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**Transcending the Divide in Oneself: An Enquiry Over
Body-Mind Dualism and the Nature of Consciousness
In Transcendental Meditation**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Methodology

This thesis draws knowledge from fieldwork done amongst the Transcendental Meditation Organization's Estonian branch located in Tallinn. It was established during the re-independence period of Estonia when the Soviet Union collapsed. Over the course of decades, the member count has significantly decreased and there are not many practitioners actively engaged in the community. The affiliates of the group are men and women, mostly between over 40 years of age but there are many in their 20s as well. Currently, the head of the association is Valve Värk who also happened to be my instructor of the Transcendental Meditation technique.

The idea for my thesis originated from my year as an exchange student at Durham University in the United Kingdom. There I wrote a research project on how meditation could influence a person's state of consciousness. Before that, I had followed various meditative practices. Wanting to continue my work, I decided to make my Bachelor's thesis on a similar topic.

My first contact with this particular training method and group was purely coincidental. At that point, I did not know if there were any active meditation communities in Estonia amongst whom I could do fieldwork. I typed 'meditation groups in Tallinn' to Google and the first search result was the Transcendental Meditation Organization. I had heard of this technique but had never tried it so I was immediately interested. After contacting Valve and explaining to her some of the ideas, my research began.

My fieldwork started in October 2016 and lasted until January 2017 in Tallinn, Estonia. During that time, I received training of said technique and adopted it into my own daily practice. I had weekly sessions with my instructor who explained to me the main premises of meditation, as stated in the Transcendental Meditation discourse, and acted almost like a representative figure of the entire organization. She would also organize meetings with other informants and shared a lot of prior research done on this training method. Her help and knowledge has been of invaluable assistance to my work but has not shaped or misinfluenced the thesis' objectivity.

In addition to that, I also participated in a one week meditation retreat held by the organization. It took place in the Väike-Maarja High School during the first week of January

2017 where I carried out the majority of semi-structured interviews with practitioners from all over Estonia. There were 17 of them in total and the older members share a long history together ever since the foundation of their movement. I also sent out a questionnaire via e-mail to the other associates that were missing but did not receive a lot of answers and that is why I have not included it in my research.

The overall goal of my fieldwork was to conduct participant observation amongst the Transcendental Meditation Organization and to practice the technique individually. Me personally practicing the technique was an essential part to the thesis because it allowed me to gain my own subjective experience. Even though I had previously practiced other types of meditation, I approached this particular training as a full beginner and let myself be taught by my instructor. At the same time, my prior contact was actually beneficial because I made progress faster, thanks to knowing some of the fundamental principles of meditation.

Most of my informants were between 40 and 60 who had been practicing meditation for decades. Thus, they possessed a lot more knowledge about the discourse as well as a wider range of different incidents. Nevertheless, my research includes several examples of younger practitioners who may not have as much experience but can still give their own phenomenological accounts. I had no problem with getting people to talk, answer or be open with me. However, most of them were not eager to come converse with me themselves either. Some would volunteer to be interviewed and were excited to do so. But, in general, we would discuss the topics of this research only when I directly asked them.

All in all, doing participant observation and adopting the technique myself allowed me to gain an insight into the workings of the Transcendental Meditation Organization and gave me the opportunity to get my own phenomenological experience. I gained a deeper understanding about the nature of consciousness as experienced during meditation by me and my informants. My observations and information are based on an individual's subjective perspective but in the thesis I am also trying to apply that knowledge to a wider context.

1. Introduction:

The Mind-Body Problem

I first came into contact with meditation when I just graduated from high school. Of course, I had heard about it previously but it always remained to be this mystical and weird thing - something only yogis and spiritual people would practice. To be honest, my initial interest for trying it out came from the selfish desire of improving my mental performance – to sharpen the blade we call ‘the Mind.’ It worked. I was able to enhance my focus in life, the ability to concentrate for many hours and be more in control of my behavior.

As I continued my practice, I never had the intention of progressing further with it. There are many stories and ideas about topics such as ‘enlightenments’, ‘awakenings’ and other epiphanies but only a few can actually tell what they all mean. I do not claim to be enlightened because, in my opinion, any claims of the like would immediately falsify me. That is why, throughout this thesis, I take the Socratic position of “*I know nothing.*” Yet, I have had several strange occasions while meditating, wherein it seems as if I enter an altered state of consciousness. Although I am completely awake and aware, both my body and mind feel at one instance estranged from me and at others fully united. In search of getting at least some explanations, I had decided to do my research on this topic.

My aim with this thesis was to enquire over the notion of body-mind dualism or the subject-object divide that remains to be a topic of controversy in anthropology, philosophy and science in general. I did my investigation based on consciousness as experienced in the practice of transcendental meditation. My research questions include: ‘*How does transcendental meditation influence a person’s consciousness during practice and outside of it?*’ Namely, ‘*How does it affect their experience of their body and mind?*’ and ‘*How, if at all, does the subject-object divide manifest itself?*’ I also seek to enquire into over the nature of consciousness in general, as described by my informants, and what role does it play in an individual’s life.

The underlying conflict and tension of this thesis and my meditation experiences involves the notion of body-mind dualism. It was Rene Descartes who notoriously brought it to surface as it exists in science today by saying “*I think, therefore I am*” (1641). The mind-body problem is the problem of explaining how mental states, events and processes - like

beliefs, actions and thinking - are related to the physical states, events and processes, given that the human body is a physical entity and the mind is non-physical (Crane : 1999), or the relationship between these two worlds of body and mind (Popper 1995 : 5). Cartesian dualism takes the position that mental phenomenon are non-physical (Hart 1996: 265-7), or that the body and mind are distinctive from one another with the latter existing separately from the former (Crane and Patterson 2001: 1-2). However, in anthropology, Tim Ingold shows that this separation has many implications because of leaving our involvement in the world ambiguous „*as we have come to live in a world where thought is active and action is passive*“ (Ingold 2000: 416). Most current philosophical positions are either dualist – dividing body and mind - or monist - unifying reality and substance of oneness. Most modern philosophers maintain that the mind is not something separate from the body because of an empirically unidentifiable meeting point between a non-physical mind and its physical body (Jaegwan 1995: 240).

An anthropological account on the mind-body problem represents more the monist view. The paradigm of embodiment postulates that: „*the body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground for culture*“ (Csordas 1990: 5), hence it is already situated in and constituted by culture. Such an approach stems from the school of phenomenology pioneered by the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the latter of whom wrote that: „*the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them*” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 82). Phenomenologists take the position that consciousness originates from the body and is the body projecting itself into the world. Individuality can never be understood as long as the world is made into an object, because both universality and the world lie at the subject's core. It is realized only “*if the world is the field of our experience, and if we are nothing else but a view of the world...*” (*ibid* : 406). Even beforehand, some aspects of embodiment had been predicated by Mauss, who stated that “*the body is simultaneously both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out, and the original tool with which that work is achieved*” (Mauss [1934] 1950: 372). Therefore, it can be thought that an individual's consciousness is never an individual thing standing distinct from the world and culture it is situated in. I found much inspiration and assistance from a phenomenological

approach in describing the experiences of myself and my informants, which is why I have included it in my research.

1.1. The Difficult Problem of Consciousness

There have been many scientific enquiries and treatises on the topic of consciousness but so far no consensus has been reached. The philosopher John Searle's common-sense definition of consciousness – called as such for its face value „...*refers to those states of sentience or awareness that typically begin when we wake from a dreamless sleep and continue through the day until we fall asleep again, die, go into a coma or otherwise become unconscious*“ (1998: 381). Consciousness and all other mental phenomenon are said to be higher features of the brain caused by lower level neurobiological processes in the brain (*ibid*: 379). But this does not give answers to how and why we have phenomenoal experiences.

The most widely cited and influential thought experiment about consciousness (Dennett 1991: 441) is that of Thomas Nagel who, in his 1974 paper „*What Is it Like to Be a Bat?*“, argued that „*an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism—something it is like for the organism to be itself.*“ He uses bats to explain his thesis, because they are mammals and their sonar system is similar to the human sense of vision. Although it would be possible for us to imagine what it would be like to fly, navigate around the environment, hang upside down, Nagel suggests that it is still impossible for humans to truly understand what is it like to be a bat because their brains would not have been wired to be as such from birth. You would be a bat-man – with the body of a bat and but the consciousness and perspective of a human. The only unquestionable fact of our experience is our own mental activity, which means that we can only know what it is like to be ourselves. Nagel would say that an objective perspective on consciousness would be unfathomable because of our limited subjective experience. This research also attempts to look into whether or not this statement holds true and if consciousness does have any objective aspects to it. There have been other anthropological researchers who have brought evidence challenging Nagel's claims as well. Rane Willerslev (2004) did fieldwork among the Siberian Yukaghirs who hold the belief that humans and animals can turn into each other by temporarily taking on one another's bodies.

When asked, how to define consciousness, my informants would say that it is indefinable and not found anywhere – it is supra-spatial and indefinable. Definitions are said to give something a form – restrict it within a framework – but consciousness is formless and infinite. Something can be placed somewhere only if it is limited and bound. That which is boundless cannot be localized. The nature of consciousness is consciousness – to be conscious. But still, what I discovered during my fieldwork was that at least the practitioners of Transcendental Meditation and its discourse have created a conditional viewpoint of consciousness as a field. Here is what one of them named Enn said:

Mathematics approaches all phenomenon through distances and quantifying temporality and spatiality. Therefore, consciousness can be viewed conditionally as a field, which comprises everything and from which everything is made of. It is thus situated nowhere.

This coincides with quantum theory, in which the structure of the Universe is looked upon as based on events not purely substance or matter. Each of these events inject knowledge into a physical system that bears information, thus the quantum approach to consciousness is “*underlined by a dynamical process of chosen course of action, which, on the psychological side, injects a new experience into the stream of consciousness of the human agent and, on the physical side, actualizes brain states that contain the neural correlates of those experiences* (Stapp 2007: 889). The quantum universe is information-based, as opposed to the purely material one of classical physics. Individual entities are micro-local quantum fields, amidst a much bigger field, that interact with their neighbors. In anthropological ethnography, a similar idea is held by Robert Kapferer who did fieldwork among practitioners of sorcery at Sri Lanka. “*It [consciousness] arises in a world of other conscious human beings who participate in the process of consciousness of any particular human being* (ibid : 134). Consciousness takes form in an intentional body, a body directed and oriented towards the horizons of its life-world. Consciousness, in other words, while embodied, nonetheless extends beyond its physical confines into the world which is fundamentally and inseparably part of the dimensionality of consciousness. These ideas had been a great inspiration for my research. More on these topics in Chapter Two.

1.2. The Nature of This Research

The terms used so far all look at the phenomenon in some way or the other but to explain the phenomenological aspect of it, or what is it like to be something, I will be drawing analogies from other fields that are not solely commonsensical but also corresponds with a hypothetical theory of consciousness as a field. Physicist Michio Kaku gives a space-time theoretical description of consciousness: „*Consciousness is the number of feedback loops required to create a model of your position in space in relation with other organisms and in relationship with time*“ (2014). Feedback loops are processes of cause and effect between two parts that interact and are connected with each other. In my own words, it refers to possessing sentience about one’s own body/mind/consciousness and increased awareness of its position amidst other forms of sentience.

