

Shamanic Initiations, Alien Abduction Phenomena, and the Return of the Archetypal Feminine: An Experiential Distillation

Tiffany Vance-Huffman
Naropa University

The purpose of this paper is to change the way people think about anomalous experiences and illnesses of the body-mind by examining initiations. Spiritual initiations are archetypal experiences that can happen to anyone at any time. Rather than taking a literal perspective, this paper uses an ecopsychological, big-picture approach to explore the spiritual dimensions of shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomena, demonstrating how they mirror each other almost identically and are both highly transformative. As such, they should be taken seriously as experiences that shift human consciousness toward a Nature-based worldview concerned with protecting all life, signaling the return of the Archetypal Feminine. Written in the tradition of the Feminine, the paper is often intentionally ambiguous so that the reader may craft their own thoughts regarding these and similar experiences. However, it concludes with the author's own explicit ideas regarding the meaning of archetypal initiations and the current age in which human consciousness and the Cosmos in general are shifting toward a new age of balance, to the Age of Mother Nature.

Keywords: archetypal feminine, archetypal masculine, initiation, shamanic initiation, alien abduction phenomenon, John E. Mack, transformation, rites of passage, ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Background: An Experiential Translation	7
Archetypal Initiations: Transpersonal, Transformative, and Often Traumatic	10
The Pathogenic Role of Trauma in Human Development	14
Literature Review: <i>Dancing in the Flames</i>	17
Literature Review: <i>The Archetype of Initiation</i>	20
Shamanic Initiation is Archetypal	21
Literature Review: <i>Black Elk Speaks</i>	25
Abduction Phenomenon Mirrors Shamanic Initiations	27
Alien Abduction Phenomenon Background	27
Literature Review: <i>Flying Saucers</i>	28
Literature Review: “Shamanic Journeys and UFO Encounters”	29
Literature Review: “Shamans, Symbols, and Archetypes”	31
Literature Review: “Mythic Dimensions of UFO Phenomenon”	32
Literature Review: “The UFO Encounter Experience as a Crisis of Transformation”	33
The Classic Abduction Experience	33
“We Don’t Understand Why You Choose Destruction”	37
Surrender	38
What About the Babies?	41
Why This is Happening: The Return of the Archetypal Feminine	42
Solution	46
Conclusion	47
References	49
Appendix A	53
Appendix B	54
Appendix C	55

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank those who made this project a possibility, foremost with my husband Charles Huffman whose unwavering support and patience is immeasurable. Deep gratitude goes to Naropa University for playing such a powerful role in my initiation and stepping up to offer the only Ecopsychology master's program in America. Particular appreciation goes to the passionate professors who trained and guided me through the field of Ecopsychology, including Stephanie Yuhas and Tina Fields, but especially to Ecopsychology Department Head Travis Cox who championed my topic and allowed me the academic freedom to run with it. Much thanks to author Keith Thompson who volunteered his time to read my paper and provide professional feedback. I am especially grateful to the John E. Mack Institute which gave me access to so many resources about my topic. This paper would not have happened without their generosity. Finally, my deepest expression of gratitude goes to the late John E. Mack for his dedication in working with abduction experiencers to bring them into healing and transformation, for thinking so critically, for ignoring the establishment and trusting himself, and for giving me the language I needed to speak of my own transformational experience. You, John Mack, are my hero. May you rest peacefully.

This paper is dedicated to all those who doubt their experiences, to the ones who think they are—or have been called “crazy,” and to those with odd health conditions that Western medicine can neither understand nor heal. This is your initiation. Fall into it...

Shamanic Initiations, Alien Abduction Phenomena, and the Return of the Archetypal Feminine: An Experiential Distillation

“Initiation represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity. It is an act that involves not only the religious life of the individual, in the modern meaning of the word “religion”; it involves [one’s] *entire* life. It is through initiation that, in primitive and archaic societies, [one] becomes what [they are] and what [they] should be – a being open to the life of the spirit, hence one who participates in the culture into which [they were] born.”

– Mircea Eliade, 1958, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, p. 3.

Introduction

Reports of unidentified aerial craft and alien abduction phenomena tend to conjure feelings of fascination, terror, and incredulity in Westerners where the philosophical foundations require one to accept “truth” only as it is determined by science and society. Specifically, if a particular object under observation cannot be measured by any of the senses, it is rendered “science-fiction” at best and “hoax” at worst. However, there are exceptions within the sciences which use a much larger lens than a microscope. Transpersonal ecopsychology, for example, takes a philosophical, big-picture approach to humans and their experience in *relationship* to Nature. It may also be viewed, metaphorically speaking, as a scientific analog to express the Archetypal Feminine. This is why transpersonal ecopsychology was the chosen lens through which this paper was written. Thus, rather than limiting an exploration to the literal, micro-focused perspective of the West with data, this paper examines the topic of alien abduction phenomenon with an infinitely broader scope, that is through human *experience* as it relates to Nature, to Earth – the very embodiment of the Archetypal Feminine. Using this approach

leads to the emergence of a striking pattern between abduction phenomena and shamanic initiations. Explicitly stated, alien abduction phenomena mirrors shamanic initiations and should therefore be considered a form of archetypal initiation. When abduction experiencers connect with professionals to work through their experiences in non-ordinary states of consciousness, it can facilitate healing and lead to a deep transformation of consciousness directly connected to the nature-based consciousness of shamans and indigenous peoples around the world. Furthermore, initiations of this nature seem to be happening quickly on a global scale, signaling the return of the Archetypal Feminine.

There are many trendy words and phrases referencing the Archetypal Feminine, such as “Sacred Feminine” and “Divine Feminine.” However, in the West these descriptors are weighed down with religious overtones that deflect from the broader meaning expressed in this paper. Rather than limiting the concept, it is simply referred to here as the Archetypal Feminine, an expression of a cosmic pattern of existence. Additionally, the Archetypal Feminine is part of a whole that includes the Archetypal Masculine, wherein one is utterly meaningless without the other. A familiar way of understanding the whole is through the Daoist tradition which focuses on balancing the Feminine and Masculine energies inherent to all Beings. The classic Daoist symbol of Yin and Yang (☯) illustrates the combination of these forces of Nature through one black and one white fish in a circle, each with an eye the opposite color of the fish. The black fish represents Yin, an expression of the Feminine, while the white fish represents Yang, an expression of the Masculine. As a symbol, it is loaded with meaning and serves as a visual reminder that human existence is part of the whole. To gain a better understanding of the Feminine lens through which this paper was written, see Appendix A for a chart comparing archetypal qualities of Feminine and Masculine.

The purpose of this paper is to neither prove nor disprove the reality of these archetypal experiences. Rather, an ecopsychological framework is applied to both legitimize the transformative nature of the experiences and spotlight healing from the subsequent trauma into transformation. The term *ecopsychology* is a modern word – combining

ecology and *psychology* – sating the Western mind to explain the ancient wisdom of connection to the Universe (Roszak, 1995, p. 8) as a means for healing the body-mind by reconnecting to – or getting back into balance with – Nature. In Western societies torn apart by violently clinging to religious or scientific dogma and simultaneously united in conditioned loyalty to consumption, ecopsychology is tasked with reminding people of their fundamental connection to their environments and the natural world as a whole. The discipline is both a field of study and a practice that fosters awareness of the human-nature connection through ecological – and self-awareness, with the foundational premise that humans can neither be studied nor healed apart from Nature (Hillman, 1995, p. xxii) because of an inseparable, coevolutionary bond, regardless of one’s unawareness. Inherent to this view is that humans have separated from Nature to the detriment of their health, sanity, and emotional well-being and that the only real hope of restoration and balance is through restoring the health of the Earth (Brown, 1995, p. xvi).

The end goal of ecopsychology appears to align with the end goal of the initiation that happens through alien abduction experiences. For those who work through the trauma, “although they may have had no special knowledge of indigenous traditions, abduction experiencers seem to be drawn inevitably to native American spirituality and Earth consciousness” (Mack, 2011, p. 106). Initiation experiences operate in the realm of myth, meaning that what happens in the process is both real *and* not real; a paradox in that it “is mythic because it is real, and real because it is mythic” (Thompson, 1989, p. 35). In Western societies, it is the scientific establishment, government elites, and the Media that determine what is “real” for us (Mack, 1994, p. 411). Statistical averages, that which is tangibly measured, count as “truth,” whereas anything out of the ordinary is labeled “pathological” (Jung, 2002, p. 30). There is no room in the dualistic Western paradigm “for a variety of small but powerful homely beings, who administer an odd mixture of trauma and transcendence without apparent regard for any established religious hierarchy or doctrine” (Mack, 1994, p. 413). However, those who hold non-dual, nature-based worldviews such as

those found in indigenous and Eastern traditions, for example, seem to struggle less with the reality of alien abduction phenomenon (Ibid). This is, in part, because they often make no distinction between what the West labels as “myth” and “reality.” For example, the Ipixuma tribe of the Brazilian rain forest carries a legend of sky beings who landed in a ship in the Amazon (Mack, 2011, p. 7). When the former head of Psychiatry at The Cambridge Hospital of Harvard Medical School, Dr. John E. Mack, asked abduction experiencer and shaman Bernardo Peixoto, who was raised among the Ipixuma, whether his people regarded the legend as literal or metaphorical, “he replied succinctly that among his people “this makes no difference”” (Ibid.) This is a big leap for the Western mind because it requires using intuition and imagination, human qualities that have no place in the scientific paradigm. Indeed, an experiencer named Victor reported of a being who told him, “The process of cultivating your mind in the traditional, rational way will obliterate [your intuition]” (Mack, 1994, p. 58). To healthily digest the material presented here, the reader would do well to sit with the ambiguity, avoid “projecting the supernatural and realize it as the super natural, that is, *as us* on some deeper level than the constructed ego – as consciousness itself” (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p. 203).

Background: An Experiential Translation

When it was released on video, I watched *Fire in the Sky* (Lieberman, 1993), an exaggerated Hollywood retelling of the Travis Walton abduction case, and it filled me with a mix of terror and utter fascination. Still, I refused to watch any kind of “grey” alien-based movie for many years. Later, I became intrigued by the idea that some stories from the Bible seem to indicate ancient explanations for contact with alien beings and crafts. I eventually began engaging again with that genre of film but was particularly drawn to documentaries and articles that dealt with so-called “abduction” experiences. It was difficult to outrightly dismiss the sincerity and often intense fear expressed by the experiencers, but it was equally difficult to believe some of the stories. Then, in June of 2015, I stopped at a used

bookstore in Atlanta, Georgia, where I stumbled across an uncorrected proof of *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* by Dr. John E. Mack (1994), a Harvard psychiatrist who treated people claiming to have been abducted by alien beings. At the same bookstore, I also bought a used copy of a book by C.D.B. Bryan (1995) called *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Alien Abduction, UFOs, and the Conference at M.I.T.* Not only was Dr. Mack a chair and speaker at the conference, but it was filled with several other multiple-credentialed professionals, including PhDs and MDs, who were seriously examining the subject. That academics and scientists were willingly putting their reputations and careers at risk in an effort to study the evidence in a different way, coupled with the fact that reported experiencers wanted no publicity – only help – caused a seismic shift in my already crumbling worldview previously rooted in conservative Christianity.

