

# **"RESEARCH FLAT EARTH!"**

## **A study of cosmology and rationality**



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# Abstract

Konceptet 'post-faktualitet' er i højere og højere grad blevet relevant i den samfundsmæssige og akademiske debat. Dette speciale undersøger en af de mest ekstreme af sådanne grupper i dansk kontekst - det danske Flat Earth fællesskab. Dette fællesskab søges afklaret på egne emiske præmisser med henblik på at skabe en forståelse for hvordan et så ekstremt tilfælde af det post-faktuelle kan opretholdes som del i et samfund der har så anderledes holdninger. Denne afklaring skabes igennem at belyse fællesskabet ud fra to nøglekoncepter - kosmologi og rationalitet. Disse to sammenhængende koncepter tegner et billede af hvordan Flat Earth kosmologien opbygges og hvordan denne bruges til at rationalisere en epistemisk kultur så vel som at rationalisere den sociale virkelighed Flat Eartherne opfatter.

Gennem et større etnografisk feltarbejde foretaget hovedsageligt på Facebook belyser dette speciale hvordan det danske Flat Earth fællesskab opfatter Jorden som en flad, stationær disk, indkapslet i en dome og omkranset af en is mur.

Igennem en analyse af hvordan deres kosmologi påvirker Flat Earth fællesskabets videnskabelig rationalitet, kommer dette speciale frem til at denne videnskabelige rationalitet praktiserer en form for relativistisk realisme. Med dette menes der at der at det danske Flat Earth fællesskab opfatter en objektiv sandhed, men at den måde dette bliver rationaliseret på igennem en epistemisk praksis bærer mere præg af en relativistisk tilgang.

Ydermere analyseres Flat Earth fællesskabets samfundsmæssige rationalitet i forhold til koncepterne ansvarspåleggelse og risiko. Igennem denne analyse vises der hvordan at der gennem Flat Earth kosmologien rationaliseres en forandring i social ansvarspåleggelse og risiko i sådan en forstand at disse begreber bliver mere orienteret mod en specifik handlende aktør og dermed virker mindre tilfældige.

Til slut diskuteres Flat Earth kosmologien op imod den kosmologi der bliver præsenteret den normative videnskab, som hos Flat Earth fællesskabet forstås som værende meningsløs og designet med henblik på at afholde dem fra spirituel oplysning. Omvendt bliver Flat Earth kosmologien i diskussionen beskrevet som en måde at repositionere sig eksistentielt i en geo- og antropocentrisk forståelse af universet.

Til slut konkluderes det at kosmologien spiller en meget stor rolle i at understøtte de rationaliteter, i det at denne muliggør at rationalisere på den måde der er beskrevet i analyserne. Omvendt konkluderes det at rationaliteterne samtidig opretholder kosmologien ved at gøre denne attraktiv fordi denne kan afstedkomme rationaliteter der kan nedsætte risiko og tillader en eksistentiel repositionering.

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# Introduction and problem analysis

In this chapter, I outline why I have chosen to write this thesis and what overarching academic debates it is meant as an intervention into. I also analyze the problem at the heart of this thesis, breaking it down into the elements through which I wish to approach it and finally, gather those elements into a problem statement.

## Post-truth

In recent years the terms 'post-truth' or 'post-factual' has gained attention in the academic and political discourse of the West. These terms cover the notions of 'true' facts being in decline, and that elements of society are distancing themselves from traditional knowledge authorities such as reliable 'mainstream' journalism and academic institutions. The debate on the post-truth society covers a wide range of symptoms, from politicians ignoring scientific perspectives, over 'fake news' to the denial of mainstream science found in climate skeptics, anti-vaxxers, and Flat Earthers etc. The idea of post-truth is so popular that it was even made 'word of the year' by the Oxford Dictionary in 2016 who defines it thus:

*"Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."*

(Oxford Dictionaries, 2016)

As is well known in Science and Technology Studies (STS) the notion of 'objective facts' requires some unpacking as to how they are constituted - and for whom. A paraphrasing of Bruno Latour, as one of the foremost STS scholars, might be: All facts are constructed, but not all facts are constructed equal (Latour, 2010:474).

Scholarly debate is split on the root cause(s) of the post-truth phenomena, but much of the discussion seems to point at the internet, and especially social media platforms as being a set of spaces where post-truth society flourishes (Hendricks and Vestergård, 2017). As the internet

enables people to seek out information, some of this information is based on disputed narratives that are outside of the mainstream understanding. These narratives come as part of the mediated content feeds that are known as social media platforms, such as Facebook. One of the most popular arguments in the post-truth discussion is concerned with the concept of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). The argument describes the negative impact of algorithmically curated 'bubbles' of narratives and how, since this algorithmic curation only shows a user content within a narrative they already agree with, this process enforces and exacerbates unnuanced views. This notion has however been critiqued for taking a view of the individual user as being without agency in the face of (social media) content curation algorithms (Madsen, 2016). The trouble with the idea of the filter bubbles, and ideas like it, is that it presupposes a lack of knowledge and a lack of agency for the individual, chalking post-truth related issues up to the workings of the internet. In turn, it has also been argued that discourse concerning post-truth is "*old wine in new bottles*" (Bach et al., 2018a). This should be understood in the sense that post-truth activities that play around with the perception of facts or exist outside of mainstream truths have always existed. The discussion around post-truth presupposes that the post-truth society exists in a time *after* a society that in some way was more truthful, a claim that is dubious at best.

However one likes to imagine the possible degradation of a truthful society, the current issuefication or making an issue of, post-truth as a concept can be viewed as a positive thing, in the sense that it is being debated, studied and reflected on. This is the view taken as a point of departure in this thesis, seeking to intervene into the academic debate on post-truth in the conceptual sense, by creating a better understanding of how some performers of post-truth rationalize and why they exist.

## Post-truth from a perspective outside the mainstream

Within the groups being labeled as performers of post-truth politics, the issuefication of the post-truth phenomena has been seen as a way for the mainstream, or 'power elite', to crack down on the fringe elements telling the 'truth'.



The "#FakeNews"

Image 1: An example of fake news being framed as a way for authority to crack down alternative knowledge.

These differences in narratives are not a new field of study and what might be termed 'the politics of knowledge' have existed as an object of study since the early days of STS. A view one might take on these knowledge controversies is that they arise in situations when groups of people open up for discussion of something that much of the rest of society considers a matter of fact. Latour (2004) distinguishes between these two views by calling them either a matter of concern; something that is up for discussion, or a matter of fact; something that is generally agreed upon. Something can be viewed as a matter of fact in groups where a fact is so stable that it is not questioned but taken for granted - as an example, this could in most groups be exemplified by a view that the Earth is a globe. A matter of concern then is when something is up for debate and many different concerns are represented in such a debate. Many narratives of the post-truth debate are born out of clashes between groups who believe different things about a certain subject, ultimately making it into a matter of concern.

At the same time as he introduces the notions of matters of facts and matters of concern, Latour (2004) reflects on how this questioning of the matters of fact, has come into being. He blames the (social) constructivism of the postmodernist movement, including himself in his critique, and wonders if certain groups picked up the relativist standpoints of that ontological position.

*“What if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse had outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique? Maybe I am taking conspiracy theories too seriously, but it worries me to detect, in those mad mixtures of knee-jerk disbelief, punctilious demands for proofs, and free use of powerful explanation from the social neverland many of the weapons of social critique. Of course, conspiracy theories are an absurd deformation of our own arguments, but, like weapons smuggled through a fuzzy border to the wrong party, these are our weapons nonetheless. In spite of all the deformations, it is easy to recognize, still burnt in the steel, our trademark: Made in Criticalland.”*

(Latour, 2004:6)

Latour implies that certain conspiracy theorists utilize the constructivist critique as a weapon to fight against the matters of fact. I find this notion extraordinarily interesting, especially in relation to conspiracy theory groups that are concerned with science. These groups approach scientific notions that, in many regards, could be considered a matter of fact and turns them into a matter of concern. What if one took the view that these groups were not outright anti-science, but instead, saw them as alternative science cultures? These groups might not be attacking science deliberately with constructivist critique, but exist in a space where these relativist critiques on the nature of scientific knowledge represent a totally different version of scientific rationalizing. If Latour is right, and the alternative science cultures practice some sort of constructivist critique, it is in my opinion interesting to investigate how their worldviews can be described from the same ontological point of view. To critique science and the nature of the worldview that science provides, you must, at least in the abstract, have an idea of how one

would practice a better science to create (or arrive at) a different worldview. To investigate this, I turn to one of the most extreme fringes of alternative science conspiracy theories: The Flat Earth Community in Denmark.

## The Danish Flat Earth Community

I was initially introduced to the Danish Flat Earth Community sometime in the first half of 2017 when a fellow student introduced me to the Facebook group “*jorden er FLAD. Jorden er ikke en globe. Life Earth*”<sup>1</sup>. In this space, I had my first encounter with the Danish Flat Earther’s perception of reality. Initially, my interest was in the satirical value of Danish Flat Earth<sup>2</sup> beliefs. It seems absurd at first glance, to meet a group of people who disbelieve a matter of fact that is so well established in society as the shape of the Earth. The first few questions that come to mind are all related to wondering how it is possible to disbelieve such an integral part of the narrative of mainstream science. The shape of the planet Earth is a cornerstone of much of science, and it is in turn proven by how that science works from that assumption. When communities, cultures, and people disbelieve a known and broadly accepted ‘truth’ interesting questions arise. In that light, the fact that this community of Danish Flat Earthers exists is an extremely interesting question from a social science and STS perspective.

Although I, in the above paragraph, try to distance myself from the satirical factor of the Danish Flat Earth Community’s beliefs, I have gained much social capital on the behalf of the Danish Flat Earthers. It is a great subject of conversation at parties, sure to make people laugh. After working with this subject for my thesis, I know just what videos, memes<sup>3</sup> or anecdotes to share with people that will make them laugh due to the extreme nature of Danish Flat Earther beliefs. However, this satirical aspect of Flat Earth beliefs are nothing, but the function of how exotic

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<sup>1</sup> English translation in appendix 1.1

<sup>2</sup> Referring to what is studied in this thesis as “Danish Flat Earth” is an emic way of phrasing the description of the Danish Flat Earth Community and its beliefs on a conceptual level.

<sup>3</sup> The precise definition of an internet meme varies a lot depending on who is consulted. In this thesis, I use the term to describe the kind of image inscribed with text often shared on social media sites such as Facebook.

the various components of their belief structure seems in a normative or mainstream science perspective.



Image 2: Flat Earth meme that denounces many stable elements of the mainstream scientific narrative.

It is not surprising that many of the claims about such things as the non-existence of gravity, outer space, and the South Pole seem exotic and absurd. This, however, is exactly one of the things that I wish to do - to some extent de-exoticize the Danish Flat Earth Community to understand their cosmology from its own sense of rationality.



## Cosmology, rationality and problem analysis.

In the following, I describe how I perceive the notions of cosmology and rationality. I describe them and their role in my thesis separately and explain how I view them as interlinked. I finish this section by a problem analysis describing the role these concepts are going to play in my analysis, what theoretical tools I use to work with them, and finish with a problem statement for this thesis.

### Cosmology

This thesis essentially boils down to understanding the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, as competing with the cosmology created by mainstream science. The use of the term cosmology is partly emic, included as a key concept in this thesis because of its frequent use in the self-description of the Danish Flat Earth Community.

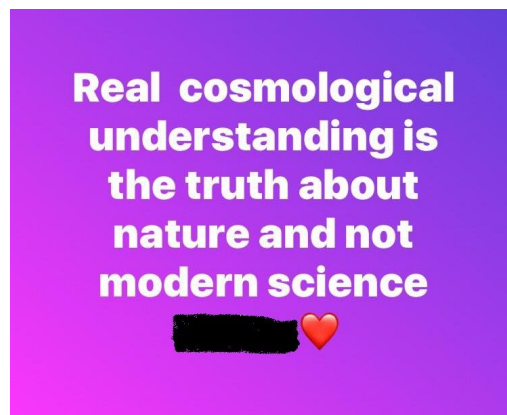


Image 3: Picture-text relating to the notion of cosmological understanding.

The term is used to describe the set of beliefs that Danish Flat Earthers have, and is posed in opposition to mainstream science. This seems fitting, as in mainstream science this term is also used to describe the origin of the universe and its total structure. Even more fitting than these dichotomous uses of the term cosmology is that the term, often used in social anthropology,

here describes a system of beliefs and practices that constitutes a religion (Leach, 1982). Although the religious connotations of the term, as will be shown later, are not incorrect, they do not merit the centerground in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. Instead, I view the term cosmology in this context to cover a series of beliefs and practices constituted by a set of rationalities that are concerned with creating and supporting facts that oppose the cosmology of mainstream science. To borrow a term from the video game modification world, the Flat Earth cosmology is a total conversion mod. This means that the world is built with the same graphical 'game engine' - the same basic components are experienced by the 'player' - but the way those components are shaped has undergone a total conversion. Understanding the totality of the Flat Earth *cosmological* conversion is key to underlining why I have chosen that term as the key concept for my thesis. As is evident from image 2 (and will be described in detail later) the Danish Flat Earth cosmology perceives some truly fundamental elements of how normative science paints the nature of reality very differently. This is the essence of why it makes sense to frame it as a Flat Earth *cosmology*.



Image 4: The term 'cosmology' defined as part of a debate on the nature of the Danish Flat Earth Community and how to characterize its beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> English translations in appendix 1.2

## Rationality

Working with the framing of a cosmology and the rationalities that support it, how does one meaningfully understand the interplay of these concepts? The notions of rationality from a theoretical perception enter my thesis through the work of Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1976) and his work with witchcraft among the Azande people. Evans-Pritchard told the story of the Azande's traditional relationship with witchcraft through a lense of an alternative rationalization of causal relationships. He framed the Azande rationality as both based on how they perceived the world in front of them, as well as how they reasoned and rationalized what they saw through their cosmology.

*"Hence we see that witchcraft has its own logic, its own rules of thought, and that these do not exclude natural causation. Belief in witchcraft is quite consistent with human responsibility and a rational appreciation of nature."*

(Evans-Pritchard, 1976:30)

Evans-Pritchard argued that witchcraft had a social function in shaping the way the Azande rationalized the reality they perceived, allowing them to make sense of events based on what they believed. In this way, he argued that their proclivity for mythical explanations of events was not based on thoughtless superstition but had a social function. This social function was based on a rationality that served to create an explanation for causal relationships and through this create social order within Azande society. This notion of cosmological elements serving to create meaning in causal relationships is at the core of what I mean when I use the term 'rationality' in this thesis.

The Danish Flat Earth Community's cosmological understanding, can be explored through Evans-Pritchard's notion of alternative rationalities based in an unscientific understanding of

causality. My approach to transferring this notion of rationality has been based on attempting to make the core of my ethnographic account about how Danish Flat Earthers rationalize the world around them, through their cosmology in a way reminiscent of the Azande.

This has been done in two overall themes - scientific rationality and social rationality. While the notion of social rationality and how society is rationalized through the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community is similar to the way Evans-Pritchard described the Azande, the notion of scientific rationality needs some more unpacking. Mary Douglas (1980), one of the foremost students of Evans-Pritchard, describes in her book named after him how scientific thought is different from everyday thought.

*“(...) to clarify the point that scientific thought is a very specialized experience that only takes place under very specialized conditions. Those who engage in it does not engage in it all the time: When they are out of the laboratory they think like everyone else does every day. The contrast between primitives and ourselves is much exaggerated by pretending that we think scientifically all the time”*

(Douglas, 1980:31)

Through Douglas' argument, she showcases both the specialized notion of scientific thought and points to the fact that no one thinks scientifically all of the time. Although the purpose of her argument is to show that Western thought is not inherently scientific, it can also be used to highlight that the experience of conducting research requires a different rationality than sensemaking in a social context. Instead, looking at scientific rationality, it is needful to envision a different set of highly specialized rationales in relation to how legitimate knowledge is produced and what practices can be viewed as legitimate in producing that knowledge. In relation to The Danish Flat Earth Community as an alternative science, I then perceive of an alternative scientific rationality. The notion of alternative scientific rationality seems odd, because normatively speaking, science is a well-established practice with a well-defined way of rationalizing. However, looking to Schaffer and Shapin's (1985) seminal history of science *“The Leviathan and the Air Pump”* this might not seem so odd.

In their book, Schaffer and Shapin tell the story of the controversy between Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle in the 1660s, a controversy that would eventually shape how legitimate science practice is perceived today. In essence, the controversy between Boyle and Hobbs was concerned with the legitimacy of experimental practices in producing scientific knowledge. Boyle eventually won the controversy, and experiments are now a, if not the, most stable part of how we perceive science. However, Schaffer and Shapin argue that this outcome was not so certain as it might seem today.

*“Yet we want to show that there was nothing self-evident or inevitable about the series of historical judgments in that context which yielded a natural philosophical consensus in favour of the experimental programme.”*

*(Schaffer and Shapin, 1985:13)*

Essentially Schaffer and Shapin show Hobbes as having an alternative scientific rationality based on a philosophy of science that discounts the validity of experimental knowledge. This concept of alternative scientific rationalities is highly relevant to the Danish Flat Earth Community, because it, as part of viewing it as alternative science, also has an alternative scientific rationality embedded in its epistemic culture. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the Danish Flat Earth Community does not distinguish social rationality from scientific rationality to the extent of mainstream science. Nevertheless, there is a distinct epistemic culture within the Flat Earth Community, producing alternative scientific knowledge through a scientific rationality, which is different from the rationality that governs how individuals rationalize the events that happen around them.

## Problem Analysis

Focusing on how these social and scientific rationalities support the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community affords a perspective on how facts are constructed, and why they are

constructed in such a way, as well as an idea of what social understandings support such an epistemic culture. This focus will enable the reader to understand how these rationalities support and motivate its practitioners to have the set of beliefs that they have.

Taken from a point of departure in the Danish Flat Earth Community, this understanding is based in one of the more extreme examples of post-truth in action. Understanding the rationalities of such a post-truth community will enable an intervention in the debate on post-truth with a set of arguments on *how* and *why* the Danish Flat Earthers are Flat Earthers. Basing the understanding of the Danish Flat Earth Community in their own sense of rationality moves the focus of the debate from a lack of knowledge, into a space of emic explanation that takes the views of the community seriously and tries to understand the reasoning and motives inherent in its rationalities. Taking this emic perspective into account allows for understanding Danish Flat Earth rationalities and their role in supporting a cosmology so vastly different than that of the society around it. In this sense, this will shed light on The Danish Flat Earth Community as a post-truth phenomenon, not through a lense of ignorance or filter bubbles, but instead using emic explanations to fuel our understanding.

Investigating the scientific rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community focuses specifically on that community as practitioners of an alternative science with its own rationality. Viewing the Danish Flat Earth cosmology through a lense of an alternative science rationality, I showcase the rationality through the epistemic culture of the Danish Flat Earth Community. These actions can be characterized as two epistemic practices, as well as the philosophy of science that it is based on. First, the actual experimentation done by Danish Flat Earthers in order to create knowledge in support of their cosmology is studied. This is done by using a view of fact-creation that is based on actor-network theory and the Latour and Woolgar's (1979) laboratory studies. Through this theoretical perspective, I go in-depth with the minutiae of fact construction by 'opening the black box' of Danish Flat Earth Community's epistemic culture and its experimentation practices (Latour, 1999).

The second epistemic practice I investigate is the finding of Flat Earth 'clues', the hidden symbols, mistakes and messages about the Flat Earth, hiding in plain sight in popular media. This is done by assuming a view of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as an actor-network of facts, and highlighting how the knowledge created as Flat Earth clues is situated in the network, simultaneously gaining support from the network as well as being strengthened by it. To better characterize Danish Flat Earth as a type of alternative science, one must understand the philosophy of science that is implied and created in relation to the epistemic practices. This complex together creates the foundation for the alternative science, scientific rationality, and epistemic culture, supporting the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

The epistemic culture and scientific rationalities of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology are two interwoven modes of behavior that together shape, legitimize and sustain the Danish Flat Earth cosmology in a mutually iterative process. Ethnographically investigating this is interesting, because it allows for an understanding of *how* something that in most of society is considered a matter of fact is reopened as a matter of concern. Understanding how the matter of concern is created can, with an added empirical focus on the Danish Flat Earth Community's social rationality, also contribute to an understanding of *why* the shape of the Earth is framed as a matter of concern. Understanding the *how* will show whereby the *why* is informed and legitimized through the scientific rationality and epistemic culture, and the *why* will contribute to an understanding of what motivates a Danish Flat Earth Community to exist in the first place. This *why* is the second part of the ethnographic account - the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as social rationality.

The understanding of social rationality in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is focused on the existential and social positioning that goes on in the Danish Flat Earth Community, and what it means for the Danish Flat Earthers to have their cosmology. To investigate this I will work with the social rationality in relation to notions of accountability and risk. The notion of accountability comes from the work of Evans-Pritchard, in viewing what Mary Douglas (1980) called a theory of accountability, based on Evans-Pritchard's "(...) *relating of moral philosophy*



*and religion systemically with social behavior”* (Douglas, 1980:11). Coupled with this theory of accountability is Ulrich Beck’s (1992) conception of the ‘risk society’, and how the perceived risks affect Danish Flat Earth rationality. Looking into Danish Flat Earth social rationality through this accountability/risk complex allows for an understanding of what their rationalities afford them in terms of comforting causal explanations through their cosmology and how this is used to make sense of their perceived reality.

The above reflections and problem analysis have led me to the following problem statement:

***How does the Danish Flat Earth Community’s cosmological outlook support a set of scientific and social rationalities? What role do those rationalities have in maintaining their cosmological outlook, in the face of the evidence presented by the cosmology of mainstream science?***

## Methodology

In the following chapter, I aim to describe and reflect on my methodology in some detail. As my fieldwork has been rather untraditional, taking almost entirely place on Facebook, there are a number of reflections that are important to explicate in this regard. After a brief introduction, I will discuss the framing of my field site as an artful, multi-sited construction. Thereafter I will reflect on my applied ethnographic methods in relation to working with immersion in mediated communications and what that means for my observational and interview methods. Lastly, I will reflect on the agile ethics of care that has been my guiding research ethical outlook.

## Introduction

To approach the problem of understanding the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as both supporting and being maintained by a scientific and social rationality it was first necessary to identify those spaces where such things were enacted, then subsequently to understand them. This was done through extensive ethnographic fieldwork carried out mostly on Facebook. I have been a part of

the Danish Flat Earth spaces on Facebook since early 2017 and conducted fieldwork in the various groups since February 2018. From May 2017 I have spent a moderate amount of time in these Facebook locations and started to actively expand my membership into more of those spaces from February, where I have also followed and studied the majority of posts made between then and the hand in of this thesis.

As stated earlier the point of departure for this entire thesis was the Facebook group *“jorden er FLAD. Jorden er ikke en globe. Life Earth”*<sup>5</sup>. It quickly became apparent that this was not the only Facebook group, in which the Danish Flat Earth Community’s members were active. The fieldwork this thesis is based on contains observations taken from ten different closed Facebook groups, and one ‘Like Page’ within the Danish Flat Earth context as well as interviews conducted both in person and over chat-services. Something that is especially important for an ethnography that relies so heavily on online data and from so many different places, is to frame the field site as it exists, mostly within Facebook, and reflect on what that means in terms of Facebook’s platform shaping how the field looks and is communicated.

Therefore the first part of this methodological section will be concerned with delimiting the notion of the field site in question. This will be done by first discussing the need for reflexivity where the conceptualization of a field site is concerned. Afterward Facebook as a social media platform and as a field site is discussed as well as reflections on access to such Facebook field sites. Lastly, the Facebook groups (and the like page) included in the field site are described and reflected upon.