The reason why I have chosen this description is that it correlates with the research done on consciousness as a unifying field, namely the aspect of smaller quantum fields being neighbored and influenced by other such fields. It also fits with the idea of Merleau-Ponty, who stated that “*consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'”* (1962: 124). When applied to Kaku’s theory, it would mean that the conscious agent is capable of creating higher amounts of feedback loops that include the individual’s own consciousness but also that of other living entities – they possess the sentience and awareness. More important to the anthropological value of my research, it includes the notions of my informants. Like Enn said:

In the case of humans, animals and physical objects, we have to look at different degrees of consciousness. Consciousness reflects in the nervous system and creates the quality of awareness. The qualities of the nervous system – it’s purity and ability to self-reflect – determine the concrete degree of consciousness and the experience anyone can have. There is no person with the same awareness. Therefore, consciousness and awareness are not strictly taken as the same thing, although at the final stage of meditation they meet.

This paragraph goes straight into opposition with Descartes’ dualism and it also challenges Nagel’s claims. Although Enn does support the idea that there is no person, or bat for that matter, with the same awareness, his and others’ experiences in meditation feel like there is some objective aspect to consciousness and awareness. This is the underlying tension I have

come across during my research and experience. On one hand, while awake, it feels *as if* the body and mind/subject and object are divided, but on the other, especially in a meditative state of consciousness, these dualities seem to collapse. This is also the position I am going to take in this thesis, namely that Cartesian dualism is almost like an illusion that we perceive as real at face value and that consciousness can be conditionally looked upon as an invisible field of embodied knowledge and events that influence human behavior and their experience.

My research is divided into three chapters, all of which give a slightly different perspective on meditation and how the individual experiences it. The first is about the phenomenology of TM and what it feels like to meditate. I am going to enquire how the subjects experience their bodies and mind and whether or not there is any perceived dualism between them. In the second chapter I will look at the collective field aspect of consciousness and how it could be understood. Lastly, the third chapter focuses on the practical application of meditation on the individual's life outside of practice – how it affects their everyday interactions, mentality and well-being. Researching and writing this thesis was a very fascinating and exciting process. I not only learned what has already been written on these topics but also found out a lot of new things about myself. It was a journey of self-discovery and enquiry, during which I got to meet people striving to live extraordinary lives of greater self-awareness and bliss.

2. Chapter One:

The Phenomenology of Transcendental Meditation

What does a person experience while meditating? What does it mean to meditate? How does it feel to be ‘ourselves’ and how does our consciousness express itself during practice? These questions are relevant for investigating the body-mind dualism and describing what meditation is like, but they are important for also studying the subject-object dichotomy in consciousness. In this chapter, I am going to first give some background information to said technique, how it is practiced and how it can explain the duality under enquiry. I will also look into how one’s experience changes as they continue practicing over the length of time as it is relevant for describing some further subjective accounts discussed more thoroughly in the third chapter.

2.1. Transcendental Meditation (TM)

I was on my way to meeting the person who I had contacted from the Transcendental Meditation Organization here in Estonia. In the e-mails we had exchanged, I could not get an idea of with who I was speaking with. All I knew was her name – Valve Värk – and that she was an instructor. She invited me to her home where she would also teach all her students. After pressing the doorbell of an ordinary apartment building in the middle of Mustamäe, I was buzzed through with no words said through the phone. Her place was just on the first floor and as I was approaching it, the door’s lock turned and it was pushed open just a little bit. It all felt very mysterious and I was excited. After stepping into the flat, I was greeted by an elderly woman in her 70s. Her hair was white as snow, as was her gown, and she smiled heartily. Although her skin looked slightly pale, her hands were warm. We exchanged courtesies and moved into the living room. It was not very large but very cozy. There were furry carpets, candles and shelves filled with books, flowers and other ornaments. I sat on the couch and we began talking about my research and the TM organization. Valve agreed to assist me and was also a big proponent of me getting actual training in this technique. She became my meditation instructor.

Transcendental meditation is a technique founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and introduced to the West from India in the late 1950s. The method is based on Vedic philosophy, which is described by the practitioners of TM as the science of consciousness.

TM is practiced for 20 minutes twice a day, involving no effort, beliefs, or special lifestyle, and requiring no specific mental abilities on the part of the practitioner (Roth: 1994). This I can attest to myself. Before starting TM, I had been practicing different types of meditation for several years already but I was positively surprised by the sheer effectiveness and ease of this particular technique. In TM discourse, the purpose of practicing meditation is creating complete harmony, peace of mind, and, using that experience, to develop the same harmony and inner peace into the dynamic activities of every day life. The technique is described by its users as easy, enjoyable and involving no concentration, contemplation or any type of control (Wallace: 1970). Instead, it establishes a distinctive state of consciousness by allowing the mind to settle into a relaxed and calm state. Although the technique requires no religious doctrine or lifestyle, the TM discourse itself seems to involve a few specific beliefs and ideas, regarding consciousness and spirituality. When I first walked into her apartment, I could immediately see pictures of Maharishi and other gurus on the wall. There was also a silent soundtrack of Vedic music playing in the background. But this is just her own lifestyle choice. I had the opportunity to meet other people who did not share the same level of affection towards these figures and were meditating mostly for its practical effects.

TM incorporates a mantra, which is a simple Sanskrit two-syllable word with no significant meaning. The mantra is just a means of focusing on something while meditating. You receive it from your instructor during the first ceremonial lesson. This was my second time meeting Valve. For the ceremony, I had to bring a white linen handkerchief, a few flowers and some pieces of fruit. We sat in front of a shrine with a large painting of yogis and dried blossoms around it. I had to sit next to Valve while she started whispering Sanskrit words. I did not understand them – I just observed silently. She continued picking off the blooms from the flowers I brought and dipped them into small cups of essential oils. After circling candles with them and doing other ceremonial gestures, she took the napkin and covered the florets. Then she turned to me and whispered me the mantra. She kept repeating it until I followed suit. We continued saying it for a few more times and the ceremony was complete. In our later sessions, I asked if there was anything special about the mantra? Valve said it is unique in the sense that it is given by what kind of a feeling the teacher has about the student. It is a tradition that the TM organization is trying to keep alive. Even though all the mantras can be found on the Internet, everyone has their own. I never even thought of asking what the mantras of my other informants were because at the end of the day it does not matter. It

is only a means of focusing on something while meditating. Once you start meditation, you begin to repeat the mantra over and over again. At first, you say it out loud but then you gradually lower its volume in your head. The sound is traced backward even further in successively finer stages in the thinking process until the finest stage of thought is transcended and the mind is left in a state what is called in Vedic literature as '*pure consciousness*' (*Samadhi*). Maharishi (1963) described pure consciousness as a state of non-dual awareness between the subject and the absolute Being of existence, from which everything is said to stem from. People use words, such as 'separate, distinct, infinite, unbound, timeless' and 'perfectly silent, beyond thought', to explain this state (Maharishi: 1972). Enn said it is a blissful condition in which the mind has settled and ceased thought activity. Sometimes when I either meditated with Valve or had group meditations with others, I would open my eyes as to see what they were actually doing. In all cases, their faces were lit up with joy and warmth. It definitely looked like they were having a pleasurable time.

In my own experience, I want to add the aspect of stillness. That is what essentially happens – muscles relax and thoughts settle. To reach this state of pure consciousness, one has to gradually refine the mantra down to its finer form of vibration, which is achieved by bringing one's full attention to the mantra and enclosing oneself from other perceptions in the environment as much as possible, as to promote concentration. When given the mantra, you receive it at its most material form – just the word. As you start repeating it out loud, you begin to focus your attention solely onto its sound. The vocalization enters an automatic feedback loop. It is as if you throw a knot around it and start pulling it towards you. As the mantra gets closer to you, you need to use less volume and will thus lower the sound of your voice. This "drawing in" happens within us as well. Eventually, you stop saying it out loud and repeat it only in your head. The refinement continues further until the mantra begins to fade away. It starts to lose its physical form completely. You then do not even actually think about it or say it either. Its conceptual form – something you could get a hold of with your mind – vanishes entirely and all that is left is only its vibrational frequency. This is when you have entered this so called pure consciousness where no effort is required to maintain a meditative state. Despite there being nothing to trace down, you do not un-experience it or lose track of the repeated intervals either. It still exists and you can feel it being there, although completely silent. It feels empty in the sense that you are not attached to any sensory or perceptual experience and are simply dwelling there. But at the same time, it

feels full in its bliss or *'bliss-full-ness'*. This is my own phenomenological account that is very similar to those of others as well. As Maharishi (1997) put it, the object of experience fades away with the help of the mantra - when the mantra disappears, the subject/experiencer *"finds themselves awake to their own existence."*

TM is considered, even by its practitioners, just an effective technique, one of many, with which you achieve something that is supra-technical. It is a means to the end of pure consciousness, which can be achieved by any similar practice, such as other types of meditation or yoga. One of my informants Andres said: *"TM takes you beyond the technique where the technique does not exist anymore and where there is only the attained state of being – pure consciousness and awareness."* The advanced TM-Sidhi program, practiced following the regular Transcendental Meditation course, is said to develop the ability to function from this silent mental state of pure consciousness on a habitual basis and thereby activate this state of pure consciousness more effectively for greater impact on the individual and society (*ibid* : 1986). More on this in Chapter Three.

2.2. A Re-Observation of Dualism

One of the biggest problems with Descartes' dualism is that it takes the body and mind as separate entities, whereas there is evidence to prove them being very deeply linked. In cases of brain damage (e.g. car accidents, drug abuse, disease), the mental qualities of the person in harm are always influenced or compromised. In neuroscience, there is strong empirical evidence showing that cognitive processes have a physical basis in the brain (Dehaene and Naccache 2001) and that mental activity influences the entire physiology and vice versa. Thus, the two are intertwined. Anthropological ethnographies reveal similar findings. Paul Stoller's early work focused primarily on the magic, sorcery and spiritual practices of the Songhay people. During his fieldwork, he discovered that the Songhay understand learning not in terms of mental activity but in terms of the body (Stoller 1997). The stomach is considered the seat of personality. Songhay bards study history and power by "eating the words of ancestors", and sorcerers learn their art by ingesting particular substances, by testing their flesh with knives and by mastering pain and illness (*ibid*: 3).

This belief that the body and mind are deeply connected with each other is held by TM practitioners as well. In fact, it is experienced, especially during practice. The state of one's physiology has a profound effect on meditation. For instance, the food you eat influences

the brain's cognitive processes and the position one sits in while meditating can hinder concentration by making the practitioner focus on the discomfort. That is why Valve and other more experienced meditators always preferred to be as comfortable as possible during their practice. They would sit on soft mattresses, put cushions behind their backs, cover themselves with blankets and be in a very cozy position. This was an especially interesting sight at the meditation retreat I went to in January. I asked one of the older men Andrus why he was so wrapped up and he said that it helped to reduce the amount of sensory perceptions he would receive from the environment. When there is less things to focus on, it is easier to establish a meditative state. At that time, I would simply sit with my legs crossed while supporting my back on a wall and it felt okay. Later, I started covering myself with blankets as well and found meditation easier. *"It just takes one extra thing out of the equation and it makes the experience more enjoyable,"* said Andrus. It is indeed increasingly more difficult to try and meditate in a busy apartment building while sitting on cold hard floors than it is in a quiet room that is warm and cozy.