When my studies in ecopsychology incorporated an academic examination of shamanism, I was immediately struck by how similar shamanic initiations were to abduction phenomena. After rereading Mack's work years later, I realized that he made the same connection. Given the regularity with which abduction experiencers are radically transformed and driven to become advocates for environmental preservation, healers using various modalities, and develop profound connections to nature-based wisdom traditions, I was finally understanding the magnitude of the phenomenon. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, my own shamanic initiation began. On March 1, 2021, I woke with what I thought was the worst fibromyalgia "flare" I had experienced to date. I had to crawl to the bathroom and couch because I could hardly move, often having to stop and take breaks from the energy required for crawling; basic cognition came to a near-grinding halt. About two-and-a-half weeks into this experience, I somehow had a stroke of insight in the utterly debilitating and blinding mental fog: "Could this be shamanic illness? Am I being *initiated*?" The answer unfolded over the next several months as a clear affirmation of shamanic initiation. That is when I knew that my fibromyalgia was something more than mere debilitating physical and cognitive challenges – it was an *opportunity* because it sounded just like

shamanic illness described below. The inability to function, however, led me to withdraw from the Ecopsychology program at Naropa University for about a year – and I could not be happier because it gave me an *experiential* understanding of the topic at hand, something much richer than head knowledge gathered from books. Like the initiates discussed below, my experiences with initiation are incredibly difficult to verbalize because they took place in a realm beyond language, beyond this reality we share collectively.

Briefly, my shamanic initiation has been nothing short of a psycho-spiritual, waking nightmare “designed” to annihilate what I thought was “me” so that my true nature, my unconscious Self could emerge. In the process, I have experienced profound healing of psyche and soul, mind, and body. The experience completely changed my understanding of my relationship to Nature, leading to Awakening. “Awakening” can be thought of as more than a paradigm shift; it is a radical shift in consciousness itself, experientially speaking. The way I navigate existence now is an entirely new dynamic, including an *experiential* understanding of the web that connects all things. What the reader must know is that my perspective shifted sharply from the well-defined, micro-focused Masculine to the symbolic, macro-focused Feminine. One may think of that like a metaphorical shift from experiencing existence as a subatomic particle to experiencing it as the Universe. English is a Masculine language in that it is highly technical, great for breaking down concepts into smaller and smaller parts. Unfortunately, English lacks in vocabulary to describe broadly scoped concepts. So, rather than mining for applicable language or even sharing or comparing my experience to those addressed here, *this paper is a metaphorical distillation of what I learned through my initiation experience*. My challenge was to find the voices who spoke the experiential knowledge I gained in the process. Where my work differs from the deeply critical thinkers included here is that they typically *speculate* about these bizarre subjects, whereas I am now affirming their speculations as accurate based on what happened to me through spontaneous shamanic initiation. The reader should note the carefully curated vocabulary choices here are often quite vague and open. This is

an intentional, Archetypal Feminine approach so that one may draw their own conclusions rather than have them determined by other voices. May the reader enjoy this translation.

Archetypal Initiations: Transpersonal, Transformative, and Often Traumatic

The word *archetype* is of Greek origin meaning “the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Famed psychoanalyst Carl Jung used *archetype* in psychiatry as a broad label for universal patterns in myths and story that play out in people and behaviors – patterns which appeared repeatedly in both his patients and his own experience – noting that “the myths and fairytales of the world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere. We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, deliria, and delusions of individuals living today” (Bobroff, 2014, p. xvii). Some of the most common elements in archetypal dreams, for example, are “abstract geometric patterns and kaleidoscopic mandalas; the experience of flying, floating, or falling; encounters with mythological creatures and strange, intelligent animals; feeling awe, fascination, fear and terror, and a sense of “Other”” (Hurd, n.d.). The archetypes we experience through dream, fantasy, and sometimes madness, affect and structure thought, feeling, cognition, and emotion; “...archetypes link both body and mind, conscious and unconscious” (Bobroff, 2014, p. xvii). Mack adds that despite the internal quality of universal archetypes, “the nature of their expression for human beings varies with the evolution of culture and shifts in the collective unconscious” (Mack, 2011, p. 308). To label an experience as “archetypal” means “it’s a possibility if you’re human, whether your culture has prepared you for it or not” (Tart, 2009, p. 230).

Myths are archetypal patterns that emerge demonstrating repetitions in the behavior of beings, from goddesses and various disembodied beings to humans and animals. They carry a similar quality to dreams in that, as famed professor of Comparative

Mythology and Comparative Religion, Joseph Campbell, explains, “dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche” (Campbell, 1973, p. 19). And just as it is with shamanic initiation experiences and reported alien abduction phenomena,

“Whether dream or myth, in these adventures, there is an atmosphere of irresistible fascination about the figure that appears suddenly as guide, marking a new period, a new stage, in the biography. That which has to be faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious – though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality – makes itself known; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value...” (Campbell, 1973, p. 55).

Indeed, it is in dreams that the unconscious mind – that which is suppressed, buried, and of which one no longer has an awareness – emerges most often. For example, culturally specific versions of the Dark Goddess Dakini involve a fierce feminine energy who appears at crucial moments through a human in dreams or mirage-like experiences (Woodman & Dickson, 1997, p. 50). The Old Hag dream experience, which tends to be frightening and violent (Hufford, 1982, p. 86), includes the transformational Goddess who does not appear in dreams until the traveler is strong enough to be vulnerable, because the ego must surrender before it can tolerate that intense, transformative energy (Woodman & Dickson 1996, p. 48). Jungian analyst David Kalsched adds further,

“In certain patients’ dreams, the image of the regressed part of the personality [i.e., the unconscious mind] would appear not just as a child, but as an extraordinary child, one that appeared to be supremely wise, or “divine” in some way, perhaps surrounded by an unearthly light or speaking in parables or showing miraculous powers. Sometimes the regressed self would be a magical animal – a talking bird, a dolphin, or a pony, representing a kind of soul-animal for the patient. On the other hand, the progressed self might also become

mythologized, appearing as a frightening vampire, a sadistic demon who tortured the patient from within. Sometimes this diabolical figure would morph into its opposite, becoming a guardian angel who protected the inner child” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 12).

As with all mythology, it is the act of peering into the dream to recognize the dreamer’s vulnerabilities, “...the surrendering of all ego-pretense and the acceptance of one’s own neediness – [that] opens up deeper resources in the psyche/world. “Angels” appear. In psychoanalysis, dreams appear in which non-ordinary or miraculous “presences” materialize” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 300). Consider the possibility that this is also what happens during shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomena: initiates are confronted with their unconscious Self that expresses as powerful psychic projections in the forms of magical animals, spirit beings, what we currently identify as “aliens,” and other “strange and monstrous” (Eliade, 1975, p. 19) images associated with spiritual transcendence described below.

How, then, can the skeptical reader accept the reality of materialized presences, of Goddesses who appear only when the initiate’s ego is strong enough to endure the fierce energy, of beings who have total control over an experiencer, whether asleep or awake? First, by sitting with the paradox of these experiences as “mythic because it is real, and real because it is mythic (Thompson, 1989, p. 35). Second, by thinking of these beings as simply a part of nature, just as we are, but in “some “super” way for which we neither have an adequate religious model nor present science” (Strieber & Kripal, p. 29). Third, by applying the lens of Transpersonal Ecopsychology (TEP), a field that “concerns itself with ultimate questions about human existence” and serves as “an essential science of spirituality” (Tart, 2009, p. 369). TEP includes the “study of optimal psychological health and well-being...” and “... recognizes potential for experiencing a broad range of states of consciousness, in some of which identity may extend beyond the usual limits of the ego and personality” (Ibid, p. 370). Transpersonal experiences are typically profoundly transformative, “both inspiring those experiencers with an understanding of

great love, compassion and nonordinary (sic) kinds of intelligence, and also making them more aware of the distorting and pathological limitations of their ordinary selves *that must be worked with and transformed for full psychological and spiritual maturity*” (emphasis added) (Ibid, p. 372) – the very heart of this paper.

Jung explains that the unconscious mind uses metaphoric language; that is, language that has multiple meanings, so rather than the “intentional clarity of conscious language[,] it is a condensation of numerous data, many of them subliminal, whose connection with conscious content is unknown” (Jung, 1959, p. 89). The metaphors or symbols that break through the unconscious mind and into awareness typically happen during non-ordinary states – as in the case of the previously mentioned archetypal dreams, as well as the archetypal initiation experiences addressed in this paper. Because the information comes from the unconscious mind and is heavy with seemingly nonsensical imagery, Stanislav Grof coined these non-ordinary states of consciousness *holotropic* states where we “encounter a rich spectrum of transpersonal experiences that help us to reclaim our full identity” (Grof, 2008, p. 48). The identity Grof refers to is that which is found within the Unconscious where the darker parts of the Self get buried due to influences like trauma and societal structures that determine acceptable behavior. When encountering the darkness of the Unconscious in holotropic states, the imagery and overall experience can seem fantastical, often terrifying and traumatizing, and include a powerful realization that despite one’s inability to reconcile the reality of the experience, it is somehow “realer than real” (Tart, 2009, p. 190). Some familiar archetypal experiences, often labeled “extraordinary,” that happen in during holotropic states include, for example, mystical visions, out-of-body and near-death (Ibid., p. 227) experiences. Charles Tart explains that what happens during those experiences includes *state-specific* memory and knowledge,

“...however, it’s often not a simple matter of starting out “ordinary,” having an extraordinary experience, and then “living happily ever after.” Years of confusion, conflict, and struggle may be necessary as you try to make sense of the NDE

[and similar extraordinary experiences] and its aftermath, and to integrate this new understanding into your life. Part of that struggle and integration takes place on transpersonal levels that are very difficult to put into words, another part on more ordinary levels of questioning, changing, and expanding your worldview” (Ibid., pp. 227-228).

Thus, Grof asks, “Can [extraordinary experiences in non-ordinary states] be interpreted and dismissed as meaningless phantasmagoria produced by the pathological process afflicting the brain, yet to be discovered and identified by modern science, or do they reflect objectively existing dimensions of reality, which are not accessible in the ordinary state of consciousness?” (Grof, 2008, p. 49). In other words, are these people “crazy” or is something really happening? While some experiences in non-ordinary/holotropic states may feel profoundly beautiful and enlightening, others do not embody the same feeling. “In extreme cases, the reaction can be so intense as to become pathological, producing a state of depression and even despair, with suicidal impulses...an acute sense of unworthiness, a systematic self-depreciation and self-accusation, which may become so vivid as to produce the delusion that one is in hell, irretrievably damned” (Assagioli, 1986, p. 26).

