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THE INSTAGRAM WITCH

An Ethnographic Study About Practicing Witches in Contemporary Postsecular Sweden

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ABSTRACT

This thesis study investigates the practice of contemporary witchcraft in Sweden. Leaving prior notions of secularism behind and instead understanding modern society as embedded with spirituality and faith, as proposed by Jürgen Habermas (2008), allow for the investigation of flourishing communities in ‘secular’ countries such as Sweden. By speaking with nine practicing witches and their online displays of magic on the social media platform Instagram, this thesis study asks questions around how the online sphere shapes a knowledge and practice that was coined long before the development of new technological media, and how processes of mediatization have shaped and transformed modern witchcraft. However it does not entirely stray away from the physical offline sphere and dives into how the spirituality of contemporary witchcraft is closely interlinked with nature and notions of ‘the local’. By looking into the micro perspective of Swedish witchcraft, the thesis lastly points to a larger structure and development in regards to themes of commercialization and marketization of the practice.

In order to answer these questions the thesis conducts digital ethnography consisting of in depth interviews, field diaries and digital observations of the participants social media to capture both the offline and online dimensions of witchcraft. The study uses a non-media centric approach and a broad sense of the means of communication. The theoretical framework mainly consists of Andersson’s (2017) mediatization from below, Shove et.al. (2012) practice theory, Campbell and Tsuria’s (2022) research on digital religion and lastly Banet-Weiser’s (2012) discussion of branding religion.

The findings indicate that witchcraft transforms when applied on social media and requires aesthetic and creative competences when practicing a ritual transfer, in alignment with the affordances and visibility of Instagram. In contestation to dramatic mediatizations of magic, witches describe magic as a more mundane and romanticized filter of everyday life. Secondly, the importance of the offline local contest matters of globalization and capitalism in a spiritual environmentalism and contestation to the alienation and incapacity that the Enlightenment and deep mediatization processes brings. Lastly, the specialization of different practices of witchcraft creates innuendo for a marketization of witchcraft and in extension a neo-esotericism of witchcraft in the form of paywalls.

Keywords: witchcraft, practice, ritual transfer, commercialization, mediatization.

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INTRODUCTION TO WITCHCRAFT

My interest in witches began in a rather unexpected way. Several months ago, I was scrolling through Instagram and wayfaring across different celebrity accounts without giving much thought of it. It was one of those gloomy days when you find yourself mindlessly scrolling social media. Out of all people, I ended up on the Instagram page of the daughter of a controversial Swedish reality star (I will not spoil who it was, but she starred in the Swedish show “Svenska Hollywood fruor”¹). The daughter sometimes appeared on the show and when my scrolling brought me to her page I became curious, wondering what she might be up to these days. I immediately woke up from my slumber-scrolling when I realized that a lot of the content on her page was dedicated to witchcraft. I recognized it straight away: candles, decks of tarot cards, a pentagon drawn on the floor boards, crystals, obscure skeleton pieces, all things playing their part in the orchestrated display of a mysterious goth aesthetic. I was taken aback as this was the first time I had seen a witch on social media and I wondered if she did it seriously, or simply as a playful performative act. Still, she had bought all of these props and materials and placed them on an altar, her Instagram stories were filled with videos of her performing rituals and divinations and her imagery of witchcraft stretched far back in time. I slowly began to realize that it was not merely an aesthetic performance, she was a *practitioner*.

From that day forward I could not stop seeing witches. They were everywhere. I came across witches on Instagram and Tiktok, I noticed them in podcasts promoted on Spotify, I saw them on movie posters and series on Netflix, I distinguished them on political signs and I came across traces of witches in boutiques when walking around the city. All things pointed towards the same thing: witchcraft is on the rise and seemingly not only in movies. Witchcraft is becoming popularized across a multitude of spheres such as popular culture, politics, the commercial sphere and on social media (Bennett 2019; Hogan 2020; Richardson-Andrews 2019; Wiles 2020). Which might be a testament to Henry Jenkins (2006) theory of convergence culture, referring to how media technologies, industries, culture and social change are all related and overlapping in late modernity. Jenkins points out how convergence is not merely a top-down corporate driven process, it is also a bottom-up consumer driven process. A convergence of both

¹ English: Swedish Hollywood Wives

corporate and grassroots communication (2006:18). Essentially, there is not only a fascination with witches from the Netflix end of things, it comes from someplace else too that is more consumer and participatory driven.

As I started researching the topic of contemporary witchcraft, I wanted to explore how deep the cultural rabbit hole of witchcraft goes. To name only a few things I came across in this rabbit hole: there are a number of different Swedish podcasts dedicated to witchcraft, on Facebook there are many closed groups with communities of witches (I actually joined a few²), Reddit forums online discussing witchcraft, and an abundance of hashtags on TikTok, Youtube and Instagram referring to witchcraft. Further, there are a multitude of stores selling witch related items in almost every single large city in Sweden and they are even quite common in some. There is a store in Stockholm selling cleaning products who brand their store as a “häxotek” (in english: a witch's pharmacy/laboratory). I visited a café in a trendy part of the same city that offers divinations and crystals as a side order to your café latte.³ Countries such as Catalonia and Scotland have within a very short time span of each other formally apologized for the witch trials that took place over 300 years ago (Burgen 2022; Durn 2022). All of these things occurring simultaneously cannot be a coincidence. Somehow the witch is back with us in our social and collective consciousness, as part of the cultural zeitgeist. Witchcraft is no longer something lurking in the peripheral outskirts of our lives, feared by society. Today, the witch has moved into our cities and onto our for-you pages on Instagram.

There are a number of ways to approach the study of witches and witchcraft. I knew from the moment I began digging in this subuniverse that I wanted to research and meet with those who actually practice witchcraft and identify as witches. I had a strong ambition to lift these stories as I find them to be wildly fascinating, additionally I wanted to trace the root of these communities and try to answer why they all of a sudden have attained such a strong cultural foothold. As a student of media and communications, the technological dimensions of witchcraft are to be

² I joined a few Facebook groups for my preparatory research on the topic. However I did not claim to be a witch, rather I asked the admins of the groups for permission to use these forums as a way of finding participants. More on this in the ethical discussion in Appendix (p 84).

³ Some witch-resources for the curious: Reddit r/witchesvpatriarchy, the political slogan “we are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn’t burn” used during feminist demonstrations, hashtags #witchcraft #paganwitch on TikTok. A store in Stockholm called “Häxan” sells cleaning articles where you can ‘brew’ your own personalized scent for cleaning. This café in Stockholm is called Café Blå and is located on Södermalm.

considered. Especially as witchcraft feels so oppositional to technology and digital media, yet there are many overlaps between the two phenomena. As the concept of convergence (Jenkins 2006) implies, more and more societal sectors converge. What we see now is how communities of practicing witches have converged with the digital and technological domains.

For context, Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2016) describe contemporary society as a ‘deeply mediatized’ one. Changing media environments and its increasing connectivity, innovation and possibilities of social relations constructs our social worlds and simultaneously shapes it right back (Couldry & Hepp 2016:35). Berit Renser and Karin Tiidenberg (2020) wrote in their study of witches that different media plays a role in introducing and popularizing neopagan communities, through TV, books and magazines. In recent years social media has added yet another layer to this, allowing neopagan practitioners to enter into dialogue with one another (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020). By exploring the mediatization of witchcraft, specifically through the visual social media Instagram, I will explore how practice both online and offline are shaped and transformed when witchcraft is practiced in a contemporary society with new technological tools and platforms.

Sweden is considered to be one of the most secularized countries in the world (Bogdan 2016:343; Hjarvard & Lövheim 2012:11). However, in recent years scholars have begun to question the premises of secularization all together. Academics such as Jürgen Habermas (2008), Charles Taylor (2007), Joseph Blankholm (2022), Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004) and Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim (2012) have all argued for a societal and cultural upsurge regarding religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in the late modern Western world, introducing the concept postsecularized society. The concept refers to the relevance of religion and spirituality in ‘secular’ society, due to reasons such as migration and growing de-institutionalized spiritual communities. The concept should not be interpreted as a “surge” in religiosity, rather as a criticism of secularization that argues for how religion is irrelevant or disappearing in modern societies (Habermas 2008:17). These scholars instead argue for the continuous importance of religion and spirituality even in contemporary modern society.

Going back to the context of Sweden, the Swedish historian Henrik Bogdan (2016) points out how even though Sweden is perceived as one of the more secularized countries in the world, there is a plethora of spiritual groups and magic orders in the country (Bogdan 2016:343). In line

with ideas of postsecularism, spirituality seems to be thriving. Bogdan explains how there has been little research made on these communities in Sweden (ibid), which might be due to the fact that Swedish society identifies strongly as secular and fails to recognize the importance of these spiritual communities because of it. Either way, these communities and practitioners are organized and sustained through the use of the internet and social media platforms (Bogdan 2016:388). Which is why the study of these communities must take digital technologies and new means of communication into account.

In this ethnographic research I investigate the communities of witchcraft by going to the source: its participants. This thesis is made within the field of media and communication, but gives a slight nod towards religious studies, due to Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (2022) work in the book *Digital Religion*, that combines the study of religion with that of digital media. The aim of this study is to understand how Swedish witchcraft is practiced today in contemporary Sweden. In doing so, the study employs Elisabeth Shove's et.al. (2012) discussion of *social practice theory*, centered around how practices of everyday life change and transform over time. I investigate how witchcraft is practiced today in a mediatized and 'secular' society and what role the social media platform Instagram has in shaping and transforming those practices, in doing so the concepts of mediatization-from-below (Andersson 2017) and concepts of affordances (Costa 2018; boyd 2014) are introduced. Lastly I deal with themes of commercialization and marketization, that might challenge witch ideals (Banet-Weiser 2012; Belk 2022).

To answer this question, I have formulated the following overarching research question, "How are modern Swedish witchcraft practices today?" which has then been divided it into the three following, more concrete, subsections:

1. How are these practices mediated, with a special focus on the platform Instagram?
2. How are these practices connected to nature and locality?
3. How is contemporary witchcraft transformed into work, i.e., as something generating a salary/money?

RESEARCH OUTLINE

In the next part of the thesis I give an overview of the historical background of witchcraft, the field of research made on the topic and the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis. Thereafter in the part called “How to talk to witches?” I present the methodological approach used in the collection of the empirical material that this thesis study is based on. Thereafter, in the section called “The Instagram Witch” the analysis is provided into three parts: I. The Mediatization of Witchcraft, II. The Nordic Noir of Witchcraft and III. The Commercial Witch. Lastly, in the part called “Concluding reflections” the analysis is summarized and the research questions answered and left with a final reflection for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I outline previous research on the topic of witchcraft. Starting off with a historical overview by referencing work of Åsa Bergenheim (2020), Julian Goodare (2016), Jone Salomonsen (2002) and Ronald Hutton (2017) to name a few. Then moving into the field of popular culture and mediatization, by referencing the work of Annette Hill (2011), as well as Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2016). Thereafter, I will give an overview of the book *Digital Religion* by Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (2021) and look at how they combine the two fields of religion studies and media and communication studies, and look at further studies of witch communities online (Miller 2022; Renser & Tiidenberg 2021). Aiming to approach the topic of modern Swedish witchcraft with an emphasis on practice.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO WITCHCRAFT

There is a plethora of cultural ideas and tropes surrounding the archetype of the witch and her craft. In this section, I go into more detail on the context and history of the witch in Sweden. Historian Julian Goodare (2016) describes how, during the European witch hunts around the 15th century, people didn't believe in witches—they knew about them (2016:2). Witches were believed to be in league with the Devil, and the European witch trials were initiated by the church to charge them for worshiping the Devil rather than God (Hutton 2017:41-42). In Sweden, there are records of people being accused of witchery in between the period of 1597-1720, most of them women and farmers (Bergenheim 2020:143). Swedish historian Åsa Bergenheim (2020) argues the fear of witches during the witch trials was not fear of Satan, but rather the result of society's fear of woman and her sexuality at the time (Bergenheim 2020). The people accused of witchery were mainly women, especially those in town who knew herbal medicine—the medicine women (Goodare 2016:11). Stefan Persson (2020) writes about herbal- and folk medicine as well as their many overlaps with ideas of magic in pre-industrial Sweden. Healing, and magical rituals, were common among ordinary people (2020:105-106). With the growth of the pharmaceutical industry, folklore of herbal medicine disappeared (ibid). Essentially, many of the accused witches were ordinary folk, who practiced herbal folk medicine. I will return to the topic

of herbal medicine in the analysis part of this thesis. After the witch trials had ended, there was not a lot of mention of witchcraft for nearly 200 years (Harvey & Hardman 1996:3-4).

Historian Ronald Hutton (2017) argue that liberals and feminists, in more recent years, have somewhat romanticized the narrative of the pagan witch religion from the perspective of being something joyous and liberating, portraying the ‘natural world’ as a place for an elevated status for women, a lifestyle that stand in opposition to church aristocracy and patriarchal structures (Hutton 2017:120). Essentially, history can often be reimagined and somewhat romanticized at a later stage in time. Which brings us to the spiritual movements that started forming during the 1900s.

NEOPAGANISM, NEW AGE AND WICCA

Witchcraft goes under the umbrella term of paganism, a term used for ancient spiritual religions that worship nature and its magical capacities (Harvey & Hardman 1996). Today these ancient beliefs are called neopagan, referring to the modern interpretations of ancient paganism. An example of this is the New Age hippie movement that grew large during the 70s in the U.S. (Salomonsen 2002), which proved to be a massive commercial success for selling spiritual related items and services (Banet-Weiser 2012:189-190). Typical of these more modern neopagan movements is the reclaiming of the witch as a token for female empowerment (Salomonsen 2002; Harvey & Hardman 1996).

One of the leading spiritual communities from around that time, apart from the New Age communities, is that of ‘Wicca’. A religion founded in the U.K. around the 40s by a man called Gerald Gardner that later grew large in the U.S. Wicca combined the beliefs of paganism with those of witchcraft, creating a much more religious variation of witchcraft. Wicca grew in popularity, especially when emigrating to the U.S. and becoming affiliated with New Age movements, resulting in practicing witches (Berger 2019:5). When Wicca grew strong in the U.S. it became associated with other social movements (ibid), for example the feminist movement called *ecofeminism*. The ecofeminists Mies and Shiva (1993) writes how feminists during that time began to realize the cultural significance of the witchtrials and the strong

symbolic potential of an historical event where women were murdered under the patriarchal regime of men, the church (1993:16f).

Important to note is that not all witches are Wiccan (in this thesis, only one of the nine participants are a Wiccan witch), the others refer to themselves as pagan witches. Partly due to Wicca being a more institutionalized religion that many witches are critical of. Spiritual communities, such as pagan witches, are often described as de-institutionalized (Habermas 2008). Making Wicca the exception to this even though Wicca is also embedded with some level of individualism in its means of practice. Another distinction to make is how more neopagan communities do not consider witches to be solely women, they include both men and women in the communities (Berger 2019:5). This is manifested in this study as not all of my participants identify as women.

WITCHCRAFT IN MORE RECENT YEARS

During the middle of the 1990 these types of neopagan groups began to set roots in Sweden, mostly in urban areas in larger cities. These communities were mainly Wiccan, however there is little documentation on paganism. Partly due to the small quantity of research on paganism in Sweden, which makes it impossible to be entirely sure about the lineage of Swedish paganism (Bogdan 2016:380). Secondly, as Wicca is a religion it keeps documentation of its members. Paganism on the other hand is de-institutionalized, it has no 'church', no leading figure or holy scripture. Anyone can call themselves pagan witches and therefore the number of pagan witches is unknown.

However, something else happened during the late 1990: the development of the internet and growing computer access in Swedish households (Johnsson-Smaragdi 2002). The internet has played an important role for pagan witches to be able to find and connect with each other. This has allowed for so-called *solitary* witchcraft, referring to witches who do not practice witchcraft as part of a physical community (a so-called coven), and instead choose to practice alone. Helen Berger (2019) found that solitary witches were overrepresented in contemporary practice of witchcraft (2019:xiii). One reason for this is how witches can join online communities and forums instead where the physical locality is of lesser importance, for example on Facebook

(Bogdan 2016:388). Fortunately, social media allows for more insight into the popularity of these communities. For example, on Instagram #witchesofinstagram have 8.5 million posts and #witchcraft 7.3 million. On Tiktok #witchtok have 25.7 billion views, #witchcraft 8.9 billion and #paganwitch 102.2 million⁴.

Online communities, such as witchcraft, have been linked with other alternative social movements when emerging on the internet. Charlotte Ward and David Voas (2011) created the concept “conspirituality” to grasp how conspiracies are formed online alongside the growing popularity of alternative worldviews and spirituality (2011:103). A recent example of this is the Qanon conspiracy cult that was partly behind the storming of the Capitolium in Washington D.C. in January 2021 (Meltzer 2021). Similarly, anti-vaccination movements and far-right conspiracies have had a strong foothold in spiritual communities, such as the New Age movements during the covid-19 pandemic (Opal 2021; Parmigiani 2021; Wiseman 2021). Of course not all spiritual communities agree with these conspiracy theories, nonetheless it is worth noting that these overlaps exist with the rise of alternative spiritual lifestyles and communities online.

POSTSECULARISM AND MODERN FASCINATIONS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

There has been a rise of more popular cultural content surrounding witches over the past few years. However, it did not start out as a popular culture fascination with witches in particular. Annette Hill (2011) introduces her book on *Paranormal Media* by writing: “There is a paranormal turn in popular culture. Beliefs are on the rise in contemporary Western societies” (2011:1). Hill’s book is centered around different paranormal themes in popular culture, and one of the key points is how the increases in spiritual and paranormal awakenings in audiences can be understood as a reflection of societal insecurities. Beliefs sometimes rise in times when people seek agency over their lives (2011:9-10).

This can be linked with the postsecular turn in the late modern world. Scholars such as Habermas (2008) and Taylor (2007) have pointed towards a return of faith in society. Pippa Norris and

⁴ The numbers are collected from the platforms April 22nd 2022 and might therefore have changed upon you reading this.

Ronald Inglehart (2004) introduced the debate on secularization (the separation of religious institutions and state) by taking off from the Enlightenment. Even since the Enlightenment, leading figures in philosophy, psychology and anthropology have claimed that the role of faith will gradually be replaced by the natural sciences, calling on the 'death of religion'. This notion of secularization and death of religion has gone quite uncontested since then (Norris & Inglehart 2004:3). However, these ideas are now under criticism, due to a number of reasons, one of them being the growth of spirituality in western Europe (2004:4). Giovanna Parmigiani explained it as: "Popularized by scholars such as Jürgen Habermas (e.g., 2006), post-secularism does not imply a "return to religion," but "rather, an awareness of the continued relevance of religion in secular societies, as well as changing perceptions of what actually counts as religion, what functions it may have and where it can be located" (Parmigiani 2021:516). Religious expressions are still important for people in contemporary society, people are still spiritual but in different forms today.

In return to Hill's (2011) work on paranormal culture, it is compatible in the context of a postsecular society, where people might actually believe in something beyond natural science. Hill (2011) argues that 'culture is not only ordinary', as Raymond Williams expressed in 1958, it is also extraordinary (Hill 2011:3). Referring to the paranormal turn in popular culture and how audiences relate to paranormal content in their everyday lives (ibid). Hill points out how the paranormal has gone mainstream and is widely consumed and represented in popular culture (2011:37). In this research study I take off from the work of Hill by seeing how people include paranormal aspects in their everyday lives. But instead of pointing towards the paranormal in their cultural consumption, I refer to the paranormal practices of the spiritual community of witches.

In today's society different cultural spheres influence each other. Cultural, political and institutional spheres are converged and hard to distinguish from one another (Jenkins 2006). Religious activities are not an exception to this, as much as anything else. The mediation of witchcraft and witches are embedded and affect the actual communities of practicing witches partly due to elements of *mediatization*. Couldry and Hepp (2016) describe contemporary society as a 'deeply mediatized' one. It is a way of understanding how mediated processes are not only as a part of our society, but something that *constructs* and *is constructed* by society (2016:35).

This is due to our changing media environment with increasing connectivity, innovation and the media-interdependence of our social relations (2016:215). Popular culture and media representations have a dynamic relationship to what people are interested in and do in their everyday lives. Witchcraft is not only popular since we see it on the big screen, it usually comes from another type of resonance in people's lives. As Hill points out, increases of the paranormal and spiritual awakenings can be a reflection of a shaky society and people seeking agency over their lives in times of societal insecurities (Hill 2011:9-10). Therefore, dimensions of mediatization are necessary when studying contemporary witchcraft.

COMMERCIALIZING SPIRITUALITY

When something is part of popular culture or in mainstream culture, it is usually also profitable. Popularity is usually accompanied with implications of commercialization and commodifications of those practices and/or themes. Russell Belk (2020) defines commodification as the process of something being turned into a commodity and converted into something you can sell or buy on a market, according to capitalist logic (Belk 2020:31). For an example containing magic, the Harry Potter universe is a billion dollar industry where the experience of the Harry Potter universe goes beyond sales of the media texts, e.g. books and movies but have an endless amount of commodities invented from the transmedia storytelling. Everything from clothing items to everyday appliances and amusement parks (Hill 2011:7; Brummit 2016).

According to Russell Belk (2020) consumption culture has been explored in a wide variety of research, such as sociology, history and anthropology (2020:37), however fails to mention Religion studies. Luckily Sarah Banet-Wiser (2012) does. Banet-Weiser theorize what might be the reason for why Belk (2020) fails to mention the commodification of religion as following: "Despite deep historical relations with other social systems, especially political and economic structures (manifest in centuries of way and in economic practices such as tithing), religion has been powerfully, though not wholly, culturally defined by the content of its beliefs rather than its social, economic, or commercial purposes." (2012:166). Meaning that religion, e.g. New Age spiritual religions have many commercial dimensions to it and should therefore be understood accordingly (2012:171). In this thesis study, Banet-Weiser and her work on commodification of

the religion and/or spirituality will be used and applied to the communities of witchcraft rather than New Age communities.

