially up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. In those days, a lot of new initiatives were undertaken, but only a few have started after the year 2000. […] Almost all the enthusiastic individuals I have interviewed and talked to have passed away. […] Some sad things have happened during this period [i.e., after the death of the enthusiastic older generation]. Initiatives have closed or have declared bankruptcy. In this way, the initiatives in Järna are part of something larger; they are mirrors of life itself.

> It often starts out that way: Somebody has an idea. A strong will arises to carry out that idea. And then you start! Like [the shop with Anthroposophical products] Robygge, which started in a small shoe box. If the idea has a vital power, it will sprout, grow, and branch out into the external world. But if there is resistance from outside or it is impeded from the inside, it will lose its force, wither, and in the end disappear under the surface. ([That's what happened to] Vidarkliniken) But it lies there like a seed, biding its time, and if circumstances are right and a new enthusiast grasps it, it can reemerge…

One can note that – to put this story in Greimasian terms – neither the opponents nor the helpers are framed in terms that signal that this is an Anthroposophical text. The past was a good time because there were people in Järna who could turn an idea into reality. The last twenty years have been beset by problems because outsiders have been hostile to the work carried out by the people in Järna and because of unspecified internal impediments. Nobody can predict the future, but if a new generation of enthusiasts arises, there may be another Golden Age.

The fact that secular vocabulary is so pervasive in the interviews and recurs in written materials might give the reader the impression that this secularized way of speaking and of interpreting events permeates the entire Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden, but fieldwork shows that this is not the case. Even formal meetings, a genre that epitomizes the organizational aspect of the Anthroposophical milieu, are ritualized and have elements that link them to Steiner's worldview. At such events, quotes are read from a meditation given by

[320] Ritter 2019 (the revised second edition of a volume first published in 2000)
[321] Ritter 2019: 9, in my translation.

Steiner that goes back to the founding of the restructured General Anthroposophical Society at the Christmas meeting of 1923.[322] The text is replete with references to Anthroposophical cosmology. In essence, this is an example of a well-known theme from the history of religions where a ritual points back at a creative act in the mythical or historical past.

Since the pool of cultural resources that is available to people engaged in the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu does comprise Anthroposophical cosmological concepts, the question naturally arises of why this happens so rarely when stakeholders reflect upon the challenges facing the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden. One can only speculate about what the answer might be, but a hypothesis is that we are here witnessing a version of the well-known phenomenon of theological incorrectness that has been studied within the cognitive science of religion.[323] Depending upon the setting, people will either refer to theologically normative concepts or reason in terms of their more intuitive knowledge. A ritualized setting as the reading of Steiner's meditation is carefully scripted and is familiar to attendees due to numerous repetitions over a number of meetings. When reflecting upon the past, present, and future of the Anthroposophical movement, the intuitive explanatory models and intuitively available terminology that are invoked are almost identical to the models and terminology one could use to describe crises and conflicts in a soft-drink company or a soccer club. In other words, the cultural resources associated with the neoliberal, capitalist context of mainstream society are most salient and come to dominate the stories.

8.6 Sensemaking and a multiplicity of voices

It is only to be expected that various members of an organization voice will different opinions about the organization to which they belong. In principle, some of these differences could be linked to the age or gender of the person telling the story, their status within the organization (are they managers or rank-and-file staff?), or their allegiance to a particular interest group within the organization. To some extent, an analysis along such lines is precluded by methodological constraints imposed by research ethics. Since my interviewees needed to be anonymized due to the requests of several participants and since the Anthroposophical milieu in Sweden is quite small, identifying characteristics have been left out or obfuscated, and my study therefore cannot shed light on these matters in any substantial way. More indirectly, however, it is clear that numerous fault lines do exist, and that individual stories can frame the question of who bears the responsibility for past errors, current problems, and future challenges in strikingly different, and often contradictory, ways.

The picture painted of the past is the least fragmented. The impression that there was a period of optimism, growth, and enthusiastic collaboration in Järna under

[322] See Antroposofiska Sällskapet i Sverige 1986.
[323] See, e.g., Barrett 1999.

the aegis of a small handful of charismatic people is a recurrent motif in numerous stories. A greater degree of variation enters the picture when interviewees modify this rosy picture by commenting upon the less-than-perfect conditions that prevailed. Still, there is a recurrent complaint about the leaders, comments about how they, despite their many talents, were also rather flawed individuals who, for instance, prevented others from developing their potential or were less financially savvy than what one might have expected of a leader. Structural faults within the movement as a whole are revealed in the many stories that focus on schisms and conflicts within the movement. The Golden Age, it seems, was also a period when intense allegiances pitted one faction against another in what is sometimes portrayed as incessant infighting.

The present is, of course, the result of the decisions and events of the past as well as of the way the movement is run today. Whatever one's position within the milieu is, there is always an opposing camp to be described as blameworthy. Leaders are to blame in stories related by interviewees who do not have positions of authority in the movement, while interviewees who do can ask why members fail to do more. More sweeping, but no less pessimistic, is the assessment that problems are caused by a moral fault, i.e., people in the movement simply have character flaws. The problems that are identified, however, span an extremely broad spectrum and can be mutually contradictory, and even a hint of consensus seems to be missing. There might be so much inertia and conservatism in the movement today that younger people are simply not attracted to it, or there might be so much timeless wisdom in Anthroposophy that it is a sad symptom of the state of our times that it does not appeal to more people. Others claim that the problem lies elsewhere since young people do find Anthroposophy appealing. Perhaps, some suggest, there is a lack of well-crafted marketing strategies to employ. Another voice relates in detail how various marketing strategies were put into practice but ultimately failed.