According to my fieldwork observations, everyone has a unique flavor to their practice. What I have noticed is that, in order to make progress during meditation, I have to *give in* to whatever may come to pass. Rather than fighting or suppressing some hidden problems or memories, I let those memories arise from within my body and react however I feel appropriate. Some people will start to laugh or cry. During group meditations, one of the more experienced practitioners named Ants would occasionally start shivering out loud, shaking his body and loosening his vocals. When he did it the first time, I did not notice it nor did I recognize what it was immediately. I was just there meditating next to him and in a quite deep meditative state. The surrounding sensory world had started to fade but then I heard a strange sound. It was not something I could causally interpret – it was just sound that existed there – but gradually it began to pull me out by robbing me of my attention. During that session, I did not conclusively understand what it was and asked if other meditators had heard anything. *"Ah, it is just Ants doing his thing,"* said Andres. Ants himself described it as an impulsive response to something he felt while meditating whether that be physical discomfort or a thought about the past. It was a complete letting go and emancipation of the body. In general, others experience an overall sense of well-being and love. While meditating, these events of information stored within the body will begin to spontaneously rise to the surface. However, as you refine the mantra to its finer form, eventually, you cease to be *"about"* anything and become silent. This is the still and pure

state of consciousness that, in my own phenomenology, does not imply towards being unconscious but instead means that you exist with the world without any preceding thought or action and simply are there. It is the presence of non-dual awareness.

But who is it that is there? I delved into the literature in hopes of finding some inspiration. Here is what I found that may help with my explanations. When ‘embodiment’ is the idea that cognitive functions and social interactions are grounded on bodily processes (Gibbs: 2006), then ‘the bodily self’ is a theoretical concept, referring to those aspects of the self that are associated with the structure and functions of the individual’s body (Dieguez and Blanke 2011: 238). Although culture, personal history and memory can be ‘embodied’ to some extent, ‘the bodily self’ relates only to the organism’s basic physical properties, such as spatiality, the way we perceive its ongoing movements, detect changes in homeostasis, experience its actions to be self-generated and identify its parts as self-belonging (Bermudez et al., 1995; Legrand, 2006). I discovered that this entire concept of the bodily self stems from early clinical neurology of the past century and out of the observation of how neurological disturbances affect the way some patients perceived their own body (Bonnier 1905). An altered state of bodily consciousness can be referred to as a disarrangement of the bodily self. In such a condition, the person’s current state of physical body is misrepresented (Revonsuo *et al.* 2009). I would say that the mind is heavily influential in inducing this during TM. As one establishes the state of pure consciousness, one’s physiology becomes less active, in terms of entropy and energy needs, and, according to practitioners, the mind becomes silent. Meditation itself in general is described by my informants as the effortless quieting of the mind and ceasing of thought activity. One dives into oneself, on board the mantra, until the mind silences on the level of thought. Knowledge of oneself in space consisting of thoughts, emotions and the signals coming from sense organs, all of which begin to dissolve, while the person remains to be completely alert. After this, there is not a lot of perceptions to grasp onto that would create a solid and distinguishable ground for one’s subjectivity. In my own experience, it feels as if the body and mind merge or melt together with the environment, as the point of separation between the three becomes very hard to identify. Attempting to define it from the perspective of Cartesian dualism would be impossible because the phenomenological account of me and the practitioners contradicts it entirely. Anthropologists of embodiment have found a lot of inspiration and influence from Merleau-Ponty who was strictly against there being any dichotomy between a subject and the world. He wrote:

In so far as I am a consciousness, that is, in so far as something has meaning for me, I am neither here nor there I am in no way distinguishable from an 'other' consciousness, since we are immediately in touch with the world and since the world is, by definition, unique, being the system in which all truths cohere (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xii).

This reflected in my own experience during the meditation retreat. Because the body and mind become less active, in terms of energy usage, I feel as if 'I' as an entity begin to disappear as well. As the mantra is refined to a deeper state, my mind becomes still and body feels as if getting thinner. It is best described as a merging into oneness – both within myself, that is between my own body and mind, and with the without, that is between me as a subject and the world being an object.

According to TM practitioners, during meditation, the acknowledgement or recognition of a person's body and mind decrease up to the point where just pure consciousness remains in non-dual awareness. But this duality is experienced again after the mind returns from a state of pure consciousness into a state of waking experience. When I would sometimes talk with Andres, he gave me the impression that he believes himself to be having a soul that is neither the body or mind – a higher essence that is beyond *"this meat suit and monkey mind."* His descriptions made me think of something analogous to a spirit. He said:

Although I am conscious here and now, that same self-awareness is preventing me from experiencing the utter state of Being that is unity. Our body with all its sensory modalities and the brain's perceptions are already very limited. There are a whole lot more stimuli and vibrations which we do not pick up on, yet these "higher dimensions" exist.

This made me think about Cartesian dualism again because it slightly hinted towards some sort of a dichotomy. I looked it up again and found that Descartes' infamous phrase has actually been taken out of context. Instead of saying just: *"Cogito, ergo sum – I think, therefore I am,"* the sentence was preceded by: *"[W]e cannot doubt of our existence while we doubt..."* (Descartes, 1983[1644]: 10). The statement is often given more compactly: *"Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum – I can doubt, therefore, I think, therefore I am,"* which was penned by the French literary critic Antoine Léonard Thomas in his 1765 essay. This quote says that the only thing we can be sure of is that we exist – we can experience what it is like

to be ourselves and we are having conscious experiences. If we can doubt of our existence, question our presence in the world and recognize our own subjective experience, then we cannot deny that we are a subjective being inside a world. Although I would agree with that to a certain extent – that we are indeed individuals with our own experiences and sensory perceptions – this feeling disappears during deep meditation. In my opinion, the Cartesian divide almost happens just because we are self-conscious. Andres said: “*Only because we are immersed in the world can we imagine ourselves existing separately from it.*” It is as if our analytical mind creates this distinction because we can identify successive experiences from one another. In pure consciousness, there is nothing to be experienced – it is pure and silent. It might feel as if one’s body’s boundaries begin to disappear. TM takes you into a state of “non-specific” condition, in which thought has not yet developed because of the lack of sensory perceptions. That is why it is easier to meditate in a quiet room with no distractions and focusing on the mantra makes it even more concentrated. According to TM discourse, this non-dual awareness is said to be realized through ‘self-referral.’ Object referral means that the person is referring to objects in their environment in order to understand themselves. Self-referral is like a state of silent witnessing in which you are referring back to yourself. A great analogue to this, given by one of my informants Enno, is to think of a projector projecting images onto a blank wall. He explained it as such:

The projector is any object in the world – chairs, other people, the temperature, the floor, sound waves and light particles etc.

The projection is the sensory experience – the mental images you see in your head, the sound you hear, the kinesthetic feeling or pain you receive while sitting, and the thoughts you have as a result of that. These mental images travel to your brain but they’re still objects. That is where most people would stop but that is not the core essence of their true self.

The real ‘me’ is not the projection but actually the blank wall onto which the picture gets projected. You are the perceiver – the pure consciousness – who can recognize that there is indeed an ‘I’ and that I am a subjective being in a world. However, the origin of that subjectivity is situated inside the field of pure consciousness.

When one was to trace down the origin of a sensory perception, for instance, looking at a chair, then you were to always find its existence being situated in oneself. Rather than

the chair being an external object independent of one's existence, it is constituted, thus already being a part of one's consciousness."

Enno's statement reminded me of one of the postulates of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 7) argues, our perception ends in objects and begins in the body, meaning that objects themselves are a secondary product of reflective thinking. As meditators would say, on just the perceptual level, or in a state of pure consciousness, we do not experience objects but are simply being in the world. The unity between object and subject is a challenge to explain. My informants mostly agree that one cannot understand it but it has to be experienced. Here is how Enno did his best to describe it:

If you bring your attention to something, then it does not mean that you are actually perceiving it. Bringing your attention to the sun is not an actual interpretation of reality if you are simply creating an image in your head – in this case you are being aware of the mental representation from your past history. Being aware and bringing your attention truly to something is about feeling as if you are one with the object. It cannot be explained yet again but only experienced. This is possible due to the unifying field effect of consciousness. You can bring your attention to wherever spot in the field but that is not the purpose. The purpose is to experience the self – the pure consciousness from which everything stems.

In TM discourse and other spiritual practices, if there is consciousness, but no object, then that is consciousness of oneself, or the 'true self' – the source of all Being from which everything existent stems from. This is said to be realized through returning to oneself. Whenever one of the senses grasps onto a stimulus, we create a perception that travels beyond the object of our attention and always returns back to the perceiver. It is a feedback loop that is first invited by our senses to be created - to travel to the object and get in intimate touch with it – then circled around that object, and brought back to the source of the perception organ. Enno gave an example:

The chair I am looking right now is the object, I am the subject, and the link between us is sight or seeing. In my brain, there is the picture of said object. I am not that physical object but this field-like phenomenon, whose essence is consciousness. The picture inside my head is the actual object not the chair in of itself and the real 'me'

– the blank wall – is the subject and between them gets created a relationship or a connection.

Meditators say self-referential is about acknowledging that nothing else outside of myself does not exist and that my own existence is the only thing I can be certain of. However, that ‘self’ is existent just because of it being a body situated inside a world, which is indistinguishable from it, thus the distinction between subject and object is illusory – there is just the “self.”

2.3. The Process of Discovering Oneself

In my own experience, there have been brief episodes where I simply lose myself completely both my sense of time and space. As I go through the gradual refinement of the mantra, I start feeling a surge or just the vibration behind my eyes where the pineal gland is. External stimuli mold together and attain an irrelevant origin. I can perceive them but they lose their importance and attractiveness. Instead, I dwell in just the present – the here and now for what it truly is. Time or other temporal/spatial perceptions merge together. After that “time-warp,” or when I stop meditating, I slowly open my eyes. Then I experience a momentary shift in consciousness again – the body seems and feels slightly foreign to me. It is as if I do not want to move anywhere. At first, I even cannot do it because all my muscles are relaxed and restful. I would much rather remain in that blissful state a little longer. This is the notion of re-emerging dualism I just talked about. It is not that there is a divide between the body and mind, it is just that I experience it while being self-conscious - that is in an ordinary state of waking consciousness, wherein I can doubt about my subjective existence. Enno said that being conscious of the ‘self’ refers to having silenced the analytical mind, experiencing the field of pure consciousness and thus overcoming this duality.

Pure consciousness is completely still and silent. A meditative state is both calm and alert – a person is relaxed but poised for immediate action. The problem lies in how they are experiencing it phenomenologically. Any intentional feeling disregards them being there, as thinking and self-reflection are by nature forceful in the sense of doing. I do not get to recollect myself until I break out of meditation, or hit an interval. It is a momentary spindle or a collapse of meditateness, in which I jump back and forth between meditation and thought. Only at that point can I experience time, space and your body. At other times, it

feels as if I am temporally and spatially dislocated, yet still possessing infinite potentiality for motion. This has also made me wonder whether or not I have been actually meditating in the first place. Sometimes the intervals of the mantra felt like they were momentary occasions of zapping in and out of consciousness. I have verged on the edge of wakefulness and slumber, which put me into a state that almost resembles both of them at the same time. Sometimes I violate this naturally construed balance and tap into solely into one side or the other – I either maintain full analytical alertness or doze off for a moment. What usually ensues are my attempts of letting go by returning to the mantra. Although the technique is very simple and easy, I must say that you cannot expect it to work by itself.