Denise Cush (2007) and Chris Miller (2022) have explored aspects of commercial forces in relation to young witches. Cush (2007) explores the distinction between the commercialization of authentic and in-authentic witchcraft among young witches and found that the distinction was hard to make and often overlapped (2007:51). In Millers (2022) article “How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok: Intersections of Digital, Consumer, and Material Culture(s) on #WitchTok”, he focuses on witches on the social media platform TikTok. Miller highlights ‘material religion’, which refers to the material means of the practice of witchcraft and how different objects are attributed certain qualities or mystical powers. Miller (2022) writes: “The thingness of things attends to how and why Witches justify their use of different objects, and how this constructs and expresses a religious worldview.” (2022:5). Miller watched videos under certain witch-related hashtags on the platform and explored how aspects of commodification were represented (2022:2). However, the study fails on actually speaking to witches, asking them about their religious expressions or potential opinions on consumerism or the commercialization of their communities. In this thesis study I speak with the participants on topics around the business aspects of witch culture to what the witches think of this themselves instead of assuming. Secondly, both studies reproduce the antiquated argument of associated young women in particular with the sphere of mass-consumption and commodities. Something Rita Felski has argued strongly against, pointing out the misogynistic nature of these associations (Felski, 1995:28f), by insisting on doing commercial studies of the interest of young women, these prejudices persist in our cultural consciousness. I therefore did not go out of my way to center my thesis study around young women.

PARANORMAL PRACTICES

Two words that are usually applied to the practice of witchcraft are *esotericism*. Esotericism refers to secret knowledge production in closed communities, where the knowledge is gatekept by its practitioners from the rest of the world. Typical of these communities are how the initiation into the communities are limited to a small and specific type of people. This can be seen as a cultural heritage from the persecution of witches during the witch trials and the esoteric

knowledge of witchcraft as a necessity to avoid criminal charges for its practitioners (Bogdan 2016:343). Judging from this concept, the world of witchcraft is historically associated with secrecy and mystery. However, with the rise of the internet and new technologies, the nature of these previously esoteric communities are no longer as hidden (ibid). Something that leads to a more multifaceted version of witchcraft.

Before moving on, let's map out what paranormal practices refer to. Harvey Irwin's (2009) thorough categorization of paranormal practices are: divinatory arts, esoteric systems of magic, new age therapies, spirits, Eastern mystico-religious beliefs, Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, extraterrestrial aliens and cryptozoological creatures (Irwin 2009:4-5). These categories are not separate fields of belief, many adhering to more than one of them. Modern witchcraft fits into many of these paranormal fields, even since the development of new technologies, different spiritual techniques from different parts of the world have become accessible to a global audience (Berger & Ezzy 2009:509). For example, as you enter a store that caters to a spiritual audience, you can find different materials and tools from cultures all around the world. Tarot cards, sage, crystals and meditation are all from different cultures⁵, but cater to the individual's preferred spiritual practice.

The practice of witchcraft today is individualized and can be described as eclectic. The concept refers to the combination of many different practices, beliefs and cultural traditions. According to Berit Renser & Katrin Tiidenberg this is a result of new means of communication (2020:4). Neopagan movements can collect information from a wide variety of platforms, blogs, Wikipedia, YouTube thus making the individual practitioner less limited to the local geographical knowledge (ibid). Another way of describing these eclectic tendencies are how they are characterized by a "pick and mix" model (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020:1), or what others would call "patchwork religion" (Helland & Kienzl 2021:45).

According to the Swedish historian Bogdan (2016), the internet has been essential for the development of pagan networks over the past ten years (2016:388). Different practices, beliefs, gods and goddesses can be combined from a number of different traditions since the rise of the

⁵ Tarot card readings originate from Europe. Sage cleanings originate from the Indigenous groups of the Americans. Crystal healing originates from Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, Ancient Greece, or Ancient Rome. Meditation from India and Buddhism (Source: wikipedia).

internet, or web 2.0. Knowledge is accessible for individual actors resulting in the previously mentioned solitary practice. It is characterized by heavy individualism with eclectic elements and a patchwork/pick and mix style of faith (Bogdan 2016:386). Helen Berger (2019) stresses how solitary witches usually visit somewhat of the same internet sites when researching the practice of witchcraft (2019:2). Unfortunately, neither Bogdan (2016) or Berger (2019) goes any further into discussions regarding the dynamics between new media, such as the internet, and how it actually shapes witchcraft.

Researching aspects of online dimensions is important in understanding how these communities are formed today, when the entire practice around witchcraft is shaped due to new technological means of communication and information.

RESEARCHING RELIGION ONLINE

One of the more obvious differences in practicing spirituality today in comparison to a few hundreds years ago, is the emergence of new digital tools. In the book *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts*, Ron Grimes (2006) writes:

“[n]ot long ago, the terms ‘ritual’ and ‘media’ would have been regarded as labels for separate cultural domains – the one sacred, the other secular...” (2006:3).

According to Grimes, it is no longer controversial to practice religion or spirituality using different digital technologies (2006:4). Today there are a plethora of religious activities online (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020:3; Campbell 2021; Berger & Ezzy 2009). The combination of studying religious expressions and the field of media and communications are therefore necessary in order to understand how religious practices are actually shaped by online environments.

It should be mentioned that many witches do not consider themselves religious. The witches I spoke with were critical of the term ‘religious’ applied to their witchcraft, and did not identify as

such, instead calling themselves spiritual⁶. From a researcher's point of view, it is not entirely easy to grasp the actual practical difference between the two. Yet, I believe that many witches associate 'religion' with institutionalized beliefs. The term 'religion' seems to make witches uneasy since neo-paganism is very much based on de-institutionalized faith (Habermas 2008:17; Renser & Tiidenberg 2020:1). Further it the institution of the church are responsible for the witch trials which might also factor in. I will not go about and call my participants religious⁷. I will still use the concepts and theories from studies of 'digital religion'. A more fitting name in the context of this study would be 'digital *spirituality*'.

DIGITAL SPIRITUALITY

Religious activities online have been studied even since the emergence of the internet, Heidi Campbell and Ruth Tsuria dedicates the book *Digital Religion* (2021) to this field. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) mention how one of the first studies of religious activities online was made in 1995 by Greg Grieve, who actually wrote about neopagan communities. Since then many studies have followed focusing on everything from paganism to Christianity in these online environments (Campbell & Tsuria 2021:2). The book conceptualizes how the digital space (e.g. the internet) acts as a space for religion to be negotiated, imagined and lives outside of traditional religious institutions (Lundby & Evolvi 2021:234). Since the field of digital religion is rather new and unexplored, Campbell and Tsuria (2021) do a great job of mapping out the field and the interdisciplinary ways of approaching it. I use 'digital spirituality' when applying these theories to my case, as spirituality should not be directly equated with religious faith. Partly due to the wishes of the witches themselves, but mostly due to the de-institutionalized and individualized nature of spirituality in comparison to institutionalized religion.

In the book on digital religion, many different concepts are presented, such as: 'identity', 'authority' and 'community'. Helland & Kienzl (2021) write a chapter called "Ritual" and this is the concept I will be focusing on in this thesis. The concept of ritual is not only associated with

⁶ Many of my participants called themselves 'spirituell' or 'andlig' in Swedish. However, both translate to 'spiritual' in English. The difference between the two is unclear, but seemingly 'spirituell' is a Swedish loan from the English term.

⁷ With one exception: Aradia considers herself being religious as she is part of a Wiccan tradition.

religion, many mundane everyday activities can be described as rituals since the concept refers to cultural meaning making systems in our everyday lives, religious or not (Helland & Kienzl 2021:50). Rituals are also something we can perform both *online* and *offline*, often embedded in one another. The work of Nadja Miczek (2008) has been very influential in the study of digital religion. Miczek (2008) proposes that when looking at rituals in an online environment, elements of: transformation, invention and exclusion, should be taken into account. These are tools that can grasp how ritual transfer changes in an online environment. These theories are tied with social constructivism and deal with how technologies, society and social constructions of belief shapes human practices (Miczek 2008:150). This is explained further in under “Theoretical tools”.

In the study of digital religion the focus on institutional religiosity is prominent. Witchcraft is de-institutionalized and individualized and the ritual transfer in witchcraft does not come from an authoritative institution, instead shaped by individual practices. Thus resulting in ritual work that is less conformed and more of a subjective expression. Researching ritual work on Instagram is one way of getting a better understanding of ‘digital spirituality’ in particular.

WITCHES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Witches have been studied by academics and historians for many years. Henrik Bogdan (2016), Julian Goodare (2016), Per Faxneld (2017; 2020) and Åsa Berhenheim (2020) are only a fraction of the examples of scholars who have dedicated work to the study of the witch and her meaning and importance in history. Bergenheim (2020) arguing for how the witch represents the fear of women's sexuality during the time period of the witch hunts and Henrik Bogdan (2016) the role of witches in esoteric communities in Scandinavia (2016:380). There are indefinite ways of approaching the topic, in this research study the focus includes the online sphere and more recent years of technological developments.

There are not a lot of studies about contemporary witchcraft within the field of media and communications, yet there are a few scholars who have approached it from this angle. Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy (2009) write in an article about young witches and their relation to mass mediated portrayals of witches and witchcraft. They found that the practices of witchcraft

are very heterogeneous since the tradition is de-institutionalized. Without a centralized institution no one can really say what is the correct way to practice the craft (Berger & Ezzy 2009:503). Thus resulting in these very individual, reflexive and reflective practices. Similarly to the previously mentioned notions of “eclectic witchcraft”. Berger and Ezzy (2009) also point out that the growth of feminism, environmentalism, individual reflexivity and magical realism have contributed to the growth in these communities (2009:502). The study weighs heavily on the concept of identity and discussions of mainstreaming witchcraft rather than a focus of everyday life and the actual practice of witchcraft. In this thesis study, *practice* is emphasized rather than identity.

In Berit Renser and Katrin Tiidenberg’s (2020) article “Witches on Facebook: Mediatization of Neo-Paganism” the authors explore a community of Estonian witches in a group on Facebook. The study aims to answer how the online sphere and social media shapes the online practices of neopaganism (2020:3). My study is very much inspired by this article, with a few exceptions. Much like the method of Renser and Tiidenberg (2020:4), I also include both ethnographic interviews and online observations in my empirical material. However, I have chosen to focus on Instagram rather than Facebook. My participants were not very fond of the communities on Facebook and preferred Instagram when consuming and producing mediated witchcraft⁸. Renser and Tiidenberg (2020) focus mostly on the concept of ‘authority’ from the book *Digital religion* (Campbell & Tsuria 2021), asking how authority is maintained and achieved in the witch-groups on Facebook. I am focusing on the concept of ‘ritual’ instead. Facebook groups have a group dynamic which makes matters of authority relevant. On Instagram on the other hand, the individual Instagram accounts are more centered around the person's individual display of magic, which is why the concept of ritual makes more sense to apply to that platform and as stated above, ‘ritual’ better encapsulates the individualized practices of solitary witches today.

CULTURE AS CONTESTATION AND ECOFEMINISM

To freshen up our memory of neopaganism, it is the modern practice and interpretation of old pagan religions, characterized by the worshipment of nature. Paganism is characterized by

⁸ More detailed information on this in the method section, page 37.

animism which is a fancy way of referring to the spiritual belief of considering all things in the universe as connected (Salomonsen 2002:8). Neopaganism comes in many different forms, e.g. the New Age movement and Wicca, the religious witchcraft (Harvey & Hardman 1996; Salomonsen 2002). There are many overlaps between neopaganism, witchcraft and ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a feminist tradition that was initiated around the same time as New Age movements grew strong in the U.S. What makes ecofeminism different from many other feminist branches are the spiritual project embedded in the movement, which is also what makes it one of the more controversial feminist traditions (Adams & Gruen 2014:14). Ecofeminism also values living in balance with nature and considers the exploitation of nature as a similar experience to that of sexism and racism. Tone Salomonsen (2002) describes how ecofeminism makes the point of how women and animals are being treated equally under the patriarchal regime and how their experiences should be understood as interlinked (Salomonsen 2002:6). Which is why anti patriarchal consumerism is the core of ecofeminism (Mies & Shiva 1993:2). The religious historian Per Faxneld (2017) states that witchcraft has historically been linked with women's liberation and empowerment and how the act of practicing witchcraft can be a way for the "powerless" to attain respect and agency (Faxneld 2017:45). In the overlap of these movements and communities, the notions of women's empowerment and elevation and environmentalism become apparent.

As previously mentioned, witches have been studied throughout history. The witch craze we are noticing today is the re-run as witch communities were growing during the 1970s and 1990s too. Back then these groups were largely studied by anthropologists, as the field of media and communications were yet to be aligned with this research. These studies are important to remember as they greatly document the origin of these communities and their ties to other movements. The most prominent one being the environmental and the ecofeminist movement.

CONTESTING PATRIARCHY

The ecofeminists Carol Adams and Lori Gruen (2014) point out how the world is constructed and understood through the binary relationship between men and women. Men are associated with culture and modernity, such as the scientific study of the world and industrialization. Ideals associated with the Enlightenment. Women on the other hand are usually put in direct opposition

to men, thus becoming nature and everything before the modern, being primal, emotional and irrational (Adams & Gruen 2014:3). In a way, the witch is the embodiment of this very binary. The witch is as far away from the cultured civilized man as she possibly could be. She is closely linked with nature through her craft, (e.g. herbal medicine) and womanhood (as almost all cultures have associated witchcraft with something inherently feminine). The witch is also contesting science, as magic is more associated with the spiritual realm. Ben Highmore (2015) describes culture as a *contestation* of meaning (2015:20). In the communities of witchcraft today, dominant culture is contested, Not only ideologically as many other feminist movements already do, but witchcraft and ecofeminism also vouch for a certain lifestyle and practice. In this thesis I will explore the contestations of dominant culture within the community of witches in Sweden today.

It is hard to talk about ecofeminism without mentioning the critique of it. There are elements of ecofeminism that reproduce biological differentiations between men and women and reinforce this binary thinking between men and women, even though ecofeminism critiques it. Ecofeminism vouch that we should celebrate nature, the natural and the old ways. Reclaiming the binary of “the woman”. In doing so, ecofeminism gives credit to the binary, it only mentions that the binary of the woman is superior to that of “man”. Further, ecofeminism has been widely criticized for being gender essentialist, meaning that gender is attributed certain inherent qualities (Gaard 2011). For example, the woman’s close relation with nature. It also reinforces the same dualist view of gender by referring to the body as instrumental for certain attributes.

RESEARCH GAP

Witches and witchcraft has not gone unexplored in academic research, on the contrary there are oceans of studies and research made about the historical figure. However, most of this research is centered around the witch as a historical figure and less about the witch as a contemporary one (Bergenheim 2020; Goodare 2016; Hutton 2017). A lot of research has been done around practices of witchcraft, yet lacking a more contemporary understanding of the influences of mediatization and the digital sphere (Salomonsen 2002; Berger 2019). The more contemporary studies have had a less ethnographical approach and reinforced prejudice of young women’s

large and mindless patterns of consumption (Cush 2007), or simply studied the expressions of witchcraft and consumption without actually speaking to the participants (Miller 2022). Further, the witch needs to be understood in other ways than how authority is maintained and achieved (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020) or how popular culture influences practitioners (Berger & Ezzy 2009).

It is important to try and see how all of these tendencies correlate but especially to not only study the expressions of witchcraft, but also meet and speak with the witches who are the true experts on the subject. Further, there is a gap in looking and researching the practices of witchcraft in both an offline and an online as society is mediatized and the spheres are embedded in one another. To truly grasp what everyday life is like for these people and how it reflects society as a whole, both the offline and online dimensions of witchcraft should be considered.

Further, there is a gap in research about these communities in Sweden in particular. Witch communities in the U.S. have been studied quite extensively in the 90s and beginning of the 2000s (Berger 1999; Harvey & Hardman 1996; Salomonsen 2002). More recent studies have studied concepts such as the conspирituаlity of witches in Italy (Parmigiani 2021), and how authority is achieved in Estonian Facebook groups for witches (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020). But as Henrik Bogdan (2016) has pointed out, the field of paganism in modern Sweden is unexplored and incomplete (2016:388). Especially in the context of Swedish culture and history with more nuanced perspectives within the field of media and communications.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Here I propose the theoretical framework and tools that are used in the analysis of this case study and its empirical material. The approach embedded in the entire research is that of *mediatization from below* (Andersson 2017). In unity with mediatization, the method and theory of *practice theory* as proposed by Shove et.al. (2012) is used throughout.

PRACTICE THEORY, AFFORDANCES AND MEDIATIZATION

The concept of mediatization is mainly based on Magnus Andersson's (2017) article "Mediatization from below", in which Andersson proposes thorough analyses with thick description in relation to the mediatization concept, to avoid the pitfalls of either oversimplifying or relativising the concept. Andersson (2017) also advises on adding another layer of theory to that of mediatization (2017:49), in this case that part is played by Elisabeth Shove et. al. (2012) book *The Dynamics of Social Practice, Everyday Life and how it Changes*. The book presents the cultural theoretical approach and framework of social practice theory. The theory (and method) captures how behavioral change stems from changes in social practices, framing the dynamics of societal change through looking at the changes and stability of human practices (2012:2). Shove et.al. (2012) situates their approach to practices from Giddens structuration theory, that largely focuses on dynamic between agency and structure. This theory revolves around how human activity and social structure are recursively related. Shove writes: "activities are shaped and enabled by structures of rules and meanings, and these structures are, at the same time, reproduced in the flow of human action." (2012:3).

This very much resembles the theory of mediatization by Couldry and Hepp (2016) as briefly mentioned before, where they stress how mediated processes are both *constructed* by society and simultaneously *construct* society (2016:35). In both cases of mediatization and practice theory, the dynamic aspects of the relationship between a large structure and a smaller practice is at hand. Since mediatization is sometimes criticized for the lack of exemplification and practicality (Andersson 2017), practice theory allows me to fill that gap by pointing at the specific practices of witchcraft of my participants, both offline and online. I use Andersson's (2017) mediatization from below in order to exemplify the mediatization processes and pointing out how practices in the communities of witchcraft, point to larger societal structures.

The main concepts from practice theory that are applied to capture the changes in the social practices are: the *material* of the practice: e.g. the tools, tangible objects, technologies, the *competence* required: e.g. skill, technique and know-how and lastly *meaning*: e.g. symbolic meaning and aspirations linked with the practice (Shove et.al. 2010:8). Breaking apart contemporary practices of witchcraft into these elements, allow for insight into how the practice changes over time (ibid). Especially when the practice exists in the dynamic reality of social media and new technologies, and the spheres of offline and online practices are embedded in one

another (Helland & Kienzl 2021:44). This double theoretization, as proposed by Andersson (2017), is made in order to uncover how processes of mediatization of witchcraft transform the practice and its meaning to its practitioners.

In order to discuss how practices are shaped on social media, the concept of *affordances* is applied. Affordances refer to the possibilities and limitations of Instagram, simplified the affordances points at the means of practice. For example the searchability and visibility of a platform (Boyd 2014; Costa 2018:3649). Tom Leaver's et.al (2020) book *Instagram* is centered specifically on the platform Instagram and its layout and affordances and will also be used when describing how the platform works. This will be combined with the more ethnographic affordance concept proposed by Elisabetta Costa (2018), called *affordances-in-practice*. This is used to highlight people's agency when using online platforms (2018:3651), instead of giving away all agency to the infrastructure of e.g. Instagram. Costa (2018) criticizes the traditional usage of the concept of affordances as they are actually always contested and worked around by the people that use the platform (2018:3649). Costa's concept of affordances-in-practice is a good complement to Andersson's (2017) 'mediatization from below' where he argues for a more ethnographic approach when using the concept of mediatization in order to refer to a macro perspective. Costa's (2018) concept allows for a thick description of how the practitioners use their agencies on the platform of Instagram and how they reflect upon the mediation of witchcraft.

There is constant dialogue between mediatization and practice, where practices are shaped by affordances of given platform. In addition, practices shape social worlds and culture. Practice theory solves the issues when using concepts such as mediatization and affordances that sometimes strips the participants of their agency and refer to the intangible sublime notion of "the media". The combination of these theoretical frameworks allow for an ethnographic exploration of the communities of witchcraft without taking away their agency and importance.

RITUAL TRANSFER AND OFFLINE/ONLINE SPHERES

In Campbell and Tsuria (2021) book on digital religion, they propose many different ways of approaching the subject of religion in an online sphere. The book is mainly focusing on the

Abrahamitic religions, which is important to note as they are much more institutionalized and conformed than witchcraft (Campbell & Tsuria 2021). I chose to focus on the concept of ritual in this thesis study for a number of reasons. First of all, there is no universal way of defining a ritual, no classification will please everyone. However, Christopher Helland and Lisa Kienzl (2021) who write: a ritual is used to teach, it forms identities, regulates societies, draws communities together, transforms the psyche, and enacts faith”, referring to the work of Grimes (1982) and Bell (1992) (Helland & Kienzl 2021:42). Further, Bell (1992) emphasized that it is less useful to try and define a universal concept of rituals, instead the focus should be on looking at human activities and how they define their own differentiation and purposes (ibid). The concept is rewarding due to its fluid nature and how it can be performed individually, which is what I will be researching as (most of) my participants are solitary and use the more individualized platform of Instagram. Unlike the concept of ‘authority’ which is much more relational. Worth noting is that I do not aim to define or debate the definition of a ritual. Instead rituals are regarded in this study, as a manifestation of the witches' spirituality, both in their offline and online practices.