The Pathogenic Role of Trauma in Human Development

A key feature of initiation experiences addressed here is the trauma that is inflicted in the process. Trauma is not simply what happens to an individual, but one’s “*response* to what happens to us, and in this response we make choices for or against our own spiritual center of being” (Kalsched, p. 199). Mack defined the pathogenic role of trauma in human development as “a fundamental state of helplessness and vulnerability and an inability to define, experience, express, or integrate disturbing effects that are brought about by such hurtful or threatening events. Trauma is thus the outcome of a relationship between the intrapsychic and the external worlds” (Mack, 1993, p. 361). In early childhood, traumatic experience is *managed* by dissociation, which compartmentalizes parts of the experience and

makes life possible; “But trauma is kept alive in the inner world by continued dissociative attack, and this is where [dissociation] comes in. If it weren’t for this active inner agency, trauma would probably extinguish over time, but it doesn’t. It is kept alive by [dissociation]” (Kalsched, p. 93). A patient undergoing dream analysis explained it more pragmatically: “To protect the soul, the Self seems to set up a block, so that the unendurable pain [of traumatic experience] is channeled into the body, where nature deals with it best as it can. Because the pain is somatized, its psychological component is not consciously experienced,” manifesting as physio-psycho-spiritual imbalances (Woodman & Dickson, p. 75).

“Survivors of early trauma often report that an essential part of themselves has retreated into a spiritual world and found refuge and support there in the absence of such support by any human person... Sometimes this spiritual world gives the trauma survivor privileged access to immaterial realities that remain inaccessible to people who live mostly in one world. Many of these patients have special gifts, psychic powers, shamanic visions, or auditory messages from beyond the ego, mystical connections to animals or to nature, access to healing capacities, uncanny intuitive wisdom, artistic talent, etc. On the other hand, sometimes the spiritual world also *torments* the trauma survivor in ways that better-adapted people never have to worry about” (Kalsched, p. 9).

A noteworthy study conducted by social psychologist Dr. Kenneth Ring of “close encounter witnesses and near-death experiencers” led to the publication of his book, *The Omega Project* (1990); he “found among the close encounter witnesses one consistent result: the majority of them reported childhood trauma of some sort” (Strieber & Kripal, p. 208). Perhaps in the spirit of William James who explains that trauma breaks and opens us to spiritual experience (Kalsched, p. 25), professor of Religion at Rice University, Jeffrey Kripal, speculates that “early childhood trauma may shatter our expectations of reality, leaving us to see, amid the fragments that are left to us, shadows from ghost universes” (Strieber & Kripal, p. 333).

The kind of trauma that takes place during intense initiations – such as is often the case with shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomena – has unusual features: it shatters “reality,” challenging *everything* the initiate thought they knew; profound energies get trapped in body that effects consciousness, leading to an experience of Awakening; grants access to non-ordinary states of consciousness; facilitates awareness of the Feminine archetypes of collective consciousness, birth, death, rebirth; experience profound connection to Divine; a definitive feeling of interconnectedness (Mack, 2011, p. 297). It is important to note, however, that not all transformation – the purpose of initiation – involves trauma. For example, physician psychotherapist David A. Gotlib who works with abduction experiencers out of Toronto, reports that one-third of them did *not* experience the “classic” disturbing traumas, yet still found them positive and transformative (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 126).

A vast majority of the trauma experienced in these kinds of initiations comes from what Mack calls “ontological shock,” a term

“...to describe the experience that many [initiates] go through at the moment when they can no longer deny that what they have undergone is in some way real; an experiencer named Sharon came to feel she could no longer “disown” her experiences, it felt like “a sledgehammer’s been taken against it all. It’s all been shattered. It’s like I’ve got a five-thousand-piece puzzle of the blue sky to try to put together” (Mack, 2011, p. 55).

Eliade explains that initiation plays an integral role in the “religious formation” of humans, “and more especially that in essence it consists in a complete change in the novice’s ontological status...To become a [human] in the proper sense [they] must die to this first (natural) life and be reborn to a higher life, which is at once religious and cultural” (Eliade, 1987, p. 187). Unfortunately, the Western paradigm filters pain, suffering, and death as obstacles to be *removed* rather than growing from them:

“The path of initiation is branded in the West as degenerate; by contrast, in tribal society the initiation of the shaman is

accepted, even encouraged and supported by everyone; and the teacher helps the student to decipher his experiences by means of cultural symbols. But in our culture the symbols of transformation are negative: they include hospitalization, schizophrenia, brain-wave tests, stupefying psychotropic drugs, and ostracism from society. How many unrecognized shamans, mediums, and saints fill the madhouses of rationalism? How many people has psychology reduced to mindless robots through its abasement of the psyche? The spiritual climate in our society shuts down shamanic experience in its insipient stages, distorts it and desecralizes it as neurosis and psychotic deception. But psychic transformation cannot be extirpated by societal taboos. Spiritual experience is a transhistorical, transcultural phenomenon and can break through individuals at any time” (Kalwet, 1992, p. 54).

The “strange and monstrous” are regular features of spiritual transcendence (Eliade, 1975, p. 19); thus, the ontological challenges faced in transformative initiation experiences. In traumatic cases of both shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomena, “the transformative element [i.e., trauma] appears to be intrinsic to the phenomenon rather than a secondary reaction that is part of the recovery process” (Mack, 2011, p. 229). Jung explains that in spiritual experience, one “comes face-to-face with a psychically overwhelming Other...the only thing that can challenge the whole of [one] and force [one] to react as a whole” (Jung, p. 38-39).

Literature Review: *Dancing in the Flames*

Consider now, the archetypal Dark Goddess herself as a transformer in Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson’s (1997) *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in Transformation of Consciousness*. To examine the Goddess is to explore the feminine and masculine, not as female and male, but as forces of nature – yin and yang – that continually relate to each other as parts of a whole (Ibid., p. 2). However, current worldviews include unconscious connections to the Feminine as Satanic, dark, evil (Ibid., p. 3), rather than recognizing it as an equal expression of the whole of Nature. The authors define the

Goddess as “the life force in matter” (Ibid.). Psyche is defined as “a self-regulating system, yin and yang in perfect balance” (Ibid., p. 5).

The Iron Age marked a radical shift in the consciousness of humans; prior to this, people recognized that they were part of nature, part of the balance, but the Iron Age brought in worship of the Sun gods who were separate from earth, from nature: “Whereas they had once taken power *from* nature through bone, feathers, and blood, now they sought to exert power *over* nature...Humanity had moved from polytheism to monotheism” (emphasis added) (Ibid., p. 21). The authors explain Chaos as a manifestation of the Archetypal Feminine by describing it as a new kind of order, however, the Feminine/Chaos has no place in the distinctly monotheistic, Western paradigm which only allows for rigidly defined structure; thus, Westerners are typically resentful and afraid of chaos; and yet, “The chaos we fear is the very thing that frees us” (Ibid., p. 45). The struggle we experience, then, is a struggle between instinct/spirit and the body-mind which manifests in our dreams, for example, in the forms of the modern counterparts to the body, such as submarines and planes (Ibid., p. 55), and Jung adds UFOs to the list of unconscious, archetypal psychic projections demonstrating this very struggle (Jung, p. 18). “A dreamer is out swimming while planes are nose-diving at him, or, additionally, dropping bombs. Submarines, often with a malevolent captain, menace the dreamer” (Woodman & Dickson, p. 55). Because Westerners do not see death for what it is – transformation – they are unable to enter a process, as in a rite of passage, wherein the transformation can be experienced consciously at each level of growth; thus, we may be *fearful* of our ultimate encounter with the Great Goddess (Ibid., p. 61). “On entering this realm [of Dark Goddess experiences], the vibrations in the soul/body become so intense that the individual becomes one with light itself, light beheld consciously” (Ibid., p. 68).

Just as Jung explained that the language of the Unconscious is metaphor, so it is the language of the Feminine/Dark Goddess; *metaphor* means “a crossing over” and they appear to the individual as symbols and imagery through the imagination; “Psychic healings happen when the imagination is so charged that it can heat a metaphor

to an intensity powerful enough to change the energy in the body” (Ibid., p. 70), a physical manifestation of transformation occurring. The imagery and experience can be intense, such as a woman whose encounter with the Dark Goddess included a vision that lasted for eight hours and gripped her in a kind of transpersonal fear while she experienced intense feelings of chaos; “it was a vision of the world without spirit, without consciousness...an apocalyptic nightmare of boiling oceans and crumbling mountains” (Ibid., p. 77). The Feminine is paradoxical, paradox being the core of wisdom and the core of the Goddess; wisdom holds the balance of life/death, mind/body, masculine/feminine and so “by holding the balance of both, [Dark Goddess] allows them to transform into something new” (Ibid., p. 86). As an expression of the Feminine, “Black Goddess...opens our eyes to our illusions, she who will make us see that our treasures lie in the repressed feminine energies that we once labeled weak, irrational, disorganized, supersensitive, and all the other thoughtless labels – naïve, stupid, slow, melodramatic; descending into her territory demands the death of a rigidly controlled life to allow new life to sprout and grow” (Ibid., p. 181). However, individual realities are created by the ego observer – the one called “I” – so in order for the energy patterns to transform the person, ordinary ego perceptions must be bypassed through the unconscious mind instead of by conscious thought (Ibid., p. 192). As the Dark Goddess works through the unconscious mind, it allows the new energy to open up “the darkness of the negative emotions” so “those areas are purified and transformed” (Ibid., p. 193).

What Westerners lack regarding these often-terrifying experiences is *context*, which can change one’s entire perspective of the experience; that is, moving away from the terror and into growth. However, qualified shamans, transpersonal psychologists and depth psychologists provide context with treatment methods that assist

“...the possibility of healing [from traumatic extraordinary experiences], as did previous cultures’ attendance to the images of vision and dream. Doing so facilitates the process for one to reconnect with that which has been cut off by our cultural

identification with conscious awareness, allowing our participation “with the unconscious that nourished our ancestors – dream, vision, ritual and religious experience – are largely lost to us, dismissed by our modern mind as primitive or superstitious.” However, it does so at a *whole new level*” (Bobroff, 2014, p. xxiii).