## Framing the field site

The process of data generation for this thesis has taken place in many different locations, through many different mediations and in many different spaces with different social rules. As will be discussed later, the vast majority of the Danish Flat Earth Community’s activities are

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<sup>5</sup> English translation in appendix 1.1

undertaken online, especially on Facebook. In relation to this, it will be beneficial to view the Danish Flat Earth Community through Kozinets' (2010) distinction of 'online communities' and 'communities online'. Approaching from the understanding that 'communities online' are communities that are not based on their online interactions but have a lot of activities that take place offline. As opposite, there are the 'online communities', of which the Danish Flat Earth Community is a part. These communities are understood to have most, if not all, of their interactions online and have online forums as the basis for their communality. As mentioned above, in the case of the Danish Flat Earth Community is spread around a number of different groups and pages as well as a few offline interactions.

Accordingly, the first thing on my methodological agenda has been to clarify for the reader, and myself, the notion of the field site. In an ethnography that is primarily undertaken online, the notion of the field site as something bounded in geographical space becomes problematic for obvious reasons. Various online and offline settings and possible interactions become relevant for the research and a sense of place quickly become more complicated.

Because of this complication, it is essential that the conceptualization of the field site is clearly defined. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) point out that the conceptualization and definition of the field site have been neglected:

*"But what of "the field" itself, the place where the distinctive work of "fieldwork" may be done, that taken-for-granted space in which an "Other" culture or society lies waiting to be observed and written? This mysterious space - not the "what" of anthropology but the "where" - has been left to common sense, beyond and below the threshold of reflexivity"*

(Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:2)

Gupta and Ferguson critique the lack of reflexivity in how anthropology has dealt with the field site as a concept. They stress the importance of being able to meet new methodological challenges that arise nearly a hundred years after Malinowski (1922) and the original field sites.

They argue, through Malinowski, that the tradition of fieldwork to remain as a secure tradition within the community of ethnographers *“must be aggressively and imaginatively reinterpreted to meet the needs of the present”* (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:40).

The fieldwork that is the empirical basis of this thesis has been rather unorthodox in nature and accordingly it is important that the view of the field site as an artful construction is foregrounded (Hine, 2015). This construction of the field site is shaped by the dynamic interplay of outside forces such as relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer, as well as the deliberate conceptualization of the ethnographer (Amit, 2003).

Because of the emergent and adaptive nature of ethnographic inquiry, one of the key elements shaping my field site has been the meeting with the Facebook platform as an environment. To understand this environment it might be helpful to understand the *affordances* of the Facebook platform (Gibson, 1979). In this sense, it has been defined by how the Facebook platform allows social spaces of different variety to be created and found by an ethnographer. The spaces that Facebook affords the users of the Danish Flat Earth Community are mostly ‘closed groups’ where membership is gained through a gatekeeper, who often requires answering some questions.

Here it might be prudent to note that viewing Facebook as a ‘socio-technical environment’ enables us to see how platforms may afford different things to various types of users, e.g. the Flat Earth user and the ethnographic user (Bucher and Helmond, 2017). However, this platform-analysis view is outside the scope of this field site framing.

The way the spaces afforded to the Danish Flat Earth Community specifically impacted my fieldwork and the processes of constructing my field site was through the process of finding them over time. I have not spent an equal amount of time as a member of the different Facebook Groups, nor spent an equal amount of time investigating each group. Many became apparent to me during my research. The different groups were discovered through two approaches. The first was querying the Facebook search bar for *“Flad Jord”* and *“Flat Earth*

*Denmark*". Queries were supplemented by the Facebook algorithm suggesting other thematically appropriate groups of the Danish Flat Earth Community. This afforded me the opportunity to expand my field site outside of my original Facebook group.

It is notable that very little Danish Flat Earth activity goes on outside these closed groups, neither on other places on Facebook nor outside of the internet. This meant that gaining access to these groups was very important. In order to gain access to certain groups on Facebook, I was often prompted to answer some gatekeeping questions. These were handled by answering the gatekeeping questions truthfully, as to my research aims in the group, but also relatively briefly so that it would not take up too much time for the administrators as well as giving space for the details of my research to change and advance.

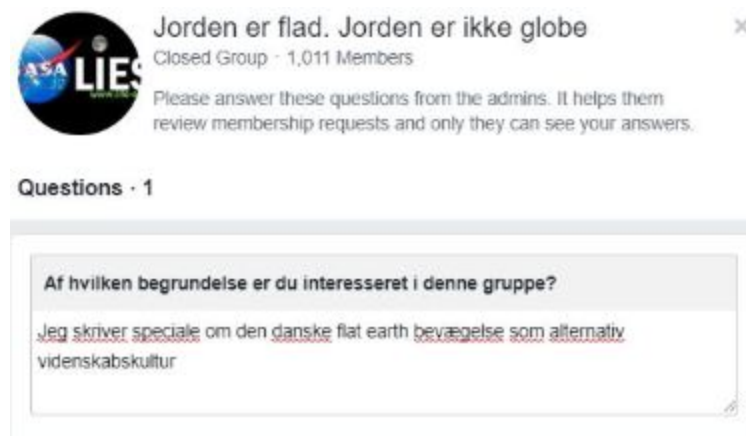


Image 5: answering a gatekeeping question, short and to the point.<sup>6</sup>

The Danish Flat Earth Community's presence consists roughly of ten Facebook groups and one like page all of different sizes and with different moderation. Generally one can say that the larger groups have less moderation and more Globeheads. Whereas the smaller groups often have a more concentrated population of Flat Earthers. In groups where there are large amounts of Globeheads, the conversations in the groups tend to be more rough and hostile. Often the Globeheads will heavily outnumber the Flat Earthers in the larger groups and the comment

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<sup>6</sup> English translation in appendix 2.1

section of a Flat Earth post will contain vehement arguments about the Earth being a globe at best and trolling<sup>7</sup> at worst. No matter the amount of Globeheads, the Flat Earthers usually set the agenda in most of the Danish Flat Earth Facebook groups, as the administrators are acolytes of the Flat Earth beliefs, they have administrator rights and often have to review posts before they can be made to the group. This is not the case in a few of the groups, notably "*Flad Jord og Månelanding - Fup eller Fakta*"<sup>8</sup> which has many very active Globeheads. On the counterpoint to this example, there are a few groups that are strictly for Flat Earthers. These groups are very heavily moderated and making statements that are pro-globe are bannable offenses. Trying to define a field(site) without these Globehead contra Flat Earth dynamics would be remiss; as will be shown later this dynamic is an essential part of the Danish Flat Earth Community. This, however, means that the Flat Earthers who are willing to argue with Globeheads gain a privileged position in the fieldwork at the core of this thesis. These very vocal Danish Flat Earthers provide good beacons for what constitutes Danish Flat Earth beliefs, but there is also a certain group who does not engage in discussion or post a lot in the Facebook Groups. These are not represented as much, if at all in, this thesis, which is methodologically problematic, but an unfortunate consequence of doing this kind of digital fieldwork. This has shaped my approach in such a manner, that to avoid overrepresenting what might potentially be the vocal parts views, I have focused on views that are widely held within the Danish Flat Earth Community.

The following is a table overview, showing the different places on Facebook where I have conducted fieldwork. It details the name of those places, as well as how many members it has if it is a closed group or a like page and a short description of what goes on in that place.

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<sup>7</sup> Trolling is the practice of posting (often insincerely) in an online forum with the intention of creating anger or controversy (Urban Dictionary, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> English translation in appendix 2.6

Table 1: Different Flat Earth spaces that constitute the field site

Space name	Amount of members	Kind of space	Description
Jorden er flad, jorden er ikke en globe. Life earth <sup>9</sup>	6696	Closed group	Main group. Many Globeheads but also a fair bit of Flat Earthers. Globehead questioning allowed to some degree.
Jorden er FLAD <sup>10</sup> - Flat Earth Denmark	517	Closed group	Mostly Flat Earth dominated, both in comments and in posts. Some Globehead questioning tolerated.
Jorden er flad punktum <sup>11</sup>	42	Closed group	Very Flat Earth dominated. Mostly one person, a Flat Earther, who posts.
Jorden er FLAD. Jorden er ikke en globe. Kun for FE`ere <sup>12</sup>	279	Closed Group	Only for Flat Earthers. Globehead commenting is a bannable offense. Meant to be the free

<sup>9</sup> English translation in appendix 1.1

<sup>10</sup> English translation in appendix 2.2

<sup>11</sup> English translation in appendix 2.3



			space for Flat Earthers, but is functionally rather inactive.
Jorden er flad. Jorden er ikke globe <sup>13</sup>	1011	Closed Group	An older group now almost entirely inhabited by Globeheads, very few actual Flat Earth post.
JORDEN ER FLAD <sup>14</sup> 	49	Closed Group	A Flat Earth group with no Globeheads. Very little activity in the period that the fieldwork has been carried out.
Flad Jord og Månelanding - fup eller fakta <sup>15</sup>	501	Closed Group	Group run jointly by a self-proclaimed Flat Earth agnostic and a Globehead. Mostly just Globeheads posting about how ignorant Flat Earthers are.
Flad Jord Gruppen! <sup>16</sup>	80	Closed Group	Very strictly Flat Earth, more so than the group that is

<sup>12</sup> English translation in appendix 2.4

<sup>13</sup> English translation in appendix 2.5

<sup>14</sup> English translation in appendix 2.2

<sup>15</sup> English translation in appendix 2.6

			supposedly only for Flat Earthers. This group is also relatively active compared to the other one.
Flat Earth Memes Denmark And Conspiracy	69	Closed group	The most recently created group. Mostly for memes and other image content. Posts are mostly by Flat Earthers but comments are very lightly moderated.
Life Earth -The New Time Cosmology	192	Like Page	A like page that has been used by several people over the last few months. A little bit broader than just Flat Earth, but specifically tied to the Danish Flat Earth Community.
Flad Jord (flat earth)	155	Closed group	An equal mix of Flat Earthers and Globeheads, a group where Globehead activity is tolerated but not overwhelming

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<sup>16</sup> English translations in appendix 2.7

			in scale. Relatively inactive in relation to posting frequency.
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In the above table is shown the online spaces where my observation and participation have been carried out and where contact with interviewees has been established.

In discussing constructed multiple and/or non-spatial field sites the work of George Marcus (1995) and his notion of ‘multi-sited’ ethnography is important. In this sense the fieldwork is constructed along the lines of something more as an abstract than something geographical and/or spatial, essentially sending the ethnographer to follow an actor, an object a concept or even a metaphor. In my case, I’ve followed the Danish Flat Earth Community, understood through the concepts of that cosmology and its discussion in the Danish sphere.

Working from what has been stated in this section concerning the need for conceptualizing the field site, reflection on Facebook as a field site, how to gain access to Danish Flat Earth Community, and how their spaces are formed, I have come to the following notion of a field site:

I conceive the field site, not as a non-spatial, but as a multi-spacial field site constructed by a common group of semi-interconnected people sharing the same cosmology upheld by a series of scientific and social rationalities. These spaces have different people and different social rules but are still bound together through their cosmology, its elements and also a common language. Although much of the content shared is in English and a bit of the discussion is also in Norwegian, the language almost universally used for discussion is Danish. The Danish language framing is made for reasons of practicality as the Danish Flat Earth Community is an easily defined group with a number of members small enough that it is easy to oversee ethnographically.

As will become apparent later, there is a certain kind of multisitedness of concepts within the conspiracy theory sphere. A demarcation can seem inorganic in the sense that many conspiracies are interlinked and shaped by each other, especially in terms of Flat Earth, which I will later demonstrate acts very much as an 'umbrella' conspiracy.

Within this field site, I also include the many Globeheads who daily engage with the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. Some Globeheads are even top posters in some groups, meaning that they are the users who post the most, in certain groups. They are, though not the central actors in this story, the Globeheads are an important part of keeping the Danish flat Earth Community vibrant and alive, as this gives opposition and controversy to discuss within the community.

So, in conclusion, it can be said that the field site in which this ethnographic fieldwork is carried out has these key characteristics: It is mostly in Danish and concerned with the Danish Flat Earth Community. The Community has most of its interactions in a series of online spaces on Facebook. It is made up both of Danish Flat Earthers and Globeheads who together engage in creating the Danish Flat Earth Community.

This is a beneficial understanding of the field site as it follows not a specific social space but a set of cosmological elements and rationalities that create a concept within an interconnected group of people. This thesis engages with a field site defined as the Danish Flat Earth Community, understood as the group of people who are interacting with the Danish Flat Earth cosmology in a Danish context.

## Applied ethnographic methods

*"Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading off") a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour"*

Now that the field site has been extensively defined and discussed it is time for an overview, reflection, and discussion on concrete applied methods.

First, I discuss how I've followed the principles of 'generalized symmetry' and 'agnosticism'.

Secondly, I will discuss the implications of applying ethnographic methods to spaces on a social media platform and what it means to work ethnographically with mediated communications.

Thirdly, I will touch upon how to work ethnographically and immersively with an online medium like Facebook.

Lastly, I will describe and reflect upon observation, participation and interview methods as well as the research ethics necessary when working with conspiracy theorists on Facebook.

## Agnosticism and generalized symmetry

Approaching the Danish Flat Earth Community from that view of emic-explanation described in the introduction also comes with a certain set of methodological commitments from the side of the researcher. In the sense, I have strived to adhere to what Michel Callon's principles of 'generalized symmetry' and 'agnosticism'. In his widely-cited paper on the translation of meaning and power in a fishing controversy the north of France, Callon defined these two principles in order to work with controversies. Callon defines generalized symmetry as: "*The commitment to explain conflicting viewpoints in the same terms*" (Callon, 1984:1). This I have aimed to do, in my use of the same terminology to describe both mainstream science and Danish Flat Earth as having cosmologies and rationalities and by taking into account and serious consideration the epistemic culture of the Danish Flat Earth Community. Furthermore, Callon describes agnosticism as: "*Impartiality between actors engaged in controversy*". This has presented itself with more difficulty than the symmetry, in the sense that the beliefs that I hold are very different from those of the members of the Danish Flat Earth Community. This has manifested itself in quite a few examples of relatively polemic expressions in relation to some

truth claims made by the Danish Flat Earthers. However, I have also found myself being angry at ignorant posts making fun of the Danish Flat Earthers and rooted for them in discussions and generally disliked when Globeheads<sup>17</sup> have posted sarcastic and mean-spirited content in Danish Flat Earther Facebook groups. This even escalated one morning before coffee and had me lose my temper at the keyboard, posting angrily at one specifically confrontative Globehead. In the end, I have felt a certain relationship with the Danish Flat Earthers, and though I might at times express a certain irreverence for Danish Flat Earth beliefs, I have strived my best for impartiality.

## Reflections on ethnography in mediated communications

In this section, I will discuss the implications of doing ethnography on Facebook. Doing ethnography on the internet is in many aspects vastly different from doing traditional face-to-face ethnography. Many aspects of social cues and behavior that an ethnographer would normally be able to rely on have been substituted with less familiar ones or omitted entirely. The interactions and the communication in those spaces are heavily mediated, through different aspects of social media platform design, through text etc. This is problematic for the ethnographer who wishes to carry on the proud ethnographic tradition of those, early ethnographers, who sought holistic immersion into a given field.

According to Christine Hine (2015), the problem with mediated communication arises because the ethnographer is unable to comprehend the social situation as a singular unit. She argues that this understanding of the social situation as a singular unit is questionable in mediated communication spaces. This happens as persons break these communications down and reweave them into highly individual patterns of meaning from public or semi-public thread-conversations.

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<sup>17</sup> Emic Flat Earther term meaning someone who believes that the Earth is a globe. Although this can have some offensive connotations, this has become the common nomenclature used by most Flat Earthers in the Danish Flat Earth spaces and therefore I will adopt this term.

*“An ethnographer in such circumstances must get used to the perpetual feeling of uncertainty, wondering what has been missed, and attempting to build interpretations of events based on sketchy evidence”*

(Hine, 2015:4)

This feeling of uncertainty and wondering is of course often, if not always, the case for ethnography. Even without online or mediated communications, things can be missed and evidence of social situations can be sketchy. However, in an ethnography like the one carried out for this thesis, that relies heavily on knowledge produced from mediated communications, it is extra important to be aware of how the mediation shapes the knowledge production. Hine (2015) argues that faced with such a problem, the ethnographer must realize that trying to create the methodologically perfect fieldwork is a distraction from trying to describe the social dynamics of a certain group of people. Instead one should deal with this problem by *“making active and strategic choices about what to study and how to study it”* (Hine, 2015:5).

In practice, this mediation feeds back into the problem analysis presented earlier. This methodological challenge is overcome by focusing more on the elements of a cosmology and how it is rationalized, rather than on specific situation-oriented social dynamics. This has also framed my strategy, especially in relation to the observational part of my fieldwork. Concretely this has meant a focus on content that is explaining the cosmology or showcasing using it for rationalizations. This has often included content like memes or other image content, videos of either experiments or explanations of cosmology, and the discussions around these.

## Ethnographic immersion on a social media platform

As mentioned above, the affordances of the Facebook platform played a key role in shaping the field site, as well as shaping the way the ethnographic methods were applied. Utilizing the different functions of the platform environment strategically as part of the fieldwork method was beneficial, especially for creating a sense of prolonged immersion with the field. Hine



(2015) argues that in internet ethnographies, it might be prudent to revise what the epistemic goals of prolonged immersion as an ethnographic method are;

*“... for it is difficult, when a field site is multi-sited and diffuse, to be sure what immersion means and how to achieve it for prolonged periods of time.”*

(Hine, 2015:56)

The case for prolonged immersion is based around the idea that the ethnographer must have time to evaluate findings and field-specific theories in relation to informants and the ongoing fieldwork. This is the feature of ethnography that allows the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of the field that she is situated in. Hine (2015) argues that this need for immersion has to be rearticulated into a format fit for the internet. In my fieldwork, this engagement in mediated form has to encompass a way to ‘live’ in the field site in the same way as informants. To do that I have been inspired by Richard Rogers (2013) ‘medium method’ in the sense of using the affordances of the medium as a strategic part of my methodology. To use the affordances of the medium for gaining the epistemic benefits of prolonged immersion on the same terms as my informants, I used two features of the Facebook platform: The ‘save’ function and the notification feature.

Using the notification feature practically meant that as soon as a Danish Flat Earth space was discovered I would turn on notifications to my Facebook profile. This enabled me to view every incoming post and so as to be immersed in the comings, goings and happenings of the Danish Flat Earth spaces on Facebook.



Image 6: Notifications on my Facebook profile for the evening of July 23, 2018.

Using the notification feature allowed for easy access to the Danish Flat Earth spaces and made it easy to comment or follow what was happening. It also created a convenient way to approach the field site in the same way and on the same terms as the informants. According to Hine:

*“There is a pleasing symmetry to using the same memory devices and practices as are available to participants, and an ethnographer may well wish to reflect on the extent to which the analysis he carries out may mirror or diverge from practices of participants who are themselves attempting to understand the environment that they inhabit.”*

(Hine, 2015: 75)

As minimum posts and comments were read, and if a post or comment was of particular interest or if I had participated in the thread I used the 'save' function as a way of saving the post for later inspection.

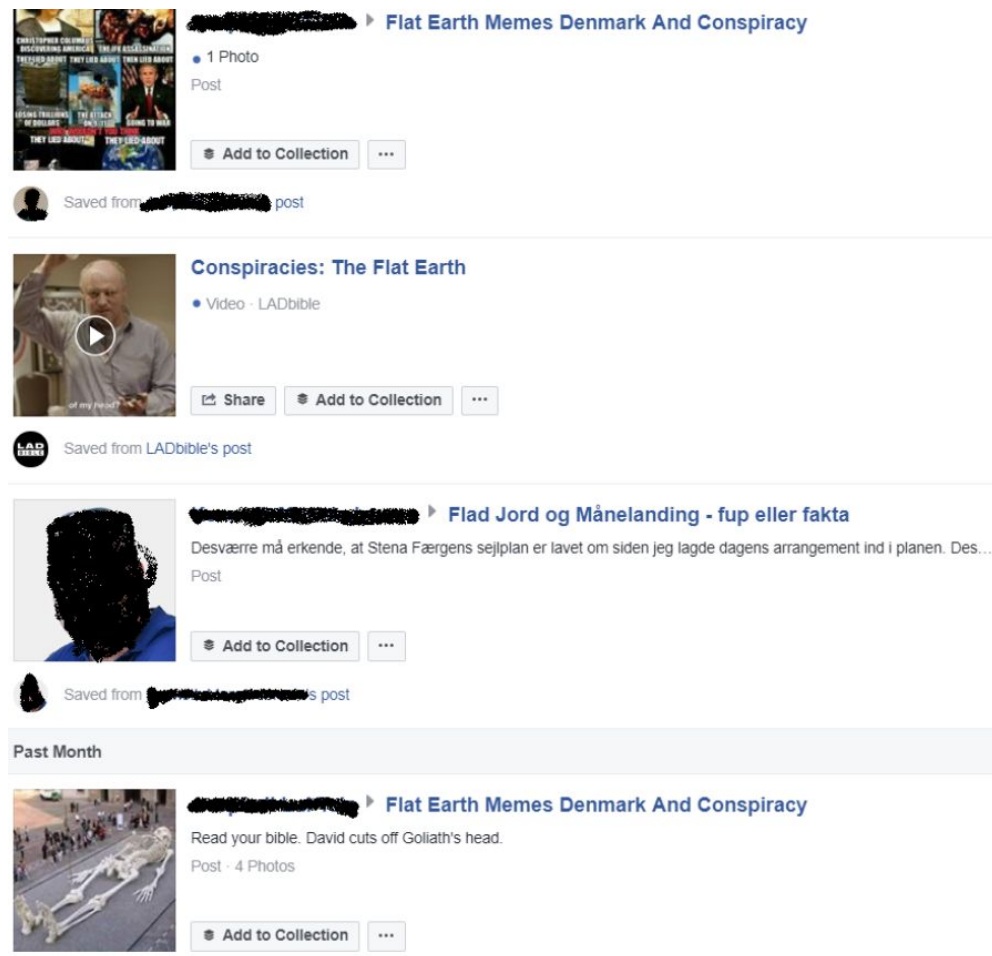


Image 7: Saved posts from the Danish Flat Earth on my Facebook profile.

This strategy allowed me to observe and participate in the flowing stream of Danish Flat Earth content, picking up interesting nuggets of empirical material and hiding it away for later. These nuggets were selected on the basis of being indicative of social or scientific rationalities or if they were interesting examples of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology being showcased.

This gave me time for reflection on the fieldwork and enabled me to evaluate and discard emergent theories and findings during the fieldwork.

## Observation and participation

In this section, it is my goal to describe how I gained the bulk of my ethnographic understanding and empirical material: through observation and participation. In this section, I will discuss how I carried out observations, what problems I encountered with participation and how these were (partly) overcome. I will describe the documentation of the vast observational material I had at my disposal and what reflections I have of this.

### Observational focus

Doing observations in an online setting means that you have vastly more data available to you, as conversations are stored for as long as that space exists. In such a case a sharp observational focus, which is constantly iterated, is necessary. In my case, the focus was on how the Danish Flat Earth cosmology was supporting a set of rationalities and how those rationalities, in turn, maintaining the cosmology.

### Observing cosmological elements

Observing the showcasing of different elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology was done partly through asking questions, but mostly by observing Danish Flat Earthers and Globeheads debate. One person would make a statement for their preferred cosmology, be it Flat or Globe Earth, and the other party would respond with counterarguments and so forth. These debates often contained telling elements, primarily of the Flat Earth cosmology, but also often how Globeheads viewed the Globe Earth cosmology.



Image 8: Danish Flat Earthers explain how giants used to live on the Earth as part of a discussion on the existence of dinosaurs. This showcases the telling of two elements of Flat Earth cosmology as part of a debate.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> English translation in appendix 2.8

### Observing scientific rationality

Observing the scientific rationality of Danish Flat Earth Community has primarily been focused on posts that showed the epistemic culture of the community. The epistemic culture in question often becomes observable especially in instances of claimed proof of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. In this case, the nature of the proofs and counterproofs, as well as the underlying conceptions of good epistemic practices and philosophy of science, were very revealing about how knowledge production was rationalized of a Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

### Social Rationality

The social rationality inherent in maintaining the Danish Flat Earth cosmology was by far the most difficult to observe. Posts and comments claiming relating interpretation of world events or techno-scientific problems in a relation to accountability and risk, or posts that argued the sensemaking in the existential sense were the most common examples of this in the Danish Flat Earth spaces. One strategy has been to look at this where informants have wondered about why people believe in a Globe Earth cosmology or the merits of Flat Earth cosmology over the Globe Earth.