Nadja Miczek's concept of *ritual transfer* (2008:150) is the main tool for grasping the ritual practices of witchcraft. The work of Nadja Miczek (2008) has been very influential in the study of digital religion. Miczek (2008) proposes that when looking at rituals in an online environment, elements of: *transformation*, *invention* and *exclusion*, should be taken into account. These are tools that can grasp how *ritual transfer* changes in an online environment. These theories are tied with the discussions around how technologies, society and social constructions of belief shapes human practices (Miczek 2008:150). As ritual transfers can be understood as individual expressions they are also linked with elements of aesthetically, inspired by Giovanna Parmigiani (2021) who argue for the aesthetic (sensory and artistic) elements of New Age movements (2021:509). She explores this in regards to conspирuality, a concept referring to the overlap between spiritual movements and conspiracy theories (2021:506). In this thesis conspiracies will not be explored as that would make this study a whole lot longer. Still, aesthetic elements will be used in regards to aspects of ritual transfer. In order to understand the possibilities and limitations of the ritual transfer, the concepts of affordances-in-practice are introduced in conversation with it. Further, the ritual transfer is a form of practice, sort of a practice with a spiritual undertone. Which is why it also works out well with practice theory (Shove et.al. 2012).

Helland and Kienzl (2021) describe the work proposed by O’Leary (1996) who specifically writes about neopagans. In his research he found that there was a divide when it came to whether or not the neopagan practitioners believed that rituals could take place in an inorganic space (internet/online) rather than the natural (physical/offline) space (Helland & Kienzl 2021:44). The dynamic interplay between offline and online, referring to this divide, will be explored in the discussion and how these two spheres relate to the practice of witchcraft.

NEOLIBERAL COMMERCIALISM

Lastly, theoretical frameworks surrounding neoliberalism and capitalist society will be applied. Ben Highmore’s (2015) description of culture as a constant battle of meaning will appear in order to understand how the communities and culture of witches differentiate themselves from dominant hegemonic culture (2015:20). This will be understood according to Sarah Banet-Weiser’s (2012) description of the ambivalent brand culture, where she explains how even groups such as pagan communities that identify as outside of mainstream capitalist culture still suffers under the same neoliberal values that any other cultural sphere and should be understood in regards to commercialization and issues of *authenticity* (2012:167).

The concepts of *commodification* and *marketization* is inspired by Russell Belk (2020) and his discussion of how markets constantly are tapping into new spheres due to the market logic of today’s society (2020:31). Commodification refers to the process of something previously considered not to be a market good being turned into one. According to a market logic where things can be prized, branded, promoted and sold in a capitalist logic and also competing with other commodities (Belk 2020:31). Belk quotes Mark Tadajewski’s description of the concept of marketization as: “the promotion of market ideologies and the expansion of the market into areas traditionally beyond its purview.”. Belk goes on to note how marketization works in similar processes as that of commodification (ibid). These concepts are used to grasp how religion and/or spirituality can be seen in the context of the capitalist society we exist in today.

HOW TO TALK TO WITCHES

In approaching the case of contemporary witches in Sweden this thesis study conducts a *qualitative* research approach. Qualitative analysis is contextualized, non-linear and characterized by a deep understanding of the topic (Bazeley 2013:4). In order to reach that type of analysis, the method needs to be shaped for that aim. My interpretation of this is to not only investigate the displays of witchcraft on social media, but by speaking with the actual practitioners. In this chapter I will go into detail about my methodological approach to this thesis.

METHODOLOGICAL AIMS AND REFLECTION

My research has its footing in a *phronetic* approach in order to achieve a reflexive analysis, inspired by Bent Flyvbjerg (2001). Flyvbjerg emphasizes the importance of phronetic social sciences as the approach does not attempt to make any value judgments or to implement a definite answer (Flyvbjerg 2001:58). Phronetic research allows for the study of practice and a detailed narration of reality (2001:129). These studies require qualitative methods. Flyvbjerg emphasized the ‘power of example’ and how case studies can produce contextual knowledge in order to understand human experience (Flyvbjerg 2001:71). The world and people are too complex to generalize and people are self-reflective and can not always be quantified. Instead, qualitative methods should take subjects' interpretations into account. As Flyvbjerg states “The object of the study is a subject” (2001:56). Individuals and communities are complex and should be treated as such.

Sandra Harding's *Sciences from Below* (2008) is used to guide the theoretical aims of the study towards a science that does not speak for its research subjects, rather seeing them as agents and historical subjects rather than objects (2008:106). One example of this is how science has a tendency of producing knowledge *about* women (for example), instead of *for* women. This is not only unethical and dehumanizing, it is also empirically weak. Sandra Harding (2011) argues that listening to the stories of people is the best empirical positioning (Sandra 2008:114-115). In the case of this research study, this has made me not only watch witches on Instagram, or TikTok or

Facebook as other studies have done (Miller 2022), but also meet with the actual practitioners and try to understand their lives as witches instead of assuming. As John Corner (2011) once wrote: “Assume less, investigate more” (Corner 2011:86). In order to give the participants justice and an empirically rich voice, I chose to conduct an ethnographic research approach.

(DIGITAL) ETHNOGRAPHY

Media is an integral part of every-day life in the Global North. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook have become hubs for knowledge and connection, as proposed by David Gauntlett (2018). Witchcraft has naturally made its way to those places. Seeing as witchcraft historically is understood as spiritual and abstract practice yet centered in rituals performed by the body, one aspect of this study is to investigate how witches utilize modern technology in their practices and every-day lives. Shaun Moores (2012) describes a non-media centric approach when studying media does not explicitly need to be centered around a media object itself, partly due to how media play such a massive role in every aspect of how we understand society and ourselves (Moores 2012:11). In my ethnographic approach, I do not only focus on the practice and use of social media and technology but the entire world around it. As Christine Hine (2015) points out, digital ethnography is a study *for* the internet and not *of* the internet. It should study the activities that contemporary internet allows (Hine 2015:6). Not necessarily by only researching the practices made on the actual digital platform.

Ethnography has a wide range of definitions, some more open than others. In this research study I define ethnography using Karen O'Reilly's definition from 2005, that Sarah Pink et.al. (2016) also uses in the book *Digital Ethnography*, that is: “‘iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods... that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role and that views humans as part object/part subject’ (2005:3)” (Pink et.al. 2016:3). This definition is useful as it does not insist on combining ethnography with a specific paradigm of theory, and highlights the role of the researcher. Pink et. al. (2016) proposes a number of different ways of adding the digital sphere to an ethnographic method as the internet and the online world is so embedded with our everyday life and realities. The online sphere is vital in the formations of our social and cultural lives today, and thus ‘the

digital' needs to be included in the study of people's everyday life. As Pink (2016) writes, new media technologies amount to new ways of engagement and the ethnography needs to be reflexive in the ways of capturing and understanding how these new technologies influence means of communication (Pink et. al. 2016:21).

PRACTICE AS A THEORY AND METHOD

Karen O'Reilly (2012) writes how "ethnography should be informed by a theory of practice" (2012:1). There is no standard definition of ethnography, o'Reilly (2012) asserts how the term can be applied to any small scale research centered around an everyday life setting that uses more than one method and that focuses on individual practices and explanations rather than their quantification (2012:3). Ethnography is a reflective and flexible process which allows the researcher to freely explore (O'Reilly 2012) a phenomenon as understood in the everyday, as situated in a social, historical and cultural context. It is crucial to understand these cases in regard to their cultural and historical context. Ethnography should be critical, theoretically informed and be relevant for cultural politics (ibid).

This research is centered around the concept of *practice*, mainly inspired by Shove et.al (2012) practice theory and how practices are ritualized as suggested by Campbell (2022). This is something that O'Reilly suggests as the best way to go about doing ethnographic research (2012:6). O'Reilly (2012) stresses how the bridge between micro and macro perspectives can be achieved by looking at the practice of individuals to be able to notice wider structures. Andersson (2017) also proposes micro-level contexts that in a second-order of investigation can say something about larger society in order to conduct a 'mediatization from the below' type of study (2017:36). Practice theory as proposed by Shove et.al. (2012) is not only a theoretical framework but also a methodological one. Much like Andersson (2017) and o'Reilly (2012) practice theory also vouches for the study of contextualized social practices in relation to societal structures in order to understand how societies change (Shove et.al. 2012:3). The methodological choices are made in light of this, making sure that both the qualitative interviews, the meetings and the digital observations are different ways of grasping these practices.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

The offline and online spheres are embedded in one another and hard to separate, therefore I judged it necessary to approach the witches from both perspectives and how they correlate, inspired by Hine (2015). Even though the thesis discusses matters of online and offline spheres, they are not considered to be two separate dimensions, instead as entirely interlinked with one another. My ethnographic approach amounted to a reflexive process of building my methods of data collections. One of these methods are qualitative interviews characterized by a reflexive and curious approach rather than a rigid interview approach. I combine the interview method with field diaries and online observations of the participants' Instagram accounts. O'Reilly (2012) suggests how ethnographic research is *iterative-inductive*, referring to the inseparability of inductivism, data collection, analysis and writing (o'Reilly 2012:5). The choices I made throughout this ethnographic study have not been linear. In alignment with this approach, I tried out a few different ideas along the way and went back and forth between different ideas. In the next section I will overview some of these.

I initially planned on including *media diaries*, inspired by the diary methods in relation to fanfiction (Pink et al. 2016), where the participants log their everyday lives for about a week, however it did not work out (see Appendix 4. for further reflection). Additionally I intended on doing a participatory method where I would join in a ritual or ceremony with the witches, but this did not work out either as I ran into ethical difficulties. This will be further reflected upon in the analysis part III. The iterative-inductive approach allowed me to explore, and try out different ways of lifting the voices of the witches (o'Reilly 2012:5). For example through 'media diaries' and/or participation, even though it often is the case when working with human subjects in research, every-day life can also prevent participation.

What I did end up doing was conducting *field diaries* from the interviews and meetings with my participants. Bazeley (2013) illustrates how part of ethnography is the observational method and fieldwork (2013:68), taking field notes are part of the researcher's way of making sense of the observations and are valid for the study (ibid). I was inspired by Shanti Sumartojo and Sarah Pink's (2019) description of atmospheres. How using sensory impressions to describe the atmosphere of a place are insignificant to the study of how people experience the world. In order to understand atmospheres however, the qualities and affordances of that place must be taken

into account (Sumartojo & Pink 2019:3). My field diaries serve these purposes as they are essential for really understanding the atmosphere and aesthetic nature of the culture but also the ethnographic method. Even though they do not really appear in my final analysis they were still vital for my writing and understanding for my participants. Parts of these field diaries are displayed in Appendix 7., anonymized and pseudonymized of course.

INTERVIEWS

The interviews were my main method and source of empirical data. I carried out nine qualitative interviews. Four of them conducted in person and five of them over Zoom. The somewhat uneven, and at times frustrating, division of four offline and five online interviews stand as reflection of conducting a research study during a pandemic. More on this in Appendix 1.1.

For the witches that I met in person I traveled to their homes, workplaces or studios. They invited me into their homes, showed me their gardens, introduced me to their families, presented their art and altars and guided me along long corridors and staircases of their office. They guided me in their everyday lives, I walked along the very same corridors as they do everyday, oriented myself in another city guiding myself along the streets that they follow each day without a map in hand. I was wrapped in a blanket in their garden and in one case hit my head on the door frame of their home. I gained insight not in the lives of a witch but rather in the life of another person.

I conducted *semi-structured* interviews, inspired by the article “Making Sense of Teen Life: Strategies for Capturing Ethnographic Data in a Networked Era” by Danah boyd (2016). I went along with the topics of my interviewee and followed their lead and rarely stayed on scripts and each of my interviews was different due to this (boyd 2016). In the article boyd (2016) explains how these style of interviews work well when including the digital sphere, the relaxed interview style allows for the interviewer to spin along with the interviewee when those topics come up naturally instead of forced (2016). Seale (2012) describes this interview style as relying on an interview guide, yet allowing the conversation to go anywhere the interview subject wants to. It’s a way to have a reflexive approach (Seale 2012:220), something that is very important for an ethnographic and inductive research study (Pink et.al. 2016:3). This inductive approach allows

for a general starting point without being influenced by any prior prejudice towards the communities (Seale 2012:368). The interviews I conducted were all inherently different from one another as they were a reflection of our meeting rather than a guide of questions. The interview guide, pilot interview, details on my transcription process and consent form provided to the participants are all exhibited in Appendix 2.3.

In Table 1, as shown below I have summarized the amount of interviews, the number of interview hours I had in total and lastly the amount of transcribed pages I got from it. The length of the interviews spanned from 65 minutes to 116 minutes. For a more detailed account of each individual interview, see Appendix 2.

Table 1: Summary

Interviews	Time	Pages
9 interviews (4 in person, 5 over Zoom)	831 min= 13.86 hours	198 pages of transcription

SAMPLING

For my method of sampling I set up a few very open criteria for participants. Hansen and Machin (2013) stresses how criteria for sampling can be very different and wide, however, it is important to be clear and transparent about the reason for the sampling criteria (2013:42). Since the topic of this research is such a narrow field and the subject of study is a rather specific group of people, I did not want to exclude possible participants and therefore kept the criteria simple. My sampling criteria were 1. Do they identify as and call themselves a witch? And 2. Do they practice witchcraft? If the answer was yes to both questions it got a green light from me. For full reflections on sampling, see Appendix 1.2.

WHY INSTAGRAM?

Even though this thesis is centered around the media of Instagram in particular, not all of the participants used the platform. Going into this research, I had assumed most of the participants would be active on Facebook, as I could tell there were many groups on the platform, also due to the Renser and Tienberg's (2020) article that focuses on Facebook (2020). Some participants did prefer using Facebook pages or Facebook groups when mediating their witchcraft. However, the vast majority preferred Instagram over any other social media platform. My approach towards this topic is inductive, I obviously had these assumptions but I was ready to be reflexive if proven wrong. I did not come to this conclusion and choice of platform until after I had met with the participants. Thankfully ethnography is such a reflexive method allowing me to change focus accordingly. For full details on the participants' use of online media, see appendix⁹.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The names of my participants' pseudonyms in alphabetical order: Aradia, Demeter, Diana, Freya, Hekate, Hel, Kali, Stigrid and Vita Stjärnan. The names were chosen by the participants themselves with the expectation of Aradia and Demeter where the participants asked me to choose for them. I didn't intend for the names to be inspired by folklore and mythology but since many practicing witches have a strong connection and interest in these topics it naturally became so. The participants I met in person are: Demeter (in her work studio/ garden), Freya (in her home), Hekate (at her work place) and Hel (in her home). I met Aradia, Diana, Kali, Stigrid and Vita Stjärnan over Zoom.

The participants of these types of communities are usually specialized in a wide range of different practices as every single participant had practiced witchcraft for at least 3 years (some had practiced for over 30). In the chart below I give a simplified overview of the witches difference in specialities and traditional background¹⁰. Not all of the participants identify as women. This thesis is a reflection of contemporary witchcraft that is inclusionary for all, something that all of my interviews emphasized during our interviews as a core value among

⁹ Table 6, page 92.

¹⁰ Traditional backgrounds refer to what branch of witchcraft they either identify as, or were trained in.

witches today. One of the participants explained it as witchcraft is no longer believed to be inherited or genetic. Instead, if you practice witchcraft, you are by definition a witch. Which is also why the notion of practice is highlighted and heavily analyzed in this study.

Table 2. Chart over participants's preferred practices and traditions

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Speciality/ preferred practices</i>	<i>Tradition</i>
Aradia	Clairvoyance, tarot readings	Wiccan
Demeter	Herbal medicine, author of books related to witchcraft and herbal medicine	Nordic tradition, herbal tradition
Diana	Curses	Nordic tradition,"historically anchored tradition"
Freya	Healing, tantra massage, Reiku	Nordic tradition, eclectic
Hekate	Astrology, tarot readings, divination	Partly hellenistic astrological tradition but not interested in labeling it too much.
Hel	Herbal medicine, ceremonial work, online witchcraft → account on Instagram	No specific tradition mentioned
Kali	Astrology, yoga, tarot readings	Celtic goddess tradition, Avalonian tradition
Stigrid	Herbal medicine, spiritual communication, tarot readings	No specific mentioned tradition
Vita stjärnan ¹¹	Ceremonial work, healing, artist (art and craft)	Avalonian tradition

¹¹ In English: The White Star

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In this research study there are a few ethical considerations to go over. I kept Hansen and Machin's (2013) description of doing in qualitative interviews throughout the fieldwork process (2013:77-78). First of all the most obvious one is about anonymity, especially since a few participants are not open about their witch identity to the people around them, some expressed fear of harassment or trivialization. I have gone to great lengths in order to keep my participants private and anonymous, even the ones who are open about their witchcraft, I have made the names anonymous, also the names of their friends and cities in which they live have been anonymized.

Mark D. Johns (2021) writes about ethical considerations when studying the relationships between religion and new media (Johns D. 2021:250). The main concern is the archiving ability of the internet and how easy it is to find material online with only little information (2021:262). For this reason I have chosen to not include any photos from the participants' Instagram accounts, censored or not. The ability to do a reverse google image search could lead someone to these peoples accounts. When I discuss the pictures and content from the participants' accounts I will describe them in detail (in Appendix) but not share the actual content. As D. John writes, religiosity is sensitive and it is important to remember that people's lives and right to privacy should be the number one priority when conducting research on online religious practices (ibid).

ANALYSIS: THE WITCH OF TODAY

The analysis of this thesis is divided into three parts: I. The Mediatized Witch, II. The Nordic Noir of Witchcraft and III. The Commercial Witch. The first part deals with how the practice of witchcraft changes in a mediatized society when the practices are moved into an online sphere. The second part is dedicated to the spiritual dimensions of Swedish witches in relation to matters of offline practices and values. The last part is dedicated to elements of marketization and the commodification of witchcraft.

I. THE MEDIATIZATION OF SWEDISH WITCHCRAFT

In this part I demonstrate different aspects of the implications of the mediatization of witchcraft. Finally the voices of the witches from the ethnographical interviews and their Instagram accounts will come to life. This part is an extension of, and homage to the work of Hill (2011) and her research of paranormal media and society's fixation with the paranormal. Unlike Hill's (2011) focus on the TV medium and audience studies this research focuses on the social media platform Instagram and how the paranormal is not only consumed by an audience but also something that is practiced in online and offline settings as an essential part of the practitioners everyday lives.

Here I also invite Andersson's (2017) perspective in the text "Mediatization from below", which I apply with Shove's et al. 's (2012) practice theory. By using practice theory as a theoretical fundament, witchcraft is not simply understood as a mediated experience through Instagram but also the practice of everyday life for the participants and what larger structure this might be in reference to. Additionally it allows for a discussion about how the offline spheres influence the online practices in a society that is largely mediatized, with help of the concepts of affordances by Costa (2018) and boyd (2014). When I use the concept of mediatization I refer to, inspired by Andersson (2017), how social media, popular culture and commercial spheres generate an *intensification* of mediated witchcraft.

A RITUAL MADE VISIBLE

Witchcraft is first and foremost associated with ‘magical practices’. By using Instagram the participants display these magical practices to the audience on the platform. Using social media is obviously a new addition in the long historical arc of the practice of witchcraft, thus begging to question what these practices look like in this format. To do so I will make use of the practice theory concepts ‘material’ (technologies, tools and tangible objects), ‘competences’ (the know-how required) and ‘meaning’ (symbolic meaning of the practice) to break down social and cultural practices (Shove et.al 2012:8).

Since the study deals with spiritual practice, I combine practice theory with work on digital religion. A simplistic way of understanding the concept of digital religion, according to Campbell (2022), is by seeing it as the bridge that connects the online religious practices with offline spaces and contexts (Campbell 2022:5). Helland and Kienzl (2022) point out how rituals are dynamic due to mediatization processes that constantly change and transform practices in today’s climate (2022:42). So let us dive into how the idea of magic is transformed through the use of Instagram and processes of mediatization.

THE VISUAL NATURE OF INSTAGRAM

During the rise of the internet and new media, information has become globalized, making content from the other side of the world available. These processes have been beneficial for the spread of witchcraft as it was previously considered to be esoteric, a term used to refer to ‘secret knowledge production’ of witchcraft (Faxneld 2020:18). But with the rise of the internet this magical knowledge became more accessible to the general public (Bogdan 2016:388). When the knowledge of witchcraft is made easily available, new values are applied to the practice of witchcraft. In my sample this was expressed as “the notion of practice”. What separated them from ‘posers’ or so-called ‘baby-witches’ , they said, was how they actually practiced magic: performing rituals, ceremonies or herbal medicine et cetera. The ‘posers’ are those who only consume content from social media or popular culture. Only accessing the previously secret knowledge of the witch is not enough, at least not if you are a practicing, professional witch. Both Aradia and Diana used the metaphor, “You can’t call yourself an artist if you do not paint.”, when talking about the necessity of being a practicing witch. Which reads as somewhat of an

implication that the most important thing if you call yourself a witch is that witchcraft is integrated into your everyday life in a practical way.

During my meeting with the witches this was made prominent. When I visited the homes of the witches, the atmosphere gave me many clues about the everyday life witchy nature of these people. Atmospheres as an ethnographic concept refers to how a place feels or what a place means (Sumartojo & Pink 2019:3). In the homes (and sometimes by looking through the Zoom camera) I felt the presence of witchcraft. They had altars, Goddess paintings, pentagons and occult symbols in their kitchens and on the living room walls, in their everyday environments. Diana, who is not open about her witch identity said:

“I have my altar open at home and occult symbols and so on. But I have always hung out with black rockers and metall people and they have always worn occult symbols themselves, so no one is really making that connection.”