Literature Review: *The Archetype of Initiation*

Spiritual initiation is an explicit example of an archetypal experience and serves as a guide for understanding shamanic initiations as they relate to alien abduction phenomenon. At the core of initiation is the concept of transformation into what the initiate is meant to be: a full human with keen awareness of all that has been buried in the unconscious body-mind. Robert L. Moore’s (2001) *The Archetype of Initiation* has much to offer in terms of a scholarly defense for including abduction phenomenon in the same category as shamanic initiations. However, there are just a few key points from which to draw that establish the foundation for this concept. Early in the book, Moore clarifies that, despite a tendency by some to romanticize sacred experiences, in actuality they are typically very unpleasant or horrible; some refer to these initiatory experiences as the ““tomb of the womb,” the alchemical vessel where one is “cooked”” (Moore, 2001, p. 31). This is clearly demonstrated in the case of shamanic initiations and abduction phenomena, which are often terrifying and painful. The second foundational point Moore makes is that ritual leaders are always involved in a truly transformative process (Ibid., p. 49). In the case of shamanic initiations, the initiates are carried through the traumatic processes by an elder shaman. In the case of alien abductions, the beings themselves seem to serve as ritual leaders who administer various procedures “under the control of a slightly taller and older-appearing alien, spoken of by the abductees as the doctor or leader” (Mack, 1994, p. 394), potentially even serving as shamanic elders themselves. In chapter four, Moore describes how discussions related to the archetype of initiation always begin with the premise that *transformations are a natural part of the human experience*, adding that those following in the Jungian tradition often use the word

“initiation” to apply to “transformation” (Ibid., p. 78). Given the highly transformative nature of alien abduction phenomenon, as well as the other related criteria associated with transformative processes, this further synonymous understanding provides explicit license for categorizing them as true initiatory experiences. Moore explains that initiation is a rite of passage (Ibid. pp. 20-23). Rites of passage may be loosely defined as a ceremony, ritual, or event in a person’s life marking a transition out of an old phase and into a new one (Alexander, n.d.), such as leaving childhood and entering puberty, transitioning into motherhood, or other initiations signaling a new role in one’s community. Rites of passage identify and acknowledge the constant cycles of birth, death, and rebirth that take place during the human lifespan.

Shamanic Initiation is Archetypal

Much can be learned about shamanism by simply studying this controversial word. *Shaman* is a commonly used label for all tribal healers around the world. The reality is that different peoples have different words they apply to healers, sages, prophets, magicians, diviners, and the like. Ultimately, however, all the words typically refer to some kind of knowledge or insight the individual obtains, which is different than the kinds of knowledge the everyday person has. The word *shaman* comes from the Siberian language Evenki and means “the one who knows” (Tedlock, 2005, p. 24). Many other words describing shamans have the same meaning, as well. Examples include Finnish *tietäjä*, Japanese *munusu*, and Quichua *yachaj* (Ibid., p. 24). Religious historian Mircea Eliade defines a shaman or medicine person as “a specialist in the sacred, that is, an individual who participates in the sacred more completely, or more truly, than” others (Eliade, 1975, p.95). A shaman is one who succeeds in having mystical experiences, whether they have been chosen or called by Superhuman Beings or seek to draw their attention themselves (Ibid.).

“The shaman is pre-eminently an ecstatic,” the ecstasy signifying “the soul’s flight to Heaven, or its wanderings about

the earth, or finally, its descent to the subterranean world, among the dead...But the body's abandonment by the soul during ecstasy is equivalent to a temporary death. The shaman is, therefore, the [one] who can die, and then return to life, many times" (Ibid.).

Shamans learn to orient themselves in the "unknown regions" where new planes of existence – planes revealed through their ecstatic experiences – are explored (Ibid.). They know the road to center of the world, the hole in the sky through which they can fly to the highest Heaven or descend to Hell; they are forewarned of obstacles they will meet on the journey, and they know how to overcome them. More briefly, the shaman knows the roads to "Heaven" and "Hell" (Ibid.). Often, initiates become shamans *because* they are healed from their "shamanic illness," – a serious illness, often inexplicable, that is typically healed through the power of the same beings by which one is being initiated (Eliade, 2004, p. 28), or as Kripal explains, "a severe psychological trial or physical illness that effects a transformation of the future shaman's being, that spiritually mutates him" (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p. 193) – but healing does not begin until they acknowledge and surrender to the experience (Eliade, 1975, p. 88): "But whatever the nature of [their] sufferings may be, they have a role in the making of the shaman only to the extent to which [they give] them a religious significant and, by the fact, accepts them as ordeals indispensable to [their] mythical transfiguration." (Ibid., p. 91). It is through the ecstatic experience that the initiate "symbolically goes up to Heaven in order to take unto [themselves] the very real source of the sacred, to transmute [their] ontological status, and to make [themselves] like the archetype of *homo religiosus*, the shaman" (Ibid., p. 78).

One form of "shamanic illness" can be found in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *delog* – "stories of people who are catapulted into the underworld, often through grave illness;" however, because these experiences are archetypal, open to any human, the illness can emerge in conditions seemingly simple as depression, which "can also lead us into the black hole that exists at the center of our being" (Woodman & Dickson, p. 38). "Perhaps, if we are "lucky" enough, we fall into that

hole – the confusion, the lethargy, the hollowness of old enthusiasm, old addictions that don't work anymore. Until the ego feels its own despair, there is little motivation toward change.” (Ibid.).

Kripal provides an even richer definition of the word *shaman*: “It means “sorcerer” and has come to name a religious specialist or magical prodigy in different indigenous cultures. These prodigies might fill any number of roles, including healer or “medicine man,” medium, out-of-body traveler, psychic military scout, community storyteller, and spiritual leader” (Strieber & Kripal, p. 193). These are ambiguous persons “whose magic can be used for positive or negative ends” (Ibid.). “Much like “the sacred,” as a category the shaman possesses both a bright and a dark side. Hence the original Tungus “sorcerer.”” (Ibid., p. 193).

“As long as we do not “essentialize” the category [“shaman”], that is, confuse it with a single, unchanging religious meaning, we can use it as a helpful, comparative lens with which to focus our gaze...[In addition to] “initiatory illness” that effects a transformation of the future shamans being, that spiritually mutates [them], if you will, other common tropes include the presence of “power animals” or totems; the ability to leave one’s body and travel in the interworld; a proclivity for trance states and robust visionary experience; erotic contact or marriage between the shaman and a particular deity, spirit, or discarnate being; and the use of psychoactive sacred plants to catalyze and supercharge these various magical powers” (Ibid., pp. 193-194).

Since this paper is comparing shamanic initiation journeys to experiences relayed in alien abduction phenomenon, it is essential to begin with a “classic” shamanic initiation experience, which transpersonal psychology also calls a “spiritual emergency” – that is, “some of the dramatic experiences and unusual states of mind that traditional psychiatry diagnoses and treats as mental diseases *are actually crises of personal transformation*” (emphasis added) (Grof, S. & Grof, C., 1989, p. x). The reader will do well to remember that this

topic resides in the world of myth, of the real *and* not real. Much of what is presented in the following happens during non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by the process itself. These are mostly visual experiences through metaphor and should not necessarily be taken literally, per se:

“The core experience of the shamanic journey is a profound encounter with death and subsequent rebirth. Initiatory dreams and visions include a descent into the underworld under the guidance of ancestral spirits, attacks by demons, exposure to unimaginable emotional and physical tortures, and finally complete annihilation. This is then typically followed by sequences of birth and ascent to supernal realms. Although there exist considerable variations in the details of the ordeals among different tribes and individual shamans, they all share the general atmosphere of horror and inhuman suffering. The tortures involve experiences of dismemberment, disposal of all body fluids, scraping of flesh from bones, tearing eyes from the sockets, or similar terrifying manipulations. After the novice shaman has been reduced to a skeleton, the bones are covered with new flesh and he or she receives fresh blood. The transformed shaman aspiring then obtains supernatural knowledge and the power of healing from various semi-divine beings in human or animal form...In the experiences of individuals whose transpersonal crises have strong shamanic features, there is great emphasis on physical suffering and encounter with death followed by rebirth and elements of ascent or magical flight. They also typically sense a special connection with the elements of nature and experience communication with animals or animal spirits. It is also not unusual to feel an upsurge of extraordinary powers and impulses to heal. Most traditional anthropologists and psychiatrists tend to interpret shamanism as a pathological condition related to hysteria, schizophrenia, or epilepsy...Shamanism is the oldest religion of humanity, reaching back tens of thousands of years. It is also a phenomenon that is practically universal [i.e., archetypal], its

varieties can be found in Siberia and other parts of Asia, in North and South America, Australia, Oceania, Africa, and Europe. *Individuals whose spiritual crises follow this pattern are thus involved in an ancient process that touches the deepest foundations of the psyche*” (emphasis added) (Grof & Grof, 1986, pp. 10-11).

Literature Review: *Black Elk Speaks*

As a pragmatic example of shamanic initiation, examine the case of Black Elk, the Lakota-Sioux shaman whose story was made famous through the work of John G. Neihardt (2004) in his classic work *Black Elk Speaks*. When Black Elk was about four years old, a bird spoke to him and when he looked to the sky, he saw two men coming to him who were singing and drumming (Ibid., p. 15). When he was nine years old, he received a vision that began with a small cloud that carried him to the heavens where he could look down and see his parents (Ibid., p. 17). The cloud carried him to another world where a horse spoke to Black Elk and showed him a vision of the horse’s life history (Ibid., p. 18). The horses changed into all kinds of animals and a cloud turned into a tepee with six old men who filled Black Elk with terror because he recognized them as the “Powers of the World” (Ibid., p. 19). He was given a sacred pipe and a calling to heal his people; he was told he would save the Lakota-Sioux nation and have great power (Ibid., p. 22). Black Elk was also given apocalyptic imagery, including intense weather, dying land, animals, and his people (Ibid., pp. 24-25); animals were transformed back into humans who were starving alongside their horses (Ibid., p. 29); he saw and heard “women and children wailing and like horses screaming all over the world” (Ibid., p. 30). The Beings took Black Elk all throughout the universe (Ibid., p. 35) and when he came back to his family tepee, he saw his parents bent over his sick body as he returned to it (Ibid., p. 36). To them, he had been in a coma for twelve days; he wanted to tell everyone what happened to him, but thought no one would believe it; furthermore, he could not even begin to verbalize his experience (Ibid., p. 37). Black Elk finally revealed the vision to his people when he performed it as a horse dance in a ceremony at 18-years-old (Ibid., pp. 122-135). The

vision changed Black Elk's view of Nature; through terrifying visions of "Thunder Beings" and without conscious awareness, it changed him as a child: he stopped killing animals for sport because he remembered he was to be a "relative" to them; soon after, he mindlessly killed a frog with an arrow and, it made him want to cry (Ibid., p. 38).