The current situation as depicted in the stories focusing on the present clearly requires decisive and urgent action. While this much is agreed upon, my interviewees have any number of – often conflicting – ideas about what, if anything, should – or even can – be done and who ought to shoulder the responsibility for doing it. New leaders, younger members, more flexibility and less allegiance to the past, more societal relevance, more cooperation between the various segments of the Anthroposophical movement, more individualism, even a radical dissolving of the current organizational structures are among the options. Some of my interlocutors seem to feel that Anthroposophy as an organized movement has played out its role entirely and that a post-Anthroposophical Anthroposophy needs to rise Phoenix-like from the ashes. Besides such attempts to provide specific suggestions, quite a few of my interviewees admitted to being unable to see any way forward: something needs to be done, but there is not even a hint of what that might be.

8.7 Collective identity construction and the narrative framing of Steiner and Anthroposophy

As discussed in section 3.3.5, sensemaking and the formation of a collective identity are closely linked. To summarize a salient point of the discussion in that section: sensemaking creates on an organizational level what autobiographical narration accomplishes on an individual level, namely a sense of identity, in that in retrospect various events are perceived as part of a coherent whole. As the preceding section has emphasized, the many voices about the chronological trajectory of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden only coalesce around a bare-bones story of decline, but there is rampant disagreement about the details. In the case of an ideologically driven movement such as a religious one, there are other defining cultural elements that one can rally around: symbols, rituals, intense experiences, an allegiance to certain doctrines, hagiographic accounts of charismatic founders, and so forth.[324] In the interview materials, as seen in chapter 7, two such potentially identity-forming elements are prominent: the founder Rudolf Steiner and the nature of the movement he founded.

Whether explicitly mentioned or merely hinted at, Steiner is a key figure in the interviews: as founder of the Anthroposophical movement and as a person who, roughly a century after his death, still defined what the purpose and direction of the movement should be. Unsurprisingly, he comes across as a charismatic leader, in a sense to be explored in greater depth in the section that follows. As a rallying point for constructing a collective identity, the narrative Steiner comes across as an almost as unstable signifier as so many other elements in the stories I was told. He is presented as an extraordinary human being, one who had managed to accomplish a great deal in his lifetime, but the degree to which he was extraordinary and the nature of those accomplishments varies from one story to another. As we saw in section 7.3, he can be presented as a scientist, a philosopher, or a psychologist, and as a man who blazed an independent path or allowed himself to be roped in by the Theosophists and perhaps ultimately even failed in his mission.

A comparison with written materials points in a similar direction. Steiner's own texts do not depict him as the bearer of qualities that separate him from the mass of humanity. His special status is only minimally based on descriptions of wondrous events connected to him, and although his doctrinal statements are ultimately grounded in claims of having had profound spiritual experiences, Steiner describes these as the result of an instrumental technique that others, too, can master. The Anthroposophical Society in Sweden – which is as close to an "official" voice as one can expect to come – presents a biography of Steiner, but, interestingly, one needs to open the scroll-down menu under

[324] On the key role that such elements play in religious milieus, see the discussion of authority in Lincoln 1994. On the role of intense experiences versus adherence to doctrine in cementing different types of social formations, see the work of Harvey Whitehouse, e.g., Whitehouse 2000, 2004.

Antroposopfiska Sällskapet (i.e., the Anthroposophical Society) and choose the last item on the menu to find the biography.[325] The text itself is very brief (305 words in the version posted at the time of writing) and presents him as a historical figure, a man who developed a scientific method that was able to encompass a suprasensible reality, later became engaged in the arts, and lived during turbulent times when many people sought his advice. In short, there are few signs of any deliberate efforts at sensegiving that would enable people to rally around a shared perception of Steiner, and, generally, my interviewees do not construct their efforts of sensemaking around a collectively shared perception of him.

The situation regarding the narrative framing of the concept of "Anthroposophy" is similar. Viewed in terms of organizational storytelling, a striking characteristic of the narratives presented by my interviewees is that the very nature of the Anthroposophical "brand" is either described in the vaguest of terms or characterized in metaphors that point in various directions. The Anthroposophical milieu is characterized by numerous products that are instantly recognizable, and various overt markers are used as signals, from the pastel colors of its iconography to the characteristic font that appears on websites, book covers, and product labels. However, when reflecting upon the past, present, and future of the Anthroposophical movement or responding to the direct question "What is Anthroposophy?", some of my interlocutors approached it by explaining that the question itself cannot be answered or that it is best answered by listing what it is not. Even in interviews with those who did offer more substantive explanations, Anthroposophy is with one rare exception (see p. 176) not described as the sum of statements found in Steiner's enormous body of work or as a subset thereof. Although not quite an empty signifier, it is instead metaphorically circumscribed in terms that appear to let individual Anthroposophists decide for themselves what they wish to fill the concept with.