The symbols overlap and have many different meanings depending on their context, something that is increasingly complex in today's visual culture (Howells & Negreiros 2019:-1-2). However, when it comes to Instagram Diana does not take the same risk. She is not active on the platform as a witch herself as she wants to keep that part of her identity hidden. Instead, she sometimes watches content others witches post on the platform for inspiration and information. The dynamic interplay between online and offline practices when being a witch is not necessarily the same, as Helland and Kienzl point out (2022:42), on Instagram the visuality is a lot more riskful than the visuality of her living room.

Leaver et.al. (2020) and- boyd (2014) respectively explore the affordances of visibility. Leaver et.al. (2020) writes that different platforms are suited for different purposes (2020:55). Instagram is a highly visual medium, the content is largely based on videos or photos from people's lives. Instagram has a very open and visual affordances in its style, it is possible to have a private account but most users follow strangers and celebrities too (2020:31). The affordances of visibility supports the insight to how witches use affordances-in-practice, as proposed by Costa (2018). The latter term refers to how people practice their agency in correlation with the platform and stems from an encounter between a platform and a user in a specific cultural context (Costa 2018:3651). Diana still lurks around Instagram and witches accounts on the platform even

though she does not post anything of her own. She dodges the visual nature of the platform. Moores (2011) has pointed out how a non-centric media approach benefits our knowledge of media too (2012:11). Naturally, Hekate did not use Instagram when she kept her witch practices hidden, as she was not ready to have that conversation and defend herself to people in her surroundings. As she slowly “came out of the broom closet” as she put it, she started using Instagram. In this context, the affordances-in-practice show how witches use the visual nature of Instagram according to their desires of being open or not about their practice of witchcraft in their offline everyday lives too.

CREATIVE SPIRITUALITY

Witchcraft as a practice has a clear aim, that is producing and/or creating magic. In this part, some examples of how magic can be mediated and ritualized through the platform of Instagram are demonstrated, referring to this as a ritual transfer as proposed by Miczek (2008:150). Theory of ritual transfer is one of the building blocks when discussing digital religion, as the transfer changes when applied to a digital sphere (Campbell 2022). When it comes to the practice of online rituals it is crucial to pinpoint the ‘transformation’ meaning how rituals are transformed in new settings, ‘invention’ pinpointing magics’ creative character, and ‘exclusion’ capturing the uniqueness of magical practice (Miczek 2008:150). In order to grasp these transformations, the concept of affordances is our best friend, with a special focus on the previously mentioned affordance of visibility (Boyd 2014; Leaver 2020).

There are many different ways the participants perform ritual transfers. Generally, the witches use Instagram as a way to frame and capture magical moments in their everyday lives. Vita Stjärnan described his portrayal of magic and ceremony on Instagram as a creative process. He said:

“I am a very visual person /.../ I have a visual way of looking at things and it is also how I explore the spiritual world /.../ the art I create is a manifestation of the visions I receive from the spiritual.”

The ‘meaning’ of the practice of these creative processes are to capture and visualize the feeling of spirituality. Miczek’s (2008) elements of invention and transformation (2008:15) in this ritual

transfer is not only to perform magic but rather to visualize a spiritual experience. To exemplify with one of Vita Stjärnan's posts from Instagram he stands with a scarf wrapped around his head and shoulders, his face painted with different occult symbols, holding a cup with smoke coming out of it. In the background there are tall trees of a forest, bathing in an orange afternoon light. Further, Vita Stjärnan has inserted illustrations of birds and occult symbols into the blue sky of the picture¹².

Vita Stjärnan explained that he uses Instagram as a space for visualizing his spirituality. The ritual transfer (Miczek 2008) is made by photoshopping and creating these symbolic photos using the visual affordances of Instagram, combined with a symbolically composed picture out in nature (offline). The 'invention' as Miczek highlights (2008:150), is how Instagram allows for creating these kinds of montages of spirituality, something that would not be possible in an offline sphere. The affordances of Instagram allow for an additional layer of spirituality that is not seen in the offline environment but rather felt. The witches use these affordances-in-practice to frame creative expressions of their experiences of the spiritual, and of magic.

Another example is Stigrid, who has a wide social media presence, she creates content on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and moderates a group on Facebook. She lives in a rather small town in Sweden, dreaming about moving to the countryside once her children are older. Stigrid has a few videos on her Instagram page where she mediates a ritual transfer (Miczek 2008:150). Stigrid posted a video captioned "Magic" in April this year. In the video she is seated in a dark room holding a burning incense stick in front of the camera, the room is dark except for the lone flame in the foreground. The text on the screen reads: "Choose one wish, and when I blow out the flame let it manifest¹³". A song is playing in the background called "My Mother Told Me", - a well known traditional Nordic song¹⁴. A few seconds into the video she holds up three fingers

¹² For full description of the image, see Appendix 5.1

¹³ The concept of manifestation is a spiritual tool for making wishes come true.

¹⁴ The song was made popular on the show Vikings (Kaspersen 2021). One of the functions on Instagram is that songs applied in the video content are flagged with its title and singer. In this case it was called "My mother told me" and allowed me to trace the context of the song.

and starts to count down until she blows out the flame and the video ends¹⁵. When we spoke of her magical content on Instagram, Stigrid mentioned to me:

“What I am doing behind the camera doesn’t have to be as beautiful. For me it is one thing to have it aesthetically pleasing for others, but when I am practicing alone it’s not the same thing.”

The dimension of adding a camera into the practice of witchcraft creates a requirement for beauty. Similarly, when I visited the home of Hel she showed me her altar that was full of many different materials for her ceremonial work. I told her I thought it looked nice and she quickly responded by saying that “of course I would tidy it up if I posted it on Instagram.”. Later I actually saw a photo Hel posted of her altar- and it was in fact tidier¹⁶. Customized for the visual dimension of Instagram.

When the transformational character of ritual is moved into an online environment it is not only shaped by the affordances of that environment, but also for the aesthetic eye. Figuring out a way to include the audience in the video is also a creative process. In the video Stigrid acts as a physical vessel for the audience, the tangible material tool for the ritual. The *invention* or newness of this practice lies in the affordances of the video: adding sound and text to the ritual and how those affordances add an *aesthetic* element to the ritual. A new layer of magic is added to the ritual where the aesthetic functions and music can help serve the purpose of portraying magic that would not be possible without the use of new media technologies and Instagram. Arguably, it becomes digitally different, in many respects.

By adding a camera for an intended audience, the aesthetic elements of the witch ritual demand and foster a new ‘competence’ required for the practice of the ritual. As Shove et.al. (2012) writes, that new competences suddenly are required is one way of understanding how practices change. Here the new competence encompasses the requirement of creating and capturing beauty in the everyday life practices of magic. The creative elements of how to imagine and display magic and ritual online is also a spiritual practice, the creativity and artistic expressions are vital in understanding ritual transfer for witchcraft today. Hekate spoke to me a lot about her view of

¹⁵ For a full description of the video, see Appendix 5.1.

¹⁶ Full description of picture in Appendix 5.1

the spiritual as a creative activity. She said the following when talking about how she first started to approach witchcraft:

“It became clear to me that I had a desire to play again and learn something that was not attached to my professional identity /.../ but it didn’t become a physical place but a creative and playful one, this spiritual space where I was allowed to build my own belief system.”

Giovanna Parmigiani (2022) points towards how the aesthetics of New Age spiritual communities are linked with how the participants in the communities experience and imagine the world together with other witches, which creates a sense of community (2022:523). Even though the aesthetics elements are very different between the practitioners in my sample, there seem to be tendencies of this in this thesis too. Witchcraft is heavily individualized today and the practices of witchcraft are broad (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020), as witchcraft is de-institutionalized and does not conform to a rigid frame of belief, the possibility for creating and playing with your spirituality flourish. Combined with new media such as Instagram the practitioners of witchcraft can share their imaginations of spirituality and offline ritual practices with others. It is a dynamic process between offline and online spheres with the end goal of creating an aesthetic and artistic expression of their spirituality through witchcraft.

I would therefore add the concept of *creativity* to Miczek’s (2008) theory of online transfer. When practicing ‘digital spirituality’ the participants of this thesis study use visual affordances-in-practice as a creative tool when it comes to their witchcraft, either as a reflection of their openness or as an extension of their creative imagination of their spirituality. The new possibilities of ‘digital spirituality’ allow for witches to explore their faith through visual online platforms, like Instagram.

THE MATERIALITY OF MAGIC

Personally, as a non-religious Western European living in a secularized country, I have never witnessed magic outside of popular culture. Social constructions of magic, in this part of the world to a large extent, come from some sort of ‘Harry Potter’ or ‘Disneyfication’ of witchcraft (Pavlovska 2020). Culturally we are therefore used to a certain type of portrayal of magic. So,

when meeting people who practice magic in their everyday lives and not in a movie, it is relevant to pay close attention to what it actually looks like.

When I first met Hel I drove far out to her house in the outskirts of Stockholm where she and her family live in a collective with another family. Hel is used to being interviewed as she is a public witch and also hosts a successful podcast on the topic. When sitting in her kitchen as the afternoon sun drowned the room in a warm light, Hel told me about what magic is to her:

“Far away from the ‘phew phew’ magic, sending out cool stuff. It is more earth, down into the humus¹⁷. /.../ The biggest topic of discussion I have with children is that they think I can conjure magic with a wand. It is quite fun. I can send out anything, but I can't make up a fire with a wand, you know? /.../ In ceremony you can go deep into yourself and your subconscious and have out of bodily sensations, that is another kind of magic that you can experience solely with yourself and drums , fire or water..You’ll find the largest magic within yourself. But I’ve said and written it many times, the most important magic and revolution is loving yourself completely.”

Returning to practice theory (Shove et.al. 2012:8), the material of the magical practice here are: dirt, water, a flame, drums and your body, however it does not create a material outcome. Hel opposes the idea of magic having any type of materiality, instead saying that magic is a feeling or a sensation. Magic is embodied as a sensory experience. This contradicts popular culture that has portrayed witchcraft as a very visible practice. This is an important remark, since visibility is an affordance of more recent technological media (Leaver et.al. 2020; boyd 2014), for example movies, photography and in extension smartphones and social media apps. As Hill (2011) writes:

“As paranormal beliefs become part of popular culture, the meaning of the paranormal changes from something extraordinary to something more ordinary. Beliefs become lifestyle practices. But, as people become familiar with representations of the paranormal they also continue to search for unique experiences. As one person explained ‘I have to see it to believe it.’” (Hill 2011:64).

¹⁷ Humus is a type of dirt or sediment.

In popular culture we are used to seeing special effects visualizing magic to us, from a wand or a ritual and so on. However, the practitioners of witchcraft describe magic as a process that happens within yourself as you practice it. In relation to how Ben Highmore (2015) describes culture as a contestation of meaning (2015:20), there is here a contestation of the meaning behind how magic is materialized. There is a fight for definition of magic between the popular cultural representations and the descriptions from the actual practitioners who lean into a more mundane description of it.

Another example of this is when Stigrids talked to me about demons. When I think of demons, I think of horror movies and scary figures lurking in dark corners, individuals that are possessed as in the *Exorcist* (1973) or an invisible force haunting someone as in *Paranormal Activity* (2007). However, according to Stigrid, this is a misunderstanding. On the topic of demons she told me:

“You have to learn many things before doing blood and demon magic. I am not ready for that yet, even though I have many years of experience. Demons usually attach themselves to your psyche and break you down physiologically.”

According to Stigrid a demon is not some kind of entity or being, it is rather manifested as mental illness. Once again, the visibility of magic, or in this case demons, is non-existing. It is once more described as an inner mental journey. As Hill (2011) points out, when the extraordinary becomes part of popular culture, it becomes ordinary to us (2011:64). Demons going from a monster figure to something as mundane as mental illness, illustrate this quite well. In this case it seems that when magic is given the affordances of being made visible, it becomes mundane and ordinary and invisible.

One of the more surprising facts that I learned when speaking about magic with the witches was the mundaneness of it. When I spoke to Hel, she mentioned how she believes that people need magic. There is a need to “re-enchant the world”. When I asked her how, she answered:

“You can do it in your everyday life. By listening to your intuition, be in your full authenticity for a moment each day. By putting up boundaries, not agreeing to have sex, by having the courage to be separated from your children, by changing your diet. I think those practices are a way of re-enchanting the world /.../ Also more active things like having an altar, taking walks outside in nature without rushing, without listening to a podcast.”

This ‘re-enchantment’ of the world is not portrayed as extraordinary, it comes across as almost the opposite. The mediatization of witchcraft and magic through popular culture have constructed an idea of magic as visible and tangible, resulting in that those people who actually practice contemporary witchcraft have to redefine what magic means and looks like, and thereby implicitly or explicitly, contesting (Highmore 2018) the popular cultural definitions of magic. One of the reasons for this might, I would argue, is the affordance of visuality and visibility that social media and new media technologies bring.

Magic is in reality, according to the practitioners, quite ordinary and comes across more as a way of *playfully romanticizing everyday life*: seeing mental issues as demons rather than a chemical imbalance, seeing magic as inner processes of self loving, rather than visual manifestations and regarding a re-enchantment of the world, not as a magical fairy land, but a place where you are in tune with yourself and the world around you without distractions.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEDIATIZED WITCHCRAFT

The first research question that this thesis asks in relation to modern witchcraft is: “How are these practices mediated, with a special focus on the platform Instagram?”. When magic is mediated on Instagram, the practice of witchcraft transforms. It becomes interactive and invites an imagined audience and therefore the need for an aesthetic eye and artistry becomes prominent. The competences of the practice of magic changes. This is not only due to the infrastructure of Instagram requiring it, rather participants use the affordances-in-practice as an extension of their spirituality. The creative and artistic spiritual work they do on Instagram is embedded with their imagination of the spiritual sphere/realm. Therefore the elements of artistry or creativity should be included when studying ritual transfer in an online environment. Further,

the mediatization of witchcraft creates a cultural imaginary of magic as tangible. Something that is contested by witches by making magic ordinary and part of everyday life experiences. In this case the romanticism is linked with making mundane everyday life activities enchanted.

II. THE NORDIC NOIR OF WITCHCRAFT

During this part of the discussion I will head further into the territory of the spirituality of witches. This will be discussed in conversation between practice theory (Shove et.al. 2012) and the topic of neopaganism (Berger 2009; Harvey & Hardman 1996; Salomonsen 2002) and ecofeminism (Adams & Gruen 2014; Mies & Shiva 1993). In combining these theoretical perspectives on contemporary witchcraft the spiritual aims of the culture emerge and allow for insight into the reasoning behind practicing witchcraft today. This section focuses more on nature and its importance when practicing witchcraft today.

A SHAMAN CAN ONLY WORK IN THEIR LOCAL VILLAGE

My grandmother grew up in the northern part of Sweden. In the village she grew up in, it is cold for many months of the year, the forests are thick with tall trees and the ground is frozen long into spring. As a kid she would always warn me for stepping too close to the roots of fallen trees, as they could be caught in the wind and stand up again, capturing you in the prison of its roots. She and her sister grew up on a farm where their parents were employed with their mother milking the cows and their father taking care of the soil. One day, when my grandmother and her sister were young they were out playing in the snow for too long and as they came back inside realized that the sister's legs were frostbitten. The town was small and located deep into the forest and they did not have a doctor nearby. However, they did have what is called a *wise woman*¹⁸, an old Nordic term for village witches specialized in herbal medicine. The wise woman came over to the farm and performed a blood ritual using glass cups on my grandmother's sister's legs. After that she healed. When I told my grandmother about the topic of my thesis project, this is what she told me. Without hesitation she put specific emphasis on saying: "After that she healed".

Witchcraft and magic are not only about the performance of rituals but also a spiritual and cognitive connection with nature. The latter part refers to the importance of having knowledge about the local nature, for example a village witch in the northern part of Sweden knows how to

¹⁸ In Swedish: *Klok gumma*

cure frostbite rather than how to cure sunburn. In Sweden one of the associations of witchcraft is the close link between magic and herbal medicine (Persson 2020:105), a heritage of these so-called wise women. Many of the participants either identify completely as herbal witches or practice it as one of their crafts.¹⁹ Going back to the practice theory concepts (Shove et.al. 2012), in order to work with the ‘materials’ that are herbs, you need the ‘competences’ in order to do so. That means learning about the flora around you, in this case the Swedish one. As Kali puts it:

“It is about bonding with the earth and its history /.../ it is about knowing where I place my feet.”

Even though ‘the Instagram witch’ is globalized, mediatized and eclectic, she is still rooted and anchored in a local offline space due to the spiritual beliefs of witchcraft that highlights the importance of a deep connection with nature, advocating for a lifestyle where you live close to it (Salomonsen 2002; Harvey & Hardman 1996). Almost every single one of my participants advocated for a lifestyle where they had access to nature, either as a future life goal (buying a house in the countryside) or as an absolute necessity.

In Sommerlad-Rogers study (2013) a strong correlation between participation in pagan movements and making “pro-environmental choices” was found (Sommerlad-Rogers 2013:49). This is not very surprising as witchcraft is based on neopaganism, the movement that worships nature itself (Salomonsen 2002; Harvey & Hardman 1996). This is also present in my fieldwork material, exemplified by my participants through promoting e.g. crafting things yourself, buying second hand or simply going into nature and collecting things yourself rather than buying it in stores. However, witchcraft takes the values of environmentalism one step further. Nature is not only regarded as a limited resource, it is embodied, nature is Mother Earth. When speaking of nature and the local environment, the participants expressed things such as:

¹⁹ See chart X over the specialities of the participants

“How does mother earth show her face from where you are standing?” (Vita Stjärnan)

“We have contact with Mother Earth, we are breathing her breath, we are breathing together with her and we breathe in her power in our bodies and reclaim the contact with her as a woman. To awaken our feminine power, and she longs for it.” (Freya)

Both of them explain how they embody nature, giving her a face, lungs and a physical body. Similar to what was discovered in Part I. this is a way of romanticizing your environment, correspondingly to what Fisk (2017) found in her study of pagan communities and their relationship with nature (2017:21). Further, this embodiment or romanticizing might create more initiative to live environmentally friendly lives, which makes witchcraft into something that can not be entirely an online ritual practice. A big part of the spiritual practices happens secluded from the online environment, as explained above. Helland and Kienzl (2022) point out that a common disagreement between religious practitioners is whether or not the online is considered to be a legitimate ritual space (2022:46). Whatever the answer would be to such a question, the offline environment is essential and witchcraft would therefore not be able to be completely transferred into an entirely online environment.

The title of this part of the discussion, “A shaman²⁰ can only work in their local village” is a quote from Hel. She told me:

“We are coming back to our heritage of earth, the seasons, the fluctuations, and you have to work with the local place where you are. I condition myself to Scandinavia but also Sweden. There is a big difference between Skåne and Umeå²¹ too when it comes to their seasons, so it becomes even more local. I read somewhere that ‘a shaman can only work in their local village’, you work with origin and you heal the earth from where you are standing.”

²⁰ Definition of a shaman: a spiritual leader, synonym: medicine man or medicine woman.

²¹ Skåne is located in the south of Sweden whereas Umeå is located in the north of Sweden.

Witchcraft embraces a knowledge production of the local. In order to heal the earth you need to know the local environment and have a deep knowledge about it.

NATURE AS THE BODY AND KNOWLEDGE OF A WOMAN

Witchcraft shares a lot of overlaps with the branch of feminism called *ecofeminism*, even though not all of the participants in my study explicitly called themselves ecofeminists or involved in that practice. The ecofeminists Mies and Shiva (1993) writes:

“Feminists also began to realize the significance of the ‘witch hunts’ at the beginning of our modern era in so far as patriarchal science and technology was developed only after these women (the witches) had been murdered and, concomitantly, their knowledge, wisdom and close relation with nature had been destroyed.” (1993:16f).

A part of these aspects of locality comes from how these movements, ecofeminism and neopaganism, have criticized globalization and advocates for an anti-globalization development in order to preserve ecological balance (Salomonsen 2002:6). The spiritual dimensions of witchcraft and nature comes from the idea of nature being its own *entity*, for some described as Mother Earth. She is femininely conditioned, as the woman is a metaphor for the cradle of life, much like nature. There are many theories and scholars who have made great work about “enchanted feminism”, “the divine female” and so on that goes more into depth about the role of the woman in these communities (Salomonsen 2002; Van Fossan 2012). I will however not dive too deep into that as it is a very deep theoretical rabbit hole. Instead, I emphasize the elements of nature, even though the woman is used as a metaphor for it. The (symbolic) ‘meaning’ (Shove et.al. 2012) for the practice of witchcraft is the importance of gaining knowledge about the local and remembering the wisdom about it that the witches who were killed, once had.

Other participants felt similarly. The pharmaceutical industry was especially under a lot of critique. Not necessarily for reasons that are conspirational, for example anti-vaccination conspiracies (Opal 2021; Wiseman 2021; Parmigiani 2021), but more moving into a rhetoric of self-sufficiency and independence. Diana prefers to make her own herbal medicine for headaches instead of immediately taking an aspirin, saying:

“It is scientific that it helps, even though you have to drink damn much of it and it tastes like shit”.

The problem Diana refers to here is how we depend on modern medicine for things that are already available to us in nature, as long as we know what to do with it. Stigrid mentioned to me how dandelions can be used in heart medicine, birch for treating colds and lavender for sleeping. All things that are part of the Swedish flora. Demeter also spoke about relearning the herbal knowledge of the witches that have been replaced by pharmacies, hospitals and synthetic drugs. In knowing and learning about “the local” the witches vouch for the reclaiming of the knowledge of the old herbal witches (Mies & Shiva 1993:16f).