Just as it was for Black Elk, it is through the "Sky Beings" that shamans obtain their power and have great mysteries revealed to them, often representing the beings in ceremonies, "and it is the medicine [people] who reveal to the novices the traditions of these divine Beings who have now withdrawn to the sky" (Ibid., p. 18). "Sky Beings" can have many meanings, largely including beings that appear terrifying, as if "monsters" from another realm. In fact, there seems to be a powerful connection between shamans and the Sky Beings typically referred to as "aliens." Famed abduction experimenter Whitley Strieber – who wrote in great detail of his experiences starting with the book *Communion* (1987) – tells how two "Delaware Indians" approached him at his property in upstate New York, wishing to show him something in the woods he owned behind his home and leading him to a place where several Delaware medicine men [i.e., shamans] were buried; this led Strieber to put in the deed to the land that the graves could never be dug up for research, keeping them in tact forever: "And I used to go out there at night, and very often in that particular area you would see the Greys...There's some kind of connection between [the aliens] and [shamanism]" (Strieber, 1999). Shaman and abduction experimenter, Sequoyah Trueblood, said that of the 100 or more shamans and chiefs he knows, *all* of them have frequent contact with various extraterrestrial and interdimensional beings who are completely separate from their ancestors and other familiar spirits (Ibid., p. 166). Mack also spoke with shamans from North and South America, Africa, and Australia who were all aware of – or had encounters with – the grey aliens we are most familiar with in alien lore and science fiction; the shamans agree that the beings have been around for thousands of years and are mostly concerned with the fate of our planet (Ibid.). Kripal also identifies the connections between shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomenon in that they are similar in psychological,

physiological, erotic, and physical process; however, “we lack context and that’s the most important thing to emphasize” (Kripal, p. 195).

Abduction Phenomenon Mirrors Shamanic Initiations

“[T]he entire history of religion can be summed up this way: strange superbeings from the sky come down to interact with human beings, provide them with cultural, technological, legal, and ethical knowledge, guide them, scare the crap out of them, demand their submission and obedience, have sex with them (often forcefully), and generally terrorize, awe, baffle, inspire, and use them.” – Whitley Strieber, Strieber & Kripal, p. 85.

Alien Abduction Phenomenon Background

Two years after the famous Roswell crash took place in New Mexico, Ohio State University professor of astronomy J. Allen Hynek was recruited by the US Air Force in 1949 to consult on what would become Project Bluebook, their attempt to determine the reality of Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon (UAP) (Bryan, 1995, p. 6). Hynek began his consultation as a hardened skeptic but concluded by demanding that the scientific community was obligated to “undertake a “respectable scholarly study of the UFO phenomenon”” (Ibid., p. 7). In 1966, writer John Fuller published the account of one of the most famous abduction cases, that of Barney and Betty Hill, in *Look* magazine and that same year as a book, *The Interrupted Journey* (Ibid., p. 4). While working on Project Bluebook, Hynek no doubt heard of the abduction account, but did not include experiences like it when he developed a taxonomy of encounters ranging from first kind – simply seeing a UFO at close range, second kind – same as the first but with “physical effects on both animate and inanimate material,” and third kind – observing the presence of “occupants” in or around the craft, which Hynek formally published in 1974 in his landmark title *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Enquiry* (Ibid., pp. 7-8). Meanwhile, more abduction cases were being reported. Thus, on June 13-17, 1992, a conference was held at M.I.T. to discuss a *fourth* kind of encounter

which is key to this paper: the abduction experience (Ibid., p. 9); that is, encounters wherein an other-worldly intelligence holds a human under control in terrestrial surroundings or takes the person by force to an aerial craft. The conference was chaired by M.I.T. physicist David E. Pritchard and Harvard professor of psychiatry and Pulitzer Prize-winning author John E. Mack (Ibid., p. 3). Mack's forty years of work in psychiatry left him ill-prepared for working with patients reporting abduction experiences (Mack, 1994, p. 1), yet he quickly saw what a close analog they were to the shamanic literature presented by historians and anthropologists such as Mircea Eliade (Ibid., p. 8). In his first book on the subject, *Abduction* (1994), "Mack compares the experiencers to a kind of unconscious shaman whose out-of-body experiences and visions he then contextualizes within humanity's long history of encounters with beings from the sky" (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p. 196). Since Mack's work was made public through an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show and two books detailing the encounters, Harvard Medical School was compelled to conduct a formal inquiry into his methods, and ultimately "reaffirmed Dr. Mack's academic freedom to study what he wishes and to state his opinions without impediment" (Harvard Medical School, 1995). Despite the controversy, Mack maintained his position at Harvard Medical School until his death in 2004.

Literature Review: *Flying Saucers*

Carl Jung's (2002) short but dense book *Flying Saucers* points to the archetypal nature of the UFO phenomenon but does not address abductions. He begins by breaking UFO sightings into the categories of rumors, dreams, and modern art. He then looks at some historical references to UFOs in art from the 12th, 14th, and 17th centuries before briefly tackling the reality of UFOs. Jung's approach is that of a skeptic, yet he seems to regularly waffle between dismissing the accounts and believing them. The indecision becomes most apparent when he spends nearly the entire book casting them in an almost purely archetypal light, then concluding that it is nearly impossible to doubt their existence any longer (Jung, 2002, p. 124). He is seemingly excited by the topic as he describes it as a "living myth" unfolding in front of

us, an opportunity to see how legends are formed (Ibid., p. 11). In terms of archetypes, for example, he points to the shape of UFOs as circular and compares them to mandalas and other circular symbols as round, complete, and perfect just as God is a totality symbol (Ibid., p. 15). He further makes connections with UFOs to the psychological structure of religious experience, adding that the formula for such experience is that one must directly face their hidden, unconscious Self which manifests as “a psychically overwhelming Other” (Ibid., p. 38). Thus, the formula for the highly archetypal religious experience, including shamanic initiations, is the same as a UFO experience.

Folklorist Peter Rojcewicz claims that “Human abductions, kidnapping, people being seized, people losing control, is as old as the human soul is old” (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 138). He reached a similar conclusion to Jung that “UFOs were mind-generated psychokinetic manifestations of the consciousness of nature, what the Greeks called Gaia, the living earth” (Ibid). In Jung’s analysis of the circular, saucer-like objects in the sky, he explains that they are unconscious projections that are thrust to the “forefront in the form of a symbolic rumour (sic), accompanied and reinforced by the appropriate visions, and in so doing activates an archetype [i.e., circle imagery] that has always expressed order, deliverance, salvation, and wholeness” (Jung, 2002, p. 18). He adds that myth is “essentially a product of the unconscious archetype and is therefore a symbol which requires psychological interpretation;” however, he also makes room for scientific explanations clarifying that many myths have natural phenomena to explain their cause, but this does not at all detract from the myth itself (Ibid., p. 19).

Literature Review: “Shamanic Journeys and UFO Encounters”

Purported abductee Sue Jamieson (2003) co-authored an article with her psychiatrist, Dr. John Mack, called “Shamanic Journeys and UFO Encounters: A Consideration of Two Avenues to an Expanded Reality” – a comparative study of both experiences. They reason that exploring both topics simultaneously can help us expand our current understanding of reality, offer modalities for healing from the trauma in the experiences, and provide a map for non-ordinary states of

consciousness, including inner and outer realities (Jamieson & Mack, 2003, *Expanding Expanding Our Understanding of Reality*, par. 1).

A significant issue with abductions is that there is no framework to navigate the shock and trauma, no elders to guide one on this path the way there is for equally traumatic shamanic initiations. There are, in fact, many striking similarities between abduction experiences and shamanic initiations (Ibid., *Shamanism & UFO Encounters*, par. 1). These include non-ordinary states of reality that alter perceptions of time and space; interactions with “beings”; receiving communication through symbols, images, metaphors; healings; traveling through tunnels; a sense of flying or rapid acceleration; energies or forces in various forms of light, energy, and vibration; unpredictability of destination or coming events; traveling between dimensions; other world families; and trauma. It must be noted that there are indeed dissimilarities between them as well (Ibid., *Shamanism & UFO Encounters* section). The most significant difference is in agency; specifically, shamans are typically able to exercise their will, whereas abductees are often stripped of this ability and find themselves exclusively under the control of some other source (Ibid.). A second difference is that of dimensional planes or realms; that is, shamanic journeyers travel in an out-of-body state, but this is not always the case for abduction experiencers (Ibid.). And a third difference is the physical and emotional trauma – shamanic initiates do experience this but have elders to prepare them and follow-up so that the trauma is received in a balanced way that heals and transforms (Ibid.). Conversely, most abductees have no conscious preparation and no follow-up to process the trauma, both physical and emotional.

Driving this comparison is the desire to reconnect with lost wisdom and ways of knowing that shape our worldview. Indeed, indigenous peoples, including many shamans, acknowledge UFO encounters as part of their reality, often living by stories of how their people descended from beings from the stars (Jamieson & Mack, 2003, *Myths & Legends*, par. 2). For example, the Cherokee and Lakota/Dakota/Nakota peoples trace their origins to the cluster of stars known as Pleiades (Ibid.). This common origin theme is not exclusive

to North America. Visitations from “star people” and “magic sky boats” have been part of African lore, for example, for thousands of years (Ibid.).

Literature Review: “Shamans, Symbols, and Archetypes”

Dr. Mack’s (2011) second book on the topic of abduction phenomenon, *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters*, contains a chapter that compares shamanic journeys and abduction experiences titled “Shamans, Symbols, and Archetypes” (Ibid., pp. 143-167). He explains how humanoid beings often first present themselves to abduction experiencers in animal form, adding that the entire experience leads many abductees into a world of symbols and archetypes that is familiar to indigenous people, especially shamans, healers, and spiritual leaders within those communities (Ibid., p. 143). When abductees relate to this language or world of symbols and archetypes, they come to empathize with – and feel an increasing pull toward – a nature-based worldview akin to that of many native peoples around the globe (Ibid.). Consciousness and existence become sacred to them and a strong sense of caring for the planet may emerge (Ibid., p. 144). Here Mack addresses the coauthor of the previously mentioned article, Sue Jamieson, because she was an abductee who came to recognize the similarities between her experiences and what she understood to be Native American “vision quests;” She eventually turned to Native American spirituality to better understand her experiences (Ibid., p. 146).

Animal encounters are a very common theme among abductees, but that is also a natural part of the shaman’s world (Ibid., p. 148). In fact, shaman and anthropologist Bernardo Peixoto was born to native Brazilian and Portuguese parents. In his experience as both shaman and abductee, he confirms that when alien beings present themselves in animal form, it happens in the exact same manner as the way “power animals” and “spirit animals” present to indigenous peoples (Ibid.). Whatever form the Beings take may depend on the Experiencer’s level of consciousness at a certain time in the individual’s life-journey; Reptilian beings often “appear to those wrestling with dark inner forces; worker-bee-like greys” tend to act on “the psyches of people

who are not ready to accept their reality; luminous beings to enlightened folks, and so on” (p. 152).

A key part of this chapter is the influence abduction phenomenon has on the psyche and how that aligns with shamanic experiences. The influence often comes from archetypal dreams, signs, and symbols that are used as teaching methods in the same manner experienced by shamans through journeying, dreaming, or other means (Ibid., pp. 157-160). A common theme among both are symbols of birth, death, rebirth, and transcendence (Ibid., pp. 160-162).