### Participation

Participant observation in a given community is what makes ethnography such a strong methodology and gives it its edge over a mere close reading. Participating in a community allows the ethnographer to understand tacit social norms by inadvertently (or on purpose) breaking the social norms of the community the ethnographer is participating in as well as many other empirical benefits.

Both Hine (2015) and Kozinets (2009) point out that participation is the key element that distinguishes online ethnography from just casually browsing the web. Participation in the Danish Flat Earth Community, however, has proven to be tricky. The main reason why

participation is tricky is because it occurs in a social group whose stated goal is to believe or debate the concept of a Flat Earth. As I, at the time of writing, have not yet become a true Flat Earther, it seems problematic to participate in the belief. Furthermore, the tone of the debate in many of the Danish Flat Earth spaces is characterized by a specific sense of antagonism between Globeheads and Flat Earthers.



Image 9: Typical example of antagonistic or trollish tone towards a Flat Earther.<sup>19</sup>

This made participation a very precarious affair as I did not want to lie about being a Flat Earther and did not want to spoil my field relations with the Flat Earthers by seeming to antagonize them. In spite of this problem I have over the course of my fieldwork participated in a number of ways that did not compromise my honesty as a researcher. This was done through a very careful use of agnostic language, not trying to say or imply that I am a Flat Earther, but not trying to antagonize the Flat Earthers.

<sup>19</sup> English translation in appendix 2.9

The first and most obvious way that I participated was through asking questions. This seems the simplest and most ‘traditional’ approach. It’s concerned with observing the Facebook groups of the Danish Flat Earth Community and asking (clarifying) questions to what is being posted/discussed. This serves as a way to clarify parts of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology and prompt responses that might indicate how it was rationalized.



Image 10: Response to asking a question about calculations a Globehead had done to disprove the Flat Earth.<sup>20</sup>

This technique can be problematic though as participation that lacks a clear contribution to the community might be unpopular with the members of that group (Hine, 2015). Trying to use this approach in the spaces that my fieldwork has been carried out in has been semi-successful. Those spaces are, after all, characterized by a spirit of debate so questions are a normal form of contribution. In spite of this, many of my questions were ignored. The questioning technique also has its limits, as it can be construed as trolling. This happened to me in a situation where I

<sup>20</sup> English translation in appendix 2.10



tried to understand the underlying scientific conceptions in an experiment proposed by a Globehead. My way of asking questions had him convinced I was a troll, still after I explained that I was asking questions because of my ethnographic research.



Image 11: Globehead informant claims that I am a troll.<sup>21</sup>

Another type of participation that was more oriented towards contributing, or at least not expecting non-reciprocal answers to questions, was what I have chosen to call ‘casual participation.’ This had the benefit of making my presence known as someone that was not antagonistic and was not trying to troll anyone. The idea behind this was to create rapport with the community at large.

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<sup>21</sup>English translation in appendix 2.11



Image 12: Casual participation.<sup>22</sup>

Participation in the Danish Flat Earth Community has been a challenge, mostly because of the hostile tone, the difficult subject matter with a high barrier of entry and the fact that I have often been ignored when trying to participate. In spite of these things, participation has happened to a certain extent, and I have gained valuable empirical insights from it. In the next section, I will turn to how these insights from both participant- and more passive observation has been documented, inscribed and recorded.

## Fieldnotes

Understanding through observation has composed the main part of the knowledge generated for this thesis. As described above, the majority of Danish Flat Earth posts were studied through notifications on my personal Facebook profile. These served as an important part of my observational process, a process that needed to be documented and recorded. According to Hine (2015), the internet ethnographer must not fall in the trap of thinking that the

<sup>22</sup> English translation in appendix 2.12

ethnography can be merely recording, especially when digital environments offer such excellent tools for recording and searching data.

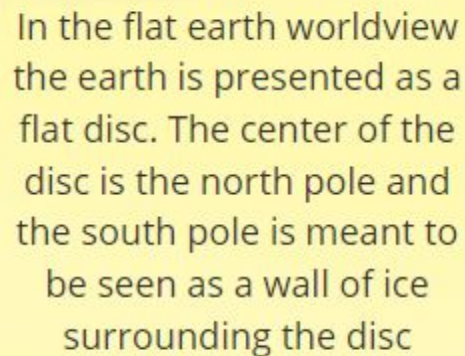
*“That being said, ethnographers will want to record aspects of field experience for later perusal and in-depth analysis.”*

(Hine, 2015:75)

This notion of keeping a *“record of aspects of field experience”*, not just recording content in the Danish Flat Earth spaces, is what lies at the heart of my fieldnote-complex. This complex houses elements of jotted notes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995) as well as broader fieldnotes and field diaries (Sanjek, 1990).

Jotted notes or scratch notes are notes taken quickly, with the purpose of jogging the memory of the ethnographer later (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995; Sanjek, 1990). As the word jotted might reveal, this idea has been proposed to encompass fieldnotes written down on paper. However, I have used the ‘saved’ content from Facebook to fill the function of the jotted notes in my fieldwork, in that the saved content, besides being empirical material in itself, also jogged my memory to the analytical reflections I was having at the time of the encounter. Thus these reflections become *inscribed* into the fieldnote-complex and are counted as foregrounded empirical material (Sanjek, 1990).

The second fieldnote technique I have used has been focused on more long-form fieldnote taking. Sanjek (1990) describes the process of writing the scratch notes into more descriptive fieldnotes. These can be used to better create the more or less coherent representation of the observed material, expounding the inscription mentioned above (Sanjek, 1990). In my case, this was done through the tool Realtime Board (Realtime Board, nd.). Through this tool, I could make sticky notes with text on them, both when looking through the saved notes as well as looking at Flat Earth material in general. These sticky notes would later be put into context to create the individual arguments of an analytical narrative.



In the flat earth worldview  
the earth is presented as a  
flat disc. The center of the  
disc is the north pole and  
the south pole is meant to  
be seen as a wall of ice  
surrounding the disc

Image 13: Sticky note from Realtime Board, detailing the Danish Flat Earth worldview.

## Interviews

In the following, I will detail my use of interviews, and how they have been shaped to answer my research questions and uncover elements and rationalities of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. During my fieldwork, I have carried out two interviews. One interview was carried out face-to-face with the informant in his home, and the other was carried out over a long period of time in the Facebook chat window. These two ways of interviewing, have been significantly different in many respects. It had been my hope to have more interviews, but because of the secretive nature of the informants, it was impossible to get more than the two interviews I got.

### Face-to-face interviews

A classic semi-structured research interview was carried out in the home of the informant over the course of roughly two hours. The interview was carried out with a very outspoken member of the Danish Flat Earth Community, who had been in the mainstream media talking about his Flat Earth views several times. Although I have permission to use his name, I will leave it out for

reasons discussed below. This interview was prepared with an interview guide that focused on two main interview techniques: Narrative questions and conceptual questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008).

The idea of the narrative style interview technique is based on using the deeply ingrained human preference for storytelling and feels comfortable for the informant (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). This technique has the added benefit of being strong in relation to getting empirical material from situations that happened before the beginning of the fieldwork, or in a situation that the ethnographer could not negotiate access to. The narrative interview technique was beneficial in relation to understanding the elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology through the informant telling stories about how they were introduced to them.

The conceptual interview technique focuses on uncovering the conceptual-structures as they relate to a given phenomenon or set of phenomena (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). This is beneficial in relation to understanding the concepts and phenomena contained in a cosmology and the practices that uphold it. Mostly, however, this technique was interesting in regard to spark conversation that showcased rationality. Asking questions about concepts of experimentation in a Danish Flat Earth context, for instance, yielded information on how those experiments related to a sense of scientific rationality.

### Textual interview

A textual interview is very different from a traditional face-to-face interview. Besides not being able to rely on the social cues in mediated communications discussed above, there are some things that are important to understanding. First off text is more difficult for the informant to produce, therefore it is better to ask more questions with a smaller scope than broad questions one could (would) use in a classic face-to-face interview. Because text is more difficult to produce than speech, Kvale and Brinkmann's (2008) narrative-style interview questions should be used sparingly. Instead, there should be a focus on questions concerned with the conceptual

technique. This can often be answered in shorter terms and is less taxing for the informant, who, because they are not in a room with the researcher feels less obligated to answer their questions and the researcher runs the risk of the informant drifting away. One should also be aware that textual interviews can take much longer than a traditional face-to-face interview.

This was the case with the textual interview carried out for this fieldwork. The interview was carried out over the course of more than a month. The informant was an administrator of one of the more active Danish Flat Earth Facebook groups, who, as a matter of fact, approached me about membership in the group (something that I already had). I tried to convince the informant to participate in a video-chat interview and offered to meet the person in or around his house, but this was declined. Because of the difficulties with gaining interviews mentioned above, I decided to go ahead with the interview in spite of the unorthodox situation.

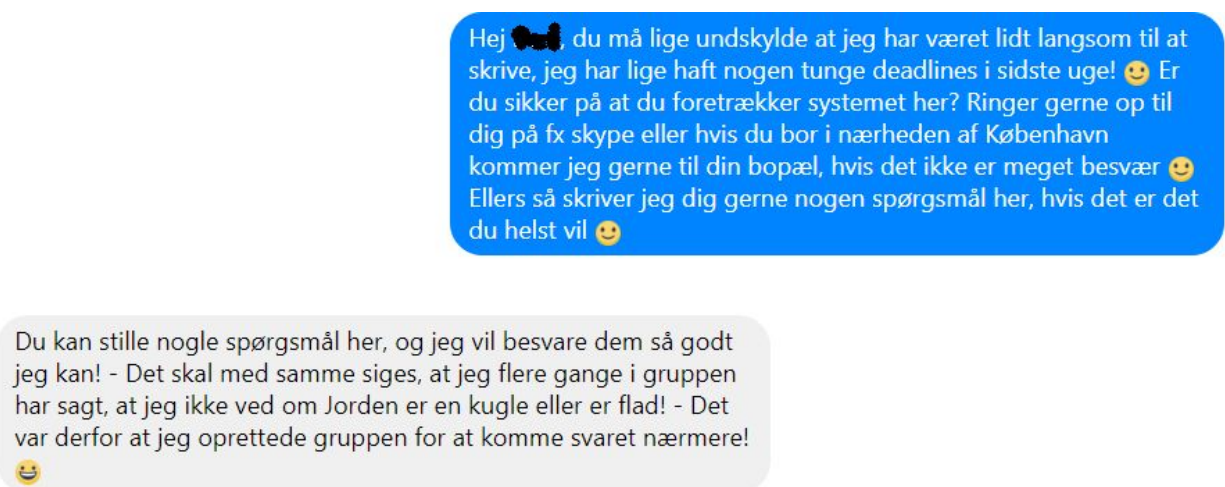


Image 14: Informant declines to have interview anywhere but in the Facebook chat.<sup>23</sup>

The long timeframe and the untraditional medium turned out to also have significant advantages. Instead of having one shot for doing an interview these circumstances allowed for an emergent explorative approach, which means that the interview proceeded as an unstructured interview but I had plenty of time to reflect on what questions I needed answered

<sup>23</sup> English translation in appendix 2.13

at that moment. This also came in handy, because I was able to gain access to the informant with immediate questions as they arose days or weeks after the initial contact. In spite of the limitations mentioned above this turned out to be a significant resource as well as an interesting methodological exercise.

## Agile ethics of care

The following section is concerned with the reflection on research ethics that has been part of my fieldwork. I will start by detailing an agile ethics of care, and go on to describe how this was implemented in practice.

Doing the fieldwork for this thesis, it was suggested to me numerous times by friends that I *“create a fake profile and pretend to be a Flat Earther.”* This seems on the surface as the most effective way of gaining entrance into the inner sanctums of the Danish Flat Earth Community. Hine (2015) even suggests creating a profile and strategically making information available as a viable research strategy. However, as research ethics go, lying, pretending to be someone else, and not being open about your research can be viewed as extremely problematic. Through my fieldwork, I have worked from a research ethics code based on two concepts: The concept of agile ethics (Neuhaus and Webmoor, 2012) and the ethics of care (Tiidenberg, 2018).

Although Neuhaus and Webmoor (2012) have developed the idea of agile ethics for *“massified research and visualization”* and thus spend much energy discussing the use of tools for such research, some of their ideas are interesting in an ethnographic setting. They propose the idea, that the researcher should have as much data available to be mined as the persons studied, and that the vulnerability of the researcher should be equal to the vulnerability of the persons studied.

*“An agile ethics makes the counterintuitive move to increased openness and transparency; to expose ourselves equally with those wrapped up in our projects. If we generate, study or deploy*

*potentially personal information in our research, then our level of privacy ought to match that of the individuals involved in the project.”*

(Neuhaus and Webmoor, 2012:60-61)

In the case of my internet ethnography, this manifested in using my personal Facebook profile, with the privacy settings set in such a way that all my activities were public. This might be a little excessive as agile ethics go, as most of my informants had stricter privacy settings and their personal profiles were not a part of the inscribed<sup>24</sup> empirical material.

Being excessive when it comes to research ethics, in general, might be the most prudent strategy. It is a step in the process of taking responsibility and practicing an ethics of care that goes beyond avoiding harm, and into space where the researcher tries to foster a sense of trust (Tiidenberg, 2018). The ethics of care can be viewed as a research ethics approach with a focus on mutual respect both in value and in practice. In my fieldwork, this has been a guiding principle although the respect has not always been mutual.



Image X: Respect and respectful language have not always been mutual during my fieldwork.<sup>25</sup>

In practicing ethics of care, some elements were easier than others. It was relatively simple, to be honest about who I was and what I was doing, both when applying for access to the different groups and when participating with people in the Facebook Groups. However, two elements that Katrin Tiidenberg (2018) stresses a great deal was problematic in my fieldwork.

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<sup>24</sup> I did however often look at profiles to get an idea of the demographic information about the person as well as if they were a Flat Earther or not, something that is often visible on their personal profiles. This can and should be viewed as a part of the empirical material, but as it is not inscribed it does not carry the same ethical weight as something that is, because it is not openly referred to

<sup>25</sup> English translation in appendix 2.14



First, there is a problem working with informed consent in such relatively large Facebook fora. It is not possible to obtain informed consent from all the people that inhabit the places on Facebook where one can find the Danish Flat Earth Community. The idea is that informants need to consent to risking possible harm. One way of mitigating that risk is through anonymization, the second practice proposed by Tiidenberg that has proven somewhat problematic in my fieldwork. Although I do not mention any names of persons in this thesis and all profile names and pictures are artfully obscured in screenshots, it is not impossible to de-anonymize. It is also worth taking into account that content on Facebook is not searchable through search engines such as Google. This means that the only way to de-anonymize my informants would be to gain access to all of the different Facebook Groups mentioned above and painstakingly comb through them to find a specific post that could be correlated with a user. Although this is not practical, it is possible, which makes the anonymization somewhat problematic.

These two are general problems that can arise when working with online content and must be discussed together. All in all, my decision for anonymizing inscribed observational and interview data and not seeking personal informed consent, was based on a reflection concerning the actual risk imposed on the informants. As a prominent member of the community spends much of the latter part of 2017 in the media's limelight, promoting both the community, its views, and the main Facebook group, that decreases the risk to informants added through my research. That consideration coupled with the fact that the main Facebook group is a large public forum with almost 7000 members too added to the sense that this was not intimate or private information that I have shared in this thesis. Those factors, combined with the fact that it is easy to be granted access to the smaller spaces, made my ethical course seem reasonable within practicality.

## Cosmological outline

*“Hør min kiære Monsieur Montanus Berg! Jeg har hørt at lærde Folk skal have saa underlige Meeninger. Er det sandt, at man holder for i Kiøbenhavn, at Jorden er rund? Her paa Bierget vil ingen troe det; thi hvor kand det være, efterdi Jorden synes jo gandske flack?”*

Erasmus Montanus (Holberg, 1731:3,2,12-16)<sup>26</sup>

The following chapter is meant to serve as an outlining of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, to give the reader an idea of some of its basic elements. To understand how the different elements of the cosmology's impact the rationalities at play in the Danish Flat Earth Community, one must understand an outline of what these elements are. I call it an outline because the actual tale is too large and diffuse to meaningfully tell within the scope of this thesis. It is important to note that the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community is not a homogenous thing that can be looked up and referenced. Each person makes up their own mind about what counts as being part of their own personal cosmology and pick from the collective smorgasbord of understandings in a la carte fashion. Danish Flat Earthers are generally open to including new ideas into their cosmology, as long as those ideas do not stem from mainstream science. The following is an attempt to outline some stables of Danish Flat Earth cosmology that are as close to being universally accepted as it gets. This outline will first describe the Flat Earth and space around it as it is constituted within the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. After this, I will describe why, how and by whom the true shape of the Earth is

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<sup>26</sup> English translation in appendix 3.1

hidden by, and how the conspiracy relates to other common conspiracy theories of a techno-scientific nature.

## The Flat Earth

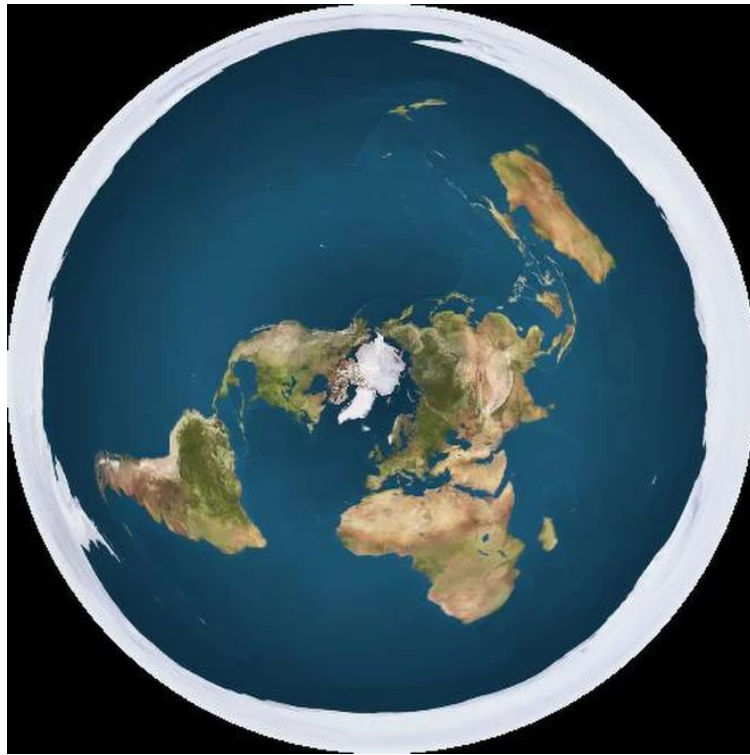


Image 15: The typical depiction of the Flat Earth as an azimuthal equidistant projection with the North Pole at its center.

In the Danish Flat Earth worldview, the Earth is presented as a flat, stationary disc in at the center of the universe. The center of the disc is the North Pole, and the South Pole is meant to be seen as a wall of ice surrounding the disc, as seen on image 15 above. This disc is stationary, covered by a dome or firmament, and within that dome are the Sun and the Moon, which are both close and roughly the same size. Gravity as a force does not exist, instead, buoyancy and density decide what falls down and what can float in the air. Space outside the Dome/Firmament might be filled with water instead of being a vacuum, and stars and planets are most likely just points of light in that water. These are the key characteristics that describe the Flat Earth and what is around it.

The Antarctic plays a key role in the Flat Earth cosmology, other than answer the obvious question of what happens when you come to 'the edge' of the Earth. One factor that specifically excites Flat Earth attention concerned with the Antarctic, is The Antarctic Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty sets up the Antarctic as a scientific preserve that can only be used for peaceful scientific purposes under the control of a committee of countries. This also bans people from freely traveling to the continent, outside of research projects, tourists are only allowed at specially designated areas. This restriction on visiting the continent is taken to be a conspiracy, keeping the public at large away from Antarctica, where they would discover that it is in fact not a continent but a wall of ice.

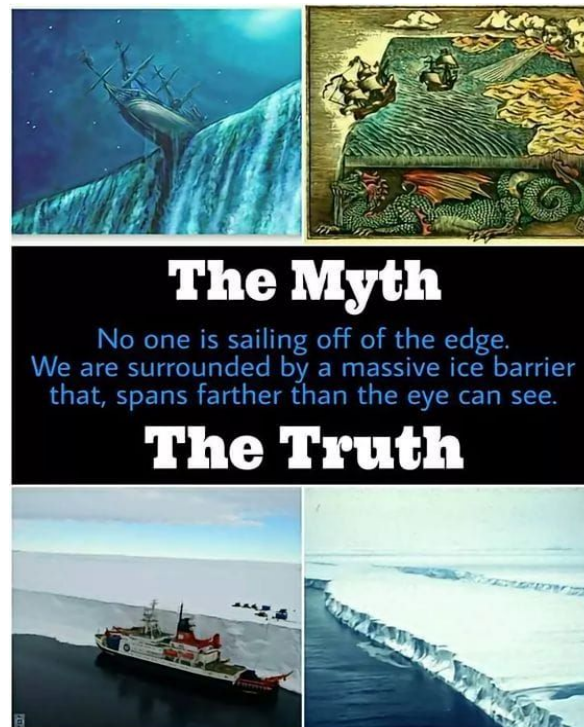


Image 16: Flat Earth meme debunking the myth of the edge and showcasing the truth.

## The Icewall and beyond

The Icewall is said to be roughly 200 feet (60m) high and encapsulates the Flat Earth. This encapsulation keeps the oceans in and ensures that they don't float away. What is meant to be on the other side of the Icewall no Flat Earther knows, though a number of things are suspected. It is generally agreed that the Earth very possibly could be a vast plane and that there is 'more land' beyond the Icewall that is kept hidden from the public living in the ice-free area humanity call Earth.

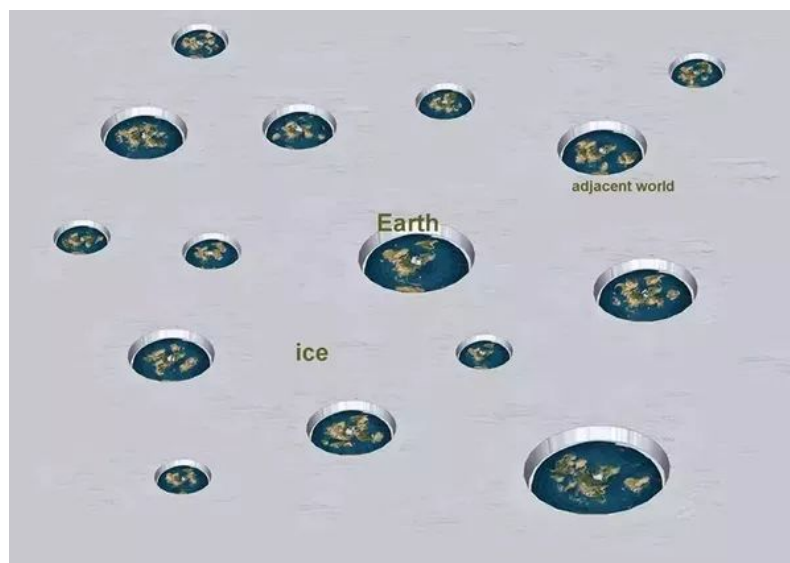


Image 17: Depiction of what might be on the other side of the Icewall.

One theory states that humanity might live on an infinite plane, other theories state that at some point on this plane one meets a barrier of sorts that is outside human understanding and cannot be penetrated. Some theories state that non-human 'aliens' might live beyond the Icewall, and periodically visit the part of the plane that is inhabited by humans. Although the precise nature of what is beyond the Icewall is not universally agreed upon in the Danish Flat Earth Community, it is understood that there is something beyond which is being kept secret.