One could, of course, suspect that my interviewees simply took for granted that I had enough background knowledge to make it unnecessary to provide the specifics. My comments in section 7.2.1, however, reveal reasons for why this is probably not the case and suggest that the reticence to pin down what Anthroposophy is has roots in its foundational corpus of writings. This is supported by textual evidence. Detailed descriptions of Steiner's teachings and Anthroposophy's practical applications are, of course, easy to come by in specialized literature, but Anthroposophical corporate communication has a similar tendency to avoid descriptions that are arguably too substantive.

[325] https://www.antroposofi.nu/antroposofiska-saellskapet/rudolf-steiner/ (accessed October 3, 2021)

The website of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden has a page that is intended to provide an explanation of what Anthroposophy is.[326] It is instructive to compare this text with my attempt (section 2.3.2) to provide some substantive indications of what Steiner's description of a suprasensible world and the path to gaining knowledge of this world entail. In my English translation, the text reads as follows:

> "Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge that wishes to lead the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the cosmos". Rudolf Steiner, 1924.
>
> The word "Anthroposophy" is derived from Greek antropos "human being" and sophia, "wisdom", but can also mean "consciousness of what it means to be a human being".
>
> Many people today live with existential questions about life and death and about the meaning of their own existence. Neither the materialistic view of the world nor traditional religious conceptions are enough to satisfy the desire felt by many people today. Studying Anthroposophy and a meditative practice [meditativ fördjupning] can lead to concrete experiences of spiritual dimensions in the human being and in the world. Knowledge of the spiritual can only be attained through spiritual methods.
>
> The Anthroposophical path to knowledge has an individual character that corresponds to the need modern people have for freedom and critical thinking. It is antiauthoritarian and is based upon one's own powers of judgment. Those who embark upon such a path of practice will soon notice that there is a tension between what one is based upon one's natural predispositions and the goals one strives for. This experience is an expression of the higher self of the human being that wishes to transcend its limitations and habitual ways of being. The path of meditative practice does not imply a flight from reality. On the contrary, its aim is to strengthen the ability of the person to deal with reality. Only when the effects of the inner work benefit others does it [i.e., the inner work] prove its true value.

To readers who are already familiar with Anthroposophical concepts, the references to a meditative practice will be familiar, and the explanation that the higher self is involved in the process will be understood in terms of an Anthroposophical anthropology that posits that the human being, besides having a physical body, also has an etheric and an astral body as well as a Self. Without this background knowledge, the casual visitor to the website could easily parse this message as the description of a rather generic form of meditation that follows no guru figure and is therefore an appropriate path for modern, critical individuals who wish to become better people.[327]

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[326] https://www.antroposofi.nu/antroposofiska-saellskapet/antroposofi/ Accessed September 9, 2021.

[327] A comparison with the websites of other national divisions of the Anthroposophical Society shows that there is considerable variation in how Anthroposophy is presented and that the rather generic description of the quote from the Swedish division is a product of this particular national society. It is, for instance, distinctly different from the explanation found on the website

8.8 Rudolf Steiner as a charismatic leader

The founders of new religious movements are prototypical examples of charismatic leaders in the Weberian sense, and seeing the narrative presentation of Steiner in my interview materials in these terms is instructive.[328] Weber makes several attempts to define the term and appears to vacillate between seeing charisma as a mysterious gift inherent in specific individuals and as a socially attributed label. In *Social Psychology of the World Religions*, both readings are explicitly and simultaneously present:[329]

> The term 'charisma' shall be understood to refer to an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged or presumed. 'Charismatic authority', hence, shall refer to a rule over men, […] to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific *person*.

Religious leaders in particular are in Weber's writings on the topic singled out as holders of this particular trait. His examples include figures as diverse as magical sorcerers,[330] tribal shamans, and the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith.[331] For Weber, charismatic leadership is an unstable source of authority, one that breaks down unless the leader succeeds in making his followers perceive him as being endowed with supernatural gifts:[332]

> The legitimacy of charismatic rule thus rests upon the belief in magical powers, revelations and hero worship. The source of these beliefs is the 'proving' of the charismatic quality through miracles, through victories and other successes, that is, through the welfare of those governed. Such beliefs and the claimed authority resting on them therefore disappear, or threaten to disappear, as soon as proof is lacking and as soon as the charismatically qualified person appears to be devoid of his magical power or forsaken by his god.

Through the process Weber referred to as the routinization of charisma, the authority vested in the person of the leader is transferred to the system built around him or her. The charisma of the founding figure nevertheless remains part of the legitimizing structure of the movement and is actively maintained by recalling their exceptional qualities in various forms of narrative, rituals,

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of the American national society, https://anthroposophy.org/learn-more/, which presents Anthroposophy as a unique, research-based spiritual path that provides "resources for personal growth and seeds for renewal of human civilization in the global era" (see Swartz forthcoming a).

[328] Weber's central texts on charisma are usefully collected in Weber 1968. Although my interviewees characterize Arne Klingborg and other leaders of the Golden Age as charismatic, this should in almost all cases be understood in the everyday or dictionary sense of the term: a person who has a "special magnetic charm or appeal" (a definition provided by the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charisma). This use of the term will not be discussed further here.

[329] Weber 1948: 295 f. Emphasis in the original.