Literature Review: “Mythic Dimensions of UFO Phenomenon”

Author Keith Thompson (1989) explores “Wrestling with Angels: The Mythic Dimensions of the UFO Phenomenon,” including abductions, using the lens and transformational model of the god Proteus who never gives clear answers. Understanding the vague nature of myths and archetypes, Thompson gives the example of Whitley Strieber who explains in his first book about his abduction experiences that he felt violated at the hands of his “kidnapping visitors” (Ibid, p. 33). In his follow-up book, however, Strieber concludes that his abduction experiences were *good* for him as a kind of spiritual initiation; Thompson notes that the facts of the experience never changed, but Strieber’s *interpretation* of them did (Ibid.), a transformation of trauma into healing.

Thompson points to the seemingly boundless mythical context of UFO phenomenon and how, like the human soul, it requires a perspective that acknowledges and encourages exploration of the many meanings and possible intentions manifest in any aspect of UFOs, including and not limited to abductions themselves (Ibid., p. 35). He looks at both the circular and trickster natures of all UFO-related phenomena which naturally leads to controversy and paradox, some of the hallmarks of the mythological and archetypal explorations of the psyche (Ibid., pp. 35-38). Referring to Jung’s speculations regarding the “world-constituting dimension of archetypal reality,” Thompson says the UFO is neither real nor mental, “but a composite of both realms and, therefore, able to manifest as physical and psychic

simultaneously” (Ibid., p. 39). This is a possible explanation for the confusing manner in which Jung, like many, expresses both belief and disbelief. Ultimately, Thompson proposes looking at the phenomenon through multiple disciplines so that UFOs and their related events are not “reduced to any singularity,” but rather placed in a much richer pantheon and cosmos so that understanding their nature and purpose can be done much more comprehensibly (Ibid., p. 40).

Literature Review: “The UFO Encounter Experience as a Crisis of Transformation”

Thompson (1989) wrote another essay, “The UFO Encounter Experience as a Crisis of Transformation,” wherein he uses the patterns in the experiencers accounts to begin his exploration of their initiatory or transformative nature. Specifically, he examines the experiential authenticity of the reports based on the degree to which the experiencer perceives their interactions with these other worldly beings or presences as fundamentally real (Thompson, 1989, pp. 123-124). This 1989 essay is really more of an apologetic argument and appears to be the first time anyone formally adds UFO-type experiences to the category of ritualized rites of passage because they have “many structural and functional likenesses to other initiatory occasions” (Ibid., p. 124). The author shows how these similarities are congruent with Joseph Campbell’s explanation of the “hero’s journey” (Ibid., pp. 125-127). A particularly strong argument for the transformational quality of UFO-related experiences is that the trauma experienced often forces a new construct of reality, leading to a liberation from attachment to identity and even a feeling that the experiencer ceases to exist (Ibid., pp. 126-127). Furthermore, this liberation from attachment allows the experiencer to back away from the ego, fears, and personal limitations in such a way that they can finally understand their connection to Nature “whose continuous stream of communication we pretend not to hear” (Ibid., p. 132).

The Classic Abduction Experience

“Classic” abduction experiences typically proceed in the following manner: Seemingly out of nowhere, the person may be in bed

sleeping or in a car, either as passenger or driver – one woman was on a snowmobile (Mack, 1994, p. 33) – and may hear a hum or see a light without an identifiable source, and/or sense a presence, all of which signals a change in consciousness into a non-ordinary or holotropic state (Mack, 1994, p. 394). In this state, experiencers do not lose consciousness, although there is a period of missing time for which they cannot account later (John E. Mack Institute, n.d.). Furthermore, abduction experiencers “are always sure that they are not dreaming or imagining; rather they experience that they have moved into another reality, but one that is, nevertheless, altogether real” (Mack, 1994, p. 394). Although this shift in reality occurs while awake, it is a very *different* one, described by one experiencer “as if the alien beings break through a kind of screen, revealing a new reality to experience” (Ibid.). During this state, the experiencer has no control over themselves in any way as they are carried up to the light through walls, windows, or any other apparent obstacle; they may even see their home and earth recede as they are taken to a craft (Ibid.). Upon recalling the event, the experiencer’s first reaction is that this cannot possibly be real because it does not fit with any scientific laws of which we are aware; however, experiencers – including children – are sometimes witnessed by friends or relatives as missing, consequently leaving families in great distress (John E. Mack Institute, n.d.). “One of the things most difficult to accept is that this can actually have a literal, factual basis. Yet we must acknowledge that facts [that] do not fit still must be looked at” (Ibid.). The craft itself is often described as cold – both emotionally and physically – with a musty smell and computer-like consoles along the walls while its occupants “are engaged in a rather businesslike way in preparing to administer various procedures” (Mack, 1994, p. 394). The procedures have a medical-like quality to them, but the instruments used do not resemble any that are familiar (Ibid.). Just as it happens with dreams or visions, the eyes of the being one is engaged with elicit a strong emotional response; whether the being is “humanlike, animal, or something else, the detail most frequently commented on is the eyes” (Hufford, 1982, p. 63). In abduction experiences, the contents of one’s mind seem to be thoroughly revealed to the beings who use gazing or staring at the experiencer, often communicating telepathically

in a process that appears to commence through the eyes (Mack, 1994, p. 394). For a composite chart comparing elements of shamanic journeys to abduction phenomena, see Appendix B.

Recall that for those “individuals whose transpersonal crises have strong shamanic features,” as is the case with alien abduction phenomenon, “there is great emphasis on physical suffering” (Grof, C. & Grof, S., 1986, p. 10). Thus, the next phase of abduction phenomenon typically involves medical-like procedures administered by a “doctor or leader,” as described by experiencers, whom is often somehow familiar to the experiencer because the abductions typically began in childhood; thus, despite their resentment at the painful procedures, experiencers frequently feel a strong bond or intense love toward the “doctor” administering them (Mack, 1994, p. 394-395). The most frequently reported medical procedures are as follows:

“...taking of small tissue samples, probing of the head (which is usually felt to be related to taking information from the brain, monitoring the state of being for the experiencer, and inserting or removing of implants), and the insertion or application of odd instruments into or onto other parts of the body, including especially the abdomen, anus, and reproductive organs. Sperm samples are forcibly taken from men, and women experience the removal of ova; fertilized eggs, which may have been genetically altered, are implanted, and later there is the eventual removal of the pregnancy” (Ibid., p. 395).

In follow-up abductions, the experiencer may be shown hybrid (“alien” and human) offspring and asked to hold and nurture the infants and small children (Ibid.). The terror experienced by the abductee at everything happening to them seems to be mitigated by some kind of “anesthetizing energy that the aliens administer with their hands or rodlike instruments” (Ibid.). The beings reportedly have a particular interest in human sexual and emotional aspects of their lives (Ibid.). Recall that it took Black Elk about nine years to verbalize his experience and note that abduction experiencers share this same

challenge, such that remembering the events later is usually incredibly difficult and traumatizing:

“When the experiences are recalled consciously, or during hypnotic regressions, the abductees go through an emotional *reliving* of great intensity and power. Otherwise, quite controlled individuals may writhe, perspire, and scream with fear and rage, or cry with appropriate sadness, as they remember their abduction experiences. This emotional expression appears altogether authentic to those who are unfamiliar with the abduction phenomenon and witness it for the first time... There has not, as yet, come to my attention in any case an alternative explanation for the trauma of the abduction experiences that my clients are reporting in such overwhelming and vivid detail” (Ibid.).

Mack, a veteran psychologist of nearly forty years prior to working with abduction experiencers, clarifies several reasons that alien abduction phenomenon cannot simply be dismissed psychiatrically: “the consistency of the accounts, the incidence among young children, the mysterious scars, the occasional witness corroborations, the sometimes physical absence of experiencers, and the notable lack of any evident psychopathology among them” (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 140). Indeed, the accounts of abduction phenomenon have a worldwide distribution (Mack, 1994, p. 9). A Roper Poll found that an estimated four million Americans have been abducted; oddly, the poll only drew from 119 respondents, “which critics found ludicrous” (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 110). Nevertheless, after Whitley Strieber (1987) wrote his landmark book *Communion*, he began receiving more than 10,000 letters *every month*; between publication in 1987 through 2000, Strieber received more than half-a-million letters with great detail regarding experiences that appeared so similar to Strieber’s (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p.32). Furthermore, another poll conducted in Canada in 1997 reported that approximately three million Canadians have seen UFOs (UFO Evidence, 1997). Perhaps, then, the Roper Poll results are more accurate than skeptics initially thought.

If the reader struggles to reconcile these reported experiences that seem exceptionally bizarre to the point of some kind of mania, remember that the experiencers themselves struggle much more. As Mack reports, one of his patients went through incredible terror when he relived the experience during a relaxation exercise:

“He had a sperm sample taken from him against his will, and he was screaming and yelling on the bed as I worked with him [during a relaxation exercise]. At the end he said, “You know, John, the physical terror is minuscule compared to the terror of acknowledging that this is real, of having to look into the eyes of the aliens”” (Mack, 1995b, p. 104).

Many experiencers describe the events as “experiments” conducted by the beings but recall that the ego observer (i.e., “I,” the conscious mind) who creates a particular reality must be bypassed so the new energy patterns can transform the experiencer (Woodman & Dickson, 1997, p. 192). This suggests that rather than experiments, the “procedures” are customized to what one’s unconscious mind desperately needs to bring forth. Perhaps it is as one woman relayed, “...they’re not here to do experiments on me – I hate that word and so do they – [but] to show things and explain” (Mack, 2011, p. 83). If this is true, what exactly are they explaining?

“We Don’t Understand Why You Choose Destruction”

After several years of exploring abduction phenomenon with patients and colleagues, Mack drew some conclusions about the potential meaning behind reported abductions. First, “the abduction phenomenon by its demonstration that control is impossible, even absurd, and its capacity to reveal our wider identity in the universe, invites us to discover the meaning of our “power” in a deeper, spiritual sense” (Mack, 1994, p. 214). Secondly, he felt that the phenomenon was chiefly concerned with two particular aspects specifically related to transformation: 1.) changing human consciousness to prevent the destruction of Earth, noting that nearly all experiencers receive information about Earth’s destruction and are compelled to act upon it, and 2.) joining two species for a new evolutionary form (Ibid., p. 413).

“The information that abductees receive is concerned primarily with the fate of the earth in the wake of human destructiveness” (Ibid., p. 396). As one experiencer named Paul noted when speaking from an alien point of view, “We don’t understand why you choose destruction” (Ibid., p. 403). Abductees regularly report being shown apocalyptic images of nuclear destruction and Earth’s environment annihilated by pollution or “toxic clouds” (Ibid., p. 396). For example, two different experiencers

“...were shown great black clouds or “blobs” suffocating earth’s living systems, the effect presumably of environmental catastrophe. A number of abductees have been shown apocalyptic images of the earth itself literally cracked open or broken up, followed by elaborate triage scenes in which some people will die, others will survive in some way on earth, and still others will be transported to some other place where human life will continue in a new way...Although the alien beings seem to be intervening to alter our consciousness in such a way that our aggression would be reduced, they seem genuinely puzzled regarding the degree of our apparently mindless or gratuitous destructiveness.” (Ibid.).