Closing your eyes during meditation limits your visual perceptions to only the images you get in your head. Albeit you would perceive them almost as vividly as real, they are still merely mental pictures about the actual world. You would be visually restricted or hindered. But what about listening? How does meditation affect your auditory perception of the world? It is clear that you cannot block off sound as easily as you can with sight. You would still hear the outside world and thus be a part of it. Every time I meditated together with Valve, we would start off by listening to the silence. *“Let us listen to the silence,”* she would always say – a feat that is impossible to accomplish. I mean, there was the unrestful noise of the city outside, the processing of the nearby computer, ticking of the clock and even the humming between our own ears that would project back to us the ‘situatedness’ of our environs. It was impossible for us to become completely silent but we removed the perceiving mind as an intermediary between our perception and the sound from the environment and just experienced the vibrational sound itself. That was as close as we could get. It made me realize that if you could hear sound, even during meditation, it means that there is a world out there and that you are experiencing sound inside of it. You cannot ever achieve complete silence even when being alone in your body. In hyperbaric chambers, deprived of all possible external sensory experiences, people are said to be able to still hear their own motility, blood flow, nervous system, brain waves – they can hear themselves inside their body, which is an environment, a vessel, a world for their consciousness.

According to Maharishi, transcendence means surpassing the dichotomy and is a gradual refinement of thought down to the level where it ceases to be almost entirely. Once this is achieved, the mind settles into its natural state and becomes self-referential. The function of TM in here is to condition the mind to be able to do so and to promote non-duality becoming

a habitual state. That is why meditation is an embodied practice that incorporates both the inner and outer world into oneness. This requires regular practicing of said technique over a long term period.

TM discourse advises a person to meditate for 20 minutes twice a day. Once in the morning before food and then again before dinner. I have been meditating first thing after waking up for several years so it was not difficult for me to continue doing it. However, during my research, I did not manage to always have another practice session in the evening. This is common amongst my informants as well. Ave is a young mother in her late 20s and she said:

Life gets in the way. I work at a restaurant and sometimes have long shifts. If I have my 30 minute break I usually spend it eating or stretching my body. In those cases, I do not always have the time to meditate. But when I am home, I do try to do it twice a day.

When at the meditation retreat, I had an interesting interaction with one of my roommates Ants. I asked him whether or not he has had any changes in experience over the course of his meditation career. He said that you cannot ever be the same person you were 10 years ago and therefore his mind is already different. Enno said that you will begin making progress in your spiritual development after you become aware of your progress and growth. When this happens, you can open yourself up to new modes of being and begin to notice different things that previously were out of your reach. He said:

Whenever you read a book over and over again, you see it from the perspective of your current level of development. You go: "How could I have missed this or misunderstood it before?" Eventually you will simply click and "get it".

For many of my informants, the experience of meditation has become more deeper and insightful because the mind expands to feel and comprehend new spheres, facets, or fields. In search of something analogous in anthropology, I found the ethnography of Csordas (1990) who researched Christian ritualists. Although it is not a similar experience, their phenomenological accounts provide at least some analogy. In Csordas' observations, people would focus on different symbols and images as to induce certain mental states. What resulted were also spontaneous uprisings of past histories and memories embedded in the body. In meditation, what accompanies the silencing of thoughts is the inevitable resurfacing

of those very same thoughts you are trying to make silent. My regular meditation sessions alone usually begin with me getting into a comfortable position, taking a few deep breaths and starting to repeat the mantra. Nevertheless, it seems to be a cardinal rule that I still get random thoughts popping into my awareness. Sometimes they rob me of my attention completely and I follow them – I drift off into some story or loop and only a while later notice that I have lost the mantra entirely. I then drop the thought and start with the mantra again. This will not be successful if there is force involved or when I am trying to make it happen. Instead, it is a complete letting go that happens by “distracting” your mind to the mantra – to give it something to be about until it is not. My body enters in to a blissful state whereby breathing becomes shallower and slower. Yet, my respiratory rate is still powerful enough to keep me oxygenized. As it decreases ever so slightly, I begin to sink into the transcendental field even more. It is a gradual falling to its surface levels and then merging together into oneness with it.

My investigation had kept bringing me back to Merleau-Ponty’s idea that consciousness always finds itself constituted inside a world, or a field, whatever the words you may use, and that it cannot exist without it. The ‘I’ is the wall – the background – and the mind is the projection. Increasing in levels of consciousness and creating more feedback loops allows the person to realize that ‘I am’ the white wall behind the picture. The majority of people have simply forgotten about it. As was said by Enno: *“There are no obstacles in the way.”*

In this chapter, I looked into the uniqueness of the Transcendental Meditation technique and discovered that it induces a distinct state of consciousness called ‘pure consciousness’, which can also be achieved by other similar methods. It is characterized by non-dual awareness, loss in sense of temporality and spatiality, feeling of merging together with the environment, unity between body and mind. I feel that, when meditation stops, one can experience dualism re-emerging just because of being self-conscious and not in pure consciousness any more. What is left is still an open world or a field of subjective phenomenology. In the next chapter, I am going to look into the objective, unifying and collective aspects of it.

3. Chapter Two:

The Unified Field of Consciousness

Amongst the practitioners of TM there is a phrase: “*Jai guru dev,*” which translates into: “*Victory to the Greatness in you.*” It refers to the notion of pure consciousness being the underlying source of all things existent and from which everything stems (Maharishi 1969). In this chapter, I am going to look into the phenomenology of a ‘collective consciousness.’ Can one experience it and if so, how does it feel like during meditation? Additionally, I will enquire over its universal aspects in the example of anthropological examples that do not involve TM. This is important for discovering how do some of these universal proponents to consciousness appear in our experiences and interactions with beings both human and non-human.

3.1 The Collective Consciousness

Our days at the retreat were all very similar. We could wake up whenever we wanted but most of us were up already around 7 AM. Then we would follow our own morning routines and go to classrooms in the other side of the school to meditate. Men and women were supposed to be in separate rooms for reasons I never understood entirely. Ants said it was just another tradition of TM discourse and that the teachings of Maharishi should remain intact as much as possible, as to maintain their clarity and prevent misinterpretations. This applied to the way the mantra technique was taught by an instructor to the student as well. Before actually starting with meditation, we would follow a series of light Yoga poses or *Asanas*. They were not meant to be difficult or strenuous but the opposite – to move the body in a mellow pace and to prompt the healthy movement of joints and the bowels. I always felt an increasing feeling of soothe while doing it and it looked like everyone else felt the same. The look on Enn’s face was just so relaxed and blissful – his eyes were closed and there was a gleaming smile on his face. As he went through the sequences, he raised his head towards the ceiling and the bright illumination from the ceiling’s lamp shined on his face. This seemed to please him even more, as he mumbled something silently with joy. When I asked him afterwards what does he feel when doing the *Asanas*, he replied: “*I am just so grateful for being able to experience being alive.*” But despite the serenity of those gymnastics, the guys would also throw out a few jokes here and there. “*You youngsters can*

do that...I am too old for that one,” pointed Andrus to one of the poses that demanded slightly more flexibility. *“We never did those ones in Hungary,”* reclaimed Ants, referring to the group’s training from Maharishi they received in the 90s. Nothing was forced and it set the right tone for meditation.

At that time, I had been practicing said technique for 3 months but, because of having used different methods beforehand, I felt like I had already made significant progress. Nevertheless, being the novice I am, my experiences were in their infancy, compared to those of my informants. Some of them had been meditating for nearly 30 years and were still gaining new insights about their ‘self’ and consciousness in general. They had also trained the advanced TM-Sidha program. So far, I had been practicing TM either alone or with my instructor but group meditation opened up a whole new field of experience, which is slightly different from regular practice. One of my roommates at the retreat Andres was also a novice who had been practicing for just a year. For him, meditating with the Sidhas was a “mighty experience,” as he felt their energy more profoundly. In my own account, I did feel a significant difference. Nothing as “magnificent” but I did have occasional instances of distinctiveness, which the TM practitioners would call “vibrational energies or frequencies”, such as raised hair on my skin, intensified humming between my ears, and some light particles running in front of my closed eyes. First of all, I was surrounded by more people whose presence I could feel both spatially as well as perceptually. Hearing their breathing, sensing their body and the sound vibrations that emanate from them, makes the experience more grounding but at the same time more groundless. The sensory perceptions give definite material for doubting of my existence there, but, simultaneously, I began to notice myself being situated in the midst of a particular field of phenomena.

After the first 20 minutes, the novices were supposed to leave the classroom and go back to the living quarters. There we would meet with the beginner women, listen to some Vedic music and have another meditation session. The more experienced practitioners – the ones who had completed the advanced TM Sidha program – stayed in the classroom to follow their own exercises. They were supposed to practice levitation – making their body float off the floor – a feat I never managed to see and remained skeptical of. This was said to be accomplished by causing vertical vibrations in one’s brain waves and making them work more coherently with the source of Being from which everything stems from – the field of

consciousness. “*When was the last time you flew?*” asked Andres from Ants during one of our conversations. Ants replied:

A few months ago, back at home. It was for just a moment and I felt like I rose a few centimeters off the floor. I did not expect it to happen and it immediately stopped when I noticed it. Currently, I am not practicing that frequently so my heavy ass remains on the ground.

The phrase TM practitioners use to describe this phenomenon is “*Jai guru dev*” which I used to open this chapter with. I first heard it at the retreat. We were all sitting together on the couch. It was the evening and the instructors were wrapping up the day, talking about tomorrow’s events. Valve would finish speaking and Helmi said to her: “*Jai Guru Dev.*” She replied with the same phrase. I remembered it from one of the TM DVDs we had watched in the afternoon as well. When translated from Sanskrit, it can have several meanings but the people I spoke with call it “*Victory to the Greatness in you.*” The word ‘Guru’ means ‘great,’ ‘Jaya’ means ‘victory’ and ‘Deva’ is ‘one who is playful/light.’ Andres explained it to me:

You know there is a Big Mind and a Small Mind. The Small Mind is your lower ‘self’ that is egotistic and disconnected. The Big Mind is the ‘higher self’ that is aware of the connectedness and ultimately selfless. ‘Jai Guru Dev’ is victory to the Big Mind in you that is both dignified and playful – meta-aware but not attached. That is what Jai Guru Dev means: “Victory to the Greatness in you.”

“*And where is it?*” I asked Valve in one of our later conversations. “*It is here and there - everywhere,*” she said with a mysterious tone and a smile on her face. Her answer was perplexing yet I intuitively felt like I knew what she was talking about – I had experienced it during meditation. Maharishi (1969) described it as the all-encompassing source of Being that unifies everything living. According to TM discourse, when one achieves the meditative state of pure consciousness, the mind settles into this source which can be conditionally looked upon as a field-like phenomenon. Such esoteric knowledge did not give me a convincing explanation but it reminded me of an article I read in one of my University courses a few years back which could provide a more relatable and anthropological example.

Bruce Kapferer, who did research amongst Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka, and whose views I find useful for my own research, approaches consciousness as a collective field of shared

intentions and interactions. He suggests that the Sinhalese sorcery practices are based on the understanding that the consciousness of human beings is formed ‘*in-the-world*’. Even more, that the realities of humans are affected by the presence of other human beings, that “[Human beings] are inevitably engaged in the webs of each other’s intentional action: that the experience that human beings have of their worlds is of actualities of their construction” (Kapferer 1995: 136). ‘Intentionality’ refers to the mind’s ability to be ‘about’ or represent something (Jacob: 2010). Understanding intentionality is vital for discussing consciousness that is not thought of as (1) reduced to an isolated individual organism and (2) not merely explored through its second order cognitive reflections or concepts but through the intentional processes and the continually changing and emergent fields of consciousness from which such categories and constructs arise (*ibid*: 135). Kapferer writes:

Consciousness takes form in the foundational fact of a unity of individual conscious human beings in a world already shared with others. To put it another way, individual consciousness emerges in a field of consciousness. It arises in a world of other conscious human beings who participate in the process of consciousness of any particular human being (1995: 134).