[330] Weber 1948: 296

[331] Weber 1948: 246

[332] Weber 1948: 296

iconography, and so forth. The process is ubiquitous and can be found in both historically well-established religions (e.g., in the hadith literature of Islam) and new religious movements. Yet, I argue in what follows that not all forms of charisma are built upon the same legitimizing foundations. A brief comparison with other new religious movements in which the maintenance of charisma plays a central role provides an illuminating view of Steiner's position in the work of sensemaking and the distinct form of charisma that is narratively attributed to him in my interview materials.

The construction of a hagiographic portrayal of the founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, has been studied in work by scholars of the study of religions Dorthe Refslund Christensen and Mikael Rothstein.[333] What these studies document is that the Church of Scientology promotes Hubbard's purportedly unique accomplishments with extraordinary zeal. Biographical narratives promoted by the movement present him as an unparalleled genius who revolutionized human civilization in innumerable ways. When Hubbard died, this was presented as his having left his physical body in order to carry out further forms of research on a non-physical plane. His writings carry such an authority that any practice that deviates from what is documented there is rejected. He is present in the Scientology milieu through his picture, his signature, recreations of his workspace, and in innumerable other ways as well.

The hagiographic narratives surrounding the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, have been extensively described and analyzed by Kimmo Ketola.[334] Ketola notes that there is an interplay between the views on Prabhupada that are expressed in a substantial body of hagiographic literature and the ways in which members (devotees, in the terminology of the movement) speak about him. Stories of how devotees met Prabhupada in the organization's formative years, or of how he behaved even in the most mundane and everyday situations, are replete with remarks about how unique he was. To take just one example quoted by Ketola, a devotee who saw Prabhupada drink water from a cup concluded that the "amazing" way in which he did so showed that he was not an ordinary person.[335] The guru is ultimately so far removed from the level of ordinary humanity that he defies any attempt to understand who he is except by complete devotion to him.[336]

Joseph Smith, the founder of an older new religious movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or LDS Church), does not hold the same unique role as Hubbard or Prabhupada do, since his role as prophet is shared by numerous other people, mythical as well as historical. The Biblical prophets are considered prophets in the LDS Church as well, and prophetic authority

[333] Christensen 2005; Rothstein 2014
[334] Ketola 2008
[335] Ketola 2008: 135
[336] Ketola 2008: 144

continues to be a central mechanism that legitimizes the top-down structure of the organization. Statements by stakeholders within the LDS Church can emphasize that his status as prophet does not mean that his every saying and action are significant.[337] There is, in a sense, no counterpart within the LDS Church of hadith literature. As the founder of the church, stories about his religious mission are nevertheless some of the best-known narratives within the organization. The first vision he had as a young man, his meeting with the angel Moroni, and the extraordinary processes reported to be involved in his translation of a text in Reformed Egyptian engraved on gold plates into English are reproduced in innumerable printed and online documents.[338]

Steiner is, as we have seen, also the object of a hagiographic process, in the interview materials as well as in published sources. In accounts by outsiders (e.g., as summarized in section 2.3.1 of the present study), Steiner can come across as a man whose career changed course quite radically over his lifetime and was given focus and direction by chance encounters, whose claims about a suprasensible reality in many ways constitute a bricolage of Theosophical and other existing cultural elements, and whose many accomplishments were facilitated by loyal helpers and followers. By contrast, he is in many of the responses by my interviewees hagiographically reduced to a kind of singular genius. Compared to the intensely hagiographic portrayals, each in their own way, of Hubbard, Prabhupada, and Joseph Smith, Steiner nevertheless comes across in the interviews as a decidedly different type of charismatic leader.

In view of the distinct way in which Steiner is narratively constructed in my materials, I propose to distinguish between various types of charisma. These are, as we will soon see, definable in terms of two intersecting parameters, *distance* and *type of attribute* (to be explained below), yielding four ideal types in all. In order to construct such a typology, one needs first to take a closer look at the defining traits mentioned by Weber. In particular, some interpretive issues in Weber's formulations need to be addressed. In his foundational texts, he firstly lists, without clearly distingushing between them, the specific *attributes* that followers attribute to the charismatic leader (e.g., magical powers, revelations, and miracles) and the *distance* that is constructed between the leader and ordinary people (hero worship, the submission of followers) as defining traits. Secondly, he refers to "belief" in the magical powers and other attributes, i.e., to

[337] In the article "Prophet" in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, this is made quite explicit: "[S]peaking of Brigham Young, Elder Wilford Woodruff said, 'He is a prophet, I am a prophet, you are, and anybody is a prophet who has the testimony of Jesus Christ, for that is the spirit of prophecy' (...). It follows that this spirit does not operate in every utterance of its possessor. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that 'a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such'" (available online at https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Prophet)

[338] Any account of the history of the LDS Church presents these stories. A hagiographic insider's account of the First Vision can be found in the article "First Vision" in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, available online at https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/First_Vision. For a discussion of the various, sometimes conflicting successive accounts Joseph Smith gave of the events, see Taves & Harper 2016.

an inner state that (barring advances in cognitive science or psychology) may be impossible to investigate by the kind of intersubjective methods that are available to researchers. If we view charisma as something that followers attribute to a particular person, it follows that one can eschew all references to belief in favor of terms such as the construction of charisma. Thirdly, since different narratives can construct charisma in different ways, it should be emphasized that charisma in the perspective adopted here is neither a property of the charismatic leader nor is it a monolithic set of attributes projected onto the leader. It is possible for the same religious leader to be placed in different locations along the two intersecting scales in different sources, so that, e.g., the particular portrayal of Steiner in the narratives I have collected can differ from that found elsewhere in the Anthroposophical milieu and at other stages in the historical trajectory of Anthroposophy.