Shaman and experiencer Sequoyah Trueblood, “an enrolled member by blood of the Choctaw nation” (Mack, 2011, p. 181), explains that abduction phenomenon is happening because the Archetypal Masculine is far too imbalanced: “Male energy, male aggression, is out of control, he says, and we must learn to “respect and honor the woman for her life-bringing,” and the gentle energy of the woman “which moderates male aggression.” (Ibid., p. 193).

Surrender

The shift in consciousness abductees experience through contact with the beings seems to open them up for more than a simple change in thinking. Just as was reported with shamanic initiations, some abductees experience “great cycles of birth, life, and death, repeating over stretches of time...Tubes, passageways, threads et cetera may be literally seen, or passed through or along physically, but at the same

time they symbolically represent important transitions from one state of being to another” (Mack, 1994, p. 398). Recall that shamanic initiations facilitate the transmission of supernatural knowledge and healing power from various kinds of semi-divine beings who may appear in human or animal form, leading the initiate to experience “an upsurge of extraordinary powers and impulses to heal” (Grof, C. & Grof, S., 1986, p. 10-11), as well as healing themselves from shamanic illness (Eliade, 1975, p. 88). There is also evidence that their abduction encounters result in healed “conditions ranging from pneumonias and leukemia to limbs paralyzed due to muscle atrophy from poliomyelitis. Furthermore, many abductees seem to gain powers themselves as healers” (Mack, 1994, p. 398). However, just as it is for shamanic initiates who do not begin healing and transformation until they acknowledge and surrender to the experience, so it is for abduction experiencers:

“The sense of separation from all the rest of creation breaks down and the experience of oneness becomes an essential aspect of the evolution of the abductees’ consciousness... As their experiences are brought into full consciousness, abductees seem to feel increasingly a sense of oneness with all beings and all of creation. This is often expressed through a special love of nature and a deep connection with animals and animal spirits. Sometimes there is a strong identification with one type of animal” (Ibid., p. 408).

One of the most traumatic aspects of the experiences is the utter helplessness or complete loss of control one feels in the encounter or upon recalling it under the guidance of a professional. It is as if the experience is somehow ““designed” to bring about a kind of ego death from which spiritual growth and the expansion of consciousness may follow” (Ibid., p. 399). An experiencer named Victor was told by a being who abducted him that it was his “acquiescence” or surrender that would transform everything about him, including emotions, cognitive thoughts, perceptions, and even his “style of functioning” in the world (Ibid., p. 50). What frequently happens among abductees who have surrendered to the experiences is “this very powerful ecological

consciousness that emerges from people that would not be particularly environmentally minded or transformational but that seems to be an outgrowth of these experiences” (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 105). Surrender leading to deep transformation of consciousness, however, only occurred with Mack’s patients “when [we] worked intensely with their experiences in a nonordinary (sic) state of consciousness” (Mack, 1995b, p. 104). The trauma and nature of abduction phenomenon is so close to shamanic initiation that

“[e]xperiencers are drawn to shamanism...because the phenomena of the abduction-encounter experience, the light phenomena, the vibrations, the trauma, moves them into realms much like shamanic initiation, into the realms of symbol, of metaphor...So they get to know shamans often, they’re drawn to conferences where shamanism is being discussed. And many experiencers will speak of their own encounters as if...they are initiates. They have that transformational power” (Mack, 2002).

The experiences are indeed so transformative that their worldviews completely and permanently shift and continue evolving in an entirely new direction that includes the whole of Nature, compelling many abductees to give up better-paying jobs to become Earth-preserving activists and healers in various service professions (Mack, 2011, p. 299).

Alien abduction phenomenon is typically intense to the point of traumatic and always inexplicable. The average American, for example, often assumes abduction reports are a hoax people create to draw attention to themselves. While those situations certainly exist, many actual experiencers – upon sharing what happened to them as they try to make sense of it themselves – lose spouses and families and are fired from their jobs, institutionalized, and sometimes driven to suicide when they share their experience (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p. 326). The traumatizing nature of abductions, primarily caused by ontological shock, is why Mack referred to them as “God’s sledge-hammer approach” to human transformation (Blumenthal, 2021, p. 159). For an experiencer named Karin (pronounced “Car-in”) the transformation that

occurs from the abduction phenomenon feels like she is “punching” herself “out of an egg. It’s like having to be born” (Mack, 2011, p. 113). Being born is, of course, one of the most intense experiences humans go through, many often dealing with birth traumas late into their lives (Metzner, 2011, pp. 10-13).

What About the Babies?

Retired Associate Professor of History at Temple University, Dr. David Jacobs, spent more than forty years amassing and analyzing data from abduction experiencers (Jacobs, n.d.). Rather than taking a Feminine/metaphoric perspective of the phenomenon, Jacobs takes a Masculine/literalist approach and, as such, sees abduction and the so-called “hybrid breeding program” (mixing human and alien genetics to create a new species) as a threatening agenda of domination for selfish purposes, as is made clear by his published work literally called *The Threat: Revealing the Secret Alien Agenda* (Jacobs, 1988). The literalist perspective is most common in the West, even among other academics such as a recognized pioneer in studies of consciousness and transformation, Ralph Metzner, PhD. His book *The Roots of War and Domination* (2008) draws on Nietzsche’s concept of master/slave morality to make the case that humans have learned to dominate each other from the alien overlords who created and dominated them (Metzner, 2008, p. 58-59). While there is nothing inherently wrong with taking the literalist approach, just as with the Sciences, it fails to look at the whole picture and thus misses a great deal of context that provides greater shape and clarity to the information under study. Conversely, taking a big-picture, metaphoric perspective – one that is interdimensional – changes the focus to human consciousness and spiritual development (Mack, 1994, p. 55-56). Recall the experiencer Victor who had his sperm forcibly removed: the being “...explained that they needed his sperm for “their needs...to create special babies” and “for work we’re doing to help the people on your planet” (Ibid.). This perspective led Mack to speculate that perhaps

“...the hybrid “project” itself might be thought of as a reflection not so much of biological procreation or colonization but as an expression of an evolution of consciousness...If we could allow

the possibility of an interpenetration of consciousness and matter, or even that physical images, or the physical world itself, could be manifestation of consciousness or spirit, then the apparent and sometimes real physicality of the human/alien sexual and reproductive process could be seen as the expression in concrete form of a change in human identity or connection in the universe.” (Mack, 2011, p. 139).

Why This is Happening: The Return of the Archetypal Feminine

Indigenous elders from the Americas and beyond have been warning for a long time through prophecies that “exploitative behavior of humans [is] manifesting, and will be manifesting, in potentially near-total collapse of our planetary civilization” (Metzner, 2008, p. 74). This brings to mind examples like Toltec prophecies and the Mayan calendar signaling the end of one age and the start of another during this time in which humans live. This seems to be aligned with “an aspect of a larger reigning principle in nature, namely a tendency toward balance or harmony, a kind of homeostatic corrective principle that manifest when extremes of imbalance occur” (Mack, 2011, p. 288). No academic resources are required as “proof” when one looks at the state of the global environment – ecologically and societally – to recognize extreme imbalances occurring at this moment and which continue ramping up to catastrophic levels, including the potential to destroy the planet with nuclear weapons. In any culture, when imbalances occur, “there are phenomena variously called Trickster...that interfere when the culture gets kind of set, [so] the Tricksters tend to break that up” (Mack, 2002). They are everywhere and ancient: in Greek culture it was Hermes and in the American West, it is Coyote. “When the culture gets too far and pushes away the darker parts of ourselves we don’t like to look at, the Trickster...tend[s] to tear, rip it up” (Ibid). Inexplicable objects observed and tracked by naval pilots only to have them suddenly disappear; experiencing an abduction and being ostracized upon sharing the experience; watching an owl suddenly morph into a small grey being with huge eyes; these

are all indicative of the Trickster archetype. Perhaps they are part of what Mack speculates is a “cosmic corrective,” as he explains:

“By this I mean that many of the abductees I am working with have come to understand that there is an imbalance in us requiring a cosmic adjustment, an intervention from outside ourselves. Yet the only language we understand, particularly in Western culture is the language of the physical, that of the embodied creature. So if any intelligence wants to reach us, it must come to us in the physical form. And that is why the aliens enter our world in the familiar high-tech way they do” (Mack, 1995b, p. 107).

Mack appears to be onto something, especially when considering that Westerners do not even pay attention to their dreams, a powerful means of the unconscious mind to bring that which is hidden to the surface; neither do they pay attention to the messages from Nature because Western philosophy is grounded in separation from Nature. Conversely, Eastern philosophy has plenty of room for these kinds of experiences, with the Dalai Lama even pointing out that the ecological devastation incurred by humans not only destroys the habitats of the plant and animal worlds, but that it also reaches into the realms where spirits reside; Mack adds, “In the context of the planet’s crisis they have had no choice, but must find some way, however difficult, to come to us” (Mack, 1994, p. 419).

The experiencer Victor was told by an alien being, “Humans have to learn how to work on this planet with the laws of nature and not plunder earth,” to use the “raw materials” in “the way they should be used.” Then “the earth will rebalance itself” (Ibid., p. 60). He was also told, “Listen to the Earth, Victor...you can hear the anguish of the spirits. You can hear the wailing cries of the imbalances...the earth’s skin is going to swat some bugs off” that do not know how “to work in symbiotic harmony” with it” (Ibid., p. 57). Another experiencer named Carlos Diaz was told, “You are killing your planet. Your planet is dying” (Mack, 2011, p. 97). These are just a very few examples of the kinds of information communicated to experiencers by the beings who

tend to transmit information in allegorical terms a message of eco-spiritual and emotional instability (Mack, 1994, p. 57). The transformational nature of the abduction experience regularly emerges through a profound connection to Earth. For example, after reconciling her abduction events, experiencer Sue Jamieson says that as she stood on her porch one morning following her abduction experiences, “I suddenly had an overwhelming feeling of illness, of sickness, of poison. I know this sounds weird, but this is the way it was. I felt like I was the planet and that I was suffering.” When she looks at plants at the side of the road, another experiencer named Andrea said, they seem to scream to her to help them: “I can feel the plant. I can feel the destruction of what’s happening” (Mack, 2011, p. 106). Westerners are quick to dismiss these kinds of expressions in people as “flaky,” but consider the view of the Navajo, for example. For them, “religion and healing are the same. The psychic connection with nature is the source of – and at the same time is inseparable from – spiritual and physical health. Illness is a “disconnection” with one’s psychic roots” (Bernstein, 2008, p. 8). Indeed, this is the essence of ecopsychology in that those psychological and physiological imbalances which manifest through all kinds of body-mind illnesses are directly tied to our disconnection with Nature, or as depth psychologist Stephen Aizenstat says, “Our alienation from the rhythms of the natural world contribute in a direct way, to our physical suffering (Aizenstat, 1995, p. 99).