Herbal medicine is a key factor. The pharmaceutical industry represents all the things that the participants dislike about living in late modernity, and the alienation from nature that modernity brings. One of the means of bridging the alienation is the old herbal medicine that is associated with witches and witchcraft, the craft of the wise women. It comes across as a reclaiming of old knowledge that was lost during the Enlightenment that reinforced the duality described by ecofeminists between science and nature, where men ‘are’ science and women ‘are’ nature (Adams & Gruen 2014:5). This old knowledge based on natural herbal medicine was the realm of women in particular. However, it does make you wonder if this dualism that is described as criticized by ecofeminists is simply reproducing the continuation of associating nature with the body of a woman, and old herbal medicine with the sphere of women’s knowledge.

CONTESTING ALIENATION IN MODERN SOCIETY

There is a notion in witchcraft that relates to Trine Syvertsen’s (2020) book *Digital Detox*. In the book Syvertsen discusses how there has been an increasing amount of desire for digital detoxing, taking time away from your mobile phone and the internet and so on. Due to people feeling as if they are too dependent on their phones and technology (2020:4-6). One of the things that Syvertsen links these tendencies with is the growing environmentalism on a societal level (2020:7). In relation to the ritual transfer (Miczek 2008:150), there are also notions of ‘exclusion’ in the transformation of the ritual work. Exclusion not of the technology per say as we have seen that most witches do use social media and phones, but to the exclusion of modern

medicine and mass produced food as noted by Hel who grows most of her vegetables herself, another example is Demeter who makes her own makeup. The ‘meaning’ behind the practice of witchcraft is centered around exclusions in the ritual transfer (Shove et.al. 2012). Everyday life choices are part of the ritual work, e.g. what you eat, consume as medicine, makeup and so on. These are all about the exclusion of mass produced items thus implying that the meaning of practicing witchcraft is to bridge the gap between yourself and what you consume.

In the case of witchcraft, unlike the study of Syvertsen (2020), it is not necessarily the phone or the technology itself that is the main issue, rather a longing to get away from modernity itself. A modernization detox, I would argue. They never explicitly mention new technologies or social media as they are dependent on it in their daily lives, using it for information and connection with other witches. They want medicine, but knowing how to brew it themselves, wanting makeup if made by themselves, and certain foods if they have grown it themselves. The enemy is not necessarily technology, but the alienation that technology brings in relation to nature and the striving for sustainable life that pays respect to the earth.

Contemporary witchcraft acts as a contestation to the alienated mainstream modern society and a dream about going back to the old local village, where people live in harmony with mother earth. Fiske (2017) points out that pagan romanticizing of nature has deep connections with a re-imaginary of it rather than a truthful depiction of the past (2017:22), which is a reflection of what Ben Highmore (2015) points out about how nature and what we think of it is a cultural construction and an offspring of societal values. (2015:25). To put it into a societal context, today we are increasingly worried about nature and climate change. During the pre-modern era, nature was regarded as the enemy (with illnesses, starvation etc.) and culture and industrialization the savior from it (factories, vaccines, mass-production etc). Today, nature is romanticized as the savior from modernization as the excessiveness of industries and technological interdependence in the neoliberal modernity is destroying the planet. It is all just a matter of perspective

REFLECTIONS ON THE NORDIC NOIR OF WITCHCRAFT

From the perspective of practice theory and the three elements we keep coming back to: materials, competences and (symbolic) meaning (Shove et.al. 2012:8). The material of the

practice of witchcraft is nature. All of the things needed are there, flowers, herbs, the Goddess. The competences are knowing what to do with all of these materials. As stated by many witches, it is important to study nature and have knowledge about it, for example what herbs to use to make tea for menstrual pains or insomnia. Lastly, the meaning of all of these practices. The meaning behind these practices are centered around becoming less alienated from nature. Not only for the sake of environmentalism but for spiritual reasons too, as witchcraft considers nature as an entity, the embodiment of the Goddess and/or of Mother Earth. Considering that by practicing magic we can heal the world from the alienation that came during the modernization of society, not depending on the pharmaceutical industry but instead being self-sufficient.

III. THE COMMERCIAL WITCH

In this final part, I will talk more about the commercial tendencies embedded in the practice of witchcraft. The work of Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) and her discussion of branding religion will be introduced with a special focus on the concept of ‘authenticity’ (2012:166). Further, the concepts of commercialization and marketization as explained by Belk (2020) are used when investigating the empirical material further. Lastly, notions of esotericism (Faxneld 2020) are introduced in relation to these commercial tendencies.

THE COMMERCIAL WITCH: AN OXYMORON

When entering the sphere of witchcraft it is unavoidable to fail to recognize the commercial tendencies in the communities and the surrounding culture. My own insight in this was most prominent when I realized that I had unconsciously dismissed a part of my intended method. Initially, I wanted to include participation in my ethnographic approach, to join in on a ritual, divination, tarot reading or cleansing. However, I never did as I had subconsciously noted how most of the witches I met (and the ones I did not meet) charged money for their services. Even when I was gratefully invited to ceremonies or celebrations by the participants I kept wondering: Am I invited or am I expected to pay for something?

Commercialization as a concept is referring to the process of something, e.g. witchcraft, being turned into a valuable commodity on a market, something that can be prized and sold (Belk 2020:31). Many scholars of neopagan religion have noted a growing global market for witchcraft and the services related to it (Cush 2007; Miller 2022; Zaidman 2003). Diana traced it back to the fantasy boom: people who “dreamt of Hogwarts picked up on these things”, in a similar vein Denise Cush (2007) discusses the connection between increasing amounts of teenage witches with the many portrayals of young witches in popular culture (2007:49). Commercialization of the spiritual communities is in constant process, commercial forces tapping into this rather unexploited market. Banet-Weiser (2012) points out that historical commodifications of faith have been proven to be successful business initiatives (2012:171). Commodification refers to the process of something previously considered not to be a market good, becoming commodified according to a market logic that can be prized, branded, promoted and sold in a capitalist logic,

thus also competing with other commodities (Belk 2020:31). Marketization refers to a market ideology being applied in spheres that previously was beyond the neoliberal market logic (ibid). In postsecular times with the growing interest for pagan spirituality, these (rather) new communities are profitable, especially when tapping into spiritual communities that are relatively new in Sweden with an untapped market.

Consumer culture is mentioned briefly in Helen Berger's (2019) book on contemporary witchcraft but never goes into depth about it, but Berger does point out how witchcraft is generally opposed to commercialism (2019:110). These opinions are prominent in my interviews as well, many witches point out how the popularization of witchcraft might lead to a commercialism and in extension the exploitation of the planet's resources. Miller (2022) discusses how witchcraft relies on a lot of materiality for ceremonial and ritual purposes (2022:7). Witchcraft is embedded with material means, herbs, sage or incense, statues, not to mention the billion dollar industry of magic crystals (McClure 2019). A few of my participants did mention and criticize the unethical refraction of crystals, but there is a collision of ideas here. Many of the witches I spoke to promoted creating or collecting these things yourself, by learning about the local environment, as stated in part II. However not everyone can, living as an urban witch does consequently mean that you are less able to find herbs in nature. Even though it clashes with nature worshipping spirituality at its core.

If breaking this practice into pieces (Shove et.al.), the symbolic 'meaning' of these practices are to consume sustainably, yet in reality, those 'material' means are not always accessible. Even though the participants might have the 'competences' required in how to collect these materials, not all can as we still live in a modernized society without an infinite amount of resources outside of our doors. Especially not in urban areas.

TURNING HOBBY INTO WORK

Hekate has worked within the cultural sphere for many years, specifically that of theater. For a long time she had felt an urge for learning something new, more specifically towards *playing* again. We spoke about how she ended up finding witchcraft and specializing herself in tarot card reading. For Heakate, tarot cards and witchcraft are not only a means of spirituality and making

readings, it is also a way of playing as a hobby. But in addition to that, it is also an opportunity to make your hobby into work. Through one of the podcasts that Hekate listens to she came across an American artist that has made his own deck of tarot cards.

“Even though I had said that I was going to have tarot as my hobby I started thinking, what if I could spend more of my time doing this?”.

This idea of turning a hobby, or lifestyle, into work kept coming up during the interviews. As witchcraft is part of these people’s everyday lives it takes up some of their time, but often not as much as they would have wished. Turn witchcraft into their profession so that they can practice full time without relying on a dayjob where the witchcraft has to stay home. Freya pointed out how her identity as a witch does not fit her dayjob as a teacher, and how it would be nice to work as a witch so that she can be in her witchyness full time. Yet, she is aware of the unethical and unsustainable nature of capitalism and what it does to nature.

There is an empirical dissonance between the interviews and the Instagram accounts. Many of the witches advocate for a lifestyle without commercialization during the interviews, yet most of the content on some of the witches' Instagram accounts are advertising their services. For example Stigrid links her second Instagram account on her main account where she posts about her services selling spells and tarot readings. On Freya’s Instagram she links to her website where all of her services are posted, including reiki healing, tantra massage and workshops into being initiated as a witch. She also posts about the upcoming events with hashtags such as #lovemyjob. It is presented and marketed as an ecological service, yet it does play into the idea of marketization. Belk (2020) cites Mark Tadajewsk who defines the concept of marketization as: “the promotion of market ideologies and the expansion of the market into areas traditionally beyond its purview.” (Belk 2020:31). Witchcraft appears as something that would be positioned far beyond market ideologies, as witchcraft with its ecofeminist and environmentalist values criticizes capitalism for the exploitation of natural resources (Salomonsen 2002:6; Sommerlad-Rogers 2013:49; Adams & Gruen 2014:11). When a movement that claims to be opposed to the establishment and institutions in this form of neoliberal market logic, taps into that very same logic, issues of authenticity arise.

Even though the witches agree with the anti-capitalist values it seems like the eclectic nature of witchcraft is a major key here. The participants all had some sort of specialty when it comes to their craft,²² and abided by different traditions of witchcraft such as celtic, nordic and astrological traditions. Even though the internet means that “information is free” and witchcraft is no longer secretive and esoteric (Faxneld 2020:18), it still takes time and effort to become specialized in a particular craft. It is similar to Banet-Weiser's discussion of “individual entrepreneurialism” (2012:168). Many of my participants had practiced for years before having the confidence to call themselves specialized in something. However, when they do, they can profit from it and this specialty or hobby can be turned into a job, resulting in a salary and a professional identity that allow them to spend more time practicing witchcraft.

WHAT ABOUT AUTHENTICITY?

When investigating New Age communities in relation to the commodification of religion, Banet-Weiser (2012) found that branded spirituality is more closely tied with commercial culture than the authentic source of the practice (2012:197-198), e.g. meditation or tantra. Some of the participants in my study are selling services associated with spiritual practices that do not originate from Nordic European culture. A few examples of this based on the services my participants sell are: yoga, reiki and tantra massage. However, I would like to add that many also sell services that have more of a nordic touch to it as well. Demeter promotes workshops where she educates people about cultivating Swedish herbs, Stigrid sells spells working a lot with Swedish flora and Hel and Vita Stjärnan sell ceremonial retreats at different locations in Sweden. With these services, the issue of authenticity is partly that of how a community or a movement that identifies as anti-capitalist becomes marketized by practitioners within their own communities. Even though none of these services are a tangible commodity, they are still commodifying something by putting a price tag on a spiritual experience and applying it under the logic of a market. What Belk (2020) would call the correlation between commodification and marketization (2020.31). Yet, these services are branded as not abiding to these logics.

²² As shown in table 2, page 38.

To exemplify, on her Instagram Hel markets her retreats by uploading beautiful pictures of these retreats from previous years with a description of what it entails. An extract from one of these posts says:

“I know that many have reached out to me saying, oh if it could be cheaper and I say as I say to everyone that yes but arrange something easier cheaper, book a place, arrange all the practical stuff and I will be happy to come and fill up with everything I may. But this is what I believe in, I remember when I for the first time put a large part of my savings on just myself, wow what a thing it was. I had never spent 10,000 sek on myself in one go. /.../ Well, little did I know, investing in myself is the best thing I have done. /.../ We can offer Klarna²³ if it helps /.../”

The retreat is promoted as an investment in one's self and how spending money on yourself is a good thing, to some extent commercializing the inner journey of the self. As Belk (2020) points out, commodity culture makes more and more things into exchangeable objects (2020:33), even such deeply personal things as the inner journey of the self. Benet-Weiser (2012) writes how “religious brands openly use the strategies of capitalism while denouncing the ethos of capitalism.” (2012:167). The commercial aspects of these ceremonial retreats are debunked by the reference to investment in the self and the pathos of, how it for Hel, was the best thing she ever did. The authenticity becomes ambivalent, as these retreats are important and valuable to many, yet still surrendering to capitalist logics that witchcraft claims to oppose themselves to.

CREATING A SALARY BY GATEKEEPING MAGIC

The second thing that relates to the topics of authenticity are related to matters of esoteric knowledge. Esoteric refers to the secretive knowledge production of small tight-knit communities, witchcraft often being referred to as such an esoteric community (Faxneld 2020:18), at least historically. As mentioned in Part I, the emergence of the internet and social media, the esoteric nature of these communities have somewhat vanished as the accessibility is open and free to the general public. Witchcraft is described as a folkloristic heritage and as

²³ Klarna is a Swedish app for installment payments that has received a lot of backlash and controversy for promoting their services to younger audiences and putting them in debt.

presented in Part II. a way of not depending on any institutions by becoming self-sufficient. However, by looking further into contemporary witchcraft it seems like this practice during the 21st century has, like a pendulum movement, becoming esoteric once more, but in another shape. In the process of marketization where spells, ceremonies and workshops are sold by these individual spiritual entrepreneurs, as Banet-Weiser (2012) calls it, there is not another kind of closed nature of witchcraft today. In order to gain access and help from specialized witches to navigate the overwhelming amount of information about witchcraft online, you have to pay. The access is no longer hidden but instead placed behind a paywall. A type of market-esotericism, or *neo-esotericism* as I would argue, that gatekeeps the information of contemporary witchcraft, despite the open nature of it at first glance. Thus, the marketization of contemporary witchcraft means that the only way of creating a salary of this practice is by constructing neo-esoteric paywalls around the craft.

REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMERCIAL WITCH

The marketization and commodification of witchcraft are an ambivalent feature of contemporary witchcraft. On the one hand it allows the witches to practice their passion full time and specialize themselves further in their craft, on the other hand it commodifies the culture and encourages the esoteric nature of witchcraft. In a new contemporary form, where the esotericism is shaped by neoliberal and commercial forces rather than notions of secrecy due to fear of prosecution. Modern witches can create a salary by gatekeeping the knowledge production of witchcraft and maintaining the esoteric status of the initiation of witchcraft, thus contradicting the core values at witchcraft as inclusionary, anti-capitalist and equal.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

During the beginning of this research, I directed questions around the general inquiry: How is modern Swedish witchcraft practiced today? During the analysis portion of this thesis I have discussed the topic of practice surrounding three major themes: mediatization and ritual transfer online, nature and environmentalism in the offline environment and lastly the macro perspective by investigating the processes of commercialization of witchcraft. In this last section these questions are answered and summarized into a final take on the world of contemporary witchcraft in Sweden.

1. HOW ARE THE PRACTICE OF WITCHCRAFT MEDIATED TODAY, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE PLATFORM OF INSTAGRAM?

Platforms such as Instagram are an important dimension of the practice of witchcraft today. Witches pilgrim to the platform to post pictures and videos about their own ritual transfer, and to be inspired by others. Instagram is a new ‘material’ tool in this sense for the practice and study of witchcraft. As modern witchcraft exists in the contemporary world, these new material means of communication have opened up for the study of witchcraft from around the world, a globalization of the knowledge of magical practice.

As the ritual transfer (Miczek 2008) of witchcraft is displayed on Instagram, the affordances of the platform changes the possibilities of the magical exercise, not simply due to the infrastructure of the platform but due to how the witches work with and around the platform to their own needs and ambitions, as Costa’s (2018) concept of affordances-in-practice. One indicator of this is how the witches use Instagram as a reflection of their ‘openness’ of their identity as a witch in how they worked with the affordance of visibility (Leaver et.al. 2020; boyd 2014). If the witches are open about their identity in their offline social relations they use Instagram to display those aspects of their lives. If they were not open about their witch identity they sometimes used Instagram to be able to see other witches' content on the platform but never posted anything themselves.

In order to understand how ritual transfer changes, we must look at the ‘exclusion’, ‘invention’ and ‘transformation’ of these rituals (Miczek 2008:150). Shove’s et.al. (2012) concept of ‘competences’, helps determine the notion of ‘transformation’ when performing a ritual in the context of Instagram. The most prominent new required competence is the technique of displaying magic and ritual as aesthetically pleasing. Instagram is a highly visual medium, one of the main affordances when it comes to the platform is the visualization of it (Leaver et.al. 2020; boyd 2014). Thus when the ritual transfer is performed or translated into the online sphere of Instagram, it becomes a requirement to look good for the intended audience, the followers. The necessity of aesthetics are also important in order to gain a following on Instagram, something that is commercially necessary as demonstrated in part III. of the analysis.

In Parmigiani’s study (2022) she notes how the aesthetic dimensions of New Age spiritual communities are a way of imagining the world with others and creates a sense of communities (2022:523). I would like to argue that the aesthetic elements are not only required due to the affordances of social media, but also an extension of the spirituality itself. The participants imagine and play around with the creative nature of these communities that does not conform to institutional blueprints and allow for a creative and individual spiritual practice. The eclectic nature of witchcraft and their individual experiences of the spiritual makes the aesthetic elements of Instagram a playful imagining of the magical and enchanted world that is not possible in an entirely offline setting.

Visuality also changes the materiality of magic. Witchcraft historically has been practiced behind closed doors without insight due to its esoteric nature (Per Faxneld 2020:18), meaning that magic can be almost anything. Due to the modern affordances of visibility, that is no longer the case. The witches need to work with the affordances-in-practice in order to convincingly mediate magic. Hel stressed how she can manifest magic as practically anything, but not with a wand, as magic is not visible according to her. Freya points out how her creative inspiration when painting is a visit from the Goddess. Stigrid exemplifies this by speaking of demons and blood magic, saying that demons are not the creatures we are used to seeing in movies, instead they are disguised as mental illnesses. These are clear demonstrations of Hill’s (2011) when the extraordinary becomes ordinary (2011:64). Magic and witchcraft is ordinary and essentially a way of re-enchanting the world by romanticizing everyday life practices. The notion of

re-enchanting the world is made with rather ordinary methods such as taking a walk outside without distractions, meditating and setting up boundaries and saying no to sex, as exemplified by Hel.

When magic and witchcraft is not only practiced behind closed doors but can be displayed on social media platforms such as Instagram, using technological means and tools, the materiality of magic also changes. Magic transforms into a mundane phenomena, witches referring to it as an internal feeling, such as self love, mental illness or confidence. There witches are intentionally or unintentionally contesting the popular cultural constructions of magic. The witches' magic is portrayed as a much more mundane layer on top of everyday life practices.

2. HOW ARE THE PRACTICES CONNECTED TO NATURE?

Not all things can be studied by discussing matters of an online sphere. Even though we exist in a mediatized society, technology and modern media is present in our perception of reality even when it is not physically present (Moore 2012; Syvertsen 2020). The offline sphere is incredibly important for the witches in this study. At the end of the day, witchcraft is a pagan religion that worships nature. Even though Instagram and the accessible nature of witchcraft is a result of globalization and technology, witchcraft values the local. Contemporary Swedish witchcraft emphasizes anti-globalization values similar to the ideology of ecofeminism (Salomonsen 2002; Mies & Shiva 1996), and goes to show the strong link between witchcraft and environmental movements.

As witchcraft is spiritual and not only political, they speak of nature in a poetic or enchanted version of environmental critique. For example talking about the local environment as “How does mother earth show her face from where you are standing?” (Vita Stjärnan) or how “It is all about where I place my feet.” (Kali). It is a way of romanticizing the environment, as if the ground we walk on is enchanted, it is the body of Mother Earth. The practice (Shove et.al. 2012) of knowing the local and caring for the environment is done due to the symbolic ‘meaning’ of caring for the body of Mother Earth. Living sustainably is not only a political stance, but a spiritual practice and display of love for Mother Earth. The connection to nature is spoken of in a romantic way, and ideas around a ‘re-enchantment of the world’ is described as a connection

with the materiality of earth during a time when the destruction of nature is constantly on the public agenda, without making much progress. Witchcraft comes across as a way of finding agency and a connection with the planet, the ground and the trees in a time when it feels like it might collapse at any given moment. As Hill (2011) pointed out, beliefs rise in times of societal worry (2011:9-10). Witchcraft proposes a spiritual lifestyle that lives in harmony with nature instead of harming it and converges (Jenkins 2006) political contestations to power and spiritual constructions of beliefs.

The ‘meaning’ behind the practices (Shove et.al.) of caring and knowing about nature in the form of Mother Earth is also a way of bridging the alienation that modern society brings. It is a way of becoming closer to the spiritual entity of earth and becoming less dependent on industrial institutions. The ritual work in the offline sphere is largely about connecting and learning about what is out there and how to make use of it. The most prominent example being the reclaiming of herbal medicine within the witch communities. The ‘material’ means of the practice is the materials outside in the local nature, the Swedish flora, which is also why ‘the local’ is of great importance. The ‘competences’ of the practice relies on knowing what to do with the materials. Shove et.al. (2012) suggested how practice theory can be used in figuring out how behavioral change towards a more sustainable lifestyle can be made and encouraged (2012:141). Witches present the practice of witchcraft as a *panacea* for a sustainable lifestyle and behavioral change. Further, witchcraft claims to heal the world from the alienation of modern society, where people depend on different institutions in their everyday lives. Witchcraft is a way of becoming self-sufficient through knowledge and practice of ‘the local’.