Different narratives will portray the purported *distance* between the leader and ordinary humans in distinct ways. Prabhupada and Hubbard are narratively framed as truly extraordinary people. Hubbard's genius, as described in narratives produced by Scientology's spokespersons, was at such a high level that no other human being before or after him comes close. Prabhupada, similarly, is presented in many of the narratives analyzed by Ketola, as a person whose every action set him apart from other people.[339] Steiner, by contrast, is described as much more approachable – much more like us. He may, according to Anthroposophical cosmology, have developed powers of occult perception that nobody else has, but Anthroposophical narratives again and again emphasize that all of us can embark on the same journey of spiritual exploration that he did and deemphasize the fact that nobody is discursively allowed to reach the same level of clairvoyant perception as Steiner.

The ways in which Prabhupada and Hubbard are perceived by followers show that the *properties attributed to them* differ in crucial respects and range from thisworldly to transcendent. Prabhupada comes across as a charismatic leader of a classically Weberian kind. His authority is built on attributing to him a close and powerful link to a suprahuman reality. It is his connection to Krishna that is the legitimizing argument for seeing him as such a special person. Hubbard, by contrast, is simply presented as an unparallelled genius. Scientology narratives do not portray him as the recipient of revelations from a transcendent source, but as somebody whose own capabilities allowed him to pursue multiple careers, from nuclear physicist to explorer, and to solve riddles that humanity had searched for answers to in vain.

[339] Again, specific forms of charisma are not inherent in a particular movement nor are they necessarily characteristic of all accounts of the leader. In the early years of the movement when Prabhupada was establishing groups in New York and San Francisco, he was far less distant from his followers, who were able to interact with him personally, but this changed over time as the movement became larger: Måns Broo, personal communication 14 December 2021.

To sum up, charisma can be constructed along a continuum with four poles:

- Distant leaders whose claim to charismatic authority is narratively placed in a suprahuman dimension, with Prabhupada as an example
- Distant leaders whose claim to charismatic authority is narratively placed in a thisworldly dimension, with Hubbard as an example
- Less distant leaders whose claim to charismatic authority is narratively placed in a suprahuman dimension, with the founder of the Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith, as example
- Less distant leaders whose claim to charismatic authority is narratively placed in a thisworldly dimension.

Although Steiner can be described in different ways in different types of sources, and more emphasis or less can be placed on his insights into a spiritual dimension, my interviewees construct his charisma in the last of these four modes. As shown above, the people whose stories I have analyzed here describe him as gifted but not superhuman, as a man who excelled in his field, but with varying emphases on what his achievements were and to what extent these achievements are available to others. As in other parts of the interviews, the lack of references to a spiritual dimension is striking. Perhaps symptomatic of a tendency to present him as a very approachable figure is the fact that he was almost never referred to as Dr. Steiner by any of my interlocutors as was common in the past. Instead, he was nearly always referred to by his last name. As charismatic figures go, Steiner comes across as approachable and pragmatic.

One may expect the organizational culture of different movements to align in one way or another with the kind of charismatic leadership that is commonly constructed. Although this is a hypothesis that calls for further work and a substantial set of comparative cases[340], the movements used as examples in this section provide tantalizing illustrations of how the distance of the charismatic leader correlates with a cohesive organizational culture and a strong grip on power. Organizations with truly distant leaders fit a centralized structure, in which accounts of the charismatic founder's life are a central part of the effort of sensegiving employed by those who wield power and where there is one single locus of authority. The organizational culture of Scientology is focused on the figure of its founder L Ron Hubbard and attributes its entire set of doctrines and practices to him.[341] Changes to these teachings are anathema. The more effective this form of sensegiving is, the more one might expect individual narratives to align with the collective identity of the organization. Anecdotal evidence, again

[340] This is work that at the time of completing this study is still in progress as Swartz forthcoming b.

[341] One interesting perspective on this matter is provided in Rothstein 2007. The argument there is that the bulk of writings that Scientology claims were written by Hubbard is so voluminous that he would have had to produce in the order of 50 to 70 publication-ready pages of text every single day throughout his entire career as a leader of his movement. Even for a prolific author like Hubbard this figure is so large that is almost certain that some of these texts were written by others.

from Scientology, suggests that members of that organization produce narratives characterized by a prominent use of a collective "we".[342] Organizations with less distant leaders will have a more pluricentric locus of authority and have a less exclusive focus on using narratives of the founder in its attempts at sensegiving. The LDS church accepts that Joseph Smith, besides being a prophet, was a fallible human being, and attribute prophetic gifts to others. Important messages from the leadership do not necessarily invoke the founder's name[343], and a key assumption is that any individual can receive confirmation of the truth of the Book of Mormon from the Holy Ghost.[344] Even less distant on this scale is Rudolf Steiner, who is presented as an approachable human being who in many ways simply lived at the right time and happened to have gone further on a path towards clairvoyant insight that is (theoretically) open to us all. Here, the organizational culture is so infused with a pluricentric ideal that individual members are expected to relate to the movement in an individualized way, and as the narratives here amply attest, pleas for more structure and a more assertive leadership are counterbalanced by calls for a laissez-faire degree of freedom.