## Astral bodies and The Dome

No matter the extent or nature of what might be beyond the Icewall, the Flat Earth plane is viewed as a stationary disc. This means that there is no movement through outer space, and most Danish Flat Earthers disbelieve the concept of outer space as it has been presented through mainstream science. Instead, it is believed that the sky is encapsulated within an enormously large dome that separates the plane of the Earth from whatever is beyond The Dome. The Dome encloses the Earth and many Flat Earthers believe that the Earth is a closed system, where nothing can leave or enter.

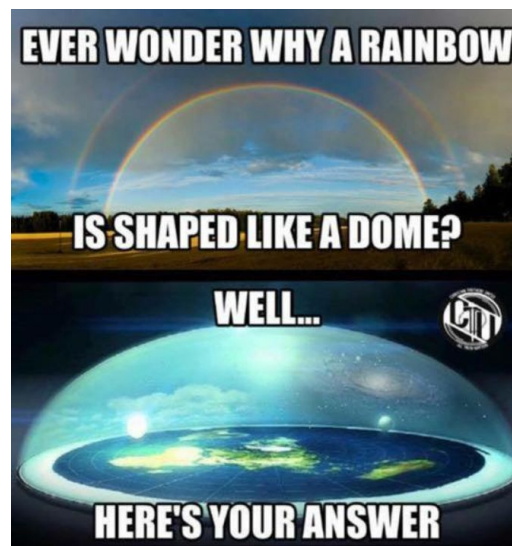


Image 18: Depictions of The Dome claimed to be proven because rainbows have the same shape as a dome.

The idea of The Dome is often related to specific interpretations of Christian theology and specifically the mentioning of 'The Firmament' in Genesis:

*"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so."*

(Gen. 1:6-7 King James Bible)

Although some Flat Earthers believe in outer-space, many focus on the part of the above quotation concerned with The Firmament dividing the waters from the waters. Based on this passage, arguments are often made that outer-space might, in fact, be filled with water instead of being a vacuum.

*“Jeg har sågar set et raket der blev sendt lige op der stødte på noget. Hvor det lød ligesom is. Så lige pludselige sage det "guing" ligesom en stor sten man smider hen over is. Så jeg tror mere på at vi er i en form for lukket system. Jeg synes også det bliver lidt interessant at der er skrevet så mange ting i Biblen. Om domen og Gud der skilte vandene fra vandene. Altså, er der vand på den anden side?”*

- From interview<sup>27</sup>

One source of much Flat Earth inspiration is depictions of the Earth in ancient religions, which is often shown to depict a flat, domed and stationary Earth. This is used to critique the current cosmology, as it is not in tune with ancient knowledge.



Image 19: Ancient depictions of the Earth used as a critique of the cosmology of mainstream science.

<sup>27</sup> English translation in appendix 3.2

In this sense, the Christian religious imagery does not get to have sole dogmatic influence, although it is the most heavily cited religion within the Danish Flat Earth Community. An example of this could be, that I several times have found Danish Flat Earthers citing the bible and pointing to passages indicating that God might live either in or above The Firmament. Although the creator is not always the Christian God, there are numerous references to a loving creator god of some sort, citing the religious conceptions in image 19 as well as Islam and other religions.

Something that can be easily observed is that stars exist as lights in the sky. What those lights actually are, is something that is less easily solved. Astrology is generally thought to hold a not insignificant power of foretelling, and so this transfers some power to the stars themselves. Stars in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology are often thought of as lights in The Firmament.

*“Ud fra det [the positions of astral bodies on the date of your birth, ed] kan de [astrologers, ed] sige en hel masse. Så er der en hel masse energi der? Er stjernerne i virkeligheden bare lys? (...) Sirius f.ek. ligner ellipser eller ovale baner der kører inde i hinanden og har farver, altså har grøn, blå, gul, rød, grøn, blå, gul, rød farve, og man kan faktisk se den når man står og kigger med det blotte øje, så kan man se at den stjerne den skifter farve at den blinker.”*

- From interview<sup>28</sup>

Some Flat Earthers have speculated that the reason the stars have been seen to move in these ellipsoid/ovaloid trajectories is that the light is being distorted through the water and the transparent material of The Firmament/Dome (For a visual example, see image 20).

Being understood as lights moving in the heavens might be the most basic observational understanding possible of not only the stars but also the planets. It is thought that the

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<sup>28</sup> English translation in appendix 3.3



differentiating of planets and stars are part of a conspiracy to have more clear goals for space travel.

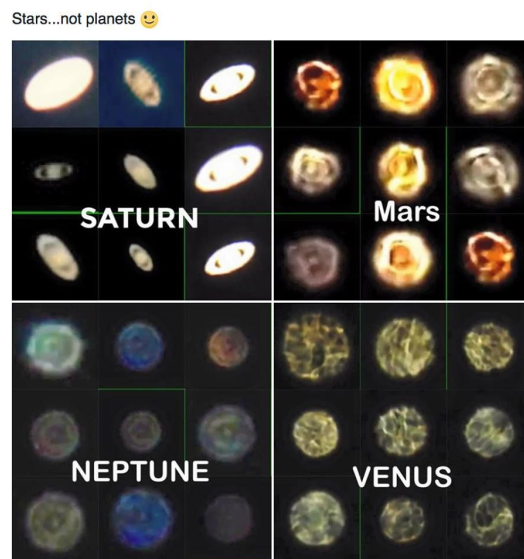


Image 20: Photos taken of planets that make them look like stars are often pictured in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

In the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, a key point is that the sun is small and local, rather than very large and far away. The small local sun and the moon are roughly the same size and revolve in circles over the Flat Earth. They are positioned within the dome and thus don't 'go down' but simply disappears out of human visual range.

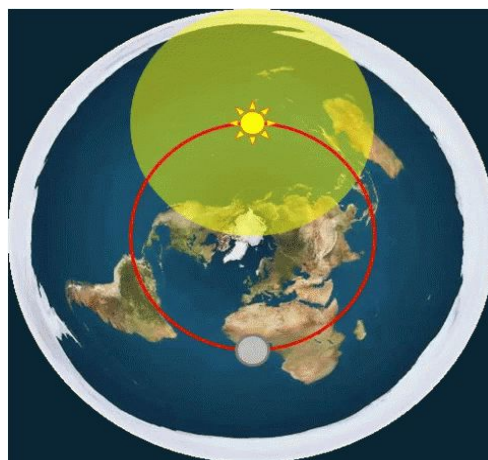


Image 21: Trajectory of the sun and moon over the Flat Earth.

On the Flat Earth, seasons are created by the trajectory of the sun narrowing and expanding, creating longer or shorter days.

To summarize, the Earth is a flat, stationary disc surrounded by an Icewall and encapsulated within a large dome of some clear material. Within The Dome are also the Sun and the Moon and the Flat Earth is viewed as an enclosed system, not giving away parts to something that exists outside The Dome. Beyond the Icewall there might be other flat worlds and of what goes on outside of the dome, little is know.

## Agnotology on a Flat Earth

In the Flat Earth worldview, many things are viewed as being faked, either by lying scientists or an authoritative power elite or both. The following section will seek to describe some stable elements of what has been and are being faked to fool the public at large.

### Scientific frauds

As the Flat Earth cosmology competes with the Globe Earth cosmology, much of the science that the Globe Earth cosmology is built on is called into question. This is evident from the section on the Flat Earth above, but many other elements of mainstream/Globe Earth science is being critiqued in this total cosmological conversation in the Danish Flat Earth Community.

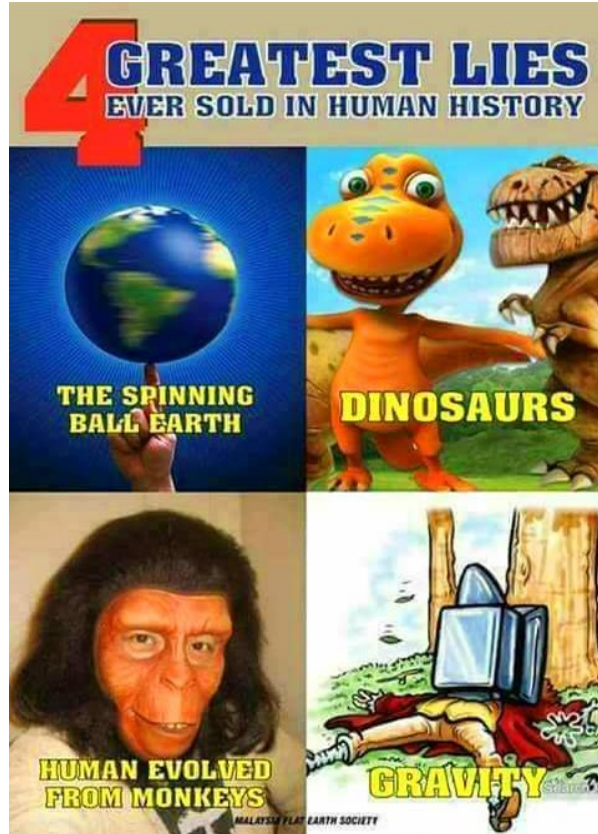


Image 22: Meme depicting what is viewed as four very successful agnotological campaigns.

In the enclosed flat and stationary Earth described above, much of the space travel that has characterized human scientific endeavors in the second half of the 20th century is necessarily fake. In this regard, it is central to reject the chief among space-related endeavors - The moon landing(s). In the various spaces, much time is spent on this subject, as these missions also supposedly allowed for some of the first photographs of the Earth from a distance. These photographs, along with the moon missions themselves are framed as lies. In fact, not only the moon landings but most, if not all space exploration as well as satellite communications are viewed as lies. Astronauts are thought to be actors and satellite communications are thought to be conducted through cables and wireless technologies based on the Earth's surface.

Having dealt with the lies connected to the spinning Globe Earth reference on image 22 as well as the space travel that aims to prove it, let us turn to the next great Globe Earth fraud -

Gravity. Gravity does not exist in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. If something is dropped, it will fall, but what causes it to fall will not be interpreted as gravity. Instead, things with a higher density than air falls through the air, and the thing with a low enough density achieve buoyancy and is able to float or fly. The rejection of gravity is a key element of the Danish Flat Earth Cosmology, in the sense that gravity in itself is the reason for a round Earth. Rejecting the theory of gravity invalidates much of mainstream science within the Flat Earth cosmology because of gravity's central role in the Globe Earth cosmology.



Image 23: The 'heavy thing upside-down' is a type of imagery very commonly used to showcase the perceived absurdity of gravity on a Globe Earth.

The Danish Flat Earth understanding of gravity and much of the Globe Earth related mainstream science has a fundamental anchoring in an up-down view of the world, which only makes sense on a Flat Earth.

Lastly in relation to the two last conspiracies referenced in image 22 those concerned with evolution and the dinosaurs, the framing of these are pretty common in relation to creationist views. Dinosaurs are being framed as something forged by what ended up being the creators of the field of paleontology and are envisioned as a way to siphon money out of taxpayers with fake dinosaur science. The anti-evolution point of view asserts that humans were created by intelligent design and that scientists and governments are working in collusion to cover it up as

a way to lead the public away from believing in a creator-deity and alternatively to worship Satan (more on that at the end of this chapter).

## Political frauds and the Flat Earth as an umbrella for conspiracy theories

Because of the vastness of the scale of the lie that would be needed to cover up the true shape of the Earth with all of the elements detailed above, the Flat Earth cosmology functions as an umbrella conspiracy theory. In this sense, the lie/conspiracy is so large that it can cover many other conspiracy theories that are not necessarily related to the Flat Earth or the scientific frauds believed to cover it up. Many of these do however have a techno-scientific component, with the 9/11 attacks being believed to be demolitions, global warming not being anthropogenic or, more recently the ill effects of the extraordinarily hot Danish summer of 2018 being the effect of geoengineering and weather control. These all have elements of techno-scientific explanations as their base, common for them and the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is that it is based on the lying scientist/governments attempting to forge some element of (a) scientific truth.

As an example, in the 9/11 context, Danish chemist Niels Harrit has used his credibility as a trained scientist to play a significant role in both the Danish and international 9/11 conspiracy theory communities. As an entry into the debate, Harrit even spearheaded a group claiming that experiments with dust samples showed significant amounts of nano-thermite, a powerful explosive that is very difficult to produce, at the site of the 9/11 attacks. Harrit et al. (2009) even published a paper on their research, although it was published in a rather controversial journal with a record of dubious peer-review practices (Aldhous, 2009). As the 9/11 conspiracy continues to be one of the most popular conspiracies in the U.S. and Europe, many Danish Flat Earthers were 9/11 conspiracy theorists well before they were Flat Earthers. The 9/11 conspiracy seems small and credible put next to the enormity of the Flat Earth conspiracy and fits well under its broad umbrella of conspiracy theories.

Another very Danish conspiracy related to the Flat Earth and science is concerned with the murder of the Swedish-American journalist Kim Wall. According to this conspiracy theory Peter Madsen, who murdered Wall, had the potential to learn that the Earth was actually flat through being the chairperson of the largest amateur space agency in the world - Copenhagen Suborbitals. Because of this potential to uncover the great lie of the world's true form, the conspiracy theory states that Madsen was framed for the murder of Wall to effectively prevent him from sending a rocket up high enough to discover that the Earth is flat.

*“Jeg mener i øvrigt også at det er baggrunden for den her fortælling om Raket-Madsen tror jeg faktisk godt kunne være iscenesat. Med eller uden hans vidende eller hvad man skulle sige, så kunne det godt være et setup. For at man faktisk var bange for at Raketmadsen blev Flat Earth. Han er jo kendt ikke, enhver dansker ved hvem han er. Altså, der er ikke noget tegn på at han var Flat Earth, men der er andre af de her private raketforskere der faktisk er blevet Flat Earth (...) Han sagde jo til at starte med at Kim Wall gik i land på Holmen, og så har han så hele tiden ændret forklaring. Så den der historie kunne sagtens være plantet. Så langt som jeg er nået i efterforskningen har jeg ihvertfald fundet ud af at Kim Wall havde to identiteter.”*

- From Interview<sup>29</sup>

That Flat Earther quoted above even spend time outside the courtroom with a sign protesting the framing of Madsen and pointing to the double identity of Wall during Madsen's trial.

These examples of conspiracy theories at fault with science and linked to Flat Earth and it's cosmology showcases it's broad umbrella-like nature when it comes to conspiracy theories. As mentioned above, the lie told to cover up the shape of the Earth is so vast that it makes other, smaller lies, seem plausible by comparison. The question then is: Who is lying and why?

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<sup>29</sup> English translation in appendix 3.4

## The Conspirator

A central part of the Flat Earth cosmology is that it is based in a conspiracy theory, and a conspiracy theory needs a conspirator. The following sections deal with who might be a part of this group of conspirators, what they are getting out of being conspirators and what they are trying to achieve.



Image 24: The UN logo is an azimuthal equidistant projection like the common depiction of the Flat Earth. This is meant to symbolize that the world leaders know that the Earth is flat.

Generally, there is a sense of uncertainty regarding precisely who the perpetrators of the conspiracy are, but several groups are indicated. The main conspirator, mentioned most frequently is the order of the Freemasons. The Masonic order(s) are often portrayed as an influential group, having members in positions of power that are orchestrated through different Masonic lodges.



## GRAND LODGE - FREEMASONS



**Bush, Putin and China's president photo taken at a secret Grand Lodge meeting. They are all in the same club, answering to the same Lord, pretending that they are enemies because that keeps them in power, so they can introduce even tighter Draconian measures in each of their respective countries to keep the swill down and ensure THEIR BREED stays on top.**

Image 25: A photograph of former Chinese president Hu Jintao, Russian president Vladimir Putin, and former U.S. president George W. Bush jr. at the 2006 APEC conference in Hanoi, wearing traditional Vietnamese ao dai robes (The Guardian, 2011). Here depicted with a masonic logo and claiming to be a photograph from a secret Grand Lodge meeting.

The Masonic lodges are favored candidates to be among the conspirators because of the organization's secretive nature, many rituals and rich symbolism. Especially the symbolism is used heavily to show that Masonic influence is present as 'clues' within the conspiracies' many lies. In the masonic logo seen in image 25, it is often claimed that masons will have you think that the G stands for God, but many Flat Earthers believe that it is, in fact, G for Gravity, the great lie that ties all of the false science together, invented by famous freemason Isaac Newton, often citing a book entitled "*Isaac Newton's Freemasonry: The Alchemy of Science and Mysticism*" (Bauer, 2007).





Image 26: Statue of George Washington with freemason symbol.

Another group that is featured as a conspirator in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is the great Jewish conspiracy. This anti-semitic conspiracy theory is derived from a piece of literature published in Russia in 1903 entitled "*The Protocols of The Elders of Zion*". Claiming to be legitimate, this document was forged to seem like a plan for Jewish world domination (Anti Defamation League, n.d.). The Jewish conspiracy, although it does not feature as commonly as the Masonic orders, does still include a pretty universal holocaust denial within the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.



Image 27: Meme featuring the anti-semitic stereotype that Jewish people are greedy. Also featuring classic anti-semitic image 'The Happy Merchant'.

Besides Jewish people and freemasons, a slew of other organizations, groups, and families are implicated. As leading members, the Rothschild and Rockefeller families are mentioned, as well as the Yale secret society 'The Skull And Bones.'

As agents for The Conspirator, NASA is the most cited organization, though many governmental organizations, especially those concerned with science, are often mentioned, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the Danish Meteorological Institute as well as countless universities. It is unclear how aware the individual employees at such institutions are, if they are simply acting in good faith, being fooled by someone higher up in the conspiracy or if they are actively lying. Higher place individuals with mass appeal like astronauts such as ESA astronaut Andreas Mogensen are believed to be paid actors, which also goes for famous science communicators such as Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Brian Cox, Carl Sagan and Bill Nye.



Image 28: Bill Nye the Science Guy portrayed as a conspirator.

Other than paid actors, most people are believed to be fooled by the lies that the conspirators tell. They gain their knowledge through textbooks in educational institutions and are taught by teachers who gained their knowledge through the same means. These people have not (yet) been awoken from their 'sleep' and will vehemently and aggressively defend the worldview that they believe. These are not people who are in on the conspiracy, but who do the work of the conspirators because they don't know better.

These conspirator groups are then enabled through their network of powerful co-conspirators as well as control over more or less naive agents to line their own pockets with the money of hard working normal people. Although it is claimed that it happens from many sources, one major source of revenue for the conspirators are funneling money out of governments through privatization of taxpayer build infrastructure, like the controversial sales of Dong Energy and NETS. Another way to funnel money out of the governments of the world is through the various publicly funded science program, either in Danish universities or in an organization like NASA.

*"Det er som om at det bliver mere og mere tydeligt, at magthavere, altså visse grupper i*

*samfundet, er i stand til at køre det her spil, hvor vi ender med at blive deres slaver. Vi er jo skatteslaver. Vi betaler jo ind til skat i massevis, vi betaler jo langt over 50% måske snarer 70% hvis man regner moms og ejendomsskat med, cigaretter og hvad man ellers betaler skat af. Det er jo også eksistentielt. Har vi brug for at betale 3/4 af det vi tjener ind for at vores børn kan gå i skole, for at vi har en vej, for at vi kan komme på sygehuset. Eller forsvinder nogle af de her penge? Det er en af de konspirationer jeg er begyndt at kigge lidt på. Det er hvor pengene i hele taget bliver af. Der er jeg ikke nået så langt endnu. Men et af de steder jeg kan se pengene bliver af, det er til fake science som jeg kalder det. Fake science for mig er rumforskning det er mega dyrt. Vi betaler til det gennem ESA, amerikanerne betaler gennem NASA osv. Der forsvinder ihvertfald nogle penge.”*

- From Interview<sup>30</sup>

Aside from getting rich, what the overall goals for these secretive authorities are, remains unclear, but a patchwork of ‘smaller’ goals are identifiable. The most classic examples are using the money siphoned off of the worlds science budgets to conduct secret research to benefit the few, or to create technologies that enable the conspirators to better control the population of the world. Through this idea, the world’s population exists to service the elite and make society function. One fear that is being voiced in relation to the goals and needs of The Conspirator is that, with the rise of automation and robot technology, the conspiratorial elite will not need so many humans to have their society function, and thus decide to depopulate the world in the largest genocide ever imagined.

*“Det jeg frygter allermest, det er jo, at de vil gøre alvor af den her depopularization, altså hvor nogle af de her mørke kræfter de siger lige pludselig, at så er vi for mange mennesker. Så er det ingen grund til at vi er 7 milliarder. For lige om lidt har vi selvkørende biler, lige om lidt har vi robotteknologi som både kan læsse og aflæsse de her biler af. Så er der en robot der automatisk kan sætte den her pakke på jorden eller køre den til supermarkedet og det ville jo betyde millioner af arbejdspladser der forsvinder globalt. Det er noget af det jeg frygter at den her*

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<sup>30</sup> English translation in appendix 3.5

*super elite pludselig siger, at så behøver vi ikke være 7-8 milliarder. Så kan vi godt være en halv milliard. Så er det kun dem, der tilhører eliten og deres venner og de børn de har brug for til deres perversiteter.”*

- From interview<sup>31</sup>

As implied in the above, satanic practices with pedophilic undertones are often a characteristic contributed to the power elite generally among conspiracy theories (Bach et al., 2018b). The conspiratorial power elite of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is no different. The purpose of overall satanic worship and turning the world into a place where people unknowingly practices satanic worship could be seen as the overall goal of the conspiratorial power elite.

To summarize The Conspirator consists of a number of semi-secretive organizations, which have members and agents in the government and scientific institutions all over the world. They practice their conspiracy in order to gain power and money over the population, through many well-meaning people who do their bidding without knowing it.

## The Danish Flat Earth Community

This chapter seeks to give some context on who and what the Danish Flat Earth Community consists of. It will discuss what characterizes the Flat Earth community, such as roughly how many people in Denmark would identify as being in that community and some typical demographic traits of those people. Subsequently, I will discuss the Danish Flat Earth Community in relation to the rest of the international Flat Earth Community and how one becomes a Flat Earther. Lastly, I want to discuss the importance of Globeheads to the Danish Flat Earth Community.

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<sup>31</sup> English translation in appendix 3.6

## Community characteristics

In the previous chapters, I have outlined some elements of the Danish Flat Earth Community as part of the framing of my field site. This includes what spaces the community are found in, as well as some basic facts. The following delves into that in more detail.

First of all the characteristics of the community is that it is highly decentralized. Most of the interaction that takes place, takes place in the Danish Flat Earth spaces on Facebook, outlined in Table 1 in the methodology. Being highly decentralized, they do have a few meetings outside of Facebook, although these have been irregular both in time, place and attendance. Some Danish Flat Earthers have expressed a wish to create an official Danish Association of Flat Earthers; *"Flat Earth Denmark"*. Although this until recently has been met with some skepticism internally within the community, due to members not wanting to be subject to official authority, lately there has been increased goodwill towards the notion of creating a more formalized organization.

Kære venner.  
Jeg ønsker at samle et team af dedikerede Danskere, der ønsker at teste globen. Dvs mødes i real life og diskutere og udføre forsøg der beviser vores påstand om den flade jord.  
Når vi bliver godt konsolideret og vores kontinuerlige test er veldokumenteret og uomtvistelige, så tænker jeg at vi går offentligt ud og deler ud af vores viden. Jeg tænker i form af offentlig fredelig gade aktivisme. Måske giver det os eksponering så medierne får øje på os.  
Lige nu står vi alle alene med vores påstande. Vi har brug for at etablere og grundlægge "Flat Earth Denmark".  
Jeg lægger gerne garage og kaffe til. Alternativt kører jeg gerne derhen hvor flertallet ønsker vi skal mødes.  
Kom frisk og lad os sammen skabe en ny og troværdig verden.

Image 29: A Danish Flat Earthers makes a call for creating a formal organization based on opening the eyes of the public through, among other things, peaceful street activism.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> English translation in appendix 4.1

The goals of such an organization would be to conduct Flat Earth research as well as opening the eyes of the public at large. Aside from handing out pamphlets and other “*peaceful street activism*”, this is proposed to be done through selling tickets to lectures, an activity that is also imagined to fund the proposed organization. These things only remain as plans and have yet to be carried out.