Intentionality is fundamental to the construction and destruction of the psychological worlds of human beings. It is at the root of social worlds, inherent to what Sartre (1958) called the ‘*magicality*’ of existential and social life. The ‘*magicality*’ of sorcery refers to a human-created world – a magical field of consciousness – in which human beings are the ultimate constructors of it and the intentional agents in it (Sartre, 1958; cit. Kapferer, 1995: 137).

Kapferer describes a story about a housebuilder who began seeing dreams about his own death and demise. The man started investigating into his social connections and discovered several indications of potential malignant magic and demonic sorcery. At one point, the victim went through a series of collapses and became virtually immobilized by consuming fear, which caused paralysis of his body. The paralysis of the body established a condition what Kapferer calls a ‘*world-within-being*’, opposed to a ‘*being-in-the-world*.’ As the imagination of potentialities about sorcery play within the experiencer’s body withdrawn into itself, the imagination draws, as Kapferer suggests, “...*the possibilities of external realities within the body of experience and actualizes them within the lived experience of the body*” (*ibid*: 140). He includes other authors to explain his point further.

Sartre uses the term ‘*chained consciousness*’ (1958: 308-359) to describe an aspect of the imaginary process that occurs at moments between deep sleep and wakefulness. At that time, the body is virtually immobile and consciousness within an immobile body is what he terms ‘chained consciousness’. Imagination is left by itself and can freely move without being checked by anything external – by one’s own analytical mind or by received perceptions and the reorientations of the body in motion that follow. The circumstance experienced by the housebuilder and highlighted by Kapferer is a chained consciousness, that is, nonetheless, confined within the body. To a certain extent, this is what I feel happens during meditation as well. The mind gradually diminishes the intentionality received from the perceptions of the physical as well as the social world, and from the internalities of one’s own consciousness, by going through a series of progressive events in one’s own conscious states. At more active states, the mind will still experience thought and other mental activity. This is the phase that was described by meditation researchers Sears and Travis (2010) as ‘*open monitoring*’ – passively observing every activity of the mind and body – in which one is left alone with themselves and will thus give rise to certain past experiences and imaginations. Kapferer continues by suggesting that, at least in the case of sorcery, chained consciousness is consciousness ‘*disembodied*’. With the body immobilized it is no longer needed for the production of consciousness and: “[*The body*] becomes the boundary of a consciousness that is given up to itself in virtual reverie, a dream-like world that projects back into itself and which has no context other than the actualities it spins through its play of the imaginary within the closure of the body” (Kapferer 1995: 142-143). It seems to bring rise to this re-emerging feeling of dualism that underlies the tension I write about. Yet this is something I have experienced in meditation, but with a slight difference. During the refinement of thought, your physiological activity begins to decrease as well, making the point of separation between one’s own body and the outside world more difficult to distinguish. In this state of pure consciousness, this is what I would describe in my own personal account, including those of others, as the feeling of ‘*oneness*’ or ‘*non-duality*’. Rather than it being a state of chained consciousness it transcends it and leads to the attainment of ‘*unity consciousness*.’ However, this cannot be attained but realized because the inseparable interconnectedness between the subject and the world is already there. As Merleau-Ponty put it:

Both universality and the world lie at the core of individuality and the subject, and this will never be understood as long as the world is made into an object. It is

understood immediately if the world is the field of our experience, and if we are nothing but a view of the world, for in that case it is seen that the most intimate vibration of our psychophysical being already announces the world, the quality being the outline of a thing, and the thing the outline of the world. (1962: 406)

Kapferer concludes that the intentionality of consciousness within a field of consciousness, the space where the intentionalities of other humans intersect, is the very reason for suggesting within embodied experience that consciousness is something separate from the body (Kapfer 1995: 149). Having a body is the very reason why we are conscious and can have subjective experiences. But, like I described in chapter one, I feel like it is somewhat of an illusion, caused by us being capable of doubting of our existence. When in a state of pure consciousness, the body-mind/subject-object dualism dissolves but re-emerges again after breaking from it. This is the prevalent anxiety and tension of this entire thesis that still remains to be somewhat of a mystery to me. It seems to me that although our individual consciousness not being something separate from our body, it is still situated in a field of collective consciousness of the social world in which we intersect with other consciousnesses and whose thoughts and actions influence the way we perceive the physical world and construct our own sense of ‘self’.

3.2 Meditating Amidst a Field of Consciousness

The phrase used by TM practitioners ‘*Jai Guru Dev,*’ depicts the prevailing assumption amongst them about consciousness resembling a field of collective experience. When asked, how to define the collective consciousness, meditators would much preferably use the term ‘collective awareness’ - a group of people, who have a collective quality of some sort, their nervous system becomes more receptive or reflective to certain intentionalities. This motivates them to co-operate within their frame of shared qualities. This is reflected on the level of the world, nations, nationalities, groups, all the way down to the individual level. Inspired by the sayings of Maharishi, and resembling the findings of Kapferer, Enno said:

Every person’s thoughts and mind are a vibration or a wave in the ocean of the collective consciousness. They are mutually intertwined and influential. The collective consciousness is the sum of all the consciousness of humanity, which is changing constantly.

A lot of research has been done about the effect of TM on crime prevention and the broader societal level. One study done in Washington, DC 1993, sought to see how a group of meditating Sidhas could impact the city's felony and social stress rates, which tended to soar at summer. The project took place between June 7th and July 30th and it was led by a renowned quantum physicist John Hagelin and comprised of 27 other independent scientists. Based on previous experience, the researchers predicted in advance that the meditators would reduce crime by over 20%. In the first week of the study, 800 Sidhas arrived to Washington and unbeknownst to its residence, started to carry out group meditations. After an initial time period, and as the amount of those meditating grew up to 4000, violent crime declined steeply, reaching a maximum low of 23.3%. The statistical probability of 'pure chance' was less than 2 in 1 billion ($p < .000000002$) (Hagelin *et al.*: 1999) and other possible causes, such as temperature, precipitation, weekends, and police and community anti-crime activities could not be attributed to any of these changes. Soon after the project, crime rates began to rise again. In a preceding study during the Israel-Lebanon war, levels of conflict were reduced by 80% on days when the number of meditators were largest, with the effects of holidays, temperature, weekends, and other forms of seasonality were being controlled (Orme-Johnson *et al.*: 1988). During my fieldwork at the meditation retreat in Väike-Maarja, similar observations were being carried out. Ants is the head of the local fire department and thus had access to reports of crime, accidents and other incidents. Every year the retreat has been held, crime rates plummet during that particular time period and remain lowered for a while afterwards. My informants suggest that TM establishes inner harmony – harmony in one's own subjective body-mind attunement, harmony between the brain's hemispheres – which begins to spread outward to other bodies. That is why at the retreat we were always supposed to carry out our meditation routines at the same time so that the effect would increase in magnitude. Although men and women were in separate rooms, us meditating together was said to leave traces of blissfulness into the surrounding field of consciousness. I do not know what to think of it because it makes the whole notion of an invisible sphere even more mysterious, especially if you could influence it from a distance.

Being perplexed by it, I remembered I had heard of the work of John Hagelin who was also one of the authors of the crime prevention studies. He has proposed that the unified field of modern theoretical physics and the field of 'pure consciousness' are identical (Hagelin 1989), thus making him proclaim that consciousness is not only the result of our subjective

experience, but also a unified and unifying field (*ibid* 2007: 19). To me, this seems to coincide with the findings of Kapferer and the ‘magicality’ of human worlds, wherein humans are conscious agents within a social field. This suggestion may have a profound effect on the entire society. Maharishi predicted (1977, 1986) that as few as 1% of the population practicing TM, or as few as the square root of the number doing the advanced TM-Sidhi program together as a group twice a day, would reduce the stress of the whole society and lead to greater harmony of the collective consciousness. Each level of society (family, community, city, state, nation, world) is said to have a corresponding collective consciousness that results from the combined quality of consciousness of all the individuals in the society (*ibid*: 1977). According to the TM practitioners, the character of pure consciousness (experienced during TM) is ultimately like a universal substrate fundamental to the consciousness of each individual (e.g., Radhakrishnan, 1968) and that the beneficial effects of that experience are thus shared to some degree by others (Maharishi: 1986).

In addition to attempting to create more coherence here in Estonia, the TM organization also has an interesting history in regards to the effect they have had on our current society. When the Soviet Union was on the brink of its collapse, Maharishi saw an opportunity to spread his discourse and the practice of TM to the countries that began to gain their independence. He issued to send teachers to the region who were supposed to train new practitioners who themselves would then start teaching others. The vast majority of my informants come from that era and have practiced for nearly 30 years. In total, it is said that as much as 20 000 people were taught the TM technique but it seems not many are left. An interesting incident at that period happened during the Attack of the Tallinn TV-tower in August 1991. The event was hectic and dangerous – on the brink of complete chaos. When the Soviet tanks were cruising on the Narva highway towards Tallinn, the citizens were standing on their toes, in fear of an actual military conflict. After the tanks reached their destination, the situation was even more tense and stressful. According to Valve, she and a few dozen other TM practitioners were sitting in a nearby brush and meditating together. They created harmony within the close environment and were trying to emanate it outward as to make it spread. As they meditated, they focused on feelings of peace and compassion. In their own words, this influenced the collective consciousness of that place and established equilibrium within it, which contributed to the peaceful calming down of the event. Those who participated and with whom I managed to talk to believed that their inner coherence had a direct effect on the entire harmony of their surroundings. In their meditation, they influenced the field of

consciousness, thus affecting everything and everyone in it. This is yet another mystery that I cannot understand completely nor could conceive of being explained through a third-person's perspective. What truly happened at that summer day remains to be a puzzle.

The feeling of 'non-duality' is said to be difficult to explain and needs to be experienced first-hand. Here is what Enno said:

Intellectual or perceptual understanding and spiritual understanding are distinct things. You notice certain things according to your level of awareness. If you bring your attention to something, then it does not mean that you are actually perceiving it. Bringing your attention to the Sun is not an actual interpretation of reality if you are simply creating an image in your head – in this case you are being aware of the mental representation from your past history. Being aware and bringing your attention truly to something is about feeling as if you are one with the object. It cannot be explained yet again but only experienced. This is possible due to the unifying field effect of consciousness. You can bring your attention to wherever spot in the field but that is not the purpose. The purpose is to experience the self – the pure consciousness from which everything stems.

If the attainment of pure consciousness leads to self-referral – that is back to pure consciousness – then this could only be so if there indeed is an objective field that unites and unifies all things existent. On the flip side, this may also be an experience of the same world of intentionality and magicity, just phenomenologically different during meditation. There is no direct intentionality to be found during meditation but only the state of pure consciousness. What I have found is that, as a result, you undergo a process in which the sense of 'Self/Other', 'body/mind', 'subject/object' begin to merge together. You enter a state wherein your personal consciousness enters a feedback loop of 'chained consciousness' between your own body and the surroundings. What ensues, as Kapferer would suggest, is consciousness 'disembodied', meaning that the boundaries of the body become not needed for the production of consciousness. You are not unconscious or dreaming but aware of yourself through the unifying field of experience in a group meditation context by finding yourself nowhere in it but simultaneously all of it – *Jai guru dev.*

In this chapter, I looked into how consciousness can be looked upon as a field-like phenomenon and in what way it is explained. Drawing upon the teachings of TM discourse, anthropological ethnographies and research in physics, I have discovered that there is a collective aspect to consciousness that functions in a unified and unifying manner. It works reciprocally and is enmeshed within the social worlds of human beings. Practitioners of TM believe to be able to influence this field with their meditation and strive for impacting the wider society with it. In the next chapter, I will turn to how meditating influences a person's life outside of meditation and what effect it has on those around them.