8.9 Sensemaking and sensegiving

The stories presented by my interviewees are built around the premise that the survival and flourishing of Anthroposophy is the object to be attained and that the organization hence plays a truly important role. At the same time, it is difficult to find concrete references in these narratives to why it is important. What is the fundamental mission of Anthroposophy? What message does it provide that is so vital? To questions such as these, negative or metaphorical descriptions of Anthroposophy with little concrete content are provided. In terms of the need for an organization and its stakeholders to construct a collective identity, the lack of a more specific and more homogeneous answer calls for an explanation.

A collective identity is negotiated in a complex interplay between the sensemaking that individuals engage in and the sensegiving provided by authoritative voices within the movement. In the case of the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu, the perception is quite common among my interviewees that a clearer message is needed that can define and explain "what Anthroposophy is", yet the strictures against doing so seem to stand in the way

[342] Mikael Rothstein, personal communication.

[343] For instance, an important proclamation issued in 1995 that affirmed conservative gender roles and family patterns was introduced with the words "We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim", and no other authority was invoked anywhere else in the text. See https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/10/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng

[344] A suggestion along these lines is part of the Introduction to the Book of Mormon: "We invite all men [sic!] everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost".

of providing such a definition. Two factors in particular seem to prevent a more distinct collective identity from emerging

Firstly, there are statements in Steiner's writings that some interviewees explicitly refer to and that others seem to implicitly accept. Their familiarity with widely reproduced statements enables them to put into their own words what is essentially a small set of well-established emic views: that Anthroposophy is elusive and resists every effort at pinning down what it is, that it is a way of acquiring (scientific) knowledge of a suprasensible reality, or that it is an individual path. By implication, any attempt to formulate a set of basic Anthroposophical tenets would seem to go against the explicit statements of the founder. This is a doctrinal position that nudges present-day Anthroposophists to adopt this way of "non-defining" the movement. A Steiner quote that one hears and sees reproduced in various contexts, including the website of the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden referred to above, is his own "non-definition" that Anthroposophy is "a path of knowledge that wishes to lead the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the cosmos".

Secondly, the question of who can define Anthroposophy and how to define it can seem intractable in a milieu where the emphasis on an individual path and personal freedom of interpretation are held up as ultimate values. As in any movement, there are people in leadership positions who could potentially engage in a campaign of sensegiving and provide an official answer to the question of what Anthroposophy is. At the same time, infringing upon an individual's personal freedom can be presented as something very negative. The paradox that arises when one wants somebody to assume the responsibility inherent in a leadership position yet respect the need for each individual to disregard what the leaders say is summed up in this passage from my interview with Rut. Here, she both suggests that 1) the leaders of the organization should step up and provide a concise description of what Anthroposophy is and that 2) everybody else can also define it as they see fit:

> I feel that the Anthroposophical Society has both the right and the duty to express their views on what Anthroposophy is. They really ought to do so loudly and plainly, and clearly and simply, and even in an elaborated way, and they surely try to do this, even if there still is a lot of work to do. But the same holds true for everyone who is interested in Anthroposophy – that they can explain how they understand Anthroposophy. […] Yes, in principle, everyone [has the right] to say what Anthroposophy is for them.

For Oskar, as well, a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of a clear collective identity. Instead, one of the core values promoted by the Anthroposophical leadership is just the opposite, namely an individualistic imperative that, he maintained, ultimately undermines any attempt to present a unified vision. The blame for this failure does not even stop with the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden: in Oskar's narrative, this is a task that

should have been undertaken by the top-level leaders, i.e., people at the Goetheanum in Switzerland.

> [One of the former leaders] said that when someone asks him what Anthroposophy is he says that it's a path of meditation and a path of learning. You work on yourself. That's what it's all about. […] You can ask yourself, then, okay, if Anthroposophy is the meditative path for everyone, what literature accompanies it? And then they say "Look for it yourself." There are the basic exercises and *How to Attain Knowledge* and *Outline of Occult Science*. It has certain things, but there is nothing methodological about it. One must individually see, yes, that's what I feel like doing and so forth, and it's the same thing with the School of Spiritual Science. They are fantastically beautiful texts. And I've asked myself why – and this is the responsibility that I think the Goetheanum fails to take on – why isn't there a book that says "This is the Anthroposophical path of learning. These are the exercises one does. You can do other ones as well if you want to, but you have to at least do these." Everything has to be so free. You're not allowed to say "You need to do this and this". Instead, everything has to be free. But it's so strange because if one has the foundation then one can improvise and say, "Good. Now I'll develop in this direction, but at least I have this." But nobody has done that. And that is a typical example of bad leadership. If I were to tell them this, they would say that it's not their job to do that. They come up with all sorts of excuses. It's so bad.

As we have seen, there are plausible reasons inherent in the history of Anthroposophy for why it would be difficult for those who have leadership positions to engage in effective sensegiving and have any account of "what Anthroposophy really is" be accepted by a large number of people. Yet in Oskar's narrative, it is precisely this clear and unambiguous account that is lacking, ideally in the form of a book that provides a definitive explanation regarding the core contents of the movement, presented by people in charge. The lack of such an instrument of sensegiving is here diagnosed as the result of "bad leadership" and the fault of centrally placed people who only offer "all sorts of excuses".