Estimating the amount of Danish Flat Earthers that could potentially be part of such an organization is tricky. One informant estimates that there are between 200 and 500 Danish Flat Earthers, which seems a little high to me, who would put the range between 200 and 300. There is a twofold reason why it is so difficult to estimate the number of Danish Flat Earthers. First, what constitutes a Flat Earther might seem unclear, as someone can be Flat Earth agnostic, be into conspiracy theories without self-identifying as a Flat Earther or just plain believe the Earth is flat, without being part of the community around it. This fussiness, combined with the fact that many Flat Earthers are elusive conspiracy theorists, who disappear from the Facebook spaces because of the confrontative tone and large amount of Globehead. The view that there are around 200 to 300 is then based on the distinct users who I’ve seen engaged with Danish the Flat Earth spaces over my period of engagement and ethnographic research within the community.

Another key characteristic of the community is the demographics of its active members. These are almost uniformly male, white and mostly 30-50 years of age. While quite a few outliers exist agewise, I have through my fieldwork only seen 3-4 female users identifying as Danish Flat Earthers and absolutely no people of color.

## Danish Flat Earth and the world

The Danish Flat Earth Community is situated within a much larger global community. This community has both held conferences in the U.S., Canada and in the U.K. and creates a lot of the content that is used in the spaces of the Danish Flat Earth Community. There can be little doubt that the international Flat Earth community has great influence on the Danish community, and there are few uniquely Danish elements of the Flat Earth cosmology that I present in this text.

However, outside of the Danish community, that is large enough for an individual Flat Earthers to oversee, it is believed that sinister forces are at work. Certain groups are thought to act as what is termed 'controlled opposition', posing as being legitimate Flat Earthers but actually being controlled by The Conspirator. The most prominent of these is 'The Flat Earth Society' who over the past year or so have been behind the three most popular 'fake' Flat Earth stories.



[Redacted] Flat earth society er fake og har intet med FE at gøre, de er oprettet til at lave grin med FE - så alt der kommer der fra vil ikke blive godkendt.

Image 30: Flat Earth moderator points out why content from The Flat Earth Society is banned.<sup>33</sup>

The most famous of these fake Flat Earth stories, which the Danish community think is framing Flat Earth in a bad light, is the infamous "*members all around the Globe post*".

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<sup>33</sup> English translation in appendix 4.2





Image 31: Screenshot (not taken by me) of The Flat Earth Society Facebook page posting what Danish Flat Earthers believed to be an example of controlled opposition.

This is an example of someone showing such a basic mistake in how the internal logic of the Flat Earth cosmology should be applied, that many Flat Earthers have a hard time believing it to genuine. There are several other examples of such Flat Earth faux pas by The Flat Earth Society, involving Elon Musk and “*Flat Mars*” as well as Flat Earthers being painted as not believing in Australia.

This perceived disinformation campaign against the Flat Earth Community has been understood as a direct attack and creates a situation where the community has to evaluate the international content. It has also, as mentioned above, contributed to many Globeheads having a wrongful view of several elements of the Flat Earth cosmology. These Globeheads often post these misconceptions in the Flat Earth spaces as seen above, but they also play an important role to keep the community vibrant and alive.

## Globeheads

I have referred many times to Globeheads already, but in this next section, I will describe exactly what I mean and what role these people play to and maybe even in, the Flat Earth Community.

As mentioned before the vast majority of members of many of the Danish Flat Earth spaces are not Flat Earthers. They are what the Flat Earther term Globeheads. Emically, this term is mostly used to describe any person who subscribes to the Globe Earth cosmology. I have taken the liberty to ethically impose a use of it to describe the members of the Danish Flat Earth Facebook spaces who subscribe to that model. These Globeheads are in constant opposition, except for the few relatively small spaces where their input is not allowed. However, this is something that many of the Flat Earthers seem to like. Some feel like they are spreading their view and that “...all Flat Earthers were Globeheads once”, others feel that the constant opposition of the Gobeheads allows for a more dynamic Danish Flat Earth Community.

*“... altså jeg kan godt lide at der er nogen der er kritiske ihvertfald, jeg synes det bliver lidt kedeligt hvis nu vi bare havde en gruppe hvor alle var enige. Der findes jo massere af fladjords grupper hvor alle bare er enige og dem er jeg også medlem af, men jeg synes egentlig det er sjovere at diskutere med nogen, som ikke er enige.”*

- From interview<sup>34</sup>

Many of the main posters in some groups are Globeheads, trying to disprove elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. Often the debate is calm and well mannered, although there at times can be an extraordinarily harsh or hostile tone in the debates.

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<sup>34</sup> English translation in appendix 4.3

To summarize the Danish Flat Earth Community is comprised mostly of white men between 30-50 years of age. They Are getting more open towards the idea of creating a Danish association of Flat Earthers, although some content that comes from outside the small overseeable Danish Flat Earth Community is under suspicion. Having Globeheads as part of the Danish Flat Earth spaces create an opportunity for those places to stay dynamic because of the fact that these Globeheads force debate and makes the reflection on what is posted more necessary.

## Danish Flat Earth as an epistemic culture

Having now outlined what elements comprise the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as well as how their community is structured, it is clear that the way the Danish Flat Earth Community understands reality is totally different from the way of the mainstream. The Danish Flat Earthers' understanding of what surrounds them is based on a different rationalization of that reality. Interpreting and rationalizing reality through a Flat Earth cosmology requires a certain specialized scientific rationality which supports a specific epistemology and epistemic culture. This is where the view of the Danish Flat Earth Community as an alternative science comes into a right of its own.

Schaffer's and Shapin (1985) seminal history of science "*Leviathan and the Air-Pump*" tells the story of the controversy between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes as a means to investigate how mainstream science in its current form was created. Their work elaborates much on the how the specialized experience of science is rationalized, in the way described by Douglas (1980). Schaffer and Shapin draw attention towards a view of how the rationale for much of the current structure of mainstream science can be seen to be the outcome of this controversy and thus not a given. They showcase how differing scientific rationalities can create controversy over what counts as legitimate knowledge and which practices can legitimately create such knowledge. In the controversy between Boyle and Hobbs, basic elements of scientific

rationality, such as the validity of experimental knowledge, are up for discussion and only become a stable part of how mainstream scientific pursuits are rationalized as a result of that controversy. This teaches us that our current rationalization of what constitutes good scientific practice has been created through a process of embedding a certain set of values into that rationality. This way of looking at differing modes of knowledge production as rationalizations legitimizing one experience of science over another is key to the following analysis. I aim to highlight the scientific rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community through understanding how its members create knowledge, as this might indicate how that process is considered legitimate. Doing this I want to follow Latour, as well as Schaffer and Shapin, and open the black box of the Danish Flat Earth Communities epistemic culture and practices. By this, I mean that both in mainstream science and in Danish Flat Earth epistemic practices, people tend not to look into these value-oriented creation processes. Instead of looking at these processes, they are taken for granted in a mechanism Latour (1999) has called black boxing. Latour describes it as:

*"(...)the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become."*

(Latour, 1999:304)

By opening the black box to study different scientific rationalities and not taking for granted how core elements of science are rationalized in relation to Hobbes, Schaffer and Shapin (1985) unbarred the way for imagining how different scientific rationalities, effected their epistemic cultures and how these might, in turn, affect the interpretation of reality within these cultures. As might have become apparent through the cosmological outline (or else will become so through the following) the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture does not share the rationality of mainstream science. Characterizing how this alternative rationality is at play within the Danish Flat Earth Community's epistemic culture, and how this rationality shapes the creation of facts,

allows for a deeper understanding of how that difference in rationality is expressed. Having insight into this process will allow for a subsequent understanding of how that community supports its rationality through its cosmology and how the rationalities uphold its cosmology and how it informs a social rationality. As discussed in the introduction, looking at the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as a result of an alternative science allow us to understand how the cosmology functions as a social phenomenon, and how it is upheld and legitimized by viewing itself as based on an alternative science. To take this view of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as being maintained by an alternative science, it is important to understand how a specific epistemic culture brings about that alternative science, and how it is carried out both in practice and philosophy. By understanding these things I will highlight in what way the Danish Flat Earth Community's scientific rationality is supported by its cosmology and in turn serves to maintain it. Investigating this is first done by first outlining fact creation theoretically and how those newly created facts are stabilized. Then my analysis zooms in and follows tell the story of three different facts in its minutiae to understand what elements go into the construction of those facts and how they draw support from the cosmology. The analysis then zooms out to understand the philosophy of science that is practiced in the Danish Flat Earth Community's epistemic culture and how it is inferred through the cosmological outline as well as the deconstructed facts.

As mentioned in the introduction, this analysis takes its point of departure from Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Studies* (1979) in which they, through a semi-fictional anthropologist, describe how facts are constructed at the Salk Institute's laboratories in California. Their work is deemed a founding element in Actor-Network Theory, in which facts are seen being constructed in a network of heterogeneous actors, which enables them to be inscribed into research papers and mobilized into the scientific community. In this analysis, I use some of the same fact-deconstruction techniques to understand how the Danish Flat Earth Community constructs facts and, through this process, I investigate how rationality is implied.

## Mobile Flat Earth facts

When Latour and Woolgar's semi-fictional anthropological observer entered the laboratory in the 1970's it was not to increase the "*fairly detailed knowledge of the myths and circumcision rituals of exotic tribes*" but to understand a 'tribe' much closer to their home (Latour and Woolgar, 1979:17). Opening the black box of scientific knowledge creation and studying the specific minutiae of fact-construction gives an insight into the social circumstances of that fact's creation and allows for an understanding of what assumptions, epistemic norms, and ontological reflections were part of its construction (Latour and Woolgar, 1979).

The epistemic norms and practices are expressed through two main activities that enlarge and maintain the Danish Flat Earth cosmology through contributing knowledge to it. These two activities are *experimentation* and *the finding of Flat Earth 'clues'*.

The experiments carried out by the Danish Flat Earthers are interesting because they create or support the facts that interweave to become the factual tapestry of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. These experiments are diverse in nature, but all focus on either refuting central points of fact in the Globe Earth cosmology or supporting points in the Flat Earth cosmology. The finding of Flat Earth 'clues' is the practice of looking through the content put out by mainstream sources and finding the hidden clues to the Flat Earth within. This can be in everything from perceived mistakes in video material from the International Space Station (ISS) to clues hidden in movies or other popular culture.



Image 32: An example of a Flat Earth clue hiding in plain sight in popular culture.

Finding Flat Earth clues, like experimentation, also contributes to the creation or support of facts in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology and thus can be considered an epistemic practice. It is also a practice concerned with refuting the Globe Earth model through finding faults in material that is supposedly factual. As such this refutation of arguments and facts from the other side is a way of convincing more people to act as the 'allies' of one's fact. According to Latour (1986), the only real measure of the success of a fact is its ability to persuade allies to come to a course or cosmological worldview and advocate for that fact.

Facts created through experimental or Flat Earth clue-oriented practices can be viewed as fundamental corner posts in maintaining the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, especially when one assumes the view of the cosmology as an actor-network that is made up of facts and all the things human, material and conceptual, that support those facts. Taking the view of the cosmology as an actor-network supports a perspective that can more easily deconstruct the cosmology into its supporting elements for study.

To describe the different elements of the fact creation process I adopt a theoretical language from the world of Latour and other scholars involved in actor-network theory. With help from these terms, I have conceptualized the fact creation process of the Danish Flat Earth Community to fundamentally consist of a series of translations of meaning from an original observation. The concept of the translation was popularized by Callon (1986) in his study of the controversy of fishermen in Northern France. In this study, he used the concept of translations to describe how different actors tried to mobilize each other based on their different goals in a controversy. The concept of the translations of meaning that I use in the following analysis of fact construction is taken from a number of different places, but fundamentally my understanding comes from Callon who defines it thus:

*“Translation involves creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously different.”*

*(Callon 1981 in Cressman, 2009:9)*

Working with the combination of elements through translatory processes is a way of highlighting how the combination changes, supports or embellishes meaning within the two translated things. The translatory perspective supports a view of fact construction, from its basic elements through the translatory processes to a finished fact. The elements that are combined through translations tell a story of what has been deemed fit for inclusion into the fact and how those elements shaped the fact that came into being.

Although translations may just be referred to as that, the translatory process of inscription features very heavily in my analytical account of Danish Flat Earth fact creation. The notion of inscription can be understood as the translatory process in which a fact-in-creation is attributed meaning that is shown visually. This can be through text, images or diagrams and is a way that makes the fact presentable to others (Latour 1986). The point of translating an inscription is to render the rhetorics of the fact legible and easy to understand. In this, the fact shows that elements of it are *combinable* and through the inscription process it becomes *presentable* and *readable* (Latour, 1986). As a consequence of these factors, the inscription has the key point of



making a fact *mobile* (Latour, 1986). The concept of the fact becoming mobile has a double meaning. First of all, if the fact is mobile, it can be moved in space and time so that it can be at the same point as the people for whom it warrants exposing to. Those people are the ones that merit the second meaning of the mobile fact because a mobile fact also has the ability to better mobilize others. The purpose of a fact in the cosmology-as-actor-network is to strengthen its own position in the network as well as the network itself. The fact has to be able to mobilize allies by being a strong argument

*“the name of the game is to accumulate enough allies in one place to modify the belief and behavior of all the others.”*

(Latour, 1986:29)

The process by which this knowledge is stabilized within the cosmology-as-network is as diffuse and heterogeneous as the cosmology itself and depends deeply upon the construction of the facts that knowledge is built on. Latour and Woolgar (1979) posit that:

*“A fact only becomes such when it loses all temporal qualifications and becomes incorporated into a large body of knowledge drawn upon by others.”*

(Latour and Woolgar, 1979:106)

A fact is created in mainstream science when it enters that shared body of knowledge and is used and accepted by many people. This body of knowledge is relatively stable and structured, functioning through the literary inscriptions that Latour and Woolgar (1979) observed and the wider peer-review and university publishing structures. In Flat Earth science, there are no such centralized structures to facilitate the spread and stabilization of a fact. The inscription, publication, and inclusion into a large body of knowledge come on different premises than mainstream science. Instead, the sharing of fact-packages compacted into memes or videos in various Facebook groups functions in a manner comparable with the literary publishing practice that Latour and Woolgar found in the Salk Institute laboratories (1979). This publishing process functions as two-way lines in the mesh of the actor-network, because by being shared the facts

both become more stable as they gain allies, but they also stabilize the network as they themselves act as allies for other actors in that network. Compared to the mainstream science publication complex, however, the Flat Earth facts lack structures to truly make them accumulative and to retain them for display. Instead, they are moving through a stream of constantly posted content, and often, an individual fact-package will be washed away fairly quickly by this stream of content. The true measure of a Danish Flat Earth fact's stabilization and success is not, as the research paper that is referred to again and again in Latour and Woolgar's case. Instead, facts are stabilized in the Danish Flat Earth Community by the same argument being posted, often in different forms, multiple times. Even though these might change in relation to visual representation or might even change the format from a meme to a video, this repetition of argument lends the fact a measure of stabilization.

*"A new interest in "Truth" does not come from a new vision, but from the same old vision applying itself to new visible objects"*

(Latour, 1986:11)

Because of the ephemeral nature of social media content constantly being washed away, new fact-inscription packages of the same argument but varying visual must be posted many times for a fact to be considered stable. If so, that fact has reached a stabilized state and can be considered a relatively universal part of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

The creation and stabilization of Danish Flat Earth facts are not based on epistemic norms and practices alone, they are also built on a certain philosophy of science. These are often implied within the execution of the epistemic practices, but can also be viewed in the way that the facts are argued and rationalized. As mentioned in the introduction Latour (2004) imagines that at some level conspiracy theorists and other alternative science groups have co-opted some of the postmodern relativist critiques of mainstream science. The way in which these relativist perceptions of truth are present and how they might be used as a tactic to critique or discredit the Globe Earth cosmology is something that expresses a certain rationality.

To understand how the scientific rationality of the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture is supported by its cosmology I will look at how facts are created into the interwoven actor-network that is the cosmology. Opening the black box of fact creation will involve a description of how different elements of the facts are combined, their translation, inscription and their being made mobile. Lastly looking at how scientific rationality is implied by this process through a philosophy of science. This look at a Danish Flat Earth philosophy of science will enable an overlook of how the epistemic culture is rationalized through the implied understandings of such a philosophy.

## Experimentation

Much of the way that the Danish Flat Earth Community rationalizes its approach to the scientific method is based on an understanding that it is part of an overarching international conspiracy. This conspiracy has created false measurements, false observations and other types of false data in order to hide the true shape of the Earth. Because of this mistrust of established knowledge experimentation remains a key feature of how the Danish Flat Earth Community thinks of itself. As one community member expressed it:



Image 33: Danish Flat Earther outlines the importance of good experimental practice in relation to the Flat Earth science.

In the following, I will open the black box of how facts are created through experiments. This will be done by looking at how specific elements of the experiments are combined, how they are inscribed and shared. To open this black box I will look at two examples of the most common type of Flat Earth experiments -both are visual experiments concerned with distance over water.

*“Der er også mange der filmer hvor langt man kan se. Fx at se Chicago Skyline på den anden side af Michigan søen. Det er de mest almindelige typer eksperimenter. Afstand over vand og så er der nogen der prøver at forklarer hvad perspektiver er.”*

- From interview<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> English translation in appendix 5.1

These visual experiments all focus on understanding how perspective works, and how it can be used to understand and explain basic observations of a Flat Earth. These experiments are conducted either with the naked eye, through binoculars or with camera equipment, though camera equipment is most often used because of the ease of translation into something that is mobile. They have somewhat different objectives and somewhat different subject matter but share this key element of being ocular in nature and thus relying on the senses of the experimenter. This sensually oriented type of experimentation is important in the epistemic culture of the Danish Flat Earth Community. This is because of the fundamental perception of knowledge authorities as purveyors of lies and misinformation, either through ignorance or active complicity in the great conspiracy hiding the shape of the Earth. Because of the perceived lies from knowledge authorities, mediation of experimental data through anything but the senses and consumer electronics under the experimenters own control are viewed with deep mistrust. Mediation through consumer electronics is viewed as permissible because these can be easily controlled and understood. Because of this mistrust of any measure of mediation, a great deal of Danish Flat Earth experimental knowledge is based on sensual data, especially ocular, because this is the easiest to convey through video and image content in the various online spaces the community inhabits.

What follows are two examples of very typical visual experiments that I would like to highlight. These examples are chosen because they are very typical and because they portray inscription elements that are also very common for how the Danish Flat Earth Community deals with facts and knowledge creation. One experiment deals with disproving the notion that ships disappear 'over' the horizon and the other aims to look beyond the 'curve'.

## **Ships and the horizon**

This experiment is based on disproving the assumption that ships become invisible when they go over the horizon because of the curvature of the Earth. With this experiment, the Danish Flat Earthers claim that in fact, this is wrong.

This experiment is carried out by a coastline and uses a video camera with strong zoom capabilities. The experimenter then follows a ship until it is out of sight. Here the claim that is being refuted is that the ship has now disappeared over the horizon line and is no longer visible because of the curvature of the Earth. The experimenter then uses the zoom function on their video camera to show how the ship has in fact not disappeared but can be clearly seen using the zoom function.



Image 34 (top) and Image 35 (bottom): Images 34 and 35 are screenshots taken from a video before and after the camera zoomed in on a ship that supposedly had disappeared over the horizon.

The process of this experiment makes a mobile fact through three inscription translations. The first is the basis of the experiment and is simply committing the ship's visibility to video format through the camera and its zoom function. This means that there is a video-file inscribed with the fundamental argument of the experiment and that the experiment is combinable in the sense that there now is a first element to continue inscription upon.

Now that the basis of the experiment has been carried out, the combinable results of the experiment need to be further inscribed in the next two inscription processes to make the fact readable and presentable. However, the point of the fact itself has not been born yet and needs to be translated from what the experimenter sees in the video through another process of inscription, that of a textual inscription, making the fact readable. The point and the analysis have to be made clear before the fact can truly shape or support the nature of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. Already being in video format, where the zoom showing the ship demonstrates the argument, the inscription on the video of a subsequent point of analysis makes this point clearer.

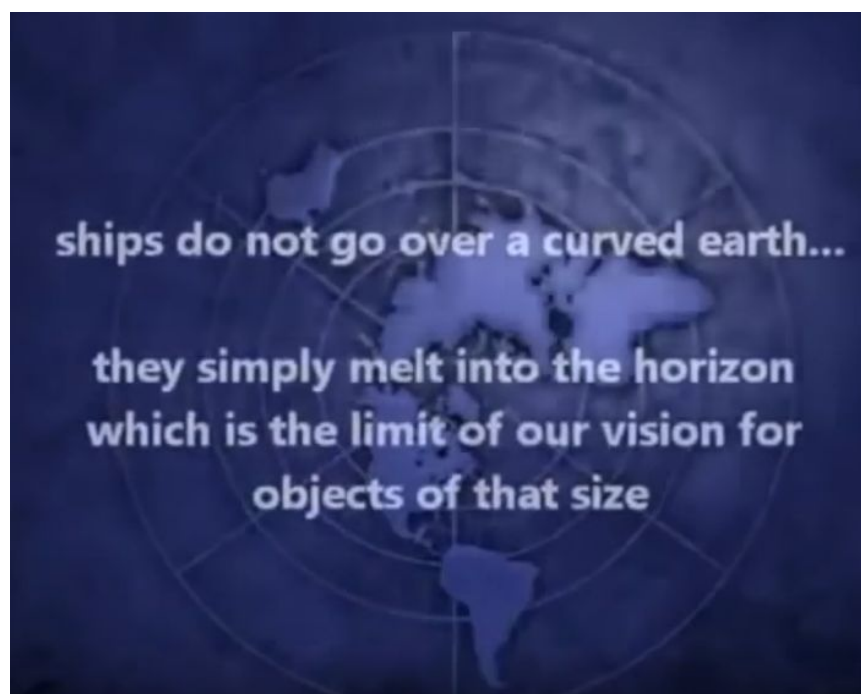


Image 36: Analytic inscription in a video showing ships not disappearing behind curve.

So even though the video to some extent demonstrated the argument by itself, the analytical point is here inscribed so that the viewer cannot miss it because it is readable. It also foregrounds the argument that there is a limit to our vision, another fact in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. This argument of limited vision, or “*the law of perspective*” as it is called is often used by Danish Flat Earthers to describe why some things are not visible beyond a certain distance.

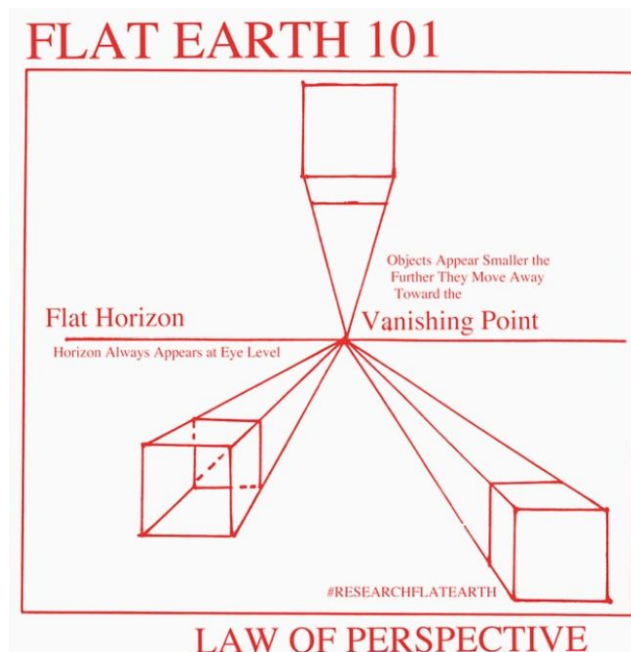


Image 37: Example of the law of perspective.

Relating the fact to the law of perspective within the inscription of text can be seen as another small translation in that our fact is related to another fact in the network, thus giving it more credibility.