Contemporary Swedish witchcraft romanticizes and embodies nature, much like Fiske (2017) reflected upon in her study of pagan communities. Mother earth is presented as a strong feminine force and nature as the cathartic panacea from the loss of agency that modernity brings. However, as Ronald Hutton (2017) pointed out, there is a tendency to sometimes romanticize and reimagine historical epochs. Pagan religion is sometimes reimaged as a liberating world with an elevated status for women (2017:12). In contrast, modernity also brought the scientific discoveries of vaccines, proper maternity care and a prolonged life expectancy. The witches romanticize leading lives close to nature, as society did many years ago during a time before many of these scientific discoveries, when people could not depend on the pharmaceutical

industries and had to treat themselves from various illnesses and issues. Which is a dimension of witchcraft where so-called ‘conspiratorialities’ (Parmigiani 2021) might stem from. This would be a relevant topic for further research on Swedish witchcraft.

3. HOW IS CONTEMPORARY WITCHCRAFT TRANSFORMED INTO WORK, I.E. SOMETHING GENERATING A SALARY/MONEY?

After answering the previous research questions we realize that the world of contemporary witchcraft is not only an aesthetic expression and romanticization of everyday life, it is also a counter-reaction to the modernization of society that leaves many feeling uneasy not being able to provide for themselves and dependent on industries without much transparency. Changing the practice of life in response to a general societal worry of climate change and the destruction of natural resources. As noted previously, in times of societal worry, spiritual awakenings rise (Hill 2011:9-10). Societal environmental worries might be a contributing factor to the growth of spiritual witchcraft communities in the context of postsecular societies (Habermas 2008; Hjarvard & Lövheim 2012; Norris & Inglehart 2004). As Shove et.al. (2012) highlights when it comes to social practice theory, looking at the smaller practices allows for pointing towards a larger structure (2012:3). In this case, that larger structure is the marketization of Swedish witchcraft.

One of the most prominent examples of this is how witches are marketing and profiting from their witch-related services by using Instagram as a commercial platform. The ‘individual entrepreneurship’ as Banet-Weiser calls it (2012:168) is most prominent when observing the Instagram accounts of the witches. With the mediatization of witchcraft, knowledge and information of different spiritual practices become available for many, only a few of the witches are specialized in a specific craft. On top of that even fewer succeed in the additional required ‘competence’ (Shive et.al.) of ‘aesthetic practice’ that generate a following on Instagram and in extension: consumers.

The eclectic witchcraft (Renser & Tiidenberg 2020:3), creates many different job titles or entrepreneurial business opportunities for these witches. What once characterized witchcraft as esoteric (Faxneld 2020), due to witches' fear of societal stigma that made them gatekeep the

magical practices, was replaced with a more open attitude towards this magical knowledge, due to new technology, e.g. the internet. With the rise of entrepreneurial witchcraft there seems to be a new wave of esoteric witchcraft, this one commercially characterized and hidden behind paywalls.

The only way of creating a salary of witchcraft is through the marketization of witchcraft that gives rise to the construction of paywalls around the craft. This is especially significant due to two things. Firstly, what most witchcraft is centered around is the reclaiming of folk medicine and lifestyles, a knowledge that traditionally was practiced by the common man. Secondly, magic and witchcraft is described as the ‘panacea’ for the alienation of modernity. However the ‘great equalizer’ of this panacea is not equally distributed unless you are willing to pay for it. Falling into issues of classicism and a hierarchical structure. If you want to be saved from modernity and enter the re-enchantment of life you need to have economic means. This marketization and development is a reflection of neoliberal market values that even witchcraft suffers from under. A development that gives rise to what I would like to call *neo-esoteric* witchcraft. I argue that ‘neo-esoteric’ witchcraft creates issues of authenticity, as this commercial logic and hierarchical structure is at the very core of what witchcraft claims not to be.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND A WORD FOR THE FUTURE

Contemporary witchcraft in Sweden is an incredibly interesting space through which contemporary society is reflected. It is an empirically rich and rewarding field of study that can be approached from a magnitude of ways. I am incredibly grateful for being given the opportunity to catch a glimpse of these subuniverses and try to understand it as a student of media and communications. In an ideal world there are things I would have done differently. To begin with, I would have loved to meet with everyone in person in order to conduct a more ethnographic style of interviews. The witches that I met in person truly gave me a rich sense of context and atmosphere. Secondly, participating in some of the ceremonial work and how it is actually practiced would have given me a stronger ethnographic understanding of the practices behind ritual transfer and what actual practices the commercial services include. As this thesis is centered around witches in Sweden I would have loved to dive further into the manifestation of

Swedish folklore, mythology and historical heritage in contemporary witchcraft. This is something I saw traces of but decided not to include in this thesis. Lastly, topics of the commercialization of witchcraft in relation to a class and power analysis would be an interesting next step for future studies as well as further investigation of conspирuality.

After having spent months of my life thinking about witches, reading about witches and meeting with witches, it is a strange feeling to be concluding this time after these relatively few pages. Trying to present my experience in this short space has been challenging, to say the least, as there are so many things that I would like to say on this topic. What is written in this thesis is simply a fragment of what could (and should) be said on the topic. Hopefully this thesis might inspire further research on the matter or at least encourage someone to scroll through a few witch-hashtags on Instagram during some gloomy day. Regardless, I know that I will be tuning in once in a while to see what the witches of Instagram are up to.

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APPENDIX

1. PARTICIPANTS

During this research I interviewed nine different people who called themselves witches. Their pseudonyms are: Aradia, Demeter, Diana, Freya, Hekate, Hel, Kali, Stigrid and Vita Stjärnan. They chose their own pseudonyms except for Aradia and Demeter who asked me to choose for them. Most of the names ended up being a reference to a Goddess, mythological story or folklore. This was not intentional but developed organically over the meetings.

1.1 SAMPLING

I came across the participants in many different ways. Witches are not that easy to come by, so my method of sampling participants were basically: ask everyone I know if they know of any witches, write to every single witch I can find on Instagram, ask for permission to join and ask for participants in closed Facebook groups and to spend a lot of time on Google. I aimed for six participants in total, three in person and three over Zoom. However, once the ball started rolling and I got in contact with a few witches, I suddenly came in contact with very many witches as they recommended and referred me to others. I decided to add three more participants as they were keen on being part of the research and due to the fact that I felt that it was incredibly rewarding to meet with these people. For a more detailed record about the sampling and contact with each participant, see table 3 below.

The criteria for my participants were that 1. They identified as a witch and 2. They practiced magic. The reason for the criteria was simple, I aimed to find participants who were serious about their witchcraft and that included the practice in their everyday life. I also wanted participants that identified as witches in particular, as there are people who identify as other mythological beings. Other than that I did not have any other sample, except that they were based in Sweden of course. I did not have any age or gender preferences as I did not think it was relevant to my case, on the contrary I found that the slight difference between the practitioners when it came to age and gender aspects made for a much more interesting sample. It really

centered the conversations around witchcraft allowing for a holistic insight into how people who are not necessarily similar in age and gender, find meaning in the same practice of witchcraft.

2. INTERVIEWS

This is a chart for an overview over the empirical interviews I conducted during this research. The participants are categories alphabetically, similar to the Charts in the methodology section. Below I have also included a short summary over the length of the empirical material collected from the interviews that ended up being approximately 200 pages of transcriptions.

The division between the online Zoom interviews and the in person interviews were mostly a matter of compromise between me and the participant. Some participants would only participate on the premise that the interview was online, some had medical issues and deemed it most appropriate to do it over zoom and in other cases they could only do the interview with short notice and the in-person meetings became impossible.

In another life or under different circumstances I would have loved to have this experience with every single one of my participants. However, these are strange times. Over the course of the past two years we have grown used to meeting each other online in order to practice social distancing. Online interaction has become a convenient alternative in cases where illness, colliding schedules, and the mobility of both participant or researcher is restricted. However, researchers are dependent on who is willing to talk to us and therefore adjustments have been made to make the interactions possible.

TABLE 3

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Date and Time</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Contact</i>	<i>Length</i>
Aradia	23/2-22, 6pm	Over Zoom	Through a closed Facebook-group	1h 8 min
Demeter	18/2-22, 12pm	In person, in their work studio	Recommended by supervisor, reached through her website	1h 36 min

Diana	17/2-22, 3:15pm	Over Zoom	Through a closed Facebook-group	1h 21 min
Freya	16/2-22, 11am	In person, in their home	Recommended by a friend, reached through her website	1h 23 min
Hekate	7/3-22, 5pm	In person, at their workplace	Recommended by a relative, reached through her website	1h 54 min
Hel	3/3-11, 10:30 am	In person, in their home	Through their Instagram	1h 56 min
Kali	25/2-22 10am	Over Zoom	Recommended by a friend, reached through her website	1h 5 min
Stigrid	7/3-22, 10 am	Over Zoom	Through their Instagram	1h 40min
Vita stjärnan	28/2-22, 1pm	Over Zoom	Through their Instagram, recommended by a friend	1h 48 min

SUMMARY

Interviews	Time	Pages
9 interviews (4 in person, 5 over Zoom)	831 min= 13.86 hours	198 pages

These time differences were caused by a number of things, one of them due to time management for the participants who in some cases could only speak with me for about an hour. Sometimes it was due to the chemistry between me and the participant and how many things they had to say and talk about.

2.1 CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

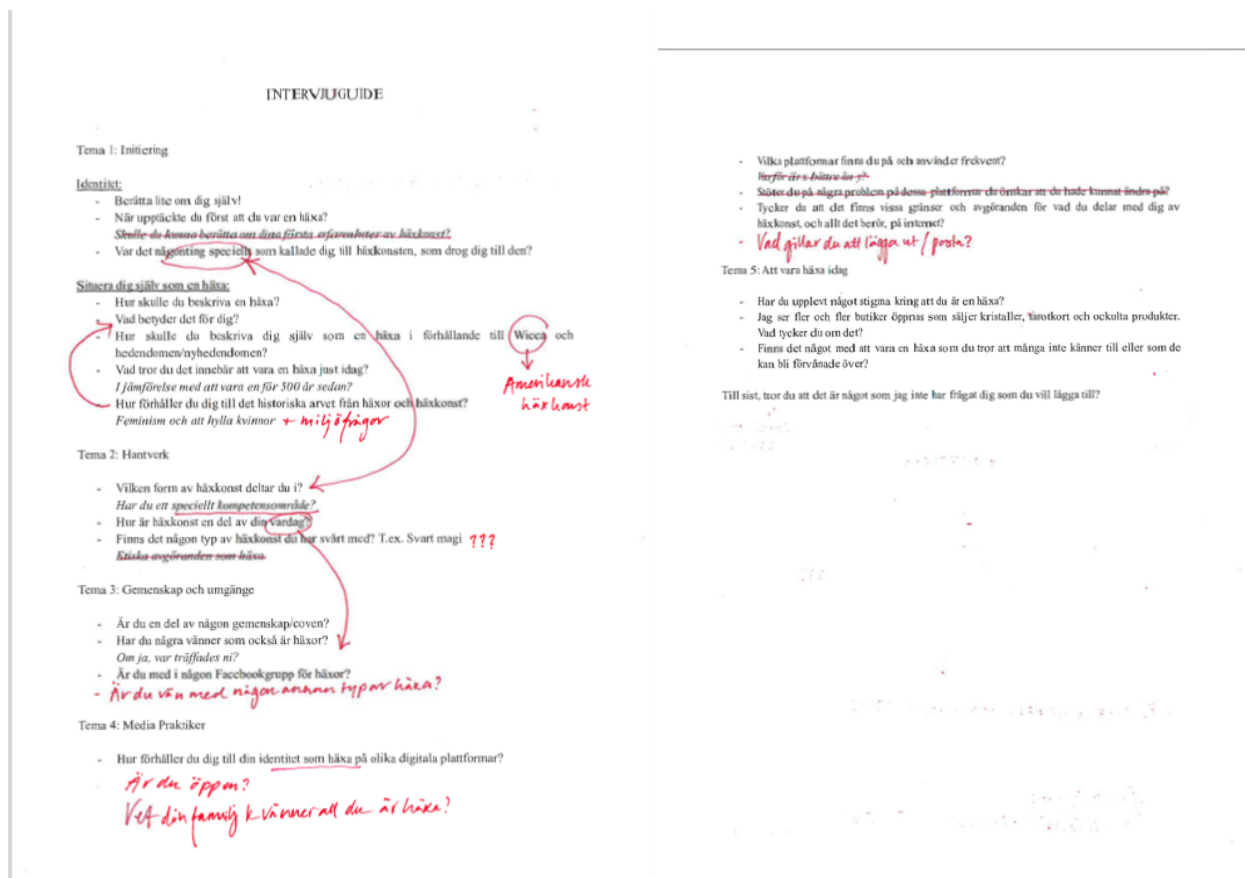
2.1.1 PILOT

I conducted a pilot interview with a witch December 16th, for a preparatory study. A pilot interview is a preparatory interview where you try out an interview guide and style and then change it for the better (Kuckartz 2014:47), and is necessary for achieving qualitative interviews.

The pilot interview is not used in the empirical data for this research but guided the interviews I conducted in this thesis study.

The pilot informed changes and adjustments to the interview questions and styles. I removed a few questions from my interview guide that I felt did not give what I thought they would and some that felt redundant and unnatural. I added the category of ‘media practices’ that I first thought would be too forced but later felt it helped me to make sure that the topic of media was always brought up at some point during the interview. I did not follow the guide strictly, I knew it by heart so I more or less followed the pace of the participants and sometimes led their way into another section or topic. In the pictures below I have tried to display how these more fluid interviews sometimes looked:

IMAGE 1 & 2:



2.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Translated to English, the interview guide questions are:

“Theme 1: Initiation

Identity:

- Tell me a little about yourself!
- When did you first discover that you were a witch?
Could you tell me about your first experiences with witchcraft?
- Was there anything in particular that drew you to witchcraft?

Situate yourself as a witch:

- How would you describe a witch?
- What does it mean to you (to be a witch)?
- How would you describe yourself as a witch in relation to Wicca and paganism?
- What do you think it means to be a witch today?
Compared to being one 500 years ago?
- How do you relate to the historical heritage of witches and witchcraft?
Feminism and praising women

Theme 2: Crafts

- What form of witchcraft do you participate in?
Do you have a special area of expertise?
- How is witchcraft a part of your everyday life?
- Is there any type of witchcraft you have difficulty with? For example, black magic
Ethical decisions like witchcraft

Theme 3: Fellowship and socializing

- Are you part of a community / coven?
- Do you have any friends who are also witches?
If so, where did you meet?
- Are you in a Facebook group for witches?

Theme 4: Media Practitioner

- How do you relate to your identity as a witch on various digital platforms?

- What platforms are you on and use frequently?
Why is x better than y?
- Do you encounter any problems on these platforms that you wish you could have changed?
- Do you think that there are certain limits and decisions for what you share with witchcraft, and all that concerns, on the internet?

Theme 5: Being a witch today

- Have you experienced any stigma about being a witch?
- I see more and more stores opening that sell crystals, tarot cards and occult products. What do you think about it?
- Is there anything about being a witch that you think many people do not know or that they may be surprised by?

Finally, is there anything that you would like to add?"

2.3 CONSENT & ETHICAL REFLECTION

SAMTYCKESFORMULÄR

Namn på person som utför studien: Filippa Jonsson
 Telefon: 070 791 62 01
 Email: FilippaJonsson@gmail.com

Forskningsstudien syftar att undersöka moderna häxor i Sverige i egenskap för en examensuppsats inom Medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap vid Lunds Universitet (kurskod MKVM13, examen vårtermin 2022). Studien utgår ifrån en kvalitativ metod, mer specifikt en etnografisk metod. Det innebär att metoden ämnar att ge en djup inblick i ämnet mer rika beskrivningar snarare än en mer övergripande bild av ämnet. För att göra det kommer studien bland annat att genomföra intervjuer med häxor. Digitala dimensioner kommer också att tas i beaktande, så som sociala medieplattformar och kulturellt innehåll. Studien utgår ifrån ett induktivt perspektiv och har därför ingen hypotes. Intervjuerna kommer även att styra vilken annan typ av medieinnehåll som kommer att användas som empiri i studien.

Du som deltagare kommer också att bli tillfrågad om du kan tänka dig att ställa upp på en mediedagbok. Detta är INTE ett måste för att delta i studien, utan är snarare en kompletterande praktik som kan ge djupare insikter för oss båda. Mediedagboken innebär att under en 3-5 dagar skriva ner vilka media man använder, i vilket syfte och hur det känns när man gör det. Medieanvändning kan innefatta allt från att läsa en bok, använda sociala medier eller att skriva med penna och papper. Om man fotat något under dagen, eller postat något på ett forum kan även detta inkluderas i mediedagboken. Om något skulle användas i studien skulle alla namn, bilder och beskrivningar anonymiseras så att inget ska gå att spåra till dig. Mediedagboken behöver inte vara en uppsats utan snarare lite lösa tankar. Det är väldigt fritt.

Ditt deltagande kommer att förbli helt och hållet anonymt under hela studien. Ditt namn kommer inte att delas med någon annan person än mig. Om du så önskar kommer även ortnamn att anonymiseras. Detta för att vi ska kunna prata fritt och ärligt, samt för att visa på att jag värnar om din och häx-kulturens integritet.

Jag kommer att spela in vår intervju och transkribera den för att använda som data i min studie. Enbart jag kommer att lyssna på själva inspelningar, men delar av transkriberingen kommer att

synas i studien och referera till dig under ett pseudonym. Du har rätt att prata hur mycket eller lite du vill under intervjun. Du har rätt att ta tillbaka svar, eller neka till att svara på frågor. Du kan även när du vill under intervjun välja att pausa eller stoppa inspelningen. Intervjun brukar ta runt en timme till en och en halv timme. Om du går med på att ställa upp i denna studie, signera nedanför:

SIGNERING

Undertecknande forskare:

Undertecknande deltagare:

Namnförtydligande:

Namnförtydligande:

Om du även kan tänka dig att ställa upp på att göra en mediedagbok så kryssa gärna i rutan nedan.

JA, jag vill bidra med en mediedagbok till studien:

This is the consent form I provided to my participants. Those I visited in person received a physical copy, the others a digital PDF version. On top I put my contact information so that they knew how to reach me with any questions or concerns and on the bottom I asked them to put their names and sign and check the box if they also wanted to provide a media diary. The text read as followed (translation):

“The research study aims to investigate modern witches in Sweden in the capacity of a degree thesis in Media and Communication Science at Lund University (course code MKVM13, degree spring semester 2022). The study is based on a qualitative method, more specifically an ethnographic method. This means that the method intends to provide a deep insight into the subject, richer descriptions rather than a more overall picture of the subject. To do this, the study will, among other things, conduct interviews with witches. Digital dimensions will also be taken into account, such as social media platforms and cultural content. The study is based on an inductive perspective and therefore has no hypothesis. The interviews will also guide what other type of media content will be used as empirical data in the study.

You as a participant will also be asked if you would like to set up a media diary. This is NOT a must to participate in the study, but rather a complementary practice that can provide deeper insights for both of us. The media diary means writing down for 3-5 days which media you use, for what purpose and how it feels when you do it. Media use can include anything from reading a book, using social media or writing with pen and paper. If you took a photo during the day, or posted something on a forum, this can also be included in the media diary. If something were to be used in the study, all names, pictures and descriptions would be anonymized so that nothing can be traced to you. The media diary does not have to be an essay but rather a little loose thoughts. It's very free.

Your participation will remain completely anonymous throughout the study. Your name will not be shared with anyone other than me. If you wish, place names will also be anonymised. This is so that we can talk freely and honestly, and to show that I care about the integrity of your and the witch culture.

I will record our interview and transcribe it to use as data in my study. Only I will listen to the actual recordings, but parts of the transcript will be visible in the study and refer to you under a pseudonym. You have the right to talk as much or as little as you want during the interview. You have the right to withdraw answers, or refuse to answer questions. You can also choose to pause or stop recording during the interview. The interview usually takes around an hour to an hour and a half. If you agree to participate in this study, sign below:”

2.4 CONSENT AND ETHICS

As an extra precautionary I also got recorded consent. I started each interview off by reading this consent form out loud so that I saw that they comprehended the information and their rights. I also asked them specifically what social media they used and if I had their permission to use that in my research. All of them said yes, even though some of them only had Facebook that I never ended up analyzing anyways. I always finished the interview by asking them if it was a good experience for them and how they felt. I also made sure to let them know that I was at their disposal for any additional questions.

Secondly, I want to highlight the ethics around the facebook groups that I joined in my preparatory work and search for participants to this thesis study. I found these groups by searching for them on facebook out of curiosity. Most of them were closed, which makes it an ethical issue. When I tried joining a few of them, the groups had different questions upon trying to enter. The questions and topics around if you are a witch or participate in witchcraft, but also questions around whether or not you abide by any religion and so on. For ethical purposes I always answered truthfully, saying I was not a witch, not religious and not seeking to become one either. When I made a post looking for participants, I reached out to the admin of the groups prior to posting and asked for their consent.

For all witches with instagram accounts, I asked permission to include their online displays of witchcraft in this study which I received. The quote collected below, table 5, from one participant's Instagram has been censored and anonymized. I have also made sure it is not traceable.