Does this mean that sensegiving is lacking in the Anthroposophical milieu and that sensemaking is the result of the collectively negotiated sensemaking of individual people in this milieu? My contention here is that, on the contrary, there is an official voice that engages in sensegiving, but that the message that is provided is one that does not satisfy the pleas for a distinct brand and a clearly formulated identity that recurs in so many interviews. For an outsider to the Anthroposophical movement, a core element of sensegiving is a paradoxical individualistic imperative, a suggestion that "our collective identity is that we are all individuals who make up our own minds". This approach to formulating a self-identity is so pervasive that it seems, as it were, to be part of the DNA of the movement.

8.10 Conclusions and suggestions for further research

Over the course of this study, answers have emerged to the research questions that were initially posed. To paraphrase slightly by adding theoretical terminology that was introduced along the way to the questions as they were

formulated at the outset, the most fundamental questions were these: What stories do stakeholders in the Anthroposophical milieu tell about the Anthroposophical Society in Sweden and about the situation of Anthroposophy in Sweden more broadly? How do these stories present the nature and chronological trajectory of the movement that they are stakeholders in? Why, e.g., in terms of the organizational culture of the movement, do these accounts take the shape they do? The narrative of a purported Golden Age, its decline, and its uncertain future has been a *leitmotiv* throughout the study. They describe a situation in which Anthroposophical institutions and enterprises have shut down, the average age of its membership is increasing, and few young people seem to be interested in joining. Retrospectively, this rather bleak picture is contrasted with a past that is framed as a glorious Golden Age. As soon as these stories about the past are examined in more detail, this rosy picture begins to crumble: the seeds of decline, it seems, were there from the very beginning. Interviewees provide a large and divergent range of reasons for that decline and the nature of the problems besetting the organization in the present. When they reflect upon the future, most of my interviewees agree that something needs to be done, but as soon as they formulate more specific proposals in the face of the threat of further decline, it becomes apparent once again that their suggestions point in many different directions.

Besides answering specific questions about the Anthroposophical movement in Sweden, two aims at higher levels of generality were also stated in the introductory presentation of the aims of the study. One such aim has been to illustrate the usefulness of a theoretical approach rarely applied in the study of religions. The point of departure for choosing the specific approach adopted here was the observation that the Anthroposophical movement is a new religious movement in a post-charismatic, settled state that essentially functions as a large-scale organization. It can therefore be studied by means of a selective and suitably adapted use of tools and approaches from organization theory. In particular, the analysis carried out here demonstrates how theories of corporate storytelling, a major research focus in organization studies, can be adapted to the study of religious movements. Stories that circulate in secular organizations can reveal much about such issues as the organizational culture, the inner workings of the organization, the image that the organization wishes to project, and the experiences of the organizations' members, and *mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for storytelling in religious movements.

The other higher-order goal is based on the contention that the Swedish Anthroposophical milieu, besides its intrinsic interest, can be seen as a specific, local instance of a broader category, namely that of settled new religions and that an analysis of organizational storytelling in that specific milieu can function as a case study that can shed light upon the ways in which new religions in a settled stage more generally function. Although an in-depth study of such issues requires a comparative approach that exceeds the bounds of this study, and the outlines of which can only be sketched below, some suggestions can be provided

to show how organizational storytelling within this particular organization reflect mechanisms that in one or another shape will be found in new religions more generally.

It is a truism of our academic field that religions are malleable entities. They are part and parcel of the broader culture and are constantly produced and reproduced in ways that reflect that broader cultural context. For present-day settled religions, that context has been identified here as neoliberal capitalism. This context is pervasive in the many stories that have been presented and analyzed in the preceding pages. As noted, interviewees almost without exception relate stories of crisis and decline but have widely divergent ideas about the causes of the decline, the nature of the present crisis, and the prospects for the future. This, however, does not mean that a complete anarchy of opinions reign. The parallels with stories about a secular corporation in perceived decline are instructive. Many companies that market tangible goods and services have faced crises and have needed to find a way forward in order to survive on a competitive market. When compared to the situation of such a secular corporation, a striking feature of the stories told to me about the Anthroposophical "corporation" stands out. The narratives overwhelmingly identify the causes of the current crisis in terms that could be applied to any non-religious organization. In other words, in a neoliberal social context, the narratives of crisis recorded in my interviews are framed in neoliberal terms: The leaders have not done their job, "customers" have turned to other products, the market has changed, and nobody has figured out how to adapt to the new circumstances. Conspicuously absent are explanations of the crisis in terms of a distinctly Anthroposophical worldview. A comparative study of crisis narratives in other new religions would provide a wealth of new insights into how organizational stories adopt, adapt, or resist neoliberal modes of sensemaking.

The fact that those who tell narratives about the organization to which they belong can resist particular modes of sensemaking if they clash with perceived core values helps explain another aspect of the narratives analyzed here and opens up further questions for future research that concern the modalities of this resistance. As this study has demonstrated, beyond a propensity to adopt explanations that one might also expect to find in secular corporations, there is no shared storyline to rally around, no vision of what a successful Anthroposophical movement ready to take on present and future challenges might look like. Perhaps a new generation of charismatic leaders could solve the problem, but, then again, maybe this is no longer a time for charismatic leaders to enter the scene. Perhaps the leaders should step up and blaze a trail forward, but, on the other hand, that might curtail individual freedom too much. Despite the adaptability of religions, some concepts and values appear to be so deeply rooted in any particular movement that even a perceived crisis will not dislodge them. For Anthroposophy, a movement where individual freedom is championed as such a core value, it would seem that there are powerful strictures against leaders providing a dominant sensegiving narrative.