Having then gone through two inscription processes, our fact in-the-making is now combinable and readable. The result of the experiment - the video, only needs to be made presentable. Making the video presentable makes it possible for it to be shown to interested parties. It needs to be inscribed into a format or platform where it can be presentable. This is done by



uploading the video to a video streaming site, most often YouTube. Being uploaded on a streaming platform like YouTube, it is made presentable through easy viewing possibilities as well as easy link sharing into the Danish Flat Earth Community's different spaces on Facebook. Finally putting the finished fact-package YouTube video on Facebook makes it ready to be put into circulation and therefore be a part of the larger body of knowledge that many Flat Earthers can refer to and mobilize (or be mobilized by).

## Looking beyond the curve

*“Der var også den her (video, ed.) der handlede om afstande og hvor langt man kunne se over vand. Jeg boede lige ved vandet, så kunne jeg tage ud og kigge hvor langt jeg egentlig kunne se og der så jeg op til en 70-80 km og det skulle jeg slet ikke kunne, der skulle jeg være forbi den her runding for længe siden. Jeg kunne se nogen skibe, og så kunne jeg kontrollere deres position via en app der hedder Marine Traffic så jeg kunne se hvordan skibet fysisk ser ud, og det svarede til det jeg så i min kikkert.”*

- From interview<sup>36</sup>

Another classic experiment often carried out in the Danish Flat Earth Community is an experiment focused on disproving the existence of Earth's curvature by photographing things far away. These are often high cliffs or tall buildings and photographing them at a distance that is greater than what should be possible on a Globe Earth, due to the curvature of such a globe, purportedly disproving the existence of the curvature itself

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<sup>36</sup> English translation in appendix 5.2

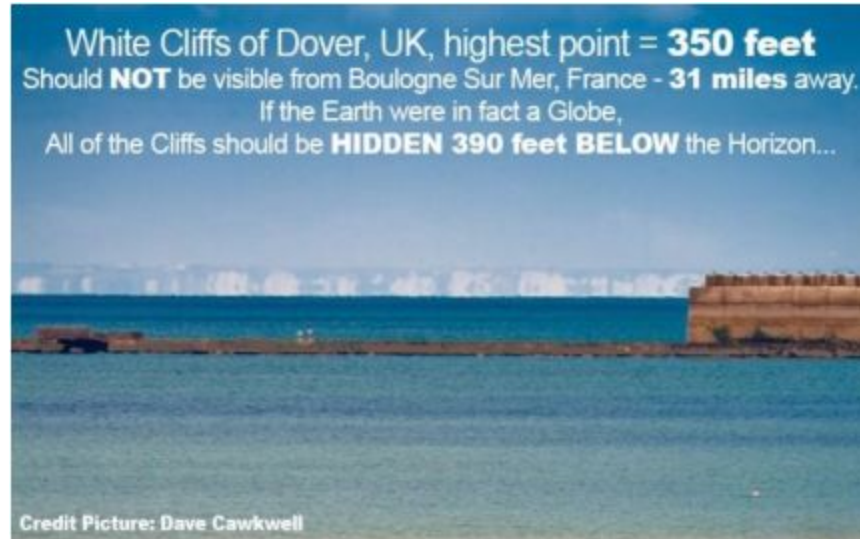


Image 38: Photograph of the Cliffs of Dover with the claim that it should be under the horizon line due to the curvature of the Earth.

This experiment can have many forms but often involves the experimenter having line of sight over water and involves a number of translations from experiment to mobile fact. The experimenter will note their height over sea level, as well as the distance to a large object in the distance. They then photograph the object, often large buildings or a cliff. Favorite examples of these are the Cliffs of Dover or the Chicago Skyline, although Danish examples also include observing Hundested harbor across Isefjord. In the photographing across bodies of water, a dual translation of this experiment takes place. This happens when the light refracts through the air off of what is photographed and makes the distant object visible to the camera that then is able to photograph that object (Lehn and van der Werf, 2005). The light is here translated twice, once by being combined with the air through refraction and another time by being captured by the camera. This allows for the photographing of the distant object and the creation of a set of visual evidence that is combinable. After the visual evidence has been recorded the experimenter will put the height and distance data into an online software tool called "The Earth Curve Calculator" (Cook, 2017).

This app calculates how much a distant object is obscured by the earth's curvature, and makes the following assumptions:

- the earth is a convex sphere of radius 6371 kilometres
- light travels in straight lines

The source code and calculation method are [available on GitHub.com](#)

Image 39: Screenshot of the interface of the Earth Curve Calculator. Height and distance measurements are put into the top fields and the area then visualized on the bottom.

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data with a photograph of something that, according to the Earth Curve Calculator should be below the horizon line, an experimenter now has material that supposedly shows that the curvature of the Earth is unobservable. The photograph nonetheless shows the object in question, which outlines the argument of the fact - that there is no curvature and that the Earth is flat. These two static images go well together, and as with the above example, the argument can be made even clearer through the inscription of text such as the text on image 38.

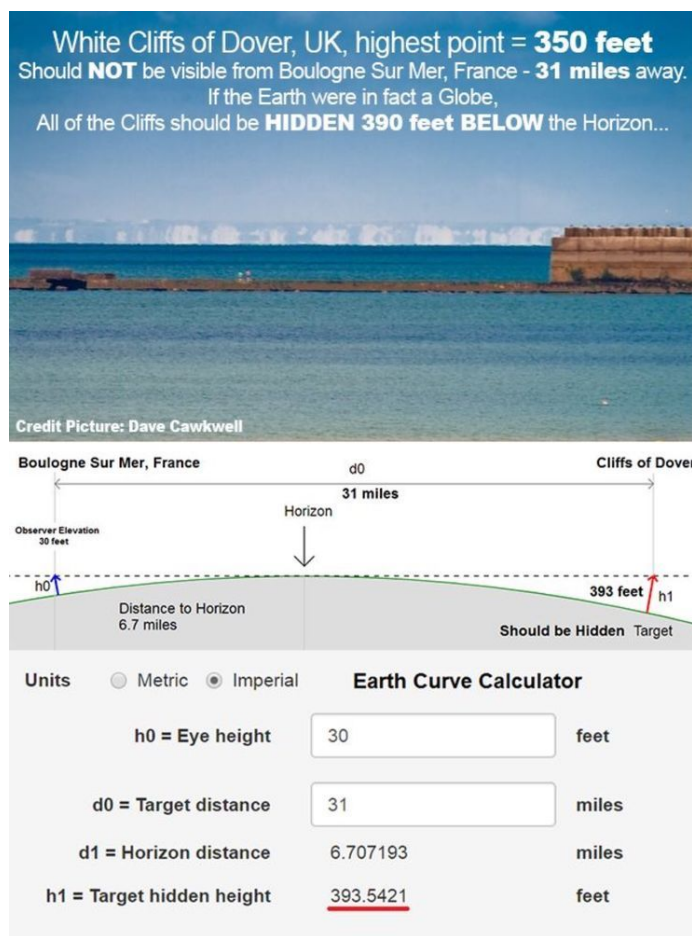


Image 40: Measurement, calculation, analysis, and a photograph combined into a meme.

Being then inscribed through a number of combinational translations processes the fact is made readable and presentable by being combined once again into a meme format. In this compact meme format, all the available information has been inscribed into one single package and is now ready to be posted into the various Flat Earth spaces and made mobile.

The above example mentioning this experiment done at Isefjord in Denmark was done as a way of verifying these results from the Cliffs of Dover but were unfortunately not inscribed and made mobile in the same clear way as the experiment it was a response to. However, it had similar results, stating that the Earth Curve Calculator predicted that Hundested Harbour should not be visible from across Isefjord, but that it in fact was.

The use of the Earth Curve Calculator as a tool for mathematical mediation of sensual data is an interesting point in relation to the general mistrust of mediation. It is hard to know exactly how this inconsistency has come about, but the Earth Curve Calculator is a tool used widely in Flat Earth Communities both in Denmark and elsewhere. One possible explanation for its wide use could be that it, because of the lack of a light refraction formula in the tool, it gives consistent results that are aligned with the beliefs of the Danish Flat Earth community.

To summarize these examples of experimental practices in the Danish Flat Earth community I have here described two typical examples of how fact creation is done up until the point of midwifing the fact into stabilization in the community at large. These experimental facts are created through a certain sensory input translated several times to become mobile and thus used easily to justify the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. The translation process often begins by documenting the sensory output in combinable video or photo format. They are then translated a number of times; in the two examples above it was through the zoom of the video camera or through the Earth Curve Calculator tool respectively that the most significant translations took place. After this mediated translation process a lot of inscription related translation is done, in order to foreground specific analytical points as readable and making the fact presentable. The format of this presentable fact is most often in the form of a meme or a video that can be easily made mobile by sharing on Facebook.

Having now looked at fact creation through one of two epistemic practices of the Danish Flat Earth Community, that of experimentation, I will in the following describe a very different kind epistemic practice: that of finding Flat Earth clues.

## Flat Earth clues

Where experimental facts build on a basis of sensual data to create or support novel facts unique to the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, Flat Earth clues as a source of facts are different. Flat Earth clues are characterized as being the search for Flat Earth knowledge hidden in plain sight in mainstream media and other freely accessible content often consumed by the public at large. The term Flat Earth clue was popularized by the U.S. Flat Earth YouTuber Mark Sargent in 2015. It refers to a 'clue' as something that does not make sense in the way that the mainstream narrative presents evidence for the Globe Earth cosmology. The concept has since taken on a life of its own and is often used to refer to a certain epistemic practice where facts and arguments against the Globe Earth cosmology are being marshaled outside of an experimental setting.

The Flat Earth clues are an element of the Danish Flat Earth Communities epistemic culture where the community's essence of being conspiracy theorists really shows. The empirical focus here is on decoding elements of the lie, a lie being told through the great conspiracy around the shape of the Earth. Because the empirical setup and focus are so different from the experimental practices, the way that facts are constructed from that is also different. The following is going to detail how facts are constructed through the type of Flat Earth clue that deals with faults in the presented narrative and how those facts are situated in the actor-networks of facts that make up the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

## The faulty lies of outer space

Flat Earth clues perceived as faulty lies are by far the most common type of Flat Earth clue. With this type of clue, a Flat Earther finds a clue that has possible relevance to the actor-network of Flat Earth facts. He then proceeds to put that clue through a series of translations before it is made mobile and sent out into the social spaces of the Danish Flat Earth community where it finds a place in the interwoven actor-network of facts that support the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

The point of departure for this part of the analysis will take hold of a thematic part of the network by looking at a specific Flat Earth clue. I will investigate how that clue is constructed as a fact, what translations it goes through to become readable and presentable and look at how it is situated in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology as an actor-network of facts and how that situation strengthens the network around it.

The thematic part of the network that I want to showcase for this analysis is that of fake space travel. Finding errors in videos posted by space agencies, especially NASA, is by far the most common theme for Flat Earth clues. In the Danish Flat Earth cosmology outer space as it exists outside of The Dome is thought to be unreachable, and outer space, as it is understood by mainstream science, is thought to be a hoax. Therefore all space travel, including the frequent missions to the ISS are thought to be an elaborate fakery showcased through the ample video content posted across the internet supposedly showing active space travel.

*“Så vi skulle kunne se hjelmen på en astronaut der står og borer eller hvad det nu er de laver uden på den her Fake Station som jeg plejer at kalde den. Som nogen jo mener at de kan se og der er også en lysende prik hen over himlen på det tidspunkt der passer med noget software på*

*en computer. Det er jo ikke svært at få software til at passe. Det kunne man let lave med en laser, altså få en laser til at lave en prik hen over himlen.”*

- From Interview<sup>37</sup>

The sophisticated lie at the basis of the conspiracy to fake all space travel must inevitably have some holes in it, mistakes are unavoidable in such a complex lie, and that is the focus of this thematic neighborhood of the Flat Earth clue supported actor-network. Searching for errors in this supposedly fake video (and image) content from outer space are key ways to look for Flat Earth clues, and the starting point for this part of the analysis does indeed come from such content.

### Bubbles in space

One of the classic examples of errors in NASA or other space agencies' content is finding bubbles in the videos supposedly filmed in outer space, and pointing that out, often through inscribing the video with arrows. The video content from NASA is already combinable, so the first inscription is making the content readable, by (re)translating the video content into a new video that is then put on a video streaming service to be presentable and shared on social media to be made mobile, in the same manner, the facts created through the experimental practice.

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<sup>37</sup> English translation in appendix 5.3





Image 41: Screenshot of a video supposedly showing air bubbles coming off of an astronaut in outer space.

The bubbles of air should not be able to be there if space was a vacuum, and thus the Flat Earth clue is born, by finding something that does not make sense in the explanatory model proffered by mainstream science. It furthers the case for the Flat Earth clue in the cosmology it is aimed at being part of. In the Danish Flat Earth Community, space agencies, especially NASA, are known to be actors with a dubious record of possibly having faked such things as the moon landings. Thus arguments are already at hand in the network to help the bubbles of air find their true place if they cannot exist in the vacuum of outer space.

*“Det simpelthen helt almindelige mennesker som der har dykket ned og har undersøgt noget. Det kan være nogen der har set at på de her film (from space, ed) er bobler, altså, bubbles in space, dem er der flere af. Hvor de finder bobler i de her rumvandring. Hvor kommer de ind i billedet? Nå ja, hvad er det for nogen pools NASA har, de har verdens største swimmingpool hvor de har sænket en del af den her rumstation ned som de så siger at det er for at øve.”*

- From Interview<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> English translation in appendix 5.4

Large NASA swimming pools, supposedly used for training purposes house a model version of the International Space Station. Air bubbles would be possible in an underwater environment and can thus explain their perceived presence in the video. The swimming pools as an explanation in the network of facts can rely on support from the overall conception of a lying NASA that characterizes much of the rest of the network. Images of NASA's supposed underwater training facilities in these swimming pools are inscribed with Flat Earth slogans and photoshopped to illustrate how easy it would be for NASA to fake the spacewalks near the ISS.

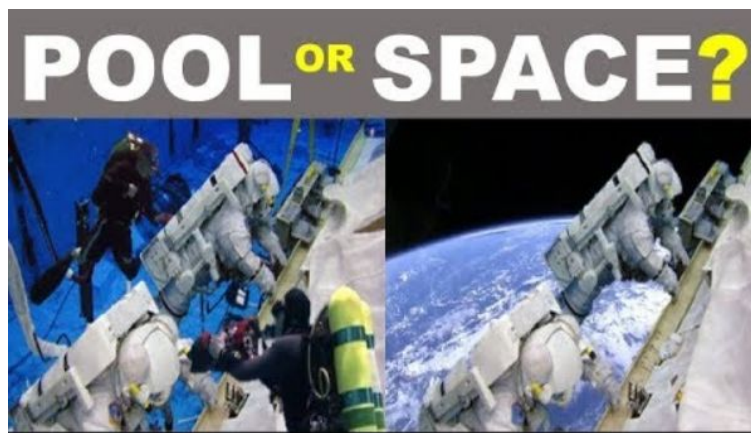


Image 42: Photo showcasing how easy it would be for NASA to fake spacewalks in their underwater training facility.

Again the meaning of the bubble clue is translated, now into a more concrete, visually readable form of argument. That NASA could be using photo and video editing techniques to show underwater clips as spacewalks align well with what is already in the Danish Flat Earth network and are strongly supportive of the translationary evolution that the bubble clue has gone through.

*“Men samtidig har de kæmpe redigeringsrum der ligner fuldstændig et studie, eller det er et filmstudie. Hvorfor har de det? Hvad skal de dog bruge det til?”*

- From Interview.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> English translation in appendix 5.5

Now that I have shown the many translations of meaning that the bubbles in space have undergone how are they situated in the network? The bubbles in space turn into bubbles in the NASA swimming pools turn the swimming pools into fake spacewalks. It can now be concluded that the credibility of NASA in this network is very low and NASA and its supporting facts don't have many allies in the network. If NASA can fake the spacewalks, can they fake the entire ISS? With these great movie studios that they evidently have, how could one draw on the disposition of facts in the network and in turn strengthen that network by demonstrating that much of the other material that NASA puts out is fake as well?

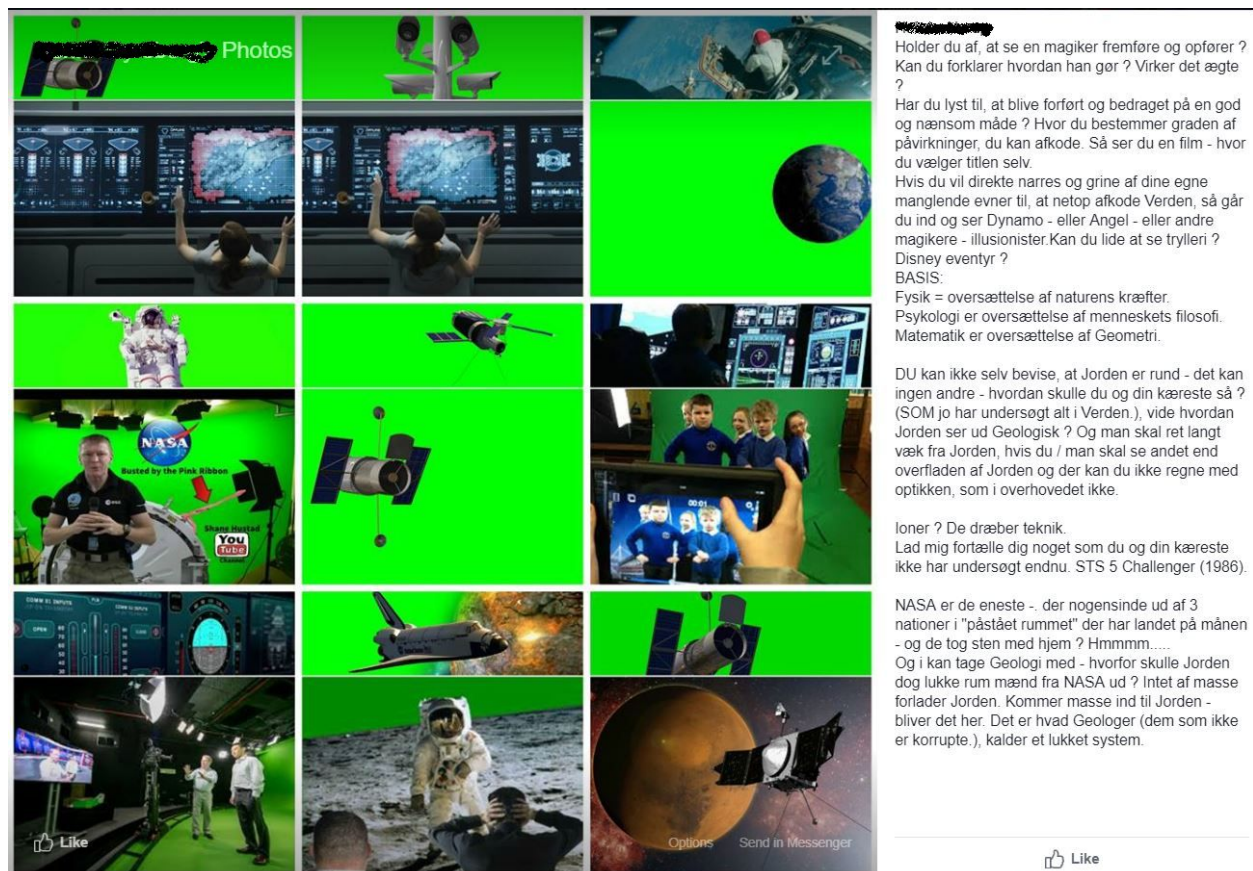


Image 43: Examples of how NASA could fake much of their output on greenscreens.

Accompanied by a refutation of a Globehead's conception of NASA's accomplishments.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> English translation in appendix 5.6

Being in doubt that NASA can be trusted, and with what has already been seen of the make-up of the network and its translatory properties turning the bubble in space into distrust, the true purpose of the Flat Earth clues come into view. Ordinary people looking into inconsistencies in authoritative accounts of reality.

*“Så er der nogen der finder ud af, at på nogle af de her raketter der bliver sendt lige op som har kamera på. Der var en der fandt ud af at han kunne se månen på det her kamera. Det var en raket der blev sendt over 100 km op. Så kunne han se månen. Han undersøgte så, at månen var oppe i Australien mens den her raket blev sendt op i USA. Han sad og ledte efter et Flat Earth clue på den her film med den her raket der blev sendt op.”*

- From interview<sup>41</sup>

I have demonstrated how the Flat Earth clue can be used in mobilizing the rest of the network of facts that it is a part of, changing meaning by being exposed to the knowledge that already exists in the network and both the network and the fact situated in it a made stronger by their mutual presence.

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<sup>41</sup> English translation in appendix 5.7



Image 44: Collection of Flat Earth clues are shared and made mobile as evidence.<sup>42</sup>

Both epistemic practices can follow the translatory inscription process of fact making and the changing meaning inherent in being situated in the cosmological actor-network of facts. The examples made above has served as just that, examples. They could have swapped places so that Flat Earth clues could have shown a somewhat similar point about inscription and fact creation. Experiments could as well have been used to show how the knowledge situated in the network around it and how that network works to change the meaning of the facts. The examples of ships, curves, and bubbles are also interchangeable with many other conceptual phenomena in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, but the ones chosen were chosen because they represent some typical examples of how facts are created and situated. That the facts created in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology have their foundation based on shaky observations or that things like the refraction of light are left out of the translation processes meant to lend the fact authority is problematic for the facts ability to gather allies outside the Danish Flat Earth network. These problems, combined with the shaky stabilization processes make the construction of the facts dubious and result in facts that are only superficially constructed.

<sup>42</sup> English translation in appendix 5.8

## Danish Flat Earth philosophy of science

To understand how the elements of the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture is rationalized it is important to understanding said culture's philosophy of science. In a sense the Danish Flat Earth philosophy of science functions as key elements in the scientific rationality, because it shows how epistemic practices are rationalized. The Danish Flat Earth Community does have its own rational understanding of what constitutes good scientific practices, as well as how those relate to truth, and what legitimate role theoretical knowledge can have in scientific pursuits, all of which are based on its cosmology. These are the local theories that exist within the Danish Flat Earth community and it's approach to understanding and interpreting the reality around them through their cosmology which is upheld by their epistemic practice.

The common thread in the Flat Earth philosophy of science is based around refutation of knowledge authorities and thus it is a philosophy of distrust and opposition to a certain extent. Knowledge production must be kept close to the producer and mediation through technology or complicated theory is not ideal, as it removes said knowledge further away from the individual.

## Good scientific norms of Danish Flat Earth research

As seen from the examples of epistemic practices that make up the bulk of Flat Earth scientific inquiry there are certain norms that are valued as specifically related to Flat Earth science and knowledge creation. These are evident from some of the practices described above and from other epistemic practices encountered throughout the fieldwork.

The basis for all good Flat Earth knowledge is the fundamental meeting and translating of evident sensory inputs into facts as seen in the above. These sensory inputs must not be mediated too much by actors outside of the experimenter's control. This is often a technological control, the equipment used has to be understood and controlled by the

experimenter to be viewed as reliable mediation and excludes large professional science equipment. But it is also a statement about mathematical and other established forms of measurement translation/transformation. The inputs that become facts and knowledge must be kept close to the individual because knowledge authorities cannot be trusted.



Image 45: Meme proposing the use of sensual data.

The sensual data on a Flat Earth is somewhat understandable in the sense that key elements of the Flat Earth approach to make an understandable cosmology, is the version of that cosmology that seems apparent in front of the observer's eyes. The Earth *does* look flat, that is what our senses present to us. With many other elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology, they take the shape of what is most easily observable through a sensual experience. The Danish Flat Earth cosmology seeks the simple answer.