3. TRANSLATIONS

Table 4: Interview Translations

<i>Name</i>	<i>Swedish</i>	<i>English</i>
Diana	“Jag har mitt altare öppet hemma och ockulta symboler och så vidare, men tja, jag har alltid hängt med svartrockare och metall folk och de har alltid haft ockulta symboler så det är ingen som tänker riktigt på den kopplingen egentligen.”	“I have my altar open at home and occult symbols and so on. But I have always hung out with black rockers and metall people and they have always worn occult symbols themselves, so no one is really making that connection.”
Vita Stjärnan	“Jag är en väldigt visuell person som ser framför mig, jag ser framför mig saker, jag har ett visuellt seende. det är så jag utforskar andevärlden, den andliga världen, att jag <i>ser</i> . och det är också det som jag skapar då och jag visuellt skapar det som jag ser. när det gäller måleri och bildkonst då är det väldigt tydligt att den här visionen har jag fått, den ska manifesteras liksom.”	“I am a very visual person /.../ I have a visual way of looking at things and it is also how I explore the spiritual world /.../ the art I create is a manifestation of the visions I receive from the spiritual.”
Stigrid	“Men det behöver inte vara lika vackert när jag håller på här bakom kameran. för mig är det asså, en sak att ha det estetiskt vackert för andra men när jag håller på själv blir det inte samma sak.”	“What I am doing behind the camera doesn’t have to be as beautiful. For me it is one thing to have it aesthetically pleasing for others, but when I am practicing alone it’s not the same thing”
Hel	“Långt ifrån ‘pew pew’ skicka ut såhär coola grejer. det är väldigt mycket jord och ner i myllan /.../ Jag tror det. det är ju mitt största samtal med alla barn. Att de tror	“Far away from the ‘pew pew’ magic, sending out cool stuff. It is more earth, down into the humus ²⁴ . /.../ The biggest topic of discussion I

²⁴ Humus is a type of dirt or sediment.

	<p>jag kan trola med en trollstav. Jag kan skjuta ut vad som helst, väldigt roligt. Men sen kan jag ju inte göra upp eld med en trollstav liksom? /.../ men sen så vet jag ju att i långa ceremonier när man tar sig in i sitt undermedvetna på ett säkert och bra sätt, då är det som att du verkligen går in i en annan slags magi, där man kan skärskåda sig själv, ha utomkroppsliga förmågor, du kan se dig själv utifrån, du kan ha känslor i kroppen. helt utan plant medicin eller berusning, bara du och trummor, eld eller vatten. så det går att hitta det största största magin i sig själv./.../ jag har sagt och skrivit det många gånger, att den största magin är också den största revolutionen och det är att på riktigt älska sig själv.”</p>	<p>have with children is that they think I can conjure magic with a wand. It is quite fun. I can send out anything, but I can't make up a fire with a wand, you know? /.../ In ceremony you can go deep into yourself and your subconscious and have out of bodily sensations, that is another kind of magic that you can experience solely with yourself and drums , fire or water.. You'll find the largest magic within yourself. But I've said and written it many times, the most important magic and revolution is loving yourself completely.”</p>
Stigrid	<p>“Man måste lära sig en del saker innan man gör blodmagi och håller på med demoner, jag är inte redo för det trots många års erfarenhet. demoner sätter sig ofta på psyket och bryter ner än psykiskt.”</p>	<p>“You have to learn many things before doing blood and demon magic. I am not ready for that yet, even though I have many years of experience. Demons usually attach themselves to your psyche and break you down physiologically.”</p>
Hel	<p>“Jag tror man kan göra det i sin vardag. Genom att lyssna på sin intuition. vara en lite stund på dagen i sin fulla autencitet. genom att jobba med sina gränsdragningar, inte ställa upp på sex. genom att våga dra iväg från sina barn. genom att helt plötsligt ändra sin diet. Jag tycker såna saker är också att återförtrola världen,/.../ men sen också mer aktiva grejer som att ha ett altare, ah ett altare utomhus, ta promenader utomhus utan att lyssna på podcast och gå jättefort.”</p>	<p>“You can do it in your everyday life. By listening to your intuition, be in your full authenticity for a moment each day. By putting up boundaries, not agreeing to have sex, by having the courage to be seperated from your children, by changing your diet. I think those practices are a way of re-enchanting the world /.../ Also more active things like having an altar, taking walks outside in nature without rushing, without listening to a podcast.”</p>

<p>Vita Stjärnan</p>	<p>“jag bekräftelse av det. det blir instant gratification /.../ men jag fick mycket bekräftelse och då växte det där. då var vi igång. jag hade inte tänkt vara på instagram så mycket.”</p> <p>I: <i>så nästan instagram som blev ett av skälen till varför du blev kvar på gotland?</i></p> <p>“ja... kanske /.../ då hade jag mig isolerad här. mne genom Instagram får jag kontakt liskom och då känns det ok att vara på en isolerad plats. så ja absolut. och att naturen är här, jag kan vara i naturen men ändå ha kontakt med omvärlden. och att allt... mitt instagramkonto handlar om häxkonst och att vara i naturen. då passar det bra också.”</p>	<p>“That got me instant gratification /.../ a lot of confirmation and so it grew. I never intended to be on Instagram that much”</p> <p><i>I: Do you think Instagram is one of the reasons why you ended up staying on the island?</i></p> <p>“Yes maybe /.../ I think I would have felt isolated here, far away from all of the cool jobs I could have had in the city. But through Instagram I get contact with others and it feels OK to be in an isolated place. The nature is here but I can still have contact with the rest of the world. My Instagram account is about witchcraft and nature so it makes sense.”</p>
<p>Kali</p>	<p>“Det handlar om att knyta an till jorden och till sitt arv /.../ det handlar om var jag sätter mina fötter.”</p>	<p>“It is about bonding with the earth and its history /.../ it is about knowing where I place my feet.”</p>
<p>Vita Stjärnan</p>	<p>“Hur visar moder jord sitt ansikte där du är?”</p>	<p>“How does mother earth show her face from where you are standing?”</p>
<p>Freya</p>	<p>“Vi tar kontakt med moder jord, vi <i>andas</i> hennes andetag, vi andas samma andetag och vi <i>är</i> där vi andas uppe hennes kraft i våra kroppar och verkligen återtar kontakten med henne. som kvinna. för att där väcka våran feminina kraft. vår kvinnliga kraft. hon längtar efter det.”</p>	<p>We have contact with Mother Earth, we are <i>breathing</i> her breath, we are breathing <i>together</i> with her and we breathe in her power in our bodies and reclaim the contact with her as a woman. To awaken our feminine power, and she longs for it.</p>
<p>Hel</p>	<p>“Vi tillbaka till ett ursprung om jorden, årstiderna, växlingarna och då jobbar man utifrån den platsen man är på. jag förhåller mig till Skandinavien men även liksom i Sverige så är det stor skillnad på Skåne och Umeå, var man är i årstiderna osv. så</p>	<p>“We are coming back to our heritage of earth, the seasons, the fluctuations, and you have to work with the local place where you are. I condition myself to Scandinavia but also Sweden. There is a big difference</p>

	det är ännu mer lokalt. jag läste någon gång att ‘A shaman can only work in their local village’, man jobbar med ursprung och man läker utifrån platsen man jobbar med.”	between Skåne and Umeå ²⁵ too when it comes to their seasons, so it becomes even more local. I read somewhere that ‘a shaman can only work in their local village’, you work with origin and you heal the earth from where you are standing.”
Diana	“Det är fortfarande vetenskapligt att det funkar. även om det, man måste dricka förbaskat mycket mer och det smakar skit”	“It is scientific that it helps, even though you have to drink damn much of it and it tastes like shit”.
Hekate	“Trots att jag sa att jag bara skulle ha det som hobby så kände jag att jag ville göra mer. tänk om jag kunde ägna mer av min tid till det här?”	“Even though I had said that I was going to have tarot as my hobby I started thinking, what if I could spend more of my time doing this?”
Hekate	“det så tydligt för mig att jag hade en längtan efter att leka igen och lära mig någonting som inte nödvändigtvis behöver vara knutet till mig som yrkesperson /.../men det blev inte en fysisk plats utan snarare en väldigt kreativ och lekfull och den här andliga platsen där jag på något sätt fått lov att bygga upp mitt eget trossystem”	“It became clear to me that I had a desire to play again and learn something that was not attached to me as a worker /.../ but it didn’t become a physical place but a creative and playful one, this spiritual space where I was allowed to build my own belief system.”

Table 5: Instagram Translations

<i>Name</i>	<i>Swedish</i>	<i>English</i>
Hel	Twilight Retreat med CENSORED och mig. Boom, boom,boom helt plötsligt börjar det bli ont om platser. Det är vi ju så glada över för alltså på riktigt det kommer bli magiskt och ja det kommer bli lyxigt. Det lyxiga är ju att maten blir serverad, era dagar planerade, sköna	Twilight Retreat with CENSORED and me. Boom, boom, boom all of a sudden there is a shortage of places. We are so happy about that because really it will be magical and yes it will be luxurious. The luxury is that the food is served, your days planned, comfortable beds in a

²⁵ Skåne is located in the south of Sweden whereas Umeå is located in the north of Sweden.

<p>sängar i vacker miljö men det är ju fortfarande inget SPA el överdrivet infrastrukturella lyxlösningar. Vi bor tillsammans i enskilda/delade rum el på den inredda ladans vind. Vi äter tillsammans på långbord. Jobbar i skog, äng, hav och inuti i den vackra dome. Det lyxiga är att ni inte kommer behöva tänka på livet utanför utan befinna er hos oss i vår bubbla av ceremoni, skymning, gryning, naturvandringar. Jag vet att många hört av sig till mig, åh om det ändå vore billigare och jag säger som jag säger till alla att ja men ordna något enklare billigare, boka plats, ordna med alla praktiska grejer och jag kommer gärna och fyller upp med allt jag kan. Men detta, är ju vad jag tror på, jag minns när jag för första gången la en stor del av mina sparpengar på bara mig själv, alltså WoW vilken grej det var, jag hade aldrig lagt 10 000 kr på mig själv i ett svep. Jag hade tillochmed pengarna på kontot men istället för att våga ta av dem så lånade jag dem, det var så kodat i mitt nervsystem att SÅ HÄR GÖR EN INTE.... Va fan måste ju få något konkret av stålarna en satsat. Well little did I know, att satsa på mig själv är det bästa jag gjort. Jag lämnade tillbaka lånet direkt efter den lång helgen. Så detta inlägg är till er som vill men tvekar pga av pengar, ta en stund vid altaret el naturpromenaden och känn efter,är det detta du vill gör det bara. Vi kan erbjuda Klarna om det hjälper. Vi kan dock lova att vi kommer göra allt vi kan för att få rå om er och skapa en riktigt magisk sommarminne till de kalla vintermånaderna. Eller CENSORED CENSORED. Alla bilder tagna av</p>	<p>beautiful environment, but it is still not a SPA or excessively infrastructural luxury solutions. We live together in individual / shared rooms electricity in the attic of the furnished barn. We eat together at long tables. Works in forest, meadow, sea and inside the beautiful dome. The luxury is that you will not have to think about life outside but be with us in our bubble of ceremony, dusk, dawn, nature walks. I know that many have heard from me, oh if it would still be cheaper and I say as I say to everyone that yes but arrange something easier cheaper, book a place, arrange all the practical stuff and I will be happy to come and fill up with everything I may. But this, is what I believe in, I remember when I for the first time put a large part of my savings on just myself, so WoW what a thing it was, I had never put SEK 10,000 on myself in one go. I even had the money in the account but instead of daring to take it off, I borrowed it, it was so coded in my nervous system that THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU DO What the hell do you have to get something concrete from the thieves you invested. Well little did I know, investing in myself is the best thing I have done. I returned the loan immediately after the long weekend. So this post is for you who want but hesitate due to money, take a moment at the altar or nature walk and feel for, this is what you just want to do. We can offer Klarna if it helps. However, we can promise that we will do everything we can to get raw about you and create a really magical summer memory for the cold winter months. Or</p>
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	<p>CENSORED Länk till Retreat finns i min profil. (HASHTAGS REMOVED AND CENSORED)</p>	<p>CENSORED, CENSORED. All photos taken by CENSORED Link to Retreat are in my profile. (HASHTAGS REMOVED AND CENSORED)</p>
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4. THE MISTAKES: MEDIA DIARIES AND PARTICIPATION

In the beginning of this research I had a hope of collecting media diaries from my participants. If you look at the consent form you can also see on page 2 a question regarding these. A few participants actually checked off that box and were keen on trying it out. However, I never collected a single media diary, and to be honest I never reminded them either as I quickly realized that the interest was low and that I would never have been able to collect a significant amount of them anyways. The media diaries were never handed in due to stress, illnesses and disinterest, which can sometimes be the case when working with a research subject, the human factor.

I never grieved over this as I mostly saw it as a potential complement to what I was already collecting. I had hoped it would give me more insight into their everyday lives, however I have once prior tried out media diaries with the same result: very low interest and dedication from participants. So I went in with very low expectations, mostly thinking it might be fun to see if it would work or not. Now it is safe to say that *no*, It did not work.

The methods of participation were never done either as most of the witches charged for their ritual and ceremonial work, something that created ethical issues in approaching and was as a result dismissed. I did not deem it professional to ask for their services free of charge.

5. DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Here I display my full descriptions of the Instagram posts that are mentioned and used in the analysis.

Table 6: Participants Media Use

<i>Name</i>	<i>Instagram (as a witch)</i>	<i>Reflection</i>
Aradia	No	Does not use Instagram as a witch. She is not open about her witchcraft online and uses private and closed Facebook groups as a social forum in order to keep her identity private.
Demeter	Yes	She is a public witch and a common figure within the scene, she uses many different platforms, Instagram being her main one. She also uses her website and has her own Facebook page.
Diana	No	She does not use Instagram to create witch content, however she might consume it there. She wants to be private in her identity in being a witch, although she still uses private Facebook groups as a platform to interact with other witches.
Freya	Yes	Uses a number of different platforms: website, blog, Facebook page and Instagram. There she goes mostly under the label of her Witch persona/ company name. Freya prefers Facebook over Instagram but still updates on both of them.
Hekate	Yes	Uses a public account on Instagram where she mainly posts about tarot readings and astrological information and content.
Hel	Yes	Considers her Instagram as a vital part of her witchcraft, considers the more activist elements embedded with her witchcraft. On her Instagram she posts about witchcraft and feminism and activism mainly.
Kali	No	Does not use Instagram but instead a Facebook page.
Stigrid	Yes	Uses a number of different platforms: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Her favorite platform to use is TikTok but her Instagram account is also regularly updated. She posts about her witchcraft, rituals, advice and information but also selfies and content about her everyday life.
Vita Stjärnan	Yes	Uses Instagram mainly, considers the page as part of his artistic craft. Is interested in photography and art and posts pictures of

		himself in a very artistic manner. Describes this practice as a visualization of his spirituality.
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CHART 2

5.1 DESCRIPTION OF INSTAGRAM POSTS

VITA STJÄRNAN AND THE BIRDS: PHOTO

Vita Stjärnan is standing in the foreground of the picture, staring right into the camera. Wearing simple beige linen trousers and a kaftan, without a shirt underneath and revealing his bare chest, VS is also wearing a dark blue scarf over his head that is floating in the wind and a beaded necklace. Across the forehead, nose and chin VS have painted a pattern and different symbols. VS underarm tattoo of a snake is visible as he grabs the scarf. In the other hand VS is holding a bowl of sorts with white smoke coming out of it.

In the background there is an open field and even further away the edge of a forest. The trees are bare and have not yet bloomed. The light is bright, seeming light early morning or late day, there is an orange light covering the treetops. The top of the picture is a bit of blue sky, but more importantly four illustrations of birds. What looks like a swallow, an eagle, a crow and a falcon (from my limited knowledge of Swedish birds). Further there are three occult symbols painted across the sky, the symbols resemble those painted on VS forehead and look completely foreign to me.

The picture is beautifully composed and with crystal clear sharpness. The undertones of orange makes the picture feel warm even though the nature in the background is bare.

STIGRID AND HER MANIFESTATION: VIDEO

The video is posted on Instagram but has originally been made on TikTok using its features as you can see the small TikTok icon on the screen. In the video, Stigrid is sitting in a dark room. Wearing a regular t-shirt and a flannel. It is hard to see the background as Stigrid covers most of

the frame except for a white modern window frame, a plant and a candle standing on a surface behind her. Stigrid is out of focus as the burning incense stick is placed in front of her face, centered for the camera. After a few seconds she holds up a finger and starts counting to three before blowing out the incense flame and the video ends only a few seconds in. A song is applied to the video, it is called “My mother told me” by JDanny (feat. Natidredd). The text “Välj en önskning, när jag blåser ut lågan låt det manifesteras <3”, english: “Pick a wish, when I blow out the flame let it manifest <3”.

The video feels mysterious with the song in the background, the candlelight and the dark lit room. However, with Stigrid's relaxed clothing, sitting inside of a relatively modern room gives connotations of a rather mundane and everyday life practice.

HEL'S ALTAR: PHOTO

An elevated wooden board is standing in the corner of a room. Behind it there is a wiggly wooden stick resting on the wall, a flower pot and what looks like an olive tree. Centered in the picture standing on the wooden surface are a bunch of candles, a tall red one and a tall white one and a few small ones in yellow and pink. To the left there is a goddess statue depicting a woman sitting with her legs crossed caressing her round stomach that is painted like the globe, next to her is a necklace with wooden pearls with occult symbols engraved in them. There are four bottles of essential oils on the wooden board. In one corner there is a bowl and in the bowl there's the skin of a snake and a clay figure depicts a woman. Further, there is a tiny copper cauldron, a fairy statue and a container of crystals and what looks like small eggs and small tubes of herbs. There are many items in the picture but it is well composed and aesthetically pleasing. Everything has its place, it is organized and interesting to look at. The different colors are well balanced.

HEL'S RETREAT: PHOTO(S)

In this post Hel markets a retreat that she is organizing, the post consists of nine photos with the text of the name of the retreat written on top of them. The first photo depicts around eight different women's naked bodies standing and sitting in a dark green forest. It is taken from behind them so you can not see their faces, only their bare backs and their released hair. The

second photo was taken of a forest in the sunrise with a white fog covering the grounds. The third photo are the of the naked women sitting in a circle, the fourth of a barbecue grill, fifth a woman with a white flower crown standing in front of a flower tree, sixth of the naked women sitting on and leaning on a large rock, seventh of an altar with candles and Goddess statues, eight photo of people having some sort of meeting at a farm. The last one is of Hel herself sitting on the ground in a blood red cloak with a hood, raising her hands in a saluting motion towards the deep green forest in front of her. For the text from under this post, see translations, page X.

6. STEP BY STEP PROCESS

During the time between the 16th of February until the 7th of May I conducted the interviews. When I had a few days in between traveling and setting up meetings, I transcribed the interviews using oTranscribe.com. During the entire time I scrolled on the Instagrams of the witches I spoke with and saved certain posts in a folder on my own Instagram. The work of transcribing, coding and categorizing the interviews are a circular process according to Kuckartz, meaning going back and forth between the transcriptions/ empirical material and the coding (2014:48). More or less doing all of the methods simultaneously over the course of a month, even though I never really stopped conducting the Instagram observations.

I printed each transcription and coded them first by hand using *open* and *in vivo* coding. I did this a few times for each printed interview, I later made an Excel file where I thematically collected the codes that I thought were prominent or interesting from my printed copies. That became a way for me to sift out and critically reflect on my material. As Kuckartz proposes, my codes were then categorized according to these patterns, recurrency but also the exceptions. Kuckartz calls these categorizations, a way of grouping together the open codes (Kuckartz 2014:23). Later these categories were made into subcategories, later into themes, the themes were for example: ‘witchcraft online’, ‘witchcraft offline’, ‘commercialization of witchcraft’, ‘culture as contestation’ and so on. Always going back and forth between empirical material and the codes inspired by Kuckartz (ibid). The second or third time around I started to mark according to the three elements from practice theory of what a practice is made of: material, competences and

meaning (Shove 2020:8), but also the other thematic categories that developed throughout this process, for example ‘locality’ and ‘commercialism’.

6.1 TRANSCRIBING AND CODING

I transcribed the interviews using the program oTranscribe.com. It took a few weeks as many of the interviews were quite long. After transcribing them I converted them into PDF files and printed them. My first rounds of coding was made by hand using open and in vivo coding to open up for the analysis (Kuckartz 2014). I prefer to make all the coding by hand, as I read and wrote I kept going back to these printed transcriptions for another round of coding. I also did my analytical coding the last few rounds, marking down my concepts in the transcriptions. In the images below, I display an example of how this coding looked.