4. Chapter Three:

Everyday Enlightenment Through Self-Actualization

If there is a universal aspect to consciousness in the form of a field, embedded in an individual's subjective experience, then it means we are constantly within it. Like in the case of the existence of ourselves, we cannot doubt about the existence of the surrounding world either because of always finding ourselves being situated in and surrounded by it. But how do you experience this 'collective consciousness' outside of meditation? In this chapter, I am going to look how TM influences an individual's life when they are not practicing. How does their everyday awareness change and what potential effects it may have on the whole collective?

4.1 Being-In-The-World

It is important to immediately define what do I mean by 'every day awareness and life'. From a phenomenological perspective, it involves having subjective conscious experiences inside a given world, a term called '*being-in-the-world*,' that is used in anthropology as well. This notion stems first from the school of philosophical phenomenology. A giant of the discipline, Martin Heidegger uses the word '*Dasein*', which literally means in German '*being-there*', '*existence*', or '*presence*'. However, Heidegger uses this translation differently (Dreyfus 1990). For him, *Dasein* is a way of being involved with the world and having greater caring or alignment towards it, while remaining aware of the involvement between the nature of the world and the nature of the self in it (Childers and Hentzi 1995: 70). This is the '*authentic*' model of *Dasein*. The '*inauthentic*' form has sacrificed one's individual meaning and authenticity in favour of the public/social milieu. All human beings are continually oriented towards authentic and inauthentic existences, depending on to what degree the standards and beliefs of the society are accepted. Heidegger writes:

"This entity which each of us is himself...we shall denote by the term 'Dasein'"
(Heidegger 1962: 27).

"[Dasein is] that entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue..." (ibid: 68).

According to Heidegger (1962), Dasein's true character needs to be understood as being grounded in the state of Being – being-in-the-world. Dasein differs from everyday consciousness – everyday consciousness, as in simply wakefulness. The emphasis is on the notion of engagement in the world as a continuous process of involvement with the world, mediated and experienced through the self. It is about not merely possessing sentience, as it may involve inauthentic or acute awareness, but indicates towards a more mindful awareness of subjective experiences and embracing the enmeshment with the world on a deeper level. This suggests that the presence of a perceiving agent as a being-in-the-world is an embodied presence, which brings us back to Merleau-Ponty who emphasized the inseparability of the body from the world. For Merleau-Ponty, our knowledge of the body as a physical thing is grounded in a more fundamental awareness, given to us pre-consciously by our total bodily immersion in an environment. Only because we are inside the world can we imagine ourselves as separate from it. He reasons it as experienced through sensing:

Sensing is this living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life. The perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness to sensing (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 53).

In regards to TM, meditation can have a keen effect on an individual's being-in-the-world, starting with pure subjective perception and ending with a wider impact on the society as a whole. There has been a lot of research on the advantages of TM across all domains – decrease in blood pressure (Schneider *et al.* 1995, Alexander *et al.* 1996), reduced alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse (Alexander *et al.* 1994). According to research, one significant impact meditation has on the organism is the reduction of cortisol - the stress hormone (Eppley *et al.* 1989). If the body and mind are inter-twined and inseparable, then the state of your physiology has a direct effect on the state of your psychology as well and vice versa. Excess stress would begin to cloud one's thinking processes and also prevents a person from experiencing the attunement with the world because elevated cortisol indicates a threat in the environment. One's bodily presence will thus be less of a priority. What is even worse is that it is a vicious feedback loop: the more stressed out you are, the more stress you will experience; the more stress you will experience, the more stressed out you will become. This is something I have noticed during my own practice as well. Whenever I have a less than an ideal night's sleep, I instantly feel less attuned with my body-mind and the

surrounding space while I am meditating. It just does not feel right – I get more distracted and suffer from a seeming brain fog. Outside of meditation I may have brief episodes of losing focus or lacking compassion towards others. Therefore, I believe, that is why it is important to keep practicing meditation every day as to not lose the skill and to not “go off the rails.” Combatting stress is also the reason the group I researched organizes their meditation retreats twice a year – one in January and another in August. It is a means of taking themselves out of their everyday lives full of work and responsibilities and going into an environment where there are no distractions from the news, social media and stressful incidents. *“It is a time for self-enquiry and reflection for the coming year,”* said Ants. *“Ah! It is just so good to get out of the routine for a while to rest and rejuvenate myself,”* gasped Annika in one of our conversations. Ave came to the retreat to figure out her life. She was in a relationship which she felt like was beginning to run its toll. *“I need to separate myself from others and meditate over this,”* she sighed. To be honest, that is all you get to do there. I personally had brought my laptop as to write down my fieldwork notes but everyone else was basically tech-free. When we were not meditating or following the program, we would sit in our rooms and either have casual conversations or be in silence. My roommates were Ants and Andres – two men in their 40-50s. Despite our age difference, we found many things to talk about, starting with Ants’ time in the Soviet Army and ending with Andres’ orchard’s harvest.

“They really are just regular people,” I thought to myself after leaving the retreat. Before saying those words, I had just had a deep and fascinating conversations with Enno. We had had several talks like that early in the morning. I usually got up around 5-6AM and used it as time to do some writing in the kitchen. *“Looks like I’m not the only early riser here,”* I heard someone say behind me. It was Enno and he greeted me with a hearty hello. He started going through his breakfast routine while asking me questions about the research. It was very intriguing for him and he wanted to contribute as much as he could. A lot of the insights I had regarding this thesis came from those conversations. As he was preparing his food, I could not help but notice how diligently he did everything. He had a very specific method of cooking his oatmeal – keeping the water just below the boiling point, which he measured with a thermometer, then adding the oats, just the right amount, and letting them simmer. It was not anything out of the ordinary but he did it with such intent and mindfulness that I was left in amazement. In a few occasions, he would get distracted by our talks and something would go wrong. Then he reacted quickly without panicking or losing his temper.

For him, TM was a way of getting to know himself more and using it as a means of discovering his purpose in life and sticking to it. Putting in the effort of maintaining health and feeding himself with the highest quality of water and minerals was just the right thing to do. Most of my informants proved to be vigorous and youthful. Despite her old age, Valve was very supple in her movements and showed cognitive acuity in her talks. But there were others who found TM useful in relieving some of their medical conditions. “*Oh, I have had many illnesses – too many to name them all,*” said Andres who also happened to have a slightly hunched back. He continued:

I have tried many things – different diets, fasting, witchdoctors and therapies. They work but only up to the point I remain disciplined with them. I do have a weakness of repeating some of my old habits, especially when it is the holidays. Meditation helps me to stay on track and hold myself consistent.

Andres said that after having picked up meditation, he had gained more understanding and courage to take on one’s own responsibility in life, meaning that:

Nobody – not parents, relatives, friends, teachers, advisors, officers, policemen, doctors, professors, politicians – are not responsible for anyone’s well-being, growth and freedom, but everyone is responsible for those things themselves.

He has also realized that the unknown area about human nature is incomprehensibly vast and beyond our understanding. That is why the experience of TM is transcending – it cannot be explained but has to be experienced.

When it comes to solving intellectual tasks or facing mentally draining problems, the people I spoke with report many incidents where the solution spontaneously appears in front of them. Before picking up meditation, Enno said he would have to work hard to accomplish something. Afterwards, things started to fall into place by themselves – the necessary thoughts, mutual people, materials and information as if came to him by itself. Problems that seemed unsolvable at first, found their solution. If he had no answer, Enno would simply sit down to meditate and the answer would come. This is something I have noticed myself after having started practicing meditation, aside from TM. “*You are looking for some piece of information or a person to talk to and after a while that knowledge will reach you by itself or that particular someone will contact you by phone or e-mail,*” explained Enno. Ave said:

Life has become seemingly easier, calmer, more reasonable and less effortful. I have begun to notice resemblances especially in nature that previously had been left unnoticed. Family relationships are getting better and some distant questions of the past are beginning to find their answers.

TM discourse states that the technique is not just a great way of conditioning the mind to run into sensory experiences more deeply but an effective means for improving the functioning of the entire brain. There are many schools and enterprises across the entire world – in the USA, Brazil, United Kingdom and Denmark – that incorporate meditation into the regular curriculum. In one of the studies, they compared the students at the Maharishi International University and those in other colleges (Orme-Johnson and Duck: 1974). The results indicated a significantly higher rate of performance in almost everything: greater time competence (the ability to live more in the present, to connect past and present meaningfully), inner-directedness (independence, self-supportiveness), spontaneity and self-regard. They also held higher values of self-actualization and saw the nature of man as essentially constructive and good. Beyond their individual level, they showed more synergy and capacity for intimate relationships. During our individual sessions, Valve would show me DVDs of kids from some of those schools. They all seemed very happy and blissful. Their days would begin with them meditating in the classroom together. Afterwards they would study the same subjects taught at regular facilities in addition to some of the science of consciousness researched in Maharishi's Universities. *"Before meditation I was struggling with my homework and I used to get angry at other kids during recess,"* said Billy – one of the children from the United Kingdom. *"I am able to stay more focused and calmer while studying,"* added Sarah, sitting next to him.

This is something the TM organization is trying to do in Estonia as well – to introduce meditation to schools as an extra-curricular activity. They have taken a step back from such heroic acts as those of August 1991, but their current mission is still a challenge. Creating a separate Maharishi based educational facility, like the many ones in the United States is a project currently too far out of reach, although not impossible. There have been some successful negotiations with the principal of Väike-Maarja High School who herself is said to have benefitted from TM, but no actual arrangements have been made. The greatest obstacle are parents who are not entirely against meditation but simply have a slight "rash"

or lack of understanding towards such practices. Enn said that there is a very “*high level of noise*” in the education system, which creates stress and conflict. He explained:

Peace cannot be found on the plane of thought, because thought itself is a wave form, and the pure consciousness established with TM will bring harmony into the individual's life.

According to Enno, some people are not interested in meditation because that they do not have either a reason or a past experience to *be* interested. Only after having felt the distinct state of pure consciousness does the curiosity and desire arise. In Enno's own case, he has taught the technique to her daughter and they have meditated together in the past. However, at the time of our interview, she had stopped because of not feeling the urge. Enno said that those who will not recognize themselves making progress will shy away from the path but those who notice themselves making headway will stick to it. Maybe that is why so many of those 20 000 people who were trained TM in the 90s have disappeared. There is also the aspect of the collective consciousness that has an influence on this. For Enno, it was strange that I had come to make a research about the collective consciousness at that particular moment in his life, as he had been thinking about such topics himself. He said that the surrounding environment plays a huge role in matters of spiritual growth. At the time of the re-independence, the conditions of communication were horrible because there was no Internet or state support. Enno added that the means of changing the structure of the society were less than ideal but the entire collective consciousness of Estonian people brought about the breakthrough they sought.

This does not say that magical things begin to happen but, most likely, refers to the ‘magicality’ of the social world as stated by Sartre, and the important role of intentionality in the construction of the psychological worlds of humans. Simultaneously, it can also be caused by the habitual mode of being-in-the-world that TM develops in the person. As they practice, they grow more attuned with their own body-mind and the world around them, which carries over to the way they live life in general. Their everyday life becomes a meditation.