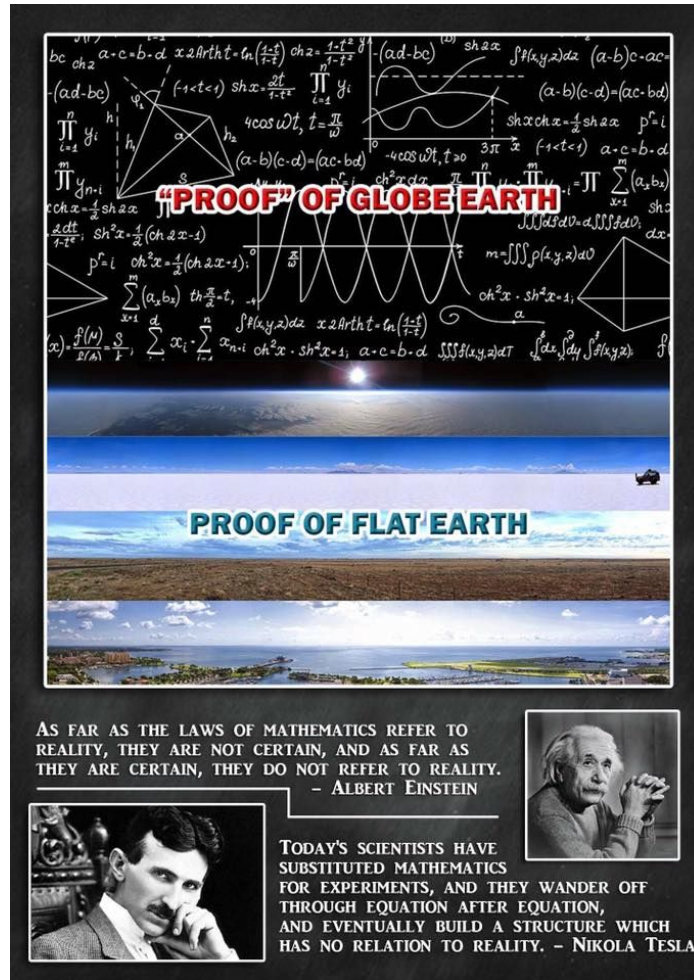


Image 46: Argument for simple knowledge production with a focus on evidence through experiments of the senses rather than that of mathematical proofs. Note that "*proof of Flat Earth*" is here meant purely as sensual/visual input.

Simplicity is another fundamental element of good scientific practices in the Danish Flat Earth Community. Legitimate knowledge gained from sensual inputs are simple and easy to understand in a Danish Flat Earth context. The idea of needing to have a university degree to understand certain things about the reality of a cosmology seems delegitimizing to the Flat Earthers as the knowledge obtained in the university degree itself is a form of indoctrination. Within the Danish Flat Earth Community, it is viewed that science is made extraordinarily complicated to better hide the fact that it is false. This making complicated discourages the



'sleeping' public to research and encourages trust in knowledge authorities in good faith because the subject matter is so complicated.

*“Det samme gælder solen, jeg mener at astrofysikere siger det er en plasma. Altså, hvad er plasma, det ved jeg ikke. Men afstand til solen den er vi jo dybt uenige i. Så det her med at de hele tiden bare kommer nogle ekstra nuller på og det hele tiden er så stort og så langt væk og så videre og det er jo også det der gør at det almindelige menneske kan ikke forholde sig til så store tal.”*

- From Interview<sup>43</sup>

Complicated science is a tool for the oppressive conspirator to control how people think, what knowledge they try to gain and through which sources they are allowed to gain that knowledge. The barrier of entry imposed by the complicated state of science is something that keeps people from doing the last core element of good Flat Earth science: Researching for yourself.

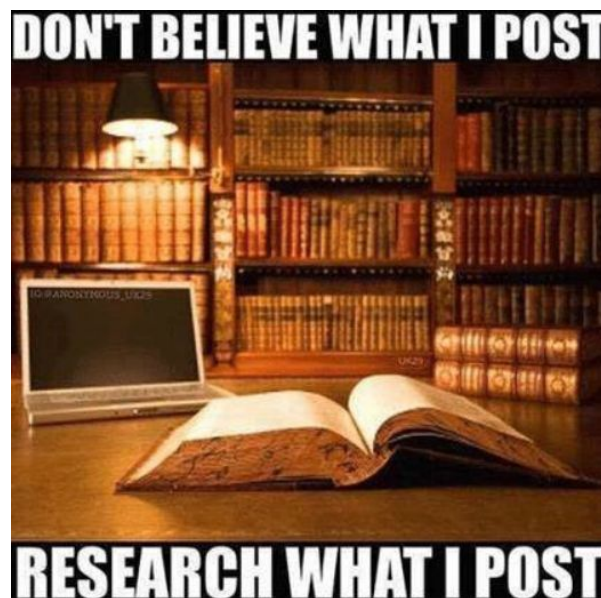


Image 47: Meme encouraging the reader to research Flat Earth.

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<sup>43</sup> English translation in appendix 5.9

Danish Flat Earthers view themselves as researchers. *"Research Flat Earth"* is the most common tagline on memes, the most common slogan and a lack of doing so are one of the most common accusations leveled against Globeheads. Being a researcher is at the core of being a Danish Flat Earther. Being an individual researching Danish Flat Earth cosmology is the perfect way to tie together an epistemic practice that is kept close to the individual and his senses and keeping the results simple so that others can research them and continue the cosmological practices of the Danish Flat Earth.

### The concepts of belief and theory

Being a Danish Flat Earth researcher who keeps their sensual data close, does not mediate it through established knowledge repositories, and keeps their findings simple is not only about practicing these norms of good Flat Earth science. It is also very much about being in opposition to the epistemic culture that creates mainstream science and its cosmology. Where this opposition relates the most is to a conflict in philosophy of science is when it concerns the concepts of belief and theory.



Image 48: Danish Flat Earther states that the fundamental elements of modern science are wrong and that it works with postulates and assumptions instead of actual data.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> English translation in appendix 5.10

In the Danish Flat Earth Community, the people in society who accepts the tenets of the mainstream scientific Globe Earth cosmology are viewed with scorn as the followers of the religion of scientism. *“Is that something you know, or something you’ve read in a book?”* a typical question might sound. Knowledge is conceptualized as something firsthand or created by people in a smaller community that one trusts. If one has not tested out the tenets of one’s cosmology at least to some small degree those tenets are interpreted as belief, therefore less valid than something that has been investigated empirically. Theory is seen as the version of belief that has had a nice scientific sheen painted on top. Theoretical knowledge is easily discredited and is not to be trusted, especially if it comes from a mainstream Globe Earth knowledge authority.

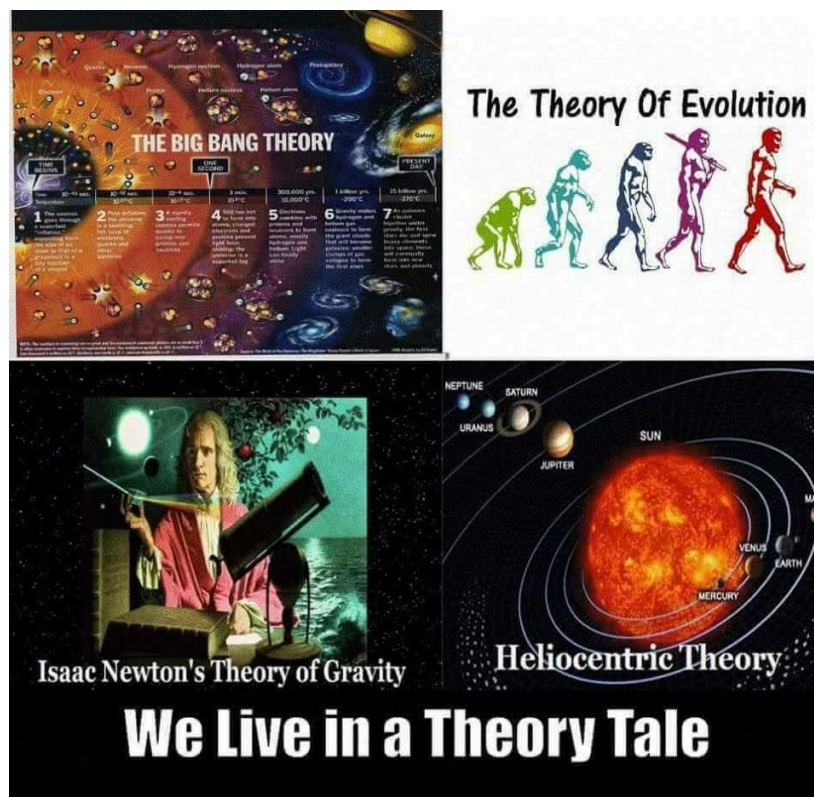


Image 49: The four biggest theories that the Danish Flat Earth Community are opposed to.

Theoretical knowledge is understood to mean ‘best guess assumption’, which might be its meaning in a mainstream scientific context, but in the Danish Flat Earth context, it is understood as without validating data. Therefore the Danish Flat Earth Community is opposed to overly theoretical knowledge as it understands it in mainstream science because it is so far removed from the sensory inputs and unmediated simplicity of what it considers norms for good scientific practice.

### Truth and Danish Flat Earth relativist realism

When it comes to conceptions of what is true and untrue in the Danish Flat Earth philosophy of science, it is apparent that there is an understanding of something being objectively true. The notion of truth is so enmeshed in the opposition to the lie of The Conspirator that truth becomes very hard to define, however. It is an understanding of truthfulness that is characterized by being in opposition, not to ignorance but in opposition of deliberate falsehoods perpetrated by The Conspirator. On this basis, there is an understanding that there is a certain truth, but it is not as of yet determined what that truth exactly is, other than the fact that it is not the truth presented by mainstream science. Instead, the truth is something that each individual Flat-Earther-as-researcher has to find, it is a simple but also heterogeneous thing not necessarily shared between you and other Flat Earthers and most of all, it does not rely on knowledge produced by mainstream science.

To assuage Latour’s fear that the conspiracy theorists had co-opted postmodern relativist critiques of science, this is not the case for the Danish Flat Earther Community. Danish Flat Earthers inhabit a strange space somewhere between and a bit to the side of the relativist-realist dichotomy. It would be a shame to call a community of Flat Earthers realists in the philosophical sense, but they are not relativists either, because they believe in an objective truth. To use Latour’s own words:

*“The main quality of the new space is not to be “objective” as a naïve definition of realism often claims, but rather to have optical consistency. This consistency entails the “art of describing” everything and the possibility of going from one type of visual trace to another.”*

(Latour, 1986:10)

Although the new space Latour is describing is a new space created visually within an inscribed and visualized fact, I will be so impertinent as to rob it from its context and use it to refer to the space to the side of the realist-relativist dichotomy I used above to describe the epistemic culture of the Danish Flat Earther Community. The community rationalizes truth with a focus on optical consistency, facts shown visually, and in turn, because it is visual it is also to a certain extent superficial. However, the superficiality of the facts on the Flat Earth is also its weakness. With Flat Earth facts being built on such unstable ground that easily levied critiques such as omitted atmospheric refraction makes it hard for the facts of the Flat Earth to gain true traction and many allies. However, Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture mitigates these faults from elements in their cosmology, which are used to rationalize that these shoddily constructed facts are in essence well constructed and that the elements that they are missing have no relevance at all. This refutation of relevance is based on ignoring arguments because they are thought to originate through the knowledge authorities of The Conspirator. If the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture and its scientific rationality produce facts that are so unstable that it has a hard time getting new allies, what other rationalizations are then at play in making people find the Danish Flat Earth cosmology appealing?

## The social rationality of Danish Flat Earthers

In the course of the last chapter I have gone through an analysis of the Danish Flat Earth Community's epistemic culture and its scientific rationality. From this I point out the unstable and superficial construction that characterize the facts interwoven in Danish Flat Earth cosmology, I now turn to how to describe a social rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community in order to understand other factors that can support that cosmology.

### Flat Earth social spaces as an un-Thing

Seeing the unstable construction of facts carried over from a superficial relationship with the objective truth that characterizes the Danish Flat Earth Community's relativist-realism, it might be an easy conclusion that presenting them with more well-constructed facts could dissuade them from their cosmology. This thought combined with the satirical value of the community has motivated thousands of people to join the different Danish Flat Earth spaces on Facebook. The majority of these Globeheads do not participate actively in the community, instead they 'lurk' and observe. However many hundreds of them do actively participate, some even being highly frequent posters. These Globeheads engage in discussions with the Danish Flat Earthers on the factual elements of both cosmologies in play. In some spaces, there are only Flat Earthers and in these spaces, the overall idea of the Flat Earth can be considered a 'matter of

fact', in the Latourian sense, since there is no contention (Latour, 2004). In the spaces with engaged Globeheads however, they create a lively discussion and through their critical participation, they prevent the Flat Earth from becoming a matter of fact, instead keeping it open as a 'matter of concern' (Latour, 2004).



Image 50: A Danish Flat Earther posts an observation supporting that the Earth is flat, which is promptly counter-argued by Globeheads.<sup>45</sup>

In this sense, one can view the failure of the Flat Earth facts to mobilize the Globeheads as allies and making the 'a matter of fact out' of the shape of the Earth, as the Flat Earth spaces being an un-Thing. Latour (2004) argues that the Thing is a closed matter (of fact) where both human and non-human actors align in unity. Having both the meaning of the object thing and the

<sup>45</sup> English translation in appendix 6.1

judiciary assembly thing, it is meant to represent both non-human and human unity, as something to strive for, if one wishes stabilization (Latour, 2004). The differing facts presented by the two sides of the controversy, as well as their proponents, are misaligned in such a way that the Danish Flat Earth social spaces can only be characterized as un-Things. In a Latourian view, this is because the stability and quality of the facts presented by the Danish Flat Earthers are not strong enough to enroll the Globeheads in their alliance. However, it also means that the Globeheads' facts are not strong enough to convince the Danish Flat Earthers. The Globeheads continually bombard Flat Earthers with their own facts, facts that are based on the construction machinery of mainstream science which is a more robust process and thus creates facts that are constructed more thoroughly. This, however, does not dissuade the Danish Flat Earthers from being Flat Earthers, which can seem irrational from a rationality based in a mainstream/Globe Earth cosmological worldview.

## Social rationality in relation to accountability

Looking at the epistemic culture of the Danish Flat Earth Community I have rendered visible a scientific rationality at play characterized by a certain relativist realism. This scientific rationality allows the Danish Flat Earthers to construct facts in a specifically superficial and unstable way but still have them as cornerstones in their cosmological network. Looking further at the exposure and relation to more stable facts constructed by mainstream science, it becomes apparent that the fact construction and its accompanying scientific rationality cannot be the singular explanation for Danish Flat Earth beliefs. There must be some other, secondary element supporting the cosmology and its unstable facts.

To understand this, I turn to what Mary Douglas has called "*The Evans-Pritchard Programme*" (Douglas, 1980). The Evans-Pritchard Programme as Douglas sees it was started when Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard published his now famous work on "*Witchcraft Oracles, and magic among the Azande*" in 1937 (Bubrandt, 2007). In this book, Evans-Pritchard outlined the Azande relationship to witchcraft and how they based their rationalizing of the world in it, which is



interesting in relation to the Danish Flat Earth Community. Evans-Pritchard found that within a society with a radically different cosmology than that of mainstream science, a different way of rationalizing social order and causal events were dominant. A sense of rationality in the witchcraft that Evans-Pritchard described was interesting because witchcraft was something that other European anthropologist at the time had concluded was meaningless superstition (Bubrandt, 2007). Evans-Pritchard's contemporaries had deemed the practice of witchcraft as mere superstition or viewed it as a racialological trait of 'primitive' people's inferior development (Douglas, 1980). Some few, including Malinowski, had interpreted the use of magic as a response to fear or anxiety, but Evans-Pritchard was the first to create a comprehensive account of witchcraft's impact on epistemological beliefs and social order (Douglas, 1980). He found that at the heart of witchcraft lay rational behavior structuring hierarchies and causal explanations in Azande society (Evans-Pritchard, 1976).

Seeking the same rationalities in the Danish Flat Earth Community, it has already been demonstrated how the community has a distinct scientific rationality expressed through a very active epistemic culture. On what level can the same parallel be drawn between Danish Flat Earthers and Azande, when it comes to rationalizing everyday society?

The Azande culture of witchcraft encompasses much more of the lives of the Azande than Flat Earth belief does in the Danish Flat Earth Community. Danish Flat Earthers are still members of Danish society with much of what that entails of social order and the like. Danish Flat Earthers have no comparisons to the intricate system and hierarchy of Azande poison oracles nor a social order of princes. The one key aspect in which the two can be equated is that their alternative cosmologies account for a social rationality that, to a certain degree, can be interpreted as concerned with accountability. By this, I mean that both Azande and Danish Flat Earthers draw their social rationality from their respective cosmologies, which both draw on things outside of modern science to be able to account for misfortune happening in their societies.

In the case of the Azande witchcraft explains unfortunate events. The classic example used to explain Azande notions of accountability through witchcraft is that of the house falling down on a man as outlined by Evans-Pritchard (1976). The Azande build tall houses on stilts, which the Azande people would go under to be shaded from the hot equatorial sun. The stilts of these houses were prone to termite attacks, and would sometimes fall down, killing or injuring any people beneath. According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande would understand this unfortunate event through the lens of accountability that witchcraft and its role in their cosmology played. The Azande would reason that the hut fell down because of witchcraft *and* termites. According to Evans-Pritchard the Azande are well aware that termites ate the wood of the house. But they are also aware that the termites are there because of witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard explains this by pointing out that Azande often refers to witchcraft by the term 'Umbaga' or second spear. This refers to Azande hunting practices in which the man who first spears an animal and the man who kills the animal gets the majority of the meat. In relation to witchcraft this means that the termites are the first spear, but witchcraft the second spear. This Example shows the roles witchcraft plays in the Azande cosmology as to create accountability as a form of social rationale. This is not by any means the only point of Evans-Pritchard's extensive analysis of witchcraft's role among the Azande, but it is a point that illustrates a similarity with the rationality of accountability displayed by the Danish Flat Earth Community.

In the Danish Flat Earth context, the cosmological narrative of The Conspirator and the conspiracy itself are used to configure accountability. In the case of the Danish Flat Earth Community, this social rationality as cosmological accountability can be seen in the way that the community has dealt with the extremely hot summer of 2018. The summer of 2018 broke many heat records all over the world, which resulted in many forest fires and droughts (Samenow, 2018). In mainstream society, these unfortunate events have largely been attributed to the effects of anthropogenic global warming.

In the Danish Flat Earth Community, the reason for the hot summer and all its bad effects are also understood to be anthropogenic, but of a somewhat more sinister nature. In the Danish

Flat Earth context the hot summer, the drought, and the forest fires can all be attributed to geo-engineering processes carried out by agents of the great conspiracy.



Image 51: Danish Flat Earther claims that Greek forest fires in the summer of 2018 were fake.<sup>46</sup>

The process of geoengineering is thought to be carried out to control the weather for a number of different reasons including power to threaten people into submission as well as the ability to make money etc. The processes are thought to have its basis in, among other things, chemtrails, which are thought to be a specific kind of airplane contrails mixed with weather controlling chemicals. The hot summer, droughts, and deadly forest fires are thought to be side effects of this experimentation with these effects. This way of thinking is akin, if not completely similar, to the way that accountability is presented by Evans-Pritchard and Douglas. It is akin in the way that elements of the cosmology are used to explain the causality of unfortunate events, rationalizing through elements of the cosmology. Another way Azande thought is similar to that of Danish Flat Earther also in the vague conceptualization of the motivations and

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<sup>46</sup>English translation in appendix 6.2

exact function of the cosmological element that has been held accountable. Evans-Pritchard notes of the Azande that:

*“They do not profess to understand witchcraft entirely. They know that it exists and works evil, but they have to guess at the manner in which it works. (...) They feel out of their depth in trying to describe the way in which witchcraft accomplishes its ends.”*

(Evans-Pritchard, 1976:31)

This explanation can be transferred as a 1:1 relationship with the Danish Flat Earth Community’s notion of The Conspirator. Just exchange the word “*witchcraft*” for “*The Conspirator*”.

Other examples of this accountability in practice include both a belief in ‘crisis actors’ in U.S. domestic terrorism;

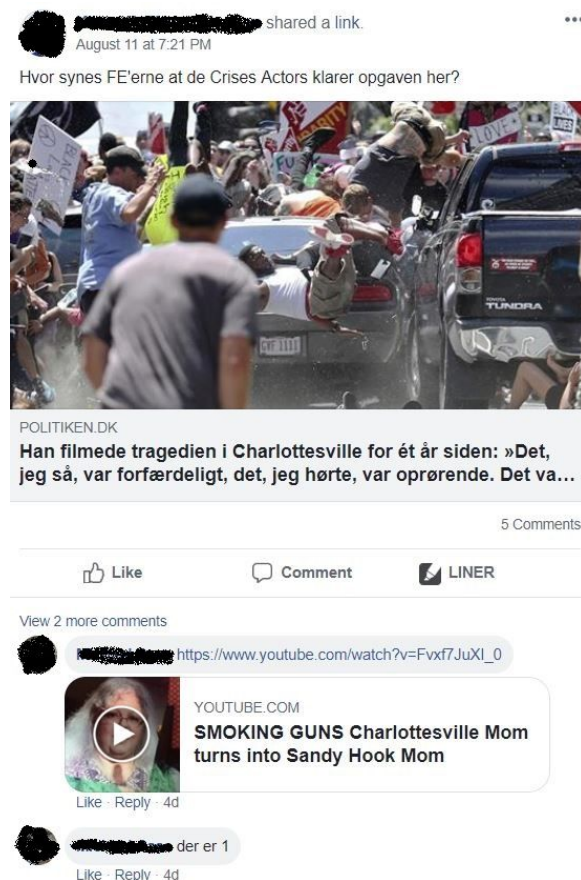


Image 52: Globehead questions Flat Earthers understanding of crisis actors and is linked to a video that supposedly shows how one crisis actor has been used in two different domestic terror attacks in the U.S.<sup>47</sup>

as well as the faking of international terrorism or relating to the terrorist attacks in Copenhagen in 2015:

*“Der er fx en der har interesseret sig meget for de her falske terrorangreb, og han har kunne se at mange af de her ritualer, fx sådan noget med en løs sko, når der så pludselig er et billede af en løs sko midt i en terrorhandling og det er sådan et symbol de har. Så er det jo gerne et eller andet med at det skal gå op i 33, 77, 322 66 og sådan nogle ting.”*

- From Interview.<sup>48</sup>

The net result of this rationalizing of unfortunate events is that they seem less hazardous. If they are fake, they do not, in fact, pose a risk to the person perceiving them, and the responsibility of the (fake) unfortunate act can be placed on The Conspirator. In this sense often violent acts of terrorism or deadly forest fires does not seem random, but both fake and planned and this planning and faking both serve to mitigate the perceived risk.

In this, we see that the social rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community is akin to that of the Azande because it bases its explanation of causality in its alternative cosmology. This way of explanation in a Danish Flat Earth context means that unfortunate events can be viewed as the responsibility of The Conspirator and faked. This is a way to show that someone, even though it is the malignant conspirator, is in control, and that unfortunate events are in fact not concerned with fortune at all, but instead, are controlled and planned as part of a plot for increased world domination. The notion that someone is in control mitigates a sense of risk about some of the most foregrounded and visible hazardous phenomena in our current society,

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<sup>47</sup>English translation in appendix 6.3

<sup>48</sup>English translations in appendix 6.4

so the following section will explore the Danish Flat Earth community and its relationship to risk.

## Danish Flat Earth social rationality and risk

Approaching Evans-Pritchard's (1976) study of witchcraft as Mary Douglas (1980) conceptualized it, as *"a theory of social accountability"* (Douglas, 1980:11), allows for a perspective of accountability as a way to explain and rationalize past and future. Bubrandt (2007) argues that in this sense Evans-Pritchard's study of witchcraft as social accountability was a precursor to Ulrich Beck's notion of the risk society (Beck, 1992). Bubandt (2007) argues this because both accountabilities, as well as the notion of risk, are attempts to explain and understand previous events and to accommodate (possible) future events through rationalizations. This way of explaining the events that make out everyday outlooks is very important to Danish Flat Earthers because their cosmological opposition of the mainstream narrative requires a reexamination of many of these narratives. This reexamination is also a reinterpretation through a rationale based on that cosmology and shows clearly how the cosmology supports and impacts the rationality at play in explaining events.