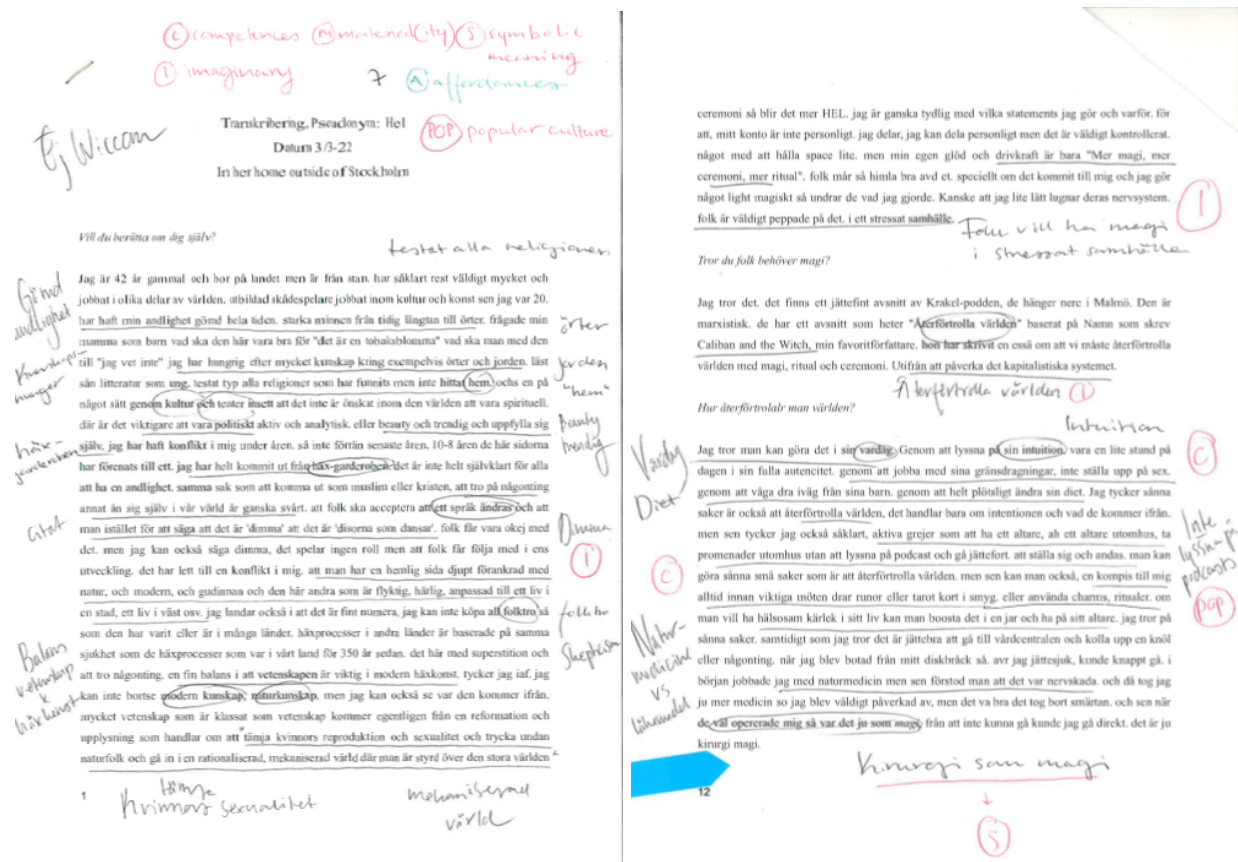


IMAGE 4 & 5

I highlighted the most prominent codes I knew I would use in the PDF on my computer as well. I wanted the PDF:s to be less “crowded” than my printed copies. Later I transferred the codes into an Excel file where I kept all of my codes under categories, subcategories and themes. I started by coding essentially everything and over the circular process going back to each interview over and over again I filtered the codes down to the bare essentials as my empirical material was large (about 200 pages of transcriptions). As I started to filter them I began using new sheets in Excel to keep track of the emerging themes. There I put the entire quotes from the interviews as well so that I kept track of the context of each code. I also put a column of my analytical concept to the right of it so I kept track of my analytical intentions of the quotes. An draft from a part one of these of the subcategories for “online witchcraft” is laid-out below:

Online Witchcraft						
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Concept</i>
Magic/ Ritual	Material(ity)	sociala medier	tiktok			
			instagram	Att uttrycka sig i text blir ett kreativt utlopp. när det kommer till hantverk och textilhantverk som jag jobbat med mycket så är det väldigt magiskt, att spinna en tråd att väva ett tyg. man pratar mycket om väven som sträcker sig över jorden, alla är en tråd av väven. det finns mycket textil-symbolik i det andliga i den här världen. då passar det bra att väva, brodera, sy, att man syr in sina böner, man syr in sina drömmar och visioner i de här sakerna man skapar så blir de fulla av kraft liksom. att man använder sig av naturen, man kanske påbörjar ett projekt vid nymånen	Vita Stjärnan	

				till exempel. den växande energina v nymånen så växer, växer och växer det och når sin peak vid fullmåne. så avslutar man när månen sen går tillbaka och wrap it up. så hantverk och konst blir så himla tydligt hur man kan göra magi av det, det tycker jag är kul.		
			Instagram	jag tycker instagram är så himla bra format. det tillåter en att göra visuella uttryck. det är kul. det är väldigt småskaligt, inläggen är väldigt begränsade på ett sätt till hur mycket text och information man kan ha	Vita Stjärnan	
			Instagram	däremot så är instagram och sociala medier, ett fucking hellhole. jag hatar egentligen att vara på soc. emdier. man kan säga att jag använder instagram som plattform men jag är ingen konsument. jag gillar inte att, nu tycker jag instagram, just nu har jag en liten kris med sociala medier. jag tycker instagram vill vara tiktok, de promotar korta snabba informationsflöden som inte ger någon interaktion eller som bygger på community. de kopplar inte samman människor de är bara ett sätt att få folk att fastna vid skärmen och stimuleras. stimulates av snabb content. stressigt. för mycket. överväldigande. jag har kompisar som instagram är elak mot soms tänger ner konton och tar bort posts de tycker... kroppar utanför normen blir ratade av instagram. man måste vara norm-snygg och se ut på ett visst sätt. jag tycker instagram är, the worst. men jag har ingenstans att fly till heller.	Vita Stjärnan	

				<p>än så länge vet jag inte var man skulle gå? jag vill bara bojkotta instagram men var ska man annars vara. det är ett bra sätt att få spridning på saker man vill göra.</p>		
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CHART X

7. FIELD DIARIES

I conducted field diaries from the meetings I had with the witches. I practiced poetic writing and writing as inquiry during these field notes. When writing these field notes I was inspired by Sumartojo and Pink’s (2019) discussion about atmospheres and how to capture them by referring to the sensory experiences of the place (Sumartojo & Pink 2019:3).

For some participants, especially those I met with over Zoom I only wrote down a few sentences. The ones I met with in person were a bit more extensive, I never wrote one for Hekate though as I met with her at her workplace and in my judgment it felt unethical to describe her workplace in the same way I would a home. Below I have attached three of the field diaries from my meetings with Demeter, Freya and Hel.

DEMETER

The sun is already shining through the window as I wake up in the morning. Between the pine trees outside a cool sunshine brood, and I can tell it’s going to be a beautiful day. I wake up there because I am going to meet with Demeter, she is the reason why I am back home sleeping in the office space that was once my sister’s bedroom. Demeter and I have been emailing back and forth and today we finally get to meet. She texted me the address to her studio and added: “You’ll see the cabin inside the red fence”.

We are on the other side of [REDACTED], in some of the city center's older neighborhoods. We drive along a long hilly street lined by the traditional red houses with white window frames and chimneys, Demeter would later tell me these houses, including her own, are k-marked. It is a legal designation for cultural historical buildings to protect them from being rebuilt or torn down, in these houses some of the first [REDACTED] lived. I've actually been in this area before, it is a lovely place to stroll, the small houses hiding behind high red fences that makes your mind wonder what might be hiding behind them. There are rusty bicycles leaning on the vine-covered facades and fences, but the network of plants are brown and bare after a long winter. [REDACTED] has very uneven terrain with many peaks and valleys, the street we are on is rising and by the end of it we are on the peak of a hill. Through the windshield I can see the water spread out before us below the hill. On the other side of the lake I can distinguish new islets rising from the water, everything covered by the cold spring sunshine. We are by the end of the street, the last red house in front of the water, and it's the right house number that Demeter gave me written by the gate.

I step out of the car on the headland bathing in sunshine, and from behind the fence I can see the top of a head running around in the garden. Unlike the other houses I passed on the street, this one has a much lower fence, maybe so that it won't cover the beautiful view. The garden is tucked into a brown and gray winter hibernation, still I can easily imagine all of the colors that soon will flourish from the earth. When I am standing by the fence with a vine-covered arch above it, I couldn't help but feel that this was, as a matter of fact, exactly the kind of place where an urban witch would be living.

After I call out to Demeter over the fence, she comes to greet me. Demeter is incredibly warm and relaxed, she greets me almost as family even though it seems as if I just caught her lost in thought. She is wearing a beautiful red furry coat and her gray hair brushed to the side. She fiddles with the gate that is protesting for a while, until she invites me into the big garden that stretches even further than I first thought. Right in front of the fence the studio house stands, painted in falu-röd with white window frames and a yellow wooden door. A green staircase leads to a small balcony on top of the entrance to the small house. The garden has a wooden plateau, different wooden work benches and an outdoor toilet in a corner of the fence. The trees are bare

but I can distinguish small buds appearing on some of the bushes. Behind Demeters house a tall apartment building rises above us, even though the apartment building is located below the hill it still rises above us, and the sun would in a few hours be swallowed behind it. The entire building is surrounded by scaffolding and cranes.

“They are building a massive apartment complex” Demeter told me.

The hammering sounds echoes between the house and the rock wall we are located on. When I turned my back to it, the sound reminded me of a woodpecker, and I started to imagine it as such. It is a romantic contrast, the garden as an oasis in the city located in front of the beautiful view of the lake and islets, yet with the growing urban environment on the other side of it. Demeter suggests that we can conduct the interview outside in the sun. She has taken her outdoor furniture and placed it in a sunny part of the garden that is not yet covered by shade. I couldn't agree with her suggestion more, this is one of the prettiest parts of ██████████ that I've ever been to, and I can't get enough of it.

Before we sit down, Demeter gives me a tour of the cabin. We take our jackets off, underneath her red coat Demeter is casually dressed in jeans, hoodie but with her lips painted red. She tells me about the history of the houses along the street, some of them are made for living in but others aren't. In her case it is what's called a studio, one that is not fit for residing in full time. Instead she comes here to plant in her garden, craft, write or to simply come away from the busier part of town. The houses have hundreds of years of history and Demeter's small house wasn't always considered inappropriate for living in.

“During the YEAR there used to be a couple living here with their seven children” Demeter says as we are standing in a small hall that was added to the house fairly recently, “And you'll see how crazy that is as we enter the actual cabin”.

And she is completely right. The house is only a few square meters big, the thought that nine people used to live here feels absurd, in a room not much bigger than my small kitchen back home in Malmö. However, it looks like a Swedish idyll. The bleached floorboards are bathing in a soft light from the sunbeams that are filtered through the white laced curtains that cover the windows. A tall white tiled stove is standing in the corner of the room that is painted in a sky blue color and in the low ceiling there are exposed ceiling beams in a dark wood color. Demeter

sits down on a sofa that is standing against one of the walls and I ask her if I can take a picture of her there.

“Of course, but I regret now that I didn’t bring my witch cloak with me, I left it at home. I hope it’s okay that I am wearing simple muggle clothing today” she tells me with a big smile.

I take her photo and make sure to include the framed embroidery that is hanging on the wall above her that says “Grateful heart and good intentions goes a long way”²⁶. Later we step out into the garden again. Unlike Demeter who elegantly disappears out the door, I accidentally strike my head right into the low doorway. I am slightly embarrassed and curse my tall build. However, it rather immediately brings my thoughts to that family of nine who used to live here once upon a time, and I wonder if any of them used to hit their heads in the doorway right where I just did.

In the sun it’s warm enough for me to take off my thick scarf, however Demeter still insists on us wrapping ourselves up in blankets. Something I am grateful for an hour later when the sun disappears behind the apartment complex. The air smells of cold, there is no better way of describing it. It’s some sort of mixture of stone, earth and water, metallic almost. No flowers have yet flourished and replaced the cold scent of winter. Demeter brings silver charms, carton boxes and small fabric bags with her out and asks me if she can craft some medallions as we talk, and I tell her that of course she can. However she stops almost as soon as we sit down and I hope it’s because she enjoys the quality of our conversation, but it might rather have been due to a pair of pliers that seem to have grown legs and run off somewhere. As I start fidgeting with my recording devices and notes, Demeter takes the time to turn her gaze up towards the tree crowns above us and talk to a crow sitting on a branch, loudly cawing at us.

“Yes, yes, calm down now, I hear you” she says and shakes her head lovingly, I ask if it is a friend of hers. “Yes, he is a bit grumpy that he hasn’t been fed yet but he is simply going to have to wait. I also have a squirrel friend somewhere around here”. I hope the squirrel will also stop by and say hello but it never does. It is probably out on other adventures on what seem to be the first day of spring.

²⁶ Author's translation. In Swedish: “Tacksamt hjärta och god vilja förmår mycket”

Freya

The world is painted gray. The cloudy sky and asphalt roads are fashioning the same color, except for the bright white snow piles that haven't yet melted by the side of the road. It's a typical February day and I am on my way to go meet with a witch. Her house is located in a calm living area in ██████████ outskirts, not too far from where I have spent parts of my life too. The stone villas are shoe box-shaped and the tall apartment houses are sand colored and contrast their gray surroundings. As I walk along the streets looking for the right house number, my mind keeps traveling to my younger days trying to figure out if this is the street on which one of my friends used to live with her family. I slightly remember each corner, the curve of each hill. My nostalgia is put on hold as I see a door entrance that is significantly more decorated than the others I've passed on the street. There is a heart made out of twigs on the door, charms and a wooden sign with her name on it. The door is ajar.

I paw forward wondering if the door is open for me. I use the door knocker and knocks three times. After my second try I can distinguish a low voice from inside the house, telling me to come on in. My first thought upon entering was the distinctive smell of clay in the air that reminds me of my craft classes in school. Before me there is a large table on which the wooden board is covered in carvings and paint residues, above the table long shelves cover the wall with boxes of crafting tools, brushes and paint. The entire apartment reminds me of the craft classes in school where I've made a lot of questionable woodwork and clay figures in my days. Freya enters the room from around a corner and welcomes me. She is slightly wary and takes my hand without looking directly into my eyes.

“I have to admit, I am slightly nervous” she tells me immediately.

It is a strange feeling hearing that from someone you'd think wouldn't be scared of much. Especially since I always feel particularly young when I am back in my hometown, in areas I used to be part of long ago. All the years of adulthood and independence seem to fall off of me for every bus stop, corner shop and apartments I remember walking in and out of as a kid. I reassure Freya that I am not someone to be nervous of, “I am not even a real scientist” I tell her.

I put my outer clothing on the wooden hooks by the entrance and ask Freya to show me around after a short discussion about how we came in contact with one another. She was recommended

to me by the mother of an old friend of mine. She gladly shows me around her apartment, located in a house in which another family lives on the top floor. In here, she not only lives but it is also her work space where she hosts classes for other witches. We step inside a room where drums in synthetic leather cover the wall. Some of them have a beautiful motif painted on the synthetic skin. Freya paints them by order, some of her drums have been shipped as far as to Australia. Something I can tell that she is very proud yet humble of. One of the drums has a tree painted on it with roots deep into the ground and all of the moon phases painted on top of the tree crown. Freya later tells me that it's a *kvinnoträd*, a female tree, on which a circular marking after a broken tree branch on the trunk symbolizes her vulva.

On our way to the other part of her home we pass a door and Freya stops me in front of it. She reminds me that she also is specialized in tantra massages and opens the door before me with the words:

“Welcome to the uterus”.

And it truly does feel like stepping into some sort of organ. The small room is bathed in a warm red light, the only window is covered by red fabrics and a massage bed is standing in the middle of the room. It is strange seeing this room from inside, I would never have thought that inside of this white villa there would be a room decorated as a uterus. We continue the tour into the main living space. On a bureau Freya keeps her altar, its centerpiece is a handmade statue of a Goddess. She represents the nordic goddess Freja, the one she is named after in this study.

“And here we have some of my art!” Freya says with a sudden confidence and gesture to one of the living room walls. “I usually end up doing quite a lot of vulvas.”. And she is correct. Framed artwork of vulvas in different colors and sizes cover the wall, they might have been mistaken for flowers alone, but as a constellation they can't be mistaken for anything else. A rose garden of genitalia.

At last we sit down at her kitchen table where her MacBook charger menders around the table legs as a snake. Above us I can hear her neighbors moving across the floor. Freya strikes me as a very happy person, she radiates warmth even though she is slightly on edge before our interview. When she talks she gestures and grimaces, she is a natural storyteller. But I can still tell that she is suspicious of my intentions, maybe unsure if I am there to confront her about whether or not

she can perform magic or read my mind. As I set up my recording devices and computer she asks me about what it says on my cursive tattoo on my arm.

“It says ‘All of my sisters’” I tell her “I have a lot of sisters and I had it made when one of them had her first daughter”.

I can tell that she is happy with my response, as if her shoulders become slightly more relaxed. I think sisterhood is something that for many transcends family and is viewed not only a feminist stance but also a way of greeting the world with respect and without judgement. As if Freya just then realized I sat before her not as her executioner but as her peer. After our interview we say our final goodbyes before I head back out to the gray February day, and Freya asks me something I’ve felt that she has wanted to express ever since I first arrived.

“I have to ask, are you a witch yourself?”

It is strange. I really want to give Freya the answer I assume she wants, or at least the one that won’t hurt her feelings. I’ve understood her craft and I admire her way of seeing the world through her witchcraft. Yet, I am not a witch nor I think I ever will be. So as I kindly explain to her that I am not, I feel almost disappointed with myself. And the entire bus ride back home to my old neighborhood, that is the feeling that stays with me. That I am not a witch even though I guess I secretly wish that I was.

Hel

I am not entirely sure where I am without looking at my GPS, but I think I have traveled quite far away from the city. On the way here I drove past large paddocks with horses, and I had to take a detour around a small snow covered road that was blocked by an old rusty gate, locked with a padlock. I have to tell Hel that I’ll be late, I didn’t anticipate these small country roads betraying me as much as they end up doing. I have her address with the description “The big red house after the second railway”. As I drive around the corner of the forest I see the railway I have to drive over and there is only one house to be seen, standing by the edge of the forest with massive fields around it.

I step out of the car and it’s completely silent, the only things to be heard is the wind traveling across the fields and the gravel from underneath my boots. A rooster's cry breaks the serenity and

I see a group of hens and a rooster traveling as a pack by the sloping edge of the forest. Their feathers are furry in a fluffy winter coat and I have to stop myself from going over to pet them as they hopelessly pick the cold frozen ground. As I learned later, the family used to have over a dozen chickens that provided them with fresh eggs, but the foxes insist on snatching them away. Maybe that's why they are traveling in packs. There is also a barn on the land, a caravan and a few cars. There is a Pride-flag sticking up from a pole in the ground that is fluttering in the breeze.

It's a stately house I've arrived at, a tall two floor wooden house painted red with the traditional swedish white detailing. There are two stone stairs leading up to two large doors into the building. They aren't numbered and I can't hear any voices which makes me wonder which door I am supposed to knock on. As I stand there trying to figure it out, I feel almost alone on earth. In front of what seems to be a silent and empty house, in the middle of a massive open field, next to a railway empty of any trains. I feel as if I was just dropped in a post apocalyptic time, the last person on earth without any signs of life. Except for the hens. Me and the hens, the last women on earth. A blue train suddenly swoops by, breaking the silence before it a few seconds later once again leaves me in silence. I decide to make my way inside.

In the hallway I am greeted by a massive amount of shoes on the floor and a coat hanger covered by jackets. I realize the house I just stepped into has an incredible open floor plan, to my left there is a kitchen with blue cabinets and a kitchen island. Right in front of me behind the coat hanger I can see a man and a child sitting around a round table eating, they are waving at me smiling. I wave back as I try to take my shoes off without tripping over the child sized boots scattered around my feet. The atmosphere is completely different in here. Massive windows cover the back wall drenching the house in sunshine, unlike the shade I arrived from at the back of the house. It is a very colorful home, a cat is resting on a green couch staring at me as I enter. There is a fireplace with statues standing on top of it, framed pictures of the family covering the walls, colorful pillows, shelves covered by books and exposed ceiling beams above us. By the left wall of the big room there is a spiral staircase in steel, and I see Hel's feet emerge from the second floor as she makes her way down the stairs. Hel greets me, she has a very friendly

appearance and she wouldn't strike me as a witch if it weren't for the large medallion hanging around her neck and the moon tattoo on her forehead.

Hel shows me around, she apologizes for the entrance, it is a little bit messy as they are still renovating. They are doing all the renovations themselves using a sustainable construction method, it takes more time as you have to adapt to the natural capacities of the material, wait for the clay to dry on its own (sometimes with the help of a hair dryer). They don't use any chemicals, Hel tells me they are not only bad for the environment but also bad to inhale for people, her children. Her second son comes down the spiral staircase and with a small voice he asks if Hel could read him a story. I feel a little bit guilty when she tells him that he is going to have to wait. The home seems like a wonderful place to grow up in, through the massive windows I can see a swing hanging from a tree in the forest outside, there is so much room to play and run around.

Apparently the other door leads into another family's apartment, however they own the house together and live as a collective together with them. But today they are out of town. There is however another door inside the house that connects the two apartments so that the kids can run in between them. Hel guides me there, the decor is slightly different but still with the home made feeling, a bunch of empty peanut jars are standing on top of the counter. We look out the window together and Hel tells me about their garden where they cultivate their own vegetables. I ask if they are self-sufficient but unfortunately, Hel says, they aren't or at least not yet. They still have to go to the farmers market to pick up a few things. It's not too bad since this entire part of town is quite known for its sustainable agricultural life. There are many commodities that are grown locally out here, the area is known for its anthroposophical communities.

"The harvest is unreliable" Hel says as we stand by the window looking out on the fields where they've put up a fence around their cultivations "One year we got a large amount of cucumber and tomato, but just one year later we got next to nothing".

The vegetables are grown by the two families in the collective together, however Hel is not only part of that community since she is also a witch and a priestess. In the caravan I passed out back she grows her own herbs. That space is for her, to cultivate her craft as a herbal witch. We sit

down by a long table with benches alongside it and as the sun grows lower and lower in the sky and paints the room orange we start talking about just that.