4.2 Meditation as Habitus

However, meditation brings along a change in attitude towards life, beliefs, circle of friends etc. Enno wonders whether or not to think of it as positive or negative depends on many other conditions. Probably the greatest change a person experiences after starting this practice is an overall shift towards becoming more aware and present while being in the world. My informants report feeling more aligned with their environment and in touch with other people. The sensation of unboundness, infinity and timelessness experienced when in a state of pure consciousness begin to span into the practitioners everyday setting as well. I like to describe it as *'being more at ease in the world'* and not being that disturbed by the unpredictable and unforgiving tides of whatever may come. Likewise, a person's entire way of being can get altered as they meditate, both in general as well as after having just practiced. For Valve, the feeling of attunement is especially strong during the first hour post-meditation but with more frequent practice it can traverse beyond it. This led me, in search of research for this chapter, to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *'habitus'*.

Pierre Bourdieu in his *Theory of Practice* (1977) outlined the term *'habitus'*, which describes the collection of embodied positions, movements, dispositions and habits that the individual uses to perceive and fit into their social environs. The habitus is not expressed *in practice* but rather subsists in it (*ibid* 1990: 52-62). According to this, practicing a certain activity develops skill – skill that is acquired through routinely carrying out specific tasks involving characteristic postures and gestures. In the context of TM, skill is developed by following the routine of meditation, repeating the mantra, learning to silence thoughts and conditioning the mind to reach pure consciousness. All of these create a particular body that Bourdieu calls *'hexis'*. He writes:

A way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements' – all of these, and more, comprise what it takes to be an accomplished practitioner, and together they furnish a person with his or her bearings in the world (Bourdieu, 1977: 87).

Based on that, the reason why people orient themselves towards the world in different ways does not come from interpreting the same sensory experience in terms of distinct cultural models or cognitive schemata, but because their physical embodiment and senses are differently attuned to their environment (Ingold 2000: 154). In anthropology, Jean Lave uses

a similar approach. Her book *Cognition in Practice* (1988) takes the object of psychological analysis “*the whole person in action, acting within the settings of that activity*” (*ibid*: 17). For Lave, cognition is a social activity that is enmeshed in the nexus of continuous interactions between individuals and the world, or as Kapferer put it: “...*human beings are inevitably engaged in the webs of each other’s intentional action...*” (Kapferer 1995: 136). Therefore, thinking is inseparable from doing – mind from body – thought is ‘*embodied and enacted*’, and cognition is “*seamlessly distributed across persons, activity and setting,*” (Lave 1988: 171).

All in all, the habitus is a particular *modus operandi* that organizes bodily sensory data and ultimately creates together the individual’s being-in-the-world. According to Bourdieu, these embodied dispositions are shared by people with similar social, ethnic, professional, and religious backgrounds. The habitus is acquired through *mimesis*, which is the key component to attaining a state of double consciousness (Willerslev 2004: 647). The Yukaghir hunters in Siberia seek to attract their prey by mimicking their bodily movements and posture. Any distinction between subject and object dissolve and the hunter comes to experience the bodies of himself as that of the animal ambiguously as both subject and object, Self and Other, at the same time. Willerslev writes:

To mimic something is to be sensuously filled with that which is imitated, yielding to it, mirroring it – and hence imitating it bodily (Willerslev 2004: 638-663).

This does not only apply to hunting animals but can be found in human interactions as well. The person who we think we are is a direct reflection of our social mirror. However, this can pose certain implications on the individual, as their *Dasein* may pick up an inauthentic façade. Mary Douglas writes that: “*the body is a medium whose forms – whether adopted in movement or repose – express social pressures in manifold ways*” (1970: 93). Michael Jackson also holds that it may lead to the ‘subjugation of the bodily to the semantic’, which lessens the body and its experience in two ways. Firstly, movements of the embodied habitus – gestures and postures – would be reduced to the status of signs that lead the interpreter to their extra-somatic cultural meanings. Secondly, the body itself is rendered passive, whereas the active role of mobilizing it is delegated to ‘society’ that is detached from the body (Jackson 1989: 122-130). However, this notion fails to recognize a pivotal point of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, namely that the body is given to perception in movement and that bodily movement carries its own intentionality. It is because of this intentionality that the

subject's action is, at one and the same, a movement of perception (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 110-111). The perceiving mind is inseparable from the moving body.

But what I have come to see in my own experience and those of my informants is that meditation develops a distinct type of habitus that seems to circumvent most of these issues. The TM technique itself during practice and the overall outside attunement afterwards have a different feeling to it. In search of similar research, I found inspiration from Philip Zarrilli who distinguishes the two with the terms 'inner' and 'outer' experiences that describe an embodied practice having internal and external dimensions (Zarrilli 1998: 124). For instance, in a traditional yoga-based Indian martial art *kalarippayattu*, students are supposed to attain a 'complete knowledge of the body', by mastering both the physical body as well as the 'subtle Yogic body'. The practitioner first learns the 'outer forms' of positions that make the body more flexible and fluid, and only later "*through assiduous daily practice does one actualize that which is internal – the 'inner secrets' of the practice*" (*ibid*: 125). This exact process occurs in TM as well. You can learn the gist of the technique quite easily and fast, which will make you experience the positive benefits of increased focus, greater synergy with one's peers and more desire for personal growth, but the continuous development of the method unravels certain realizations in regards to the 'self' and opens up new potentialities for possible modes of being. To me, meditation is an embodied practice that incorporates both "inner" and "outer" world sensory experiences into a non-dual oneness. The internal and external experiences will also meet as the person attains a more meditative way of being – their habitus becomes a meditation. The overall/optimal state of the practitioner is when the body-mind "is" or "becomes all eyes" – a metaphor for the optimal state of sensory awareness for the immediate environment (Zarrilli 2015: 136). This type of extra-ordinary state is a state of being-doing, in which there is no thought and in which "*the 'self' drops out*" (Austin 1998: 296). As Evan Thompson put it: "*one gradually suspends "one's inattentive immersion in experience" and develops "meta-awareness" – "an awareness of awareness"*" (2007: 19). This "knowing that I know" is the key to developing an authentic way of Being, as the individual is aware of the 'self' as situated in a world and can thus mindfully construct their own habitus. Such intentional development of a particular body allows the individual to live in terms of their own choosing. This realization reminded me of a quite popular piece of anthropological writing from which I found inspiration for this chapter.

Nigel Rapport, in his book *I Am Dynamite*, says that individuals possess existential power “to create personally meaningful and viable environments and to traverse these in the pursuit of their own life-projects (Rapport 2003: 3). It is the notion of following an authentic *Dasein* and creating one’s own mode of Being in the world, mediated through the ‘self.’ He continues:

Individuals who see their lives in terms of the pursuit of a certain life-project, who see the meaning of their lives significantly in terms of the achievement of a particular goal or goals, can succeed in giving their actions a certain robustness, power and independence such that they escape the influence of external forces and of other individuals who might have wished to have directed them in other ways. (Rapport 2003: 5)

He uses a metaphor from a theory of atoms by analogy with the movement of balls on a pool-table to describe individuality — a self-propelled projectile moving through space. It is being carried along a certain trajectory by its own energy and momentum, and is deflected from this path only by the gravitational force of another body, or when actually getting hit by another one (Rapport 2003: 7). However, whether or not any real displacement occurs depends upon the body’s own force relative to that of the other body. Rapport also uses the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche – one of the main examples in the book - to depict his metaphor in conjunction with the German philosopher’s concept of ‘will.’ ‘Weak will’ suggests a deviation from the projectile’s trajectory due to lack of gravity; whereas ‘strong will’ characterizes those occasions when the multitude of impulses are given precise and clear direction, possibly coordinated under a single impulse (*ibid*: 7). For Nietzsche, to be strong is to acquire “*the orientation of a straight line as against wavelike vacillation* (Nietzsche 1994: 270). This reminded me of a brief conversation I had with Helmi when we arrived at the meditation retreat. It was just small-talk without any particular goal in mind. However, we started talking about what I intended to with my life after graduation and so on. I told her that I already had a plan and I was sure of where I would go next. Being an older woman, she was happy to hear that and said it is very important to have a sense of direction in life towards a purpose you feel most attracted to. She used similar terminology, which is a great metaphor to use when thinking about our individual lives as projectiles moving in a vast field of wave-like features. This goes to show that the popular image of meditators in society is also a misconception. They are not just sitting on a park bench,

smelling flowers, listening to bird song and being ultimately detached from the everyday world. Instead, they pursue cultivating their craft, some in a more disciplined manner than others. One of them named Anti did not seem to share as intimate affiliations with the TM organization as Valve did. He used the technique to get the positive benefits. His overall mindset towards the entire thing was also different. At one time when we were preparing to watch some DVDs at the retreat, he grabbed a small bottle of essential oils and rubbed its tincture under his nose. The aromas have a specific effect, depending on the ingredients. That particular one was lavender and it is said to have a soothing upshot. Anti added a joking remark:

It is a good hit, just like with meditation. I like to be in an enjoyable and pleasurable state. That is the right way to do it.

In my own experience, I have definitely noticed that meditation has helped me to be more focused on creating my own life's project and not deviate from it due to antagonistic wave-like vacillations. Like Enno would say, it comes down to knowing oneself. In chapter one, I gave the metaphor of the projector to illustrate the concept of one's 'true self'. The projection – the picture that gets projected onto the wall - is any sensory experience you get as a member of the society. You are inevitably going to come across the trajectories of others and get hit by their projectiles but whether or not you are going to continue your path – whether or not you can see behind the experience and realize that you are the blank wall not the projection – depends on your level of awareness and strength of will. In my opinion, meditation is a technique that develops both and can be the ultimate tool in a person's mental hardware. Having a purpose and pursuing their chosen calling is characteristic to all my informants. They are self-aware and seek to live a high quality life with greater joy, compassion and love at the expense of less suffering and ignorance. Their personal development is enmeshed with spiritual growth.

4.3 Everyday Enlightenment Through Self-Actualization

Although TM in its core comes with no religious doctrines or beliefs – it is just an effective technique – it still has a slight spiritual aspect to it. However, being skeptical of it myself, that spirituality can also be misunderstood and interpreted by the Western society.

Maharishi (1972) describes the Transcendental Meditation technique as a process of systematic purification of the nervous system, leading to a continually clearer experience of the fourth state of consciousness (“pure consciousness”) and thence to a fifth state wherein pure consciousness is maintained along with waking, dreaming, and sleeping. This state of operating from a state of pure consciousness 24/7 is what Maharishi called ‘*enlightenment*.’ There are many spiritual practices that explain this term in their own way, which causes a lot of confusion as to what it actually might mean. Maharishi described the state of ‘enlightenment’, giving it criteria in terms of subjective experience and physiological conditions. It is the fifth state of consciousness wherein the fourth state of pure consciousness stabilizes and remains present during waking, dreaming and sleeping. Maharishi’s claims also correspond with those of some scientists who have researched TM.

The physicist Lawrence Domash (1975) compares the state of pure consciousness in terms of quantum physics with a zero-entropy vacuum state with very low levels of excitation or ‘mental turbulences.’ This ground state of mind is a phase transition in the nervous system to a position of order and correlation among neurons. With the method of EEG, the electrical activity of the brain can be monitored. It has been found that, during the practice of TM, the brain waves from the left and right cerebral hemispheres become more correlated and similar in the spectral distribution of brain wave energies (Banquet: 1973; Banquet and Sailhan: 1974). Additionally, Farrow (1976) saw that the coherence increases from sleep or drowsiness to relaxed wakefulness, increases again from wakefulness to the state induced by 20 to 30 minutes of TM and increases even more during intervals of pure consciousness. This physiological aspect is an important feature to the individual’s subjective experience. As the mantra gets refined into finer stages, people report that spatial self-awareness undergoes a progressive expansion – something that could potentially explain the field-like aspects of consciousness. The reason why I included quantum field theory into this research was that it coincides a lot with the teachings of TM. In quantum physics, particles of matter are found to be excitations or vibrations of an underlying abstract field; Maharishi states thoughts to be “excitations of consciousness.” In quantum theory, the basic state of least excitation – the “vacuum state”- of the field, is characterized by “least excitation, unboundedness and perfect order,” which are also used to describe pure consciousness. But this transcendence goes even beyond that.