Finally, seen as a corporation, the identity and utility of the "product" of the organization is only hinted at. It is clear from the interviews that Anthroposophy accomplishes a task of vital importance, and textual sources support this picture of a movement that ultimately has a soteriological aim potentially involving all of humanity. The specifics of what Anthroposophy is, what it offers, and how its "products" can be so important are only addressed in the most circumspect way. Perhaps, it is suggested, Anthroposophy simply cannot, or must not, be defined, or, if it can be, everybody needs to do so themselves. These tendencies towards individualism on the one hand and vagueness on the other, it has been argued, fit a particular view of the founder Rudolf Steiner's mode of charisma. This observation invites a future, comparative study of how charisma and organizational culture interact.

To summarize the predicament of the Anthroposophical milieu as it is presented in these narratives, whatever the facts on the ground may be, the many stories related to me resemble those of an organization whose product it is almost impossible to identify and where perhaps nobody should be allowed to do so, whose customer base is vaguely understood as "all of humanity", whose board of directors does not specify how the product should be marketed, and whose leaders and staff feel that the organization is crumbling. Although my interviewees seem unable to rally around a shared perception of how to move forward, many voices agree that there is a future for Anthroposophy, albeit in a new and perhaps fundamentally transformed version.

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Appendix I

List of interview questions

All interviews with the exception of one were conducted in Swedish. The interview script, which evolved over time, was used as a point of reference and as a checklist to ensure that no important topics were omitted, i.e., not everybody was asked all questions or necessarily in this order, and the precise formulation was adapted to fit the flow of the conversation. The final version, i.e., the form it had following my last alteration to it, is reproduced here, with my translations into English in parenthesis under each question.

1. Hur kom du till antroposofin? Hur och när lärde du dig om den?

(How and when did you become engaged with Anthroposophy?)

2. Om någon som inte känner till antroposofin bad dig förklara vad den går ut på, vad skulle du säga till den personen?

(If somebody who knew nothing about Anthroposophy asked you to explain what it's about, what would you tell that person?)

3. Vad får du ut av ditt engagemang?

(What benefits do you personally feel that you get by being engaged in Anthroposophy?)

4. I vilken utsträckning har antroposofin/antroposofiska verksamheter haft en effekt på omvärlden/Sverige?

(To what extent has Anthroposophy / have Anthropsophical institutions and enterprises had an effect on surrounding society / Sweden?)

5. Hur tycker du att antroposofin här (i Järna / Stockholm) har utvecklats sedan du började engagera dig?

(How do you feel that Anthroposophy has changed here in (Järna / Stockholm) since you became engaged in it?)

6. Vem organiserar olika aktiviteter som träffar och föredrag och hur går det till? Hur får man en sådan roll och vilka förväntningar finns på dessa personer?

(Who gets to organize activities like gatherings and lectures? How would one become one of those people and what is expected of them?)

7. Finns det något som du skulle vilja förändra? I så fall, har du förslag på hur det skulle gå till och vem skulle kunna ta initiativet?

(Is there anything you would like to change? If so, what would these changes be and who could initiate those kinds of changes?)

8. Vilken roll spelar Järna för antroposofin idag? Har dess roll förändrats? På vilket sätt? Vilken funktion kommer Järna att ha i framtiden?

(What role does the Järna community play for Anthroposophy today? Has this role changed over time? What role do you think it will play in the future?)

9. Vilken roll spelar Goetheanum för dig? För antroposofi i Sverige?

(What does the Goetheanum represent for you and is what is its role for Anthroposophy in Sweden?)

10. Hur viktigt är det att Antroposofiska Sällskapet får nya medlemmar? Hur skulle det kunna gå till?

(How important is it for the Anthroposophical Society to get new members? How could the Society get more people to become members?)

11. Vem var Steiner, enligt dig? Vilken roll har han för dig? För Antroposopofin idag?

(Who would you say that Steiner was, what role does he have for you and for Anthroposophy today?)

Appendix II

Interview participants

1 Anne-Marie 1/24/2014

2 Alexander 1/27/2014 (leader)

3 Oskar 2/7/2014

4 Emma 2/11/2014 (leader)

5 Sonja 3/7/2014

6 Anna 3/17/2014

7 Karl 4/13/2014 (leader)

8 Charlotte 4/25/2014 (leader)

9 Felicia 5/19/2014

10 Rut 8/27/2014 (leader)

11 Olivia 11/27/2014

12 Daniel 12/17/2014 (leader)

13 Nils 1/14/2015 (leader)

14 Moa 1/26/2015 (leader)

15 Astrid 2/11/2015 (leader)

16 Hans 2/20/2015

17 Ellen 3/4/2015

18 Fredrik 3/25/2015

19 Lovisa 4/10/2015 (leader)

20 Robin 5/20/2015

21 Peter 5/26/2015

22 Mattias 8/22/2015

23 Viktor 9/8/2015

24 Marcus 10/27/2015

25 Johan 11/1/2015

26 Nina 4/15/2016

27 Linn 6/5/2016 (leader)

28 Anders 7/25/2016

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