## Being a Flat Earther in the risk society

In a nutshell, the Beck's (1992) approach to defining the risk society can be seen as charting

*"(..)the relationship between the unbinding of social structures, qualitative changes in the nature of risk and shifting patterns of cultural experiences"*

*(Mythen, 2004:12)*

In the risk society, the notion of risk is not easily defined. Beck does not present a catch-all definition of risk because it houses so many different dimensions as a concept explaining behavior or experience. However, risk in the risk society is related to indicating threat or harm in relation to someone during an unfortunate event which may happen to someone or oneself

(Mythen, 2004). It is also a concept understood in relation to uncertainty and control, in the sense that risk is perceived as the uncertainty that lies outside of the control of a certain action (Mythen, 2004).

A key notion in how Ulrich Beck describes the risk society is by putting it into contrast with other epochs. He contrasts his notion of our current risk society with the pre-industrial and industrial societies. In these societies, risk played a lesser role, and hazards were mostly localized and limited to what Beck termed 'natural hazards' such as drought, disease or natural disasters (Beck, 1992). In the Risk society, however, Beck describes how 'manufactured risks' which are created by societal developments can be said to be socially produced instead of naturally produced. He relates these manufactured risk to broader social transitions as well as technological and scientific development. On the techno-scientific side, these include anthropogenic global warming, chemical pollution, nuclear war or accident etc. On the social side, these are seen as globalization, the burden of identity construction in a post-traditional context, and the individualization of experience (Mythen, 2004). As I have demonstrated in the cosmological outline and throughout this text, the distrust inherent in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is centered around techno-scientific issues. This is why the notion of risk and the risk society as it relates to techno-scientific risk and hazards are especially relevant in an analysis of Danish Flat Earth social rationality.

Mythen (2004) points to three 'Pillars of Risk' in Beck's notion of techno-scientific risks. These are; the transformation in relationships between risk, time and space, the catastrophic nature of risk and the breakdown of the mechanisms of insurance (Mythen, 2004).

In relation to risk, time and space, Beck argues that we have moved from localized risks into risk that is more all-encompassing. The example of the Chernobyl disaster as an example shows that the wide-ranging effects of the nuclear material that could be found as far away as England (Mythen, 2004). Also, time is transcended in the case of Chernobyl where damage is continually produced. As Beck ominously put it in 1996 *"The injured of Chernobyl are today, years after the catastrophe, not even born yet"* (Beck, 1996 in Mythen, 2004:19). In such a way, we see how

risk in the risk society has transcended both space and time and has become risky on a scale not seen in previous times. This scale is directly related to the second pillar, the catastrophic nature of risk. In this pillar, the scale of risk is presented by some of the great techno-scientific risks that exist in society today. Anthropogenic global warming, nuclear accidents, runaway genetically engineered technology etc. These techno-scientific risks threaten to, in their most extreme version, result in the extinction of all human life, in what, in the risk society thesis, has termed 'worst imaginable accidents'(WIA) (Mythen, 2004). This is risk at a scale that has previously been unheard of and a risk that social institution is not able to prevent from existing. This brings out the third pillar, which describes how the mechanism of social insurance breaks down. In the face of such catastrophic risks that transcend time and space, the risk thesis argues that it has become increasingly more difficult for societies to insure their citizens. These risks are on a scale that is viewed as unmanageable to a certain extent. This unmanageability creates a sense of distrust in social institutions, especially governmental, concerned with insuring and protecting from risk, and their ability to do that. This erosion of trust in social insurance against risk seen in the light of the catastrophic nature of manufactured risks transcending time and space are key elements of creating the risk society.

The institutions in society that in the risk society thesis that is charged with identifying hazards and thus defining risk are government, science, law, and mass media (Mythen, 2004). In the risk society thesis, these defining institutions are the central parts of what is termed the 'relations of definition'. These organizations are especially capable of defining risk in the techno-scientific sense in which they are deployed and act in this sense as the knowledge authorities distrusted by the Danish Flat Earth Community. The relations of definition especially understood as government, science, law, and mass media are the exact institutions towards which are leveled the most distrust by the Danish Flat Earthers.

In relation to the three pillars of risk, these tie up a series of risk-notions which the Danish Flat Earth cosmology is defined in opposition to. In this sense, I will demonstrate how the Danish Flat Earth Community's rationalizes the opposition to these notions of risk created by the three



pillars and what that means for an overall understanding of the Danish Flat Earth social rationality.

As the relations of definition often also encompass the institutions socially tasked with insuring from risk, it is easy to see that these are heavily distrusted by the Danish Flat Earth Community. However, these institutions are distrusted only in the manner of perceived threats from manufactured risks. By this, I mean that if a Danish Flat Earther falls down and breaks his leg, he does not distrust that a hospital will be responsible for healing his leg.

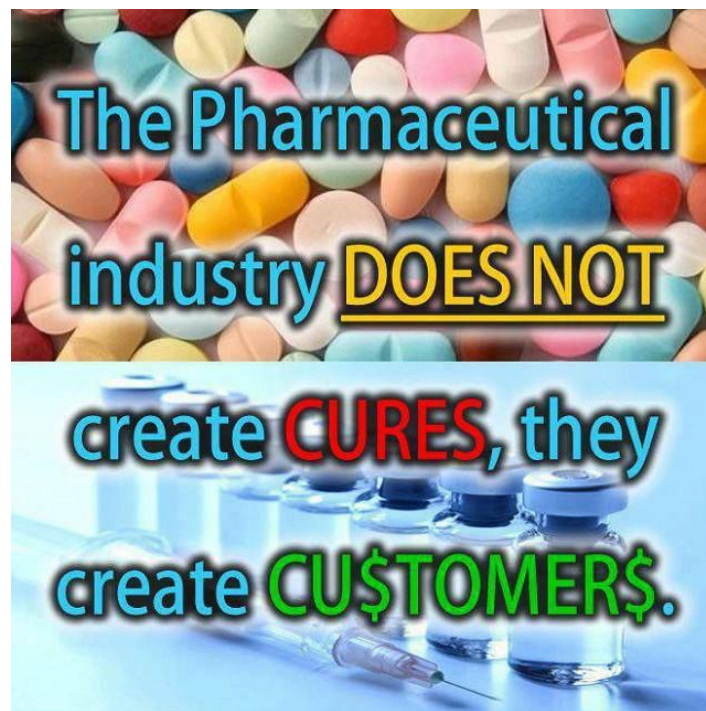


Image 53: Meme posted with the caption "*medicin er noget skidt, stop med det!*"<sup>49</sup>.

However, it is also thought that the health institutions, relying on mainstream science which is heavily corrupted and cannot be trusted to any great extent in themselves represent risk. Natural remedies are often thought as good or better than much of the medicine produced by mainstream science. Cures to diseases are thought to be withheld or drugs create new diseases

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<sup>49</sup> English translation in appendix 6.5

in the patient so that pharmaceutical companies can make a profit. These assumptions are thought to be especially true in relation to cancer cures being withheld from the public and vaccines causing autism as a form of mind control.

This distrust also extends to the case of catastrophic accidents, where a Danish Flat Earther will most likely either believe that the government will cover it up or focus on helping ‘the elite’ members of the conspiracy before him. In this sense, the Danish Flat Earthers distrust that there even is insurance in the case of a WIA-like event.

Rationalizing the idea of catastrophic techno-scientific risk with wide-ranging effects both temporally and spatially through the Danish Flat Earth cosmology’s ability to transform risk and accountability is once again showcased. The techno-scientific aspects of the great catastrophic risks that I outlined above also come into question through the cosmology, because they are based in elements that are distrusted. In the Danish Flat Earth cosmology the world, at least to some extent, controlled by the secret elite who are behind The Conspirator. The extent to which this secret elite would allow for catastrophic events to happen is only in a capacity that would benefit them in some way.



**Verdens stærkeste Diktatur de hemlige frimure kaldet Muldvarpene men de sidder på hele magten i danmark men de er lever i skjult**

Image 54: Meme describing how Denmark is a secret dictatorship.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> English translation in appendix 6.6

In this way, catastrophic events like nuclear war would not be in the interest of the elite and are instead dismissed as scare tactics used to control populations. Large-scale terrorist attacks like 9/11 are framed as false flag attacks deployed to sway public opinion into wars lucrative for the military industrial complex and the elite that controls it. With this rationality of conspiracy, catastrophic risk becomes deniable through the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community. The techno-scientific nature of these catastrophic events that transcend time and space exacerbates the critique from the Danish Flat Earth perspective. Many of the things that are considered risk in our society can be outright denied as falsehoods, such as anthropogenic global warming or nuclear weapons.



Image 55: Meme explaining how nuclear war and nuclear weapons are fake.

These elements of manufactured catastrophic techno-scientific risk can all be denied, because of the fact that they are techno-scientific in nature, and rely on a science produced by knowledge authorities discredited in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

On this basis, it is apparent that the risk perceived in mainstream society and the risks perceived in the Danish Flat Earth Community are different in a lot of ways. In a sense, the Danish Flat Earth Community rationalizing through their cosmology allows for a mitigation of perceived risk, as many of the great manufactured risk factors characterizing the risk society can be believed to be false. In a certain sense, the Danish Flat Earth Community allows for the rational redefinition of risk through their epistemic culture and cosmology. This redefinition can be described as happening through rationalizing a seizure of the relations of definition because those of mainstream society are deemed untrustworthy and corrupt. This means that the risks perceived by the Danish Flat Earth Community are other risks, based on other factors that originate in the Danish Flat Earth cosmology.

As described in the cosmological outline different risk elements appear from within the cosmology. The fear of the elite not needing the population of the world due to the increased effectivity of autonomous technologies and deciding to depopulate the planet (as described in the quote on page 68) is a risk as catastrophic as any of the ones facing the risk society. Likewise is the threat of increased political repression and the very apparent risk of living in a society which is controlled by a secretive elite where you are one of the few that understand this tremendous conspiracy. What these have in common, however, is first that there is a conscious controlling overarching actor that directs these risks, and second that they are not random. Many of the risks facing the risk society are risks characterized by such things as miscommunications creating nuclear war, unthinking majorities polluting the ecosystems with plastics and the atmosphere with greenhouse gasses or genetically engineered entities escaping labs by accident. All of these problems are outside of the control of governments or other authoritative bodies. Not so with the risks perceived by the Danish Flat Earth Community, these are to a large degree conceptualized as being controlled by the elite.

## Summary

The Danish Flat Earth Community cannot be won over by exposing them to facts that are more soundly constructed than their own. Instead, an element of a social rationality must be supporting the scientific rationality described in the previous chapter. That social rationality is characterized by rationalizing accountability and risk through the prism of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology. Supported by its epistemic culture's role in legitimizing the cosmology through epistemic practices, the social rationality of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology allows for a way to shift and mitigate personal accountability and risk. Accountability and risk are linked to the secretive elite conspirator, who is a key element of Danish Flat Earth cosmology. This conspirator can be held accountable for unfortunate events as well as be used as an argument for mitigating the risk perceived by mainstream society. This serves as a way for Danish Flat Earthers to transform perceived techno-scientific risks of the risk society into other risks unique to the Danish Flat Earth Community. These risks are characterized by being controlled by The Conspirator as opposed to the much more random elements contributing to the risks perceived by the risk society. The Danish Flat Earth social rationality opposes this idea of random meaninglessness, instead, it rationalizes meaning into the narratives through the role of The Conspirator.

## Meaning in competing cosmologies

“Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-two million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea.”

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Adams, 1986:5)

More than anything else the Danish Flat Earth Community rationalize the events and the reality around them in opposition to the cosmology told by mainstream science. This cosmology has, as the knowledge that makes it up has increased, slowly decreased the importance of humanity. This loss of a privileged position has, in relation to the Abrahamic religions, taken the image of humans as being created in God's image in a world at the center of the universe, to what is described in the opening quote of this section. The big bang, the formation of the solar system, and evolution paint a picture of not just humanity, but all of existence as a random occurrence created from a set of random circumstances spanning 13,7 billion years. The cosmology of painted by mainstream science is essentially a cosmological narrative devoid of inherent meaning. Take on top of this that it is a cosmology presented by a risk society, where responsibility for your actions are ultimately your own due to eroded social structures such as traditions and great techno-scientific catastrophes loom on future horizons. It is in some sense

a bleak outlook of a disenchanted world. And it is an outlook that the Danish Flat Earth Community denies. It denies the cosmology of mainstream science and calls it a lie created to manipulate humanity into believing that there is no meaning.

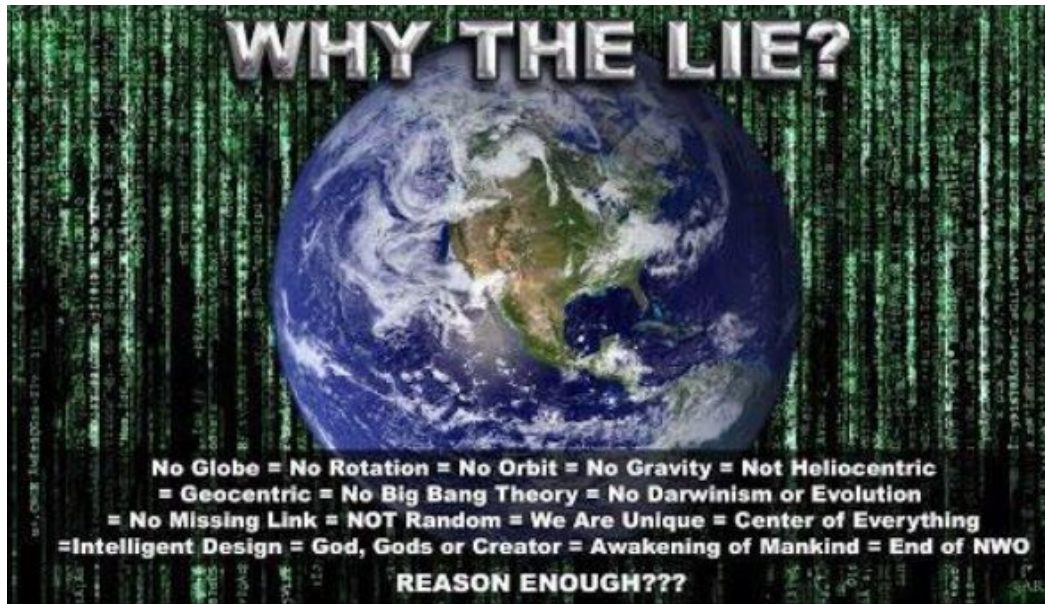


Image 56: Meme detailing the reason for the conspiracy to cover up the shape of the Earth.

The community takes its point of departure from a Flat Earth because the shape of the Earth is a cornerstone element in the mainstream scientific cosmology, and without it, the entire cosmology can be refuted and unraveled. Refuting the cosmology of mainstream science from within the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community is not only a refutation but also an existential positioning. It allows for an existential repositioning of humanity and the Earth to the center of the universe. It tells the story of a Flat Earth, enclosed in a dome in the center of the universe. It tells a story of a universe and a humanity created by a loving creator-being, an anthropocentric account to ease the experience of being a member of an unsettling (risk) society at an unsettling time.





Image 57: Image depicting a woman pulling away the cover of the scientific cosmology to reveal religious imagery.

Nonetheless, this perceived meaning is being hidden by a great conspiracy in an attempt to control the humans of Earth, for power, privilege and perverse satanic interest. Danish Flat Earthers suspect that by making the people of the world believe that they live in a meaningless existence they become docile consumers, not willing to seek out the true spiritual enlightenment that the Danish Flat Earthers know is possible. This makes the Danish Flat Earth Community a group with something to oppose, a lie to expose and a certain privileged position in relation to all the sheeple (sheep people) who are not aware of the conspiracy. This allows for a certain sense of superiority for the Danish Flat Earther while at the same time meeting enormous opposition, hostility, and ridicule from the society around him.

All in all the cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community allows for an existential recentering of oneself, humanity and the Earth into an geo- and anthropocentric model of the universe, created by a loving creator and giving a sense of meaning to the individuals that subscribe to that cosmology.





Image 58: picture-text posted detailing the cosmological position of a Flat Earth cosmology.

## Conclusion

Having set out to understand the scientific and social rationalities of the Danish Flat Earth Community, and how a so alternative cosmological outlook is supported and maintained in the face of the cosmology of mainstream science I would like to summarize a few final points.

The goal of studying rationalities as cosmological support-structures has been to understand the motivations and mindsets of one of the most extreme examples of post-truth in action. Doing so through a focus of agnostically telling the story of the Danish Flat Earth Community, its cosmology, and its rationalities have been an attempt to shed light on how this post-truth community defines and understands itself. This definition and understanding are both in relation to its own internal elements and the outside factor of the cosmology of mainstream science. This is important in relation to shedding light on the Danish Flat Earth Community, as much of what they believe is in opposition to the mainstream.

To investigate this I have conducted an online ethnographic fieldwork, embedding my (already significant) use of Facebook into the different Danish Flat Earth spaces on that platform. By using this, and other medium-specific techniques I have observed and participated in the Danish Flat Earth Community's presence on Facebook and interviewed some of its members. By describing the way this can be seen as an artfully constructed fieldsite, and how these delimitations have been shaped partly by me, and partly by the circumstances of the fieldwork, I have been able to target these methods onto an overseeable amount of people within a single community. Through an approach based on an agile ethics of care, I have treated the people of that community with respect and attempted to meet them with the same vulnerability that they have met me with.

In outlining the most universally agreed upon elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology I have been able to show that the Earth is viewed as a flat, stationary disc surrounded by an Icewall on which there is no gravitation. This disc is viewed to be enclosed in a dome and within that dome is housed the sun and moon, which are both the same size and close to the disc of the Earth. I have outlined how most Danish Flat Earthers see what is beyond The Dome, and the community's relationship to mainstream science, other conspiracy theories, and religion.

Analysing how the scientific rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community is reflected in their epistemic culture, I have investigated how that rationality is rendered visible in the fact construction process exemplified by an experimental practice. Furthermore, I have analyzed how that epistemic culture supports facts by situating them in a network of other facts that allow for a mutual strengthening and how this is a form of rationalization. From this, I have shown that Danish Flat Earth fact construction is somewhat shallow and readily excludes relevant elements, yet they are constructed in such a way that they often seem solid and convincing on the surface, especially to someone already mobilized into their network, where other facts can give support. Expounding on this analysis of fact creation processes I have investigated what manner of philosophy of science can be related to the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture and its scientific rationality. It is a manner of philosophy of science focused on

keeping knowledge production close to the individual-as-researcher, seeking to create a minimum of mediation of knowledge in the process of fact creation. This is done by eschewing the traditional accumulation of facts through theoretical knowledge and by having the knowledge created rely on sensual experience.

The two epistemic practices coupled with the philosophy of science draws a picture of Danish Flat Earth scientific rationality that can be viewed as a kind of relativist realism, seeking a concept of the truth that is willing to ignore the flaws in how their facts are constructed due to their sensual and unmediated character.

Moving on to an analysis of the social rationality of the Danish Flat Earth Community, I show that it functions like an un-Thing, in that it does not have epistemic unity, in the face of the continued posting of facts by both Globeheads and Flat Earthers. This leads to an understanding that some other social rationality, not based on the exchange of facts is supporting the Danish Flat Earth Cosmology. To understand this, I analyze the Danish Flat Earth Community's relationship to rationalizing the notions of accountability and risk. Through an analysis of the relation between Danish Flat Earth social rationality and accountability, I highlight how the Danish Flat Earth Cosmology can explain unfortunate events and shift accountability from a random element onto a deliberate one in the form of The Conspirator. Building on accountability, I investigate the analogous notion of the risk society and its relationship to Danish Flat Earth social rationality. Through this analysis I point to the fact that the Danish Flat Earth cosmology allows for a mitigation and transformation of the major risks of the risk society, thus allowing Danish Flat Earths not to feel as vulnerable towards the hazards posed by these risks. This is especially true in relation to the techno-scientific manufactured risks which catastrophic scale pose some degree of risk to all members of a risk society. These, such as anthropogenic global warming, or the threat of nuclear war, can through the cosmology be either seen as 'faked' risks or transferred into a risk controlled by a deliberate actor, cast as The Conspirator. This actor instead poses a series of other risks, which, though equally catastrophic in nature are presented by a deliberate entity acting out of rational self-interest.

From these come the assertion that the Danish Flat Earth cosmology and the social rationality appertaining to it can shift accountability and thereby also transfer or mitigate risk as they are perceived in the risk society.

In the final stages of my thesis, I discuss the role of meaning in the competing cosmologies of the Danish Flat Earth Community and mainstream science. In this discussion, I argue that the inherently meaningless nature of the mainstream scientific cosmology is less preferable than the meaningful cosmology of the Danish Flat Earth Community. This search for meaning through the Danish Flat Earth cosmology happens through a geocentric and anthropocentric existential repositioning, to view the Earth and the human being that inhabit it as the center of the universe.

Concluding on the above, the Danish Flat Earth cosmology play an integral part in informing and supporting scientific and social rationalities. Scientific rationality is supported through an epistemic culture deeply rooted in the cosmology, drawing the basis of what is good epistemic practice out of its distrust of and opposition to mainstream science. This everyman researcher with a close to unmediated approach to sensual knowledge production that is the Danish Flat Earth relativist realist rationality, is deeply rooted in beliefs that the opposing epistemic practices of mainstream science are based in lies and fakery and that knowledge should be distrusted at best or discounted at worst. The cosmology and the knowledge already established in it provide a support for new facts when they are proposed, in a sense of the analytical example where distrust of organizations accused of forging knowledge is supported in claims against them. This preexisting support, as well as the relativistic realism of the Danish Flat Earth epistemic culture, allows for a fact creation practice that creates knowledge, which superficially seems well constructed but does not uphold to much scrutiny.

As with the scientific rationality, the social rationality displayed by the Danish Flat Earth Community is deeply rooted in the cosmology. Both notions of accountability and perceived risk are shifted or transferred because of elements in the cosmology that are used to rationalize

them. These are either changed in such a way that they reflect accountability on other sources, that they present a different (type) risk or that some perceived risk simply does not apply at all because of the cosmology.

The specific makeup and elements of the Danish Flat Earth cosmology are used to rationalize many different things across a spectrum of epistemic and social practices and phenomena. These rationalizations often come from key factors of the cosmology which is its self-conceptualization as an alternative science, with all that scientific knowledge that belong to that, and the cosmology as part of a conspiracy theory, always on the lookout for forgeries or other plots carried out by The Conspirator and its agents.

Concluding further I would like to point attention to the mutual relationship between the Danish Flat Earth cosmology and the rationalities that both are supported by it, but also help to maintain it. Looking at this mutual relationship, though the cosmology is used to support the rationalizations, the ability to rationalize in such ways also strengthen and maintain the cosmology's appeal. This can be seen by the way fact construction can be shoddy, and elements can be left out so that a fact can continue to support the cosmology. Another strong example relating to the social rationality is through the redefinition of accountability and risk. Because the cosmology allows for rationalizing the transfer, change and mitigation of risk and accountability the cosmology seems more attractive. Rationalising new modes of risk perception and accountability acts as a motivating factor to overlook unstable fact construction as well. Both the rationalities impact on fact constructions as well as on the creation of new modes of risk perception and accountability support a certain existential shift. Not only, the shift described in the discussion, that being a shift into the center of the universe existentially, but also a shift away from a lot of the risks posed by mainstream science.

It can, therefore, be concluded that through its make-up, and especially through the elements of an alternative scientific knowledge and opposition to the forgeries of The Conspirator the Danish Flat Earth very practically supports the scientific and social rationalities at play within it. It can also be concluded that through a mutually supporting and maintaining relationship, both

types of rationalities serve a role in making the cosmology attractive to subscribe to. Through its alternative scientific practices, which makes it have an all-important element of knowledge production, the Danish Flat Earth Community legitimizes how their social rationale allow them to have a new mode of risk perception and accountability as well as allowing them to reposition themselves to the warming meaningful center of the universe.

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