According to Maharishi and other sages, there are seven states of consciousness in total. In addition to the four mentioned already, they are: (5th) cosmic consciousness, (6th) God consciousness and (7th) unity or absolute consciousness (Gresham 2000: 202). The transition at the fifth state is often called enlightenment in other spiritual teachings as well. This is described by Maharishi as an “ever present wakefulness” or meta-awareness that is there even during sleep. Research on long-term meditators has recognized unique EEG profiles, muscle tone measurements and rapid-eye movement indicators that imply towards the physiological conditions of such a state – enlightenment, that is (Shapiro and Walsh 2006: 227). However, the Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness says that it is too early to state that these EEG measurements indicate any higher levels of consciousness (Lutz *et al* 2007: 534-535). Whatever the case may be, establishing a more coherent brain wave pattern will allow the individual to experience a more grounded state of mind more frequently, which itself paradoxically is groundless. As a result, this phase transition will carry over to them becoming more in tune with themselves and other individuals around them. According to Maharishi, for the transcendental state of pure consciousness to become a permanent and co-existing part of waking consciousness – to attain enlightenment - the two sides of the nervous system need to be functioning simultaneously while still maintaining their separate identities. In the early periods of meditation, this cannot occur because the function of the one inhibits the function of the other. That is why a person experiences only either transcendental consciousness or a waking state and the duality between them. TM discourse says that by practicing the mind in phasing through this shift gradually one can overcome this physiological inhibition. The two levels begin to function in coherence at the same time, without inhibiting each other, yet still maintain their separate identities. Maharishi describes it as such:

The function of each is independent of the other, and that is why this state of the nervous system corresponds to cosmic consciousness, in which self-awareness exists as separate from activity. Silence is experienced with activity and yet as separate from it (Maharishi 1969: 314).

Maharishi’s description of pure consciousness and enlightenment coincide with Abraham Maslow’s (1964) concept of ‘*peak experiences*,’ which are moments of highest happiness and fulfillment. They are “*rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality, and are even mystic and*

magical in their effect upon the experimenter” (Corsini 1998: 21). According to Maslow (1968), peak experiences have several characteristics, but the elements are perceived holistically, creating the moment of reaching one’s full potential. This striving towards maximizing one’s potential is called ‘*self-actualization*’ - referring to one becoming all they want to be, and can be as an individual (Larsen and Buss: 2008). Maslow used the concept in his ‘theory of the hierarchy of needs’ (1968) as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved after the most basic physical and social needs are met and the person can start the process of actualizing their potential. In addition to peak experiences, self-actualizing people also experience many phenomena of ‘*flow*.’ The term was coined by the positive psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and flow is a state of mind wherein one is fully immersed and engaged with the activity, while losing their sense of time and self. Flow and peak experiences may seem the same but they are different. Peak experiences are the fulfillment one gets as the outcome of an external activity – ecstatic moments, moments of rapture; whereas flow is an internal mental process – complete immersion with the task at hand during which everything else fades away. I have seen that meditation can create both peak experiences and flow. Peak experiences are felt especially moments after practice when the individual has had a revelation or a breakthrough of some sorts in regards to their ‘self’ or purpose. I would say that the state of pure consciousness is a direct correlate of flow and its characteristics. However, in the examples of my informants, this feeling of ‘flowing’ carries over to their everyday life outside of meditation as well. Although getting into flow and maintaining it requires conscious effort, the outcome of the activity is the activity itself and it brings a greater feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment into the life of the individual outside of flow.

Is enlightenment flow? Does meditation lead you there? These are questions me nor my informants could give answers to. Like I said in the beginning of the thesis, I do not consider myself begin enlightened or anything the like. Reaching the end of this research, another “*I know nothing*” is appropriate. But I cannot deny that me and other people have had some mysterious yet fascinating episodes. In my own case, I can definitely attest to the positive benefits of meditation on self-actualization and having peak experiences. Using the words ‘flowing through life’ is a great metaphor because it depicts the notion of being optimally engaged with the world while maximizing the potential of your life’s project. That is the strong will that gives victory to the greatness in you.

That is how I would like to end the chapter and this particular thesis. In here, I talked about how practicing meditation develops a unique habitus in the individual that gives them a meta-perspective on life. This ability to be mindful and aware that a person attains outside of TM has a whole range of positive benefits on almost everything they do. Their every day engagements become like meditation and it feels like ‘flowing through life.’

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the practice of Transcendental Meditation and what kind of a phenomenology it can provide to an individual, in regards to the notion of body-mind dualism, consciousness and their way of being in the world.

Based on the findings of my fieldwork and research, I have come up with several ideas about the nature of consciousness and TM. My conclusions show that meditation is an embodied practice that develops a distinct state of consciousness, which my informants call ‘pure consciousness.’ It is a meditative state in which the body’s physiological activity lowers to a point of reduced energy demands and thought activity settles down to very low excitations as well. Although the experience of this state is subjective, it is commonly described by feelings of joy, bliss and unity. It feels as if the distinction between one’s body and mind, subject and object, self vs other begins to diminish and they merge together. Explaining it in words is very challenging and my informants say it can only be experienced. In such a state, identifying a distinguishable point of separation between oneself and the surrounding environment becomes increasingly more difficult because the mind is left in silence and with nothing but itself.

The findings in many disciplines and my own fieldwork indicate that rather than consciousness being something commonsensical that could be taken at face value it also has a much more mysterious and unexplainable aspect to it. In TM discourse and amongst my informants, consciousness is conditionally viewed as being a field-like phenomenon in which everything exists. Human beings with their own individual consciousnesses comprise a greater collective consciousness that functions in a reciprocal and unified manner.

I have also found that meditation has a significant effect on the person outside of practice as well. It namely has to do with their being-in-the-world or how they attune themselves to their surroundings. Practicing meditation develops a unique type of habitus that helps the individual discover their authentic ‘self’ and avoid inauthenticities in their social interactions. This also reflects in the ability to be more mindful in one’s every day life and make consciously better decisions that support the person’s ‘life project’ or purpose.

The people I came into contact with all show a sense of direction in their pursuits and blissfulness in their activities. What I have discovered is that meditation is just a very

effective technique and does not have to be accompanied with any religious or spiritual connotations, although in TM discourse they do exist. The organization here in Estonia is working hard towards introducing it to schools because of the benefit it would have on the children's development and the society as a whole. If this research could contribute to this in any way, I would be very pleased.

Before my fieldwork, I had already practiced meditation and have continued to do so routinely. I have found it to have a significant positive impact on my ability to focus, self-awareness, -control and life project. Despite having finished my research with TM, there were some topics I did not manage to include into this particular paper, which I intend to continue investigating. Although I have come up with several of these findings, I must restate that they are not definite in any way and that the nature of consciousness still remains a mystery to me and science.

Kokkuvõte:

Enda sisemise lõhestuse ületamine:

Uuring keha-vaimu dualismi ja teadvuse olemuse üle transtsendentaalses meditatsioonis

Käesoleva lõputöö eesmärk on olnud uurida transtsendentaalse meditatsiooni praktikat ja missugust fenomenoloogilist võib see inimesele pakkuda, seoses keha-vaimu vahelise duaalsuse, teadvuse ja maailmas olemise viisi kohta.

Rohkem kui 4-ja kuu jooksul viisin läbi välitööd Eestis asuva Transtsendentaalse Meditatsiooni Organisatsiooni liikmetega, mille ajal praktiseerisin antud tehnikat ka ise. Sain väljaõpet TM meetodi kohta, korraldasin intervjuusid ja osalesin ka nädalases meditatsiooni laagris, kus tegelesin grupimeditatsiooniga.

Minu välitöö avastuste ja muu uuringu tulemusena olen välja tulnud mõne ideega, mis seostuvad teadvuse loomuse ja TM-iga. Minu järeldused näitavad, et meditatsioon on kehastatud praktika, mis tekitab distinktiivse teadvusseisundi, mida minu informandid nimetavad 'puhtaks teadvuseks.' Tegu on meditatiivse seisundiga, mil keha füsioloogiline aktiivsus langeb ja mõttetegevus vaikib samuti. Kuigi selle kogemine on väga subjektiivne, kirjeldatakse seda tihti õnne-, õndsus- ja ühtsustunnetega. Minule endale tundub, et eristus enda keha ja meele, subjekti ja objekti, 'mina' ja 'teine' vahel hakkab haihtuma ja nad sulanduvad kokku. Sellises seisundis muutub märgatava lahuspunkti iseenda ja ümbritseva keskkonna vahel leidmine suurenevalt raskemaks, kuna meel on jõudnud vaikusesse.

Avastused paljudes distsipliinides ja minu enda välitöös näitavad, et teadvus ei ole ainult midagi iseenesest mõistetavat, vaid omab palju mõistatuslikumat ja selgitamatut poolt. TM diskursuses ja minu informantide hulgas on levinud arusaam, et teadvust võib tinglikult vaadata kui välja laadset nähtust, milles kõik olemasolev eksisteerib. Inimolendid oma individuaalsete teadvustega moodustavad palju suurema kollektiivse teadvuse mis funktsioneerib vastastikulisel ja ühendatud moel.

Lisaks olen leidnud, et meditatsioonil on märgatav mõju inimesele ka siis kui nad seda ei praktiseeri. Nimelt, kuidas nad maailmas on ja kuidas nad end sobitavad oma ümbruskonnaga. Meditatsiooni harjutamine arendab unikaalse habituse, mis aitab indiviidil avastada oma autentne 'mina' ja vältida mitteautentsust oma sotsiaalsetes interaktsioonides. See peegeldub ka oskuses olla rohkem teadvel igapäeva elus ja lubab teha teadlikult paremaid otsuseid, mis toetaks isiku eesmärke elus.

Inimesed, kellega kokku puutusin, omavad kõik suunatunnet ja õndsust oma tegemistes. Avastasin, et meditatsioon on lihtsalt üks väga efektiivne tehnika ja ei pea hõlmama mitte mingisuguseid religioosseid või spirituaalseid konnotatsioone, kuigi TM diskursuses neid eksisteerib. Antud organisatsioon siin Eesits püüab tutvustada meditatsiooni koolidesse, kuna uuringud on näidanud, et sellel on väga suur positiivne mõju lapse arengule ja ühiskonnale tervikuna. Kui minu uurimustöö sellele kuidagi kaasa aitaks oleksin väga rahul.

Enne välitööd olin meditatsiooni juba varem praktiseerinud ja olen seda harjumuspäraselt jätkanud. Isiklikult olen leidnud, et sellel on olnud väga suur positiivne mõju minu võimele keskenduda, olla eneseteadlik, omada rohkem enesekontrolli ja eesmärki elus. Hoolimata uurimuse lõpetamisest TM-iga, olid mõned teemad, mida ma ei mahutanud antud töösse. Kavatsen nendega edasi tegeleda. Kuigi olen siin välja toonud mitmeid väiteid, pean jätkuvalt ütlema, et nad ei ole lõplikud ega määravad. Teadvuse loomus on siiaani mõistatus nii mulle endale kui ka teadusele.

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