Reflect now on the work of Jungian analyst Jerome S. Bernstein who describes “[t]he psychic space where the hyper-developed and overly rational western ego is in the process of reconnecting with its split-off roots in nature is what I call the Borderland” (Bernstein, 2008, p. 8). Bernstein is speaking here of a “profound, psychic process in which the very psychological nature and structure of the western ego is evolving through dramatic changes. It is becoming something more, and different from, what we have known in the past” (Ibid., p. 9). He describes “Borderland phenomena” as sacred, transpersonal, and Feminine (Ibid., p. 11), while explaining that those he labels as “Borderlanders” are people diagnosed through Psychology as having, for example, Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, as well

as certain physical conditions like fibromyalgia. Notice how the clarity Bernstein provides about Borderlanders sounds strikingly similar to abduction experiences:

“Borderland people personally experience, and must live out, the split from nature on which the western ego...has been built. They feel (not feel *about*) the extinction of species; they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals that are no longer permitted to live by their own instincts, and which survive only in domesticated states to be used as pets or food. Such people are highly intuitive. Many, if not most, are psychic to some degree, whether they know it or not. They are deeply feeling, sometimes to such a degree that they find themselves in profound feeling states that seem irrational to them. Virtually all of them are highly sensitive on the bodily level. They experience the rape of the land in their bodies, they psychically, and sometimes physically, gasp at the poisoning of the atmosphere. Often, they suffer from “environmental illness” (Ibid., p. 9). He adds that “...it has become increasingly clear to me that the phenomenon itself represents a kind of return of the repressed that is “designed” ...to break down this separation [between humans and nature] (Ibid., p. 35).

Bernstein explains that the transpersonal nature of Borderland experiences results in most of his patients not believing the reality of their own experiences, but rather pathological – as “crazy” – making them “more neurotic than would otherwise be the case” (Ibid., p. 11). This is reminiscent of Black Elk’s story when he was afraid to tell his people the shamanic vision he saw and of abduction experiencers who are afraid to share their stories because they seem absurd, crazy. And yet, when comparing shamanic initiates and abduction experiencers to Borderlanders, it suggests that these sometimes-intense, nature-based experiences are likely not actually extraordinary, but quite common, particularly considering the remarkable similarities between shamanic illness and Borderlanders.

Solution

In writing about ecopsychology as a branch of psychology that explores and synthesizes the human relationship to Earth as “far more than an intellectual or therapeutic project” (Mack, 1995, p. 279), Mack says that those who open themselves up to their relationship with nature, “discovering their “ecological selves,”” often seem to encounter disturbing images, bad smells, and other psychological experiences suggesting the Earth’s desecration in their dreams, fantasies, and deeper consciousness” (Ibid, p. 284). As demonstrated throughout this paper, the openness can include terrifying experiences as the individual ultimately encounters the deepest and darkest parts of their psyche through bizarre, and apparently threatening archetypal projections. If, however, the person is not ready to confront the darker parts of themselves with the help of a professional who can provide context for the experiences, the results can be devastating; this was made clear through Strieber’s telling of all the experiencers he knows who lost their jobs, friends, and family members, and even took their own lives because they simply could not reconcile the experience without context.

Retired emergency room physician Dr. Stephen Greer refers to himself as the “Father of the Disclosure movement” (Sirius Disclosure, n.d.), an effort to uncover information the United States government allegedly keeps from the public regarding alien life and technologies. Gaining popularity through various media such as press conferences and a series of quality documentaries, Greer’s film *Close Encounters of the Fifth Kind* (Mazolla, 2020) explains to viewers a method he formulated for *intentionally* connecting psychically with alien beings to initiate peaceful contact. On the surface, Greer’s approach seems positive, like an intergalactic outreach program of sorts. However, it is potentially highly irresponsible when considering that *instigating* this kind of connection can have a detrimental impact if the person is not ready to face their darker selves. These beings are reflections of us, reflections of the parts of ourselves we bury through unaddressed trauma and social conditioning. Meaning, those who induce the

experience are, quite literally, starting an initiation process almost certainly before they are ready. Simply entering into relationship or contact with these other forms of nature sounds like it has positive potential, but as this paper has demonstrated, these intense types of initiation can be exceptionally dangerous without the guidance and context offered by a shaman or psychological professional familiar with the radically transformational nature of psycho-spiritual initiation processes. Thus, the folks Greer recruits for nightly outdoor contact events do not know what they are actually requesting.

The psychological impact of the ontological shock alone – that is, the moment when the initiate realizes that everything they were certain about regarding their existence is shattered, leaving one in a state of shock and simultaneously filled with terror – is radically life-altering. However, working with a shaman or psychologist who is familiar with these kinds of experiences and can bring context to them, allows the initiate to integrate their new understanding of reality into their entire life, facilitating the transformation of consciousness for which initiations experiences are meant. Specialized mental health referrals and support services for those with anomalous experiences and other psychospiritual difficulties can be found through organizations like Spiritual Emergence Network (spiritualemergence.org) and the Tyler Institute (tylerinstitute.com).

Conclusion

Let me be explicit: I am saying that alien abduction phenomenon mirrors shamanic initiations and should thus be considered a form of archetypal initiation. When abduction experiencers connect with professionals to work through their experiences in non-ordinary states of consciousness, it can facilitate healing and lead to a deep transformation of consciousness directly connected to the nature-based consciousness of shamans and indigenous peoples around the world. Furthermore, the Universe appears to be in a transitional stage from one age to the next, from a distinctly masculine path which was overly destructive to a new path

that brings in the Feminine to *balance* the Masculine energy. I am convinced that we are currently experiencing a quickening, of sorts, as if Earth herself is undergoing a rite of passage, dying to the old and giving birth to something new. In fact, astronomer Dr. Jennifer West recently published a paper with her theory that Earth and our solar system are literally passing through a magnetic tunnel (Lea, 2021). Tunnels are archetypal images that show up in dreams, visions, and stories as places of transition, specifically harkening back to the universal human experience of passing through the birth canal. And because we seem to be in this space of transition back into balance that includes a radical shift toward nature-based consciousness, I am also convinced through my own spontaneous shamanic initiation experience, those about which I have learned from others around the world, and the volume of unexplained illnesses of the body-mind, particularly among Westerners – many of which can easily be classified as “shamanic illness” – that spontaneous, spiritual initiations are happening en masse. A change in consciousness that aligns with Nature marks the return of the Archetypal Feminine.

Welcome to the New Age of Mother Nature. ¹

¹ What happens when someone undergoes an extraordinary and spiritually transformative experience but lacks mental imagery, a key component during initiations? For a different perspective on initiations that includes some clues to my personal experience, see Appendix C.

References

- Aizenstat, S. (1995). Jungian psychology and the world unconscious (pp. 92-100). In Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A.D. (Eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth healing the mind* [Foreward]. Berkley, CA: Counterpoint Press.
- Alexander, B. C. (n.d.). Rites of passage. In *Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/rite-of-passage>
- Assagioli, R. (1986). Self-realization and psychological disturbances. *ReVISION*, 8(2), pp. 21-31.
- Bernstein, J. S. (2008). *Living in the borderland: The evolution of consciousness and the challenge of healing trauma*. Routledge.
- Blumenthal, R. (2021). *The believer: Alien encounters, hard science, and the passion of John Mack*. High Road Books.
- Bobroff, G. S. (2014). *Crop circles, Jung, and the reemergence of the archetypal feminine*. North Atlantic Books.
- Brown, L.R. (1995). Ecopsychology and the environmental revolution: An environmental foreward (pp. xiiiv-xvi). In Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A.D. (Eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth healing the mind* [Foreward]. Berkley, CA: Counterpoint Press.
- Bryan, C.D.B. (1995). *Close encounters of the fourth kind: Alien abduction, UFOs, and the conference at M.I.T.* Knopf.
- Campbell, J. (1973). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton University Press.
- Eliade, M. (1958). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Harcourt.
- Eliade, M. (1975). *Rites and symbols of initiation: Mysteries of birth and rebirth*. Harper Torchbooks.
- Eliade, M. (2004). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton University Press.

Grof, C. & Grof, S. (1986). Spiritual emergency: The understanding and treatment of transpersonal crises. *ReVISION*, 8(2), pp. 7-20.

Grof, S. (2008). Brief history of transpersonal psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 27, pp. 46-54.

Grof, S., & Grof C. (Eds). (1989). *Spiritual emergency: When personal transformation becomes a crisis*. Tarcher | Putnam.

Harvard Medical School. (1995, August 3). *Professor John Mack* [Press release]. http://johnemackinstitute.org/1995_0803_Harvard_Medical_School_Press_Release.pdf

Hillman, J. (1995). A psyche the size of the Earth (p.xxvi) In Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A.D. (Eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth healing the mind*. Counterpoint Press.

Hufford, D. J. (1982). *The terror that comes in the night: An experience-centered study of supernatural assault traditions*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hurd, R. (n.d.). *Big dreams and archetypal visions*. Dream Studies Portal. <https://dreamstudies.org/big-dreams-archetypal-visions/>

Jacobs, D. M. (n.d.). *Biography: Dr. David M. Jacobs*. <https://www.davidmichaeljacobs.com/bio/>

Jacobs, D. M. (1988). *The threat: Revealing the secret alien agenda*. Simon & Schuster.

Jamieson, S. & Mack, J. (2003). Shamanic journeys and UFO encounters: A consideration of two avenues to an expanded reality. *Shamanism*, 16 (1).

John E. Mack Institute. (n.d.). *Biography of John E. Mack*. <http://johnemackinstitute.org/biography-of-john-e-mack/>

Jung, C. (2002). *Flying saucers*. Routledge.

Kalsched, D. (2013). *Trauma and the soul: A psycho-spiritual approach to human development and its interruption*. Routledge.

Kalwet, H. (1992). *Shamans, healers, and medicine men*. Shambhala.

Lea, R. (2021). The sun could be dragging Earth through a vast cosmic tunnel in space. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/sun-dragging-earth-through-cosmic-tunnel-space-north-polar-spur-fan-region-1640264>

Lieberman, R. (Director). (1993). *Fire in the sky* [Film]. Joe Wizen & Todd Black.

Mack, J. E. (1993). Nonordinary states of consciousness and the accessing of feelings (pp. 357-370). In Ablon, S., Brown, D., Khantjian, E., & Mack, J. (Eds), *Human Feelings: Explorations in Affect Development and Meaning*. The Analytic Press.

Mack, J. E. (1994). *Abduction: Human encounters with aliens*. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Mack, J. E. (1995a). The politics of species arrogance (pp. 279-287). In Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A.D. (Eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth healing the mind*. Counterpoint Press.

Mack, J. E. (1995b). The UFO abduction phenomenon's challenge to consensus reality. *Primal Renaissance: The Journal of Primal Psychology*, 1(1), 96-110. <http://johnemackinstitute.org/1992/06/the-ufo-abduction-phenomenon-what-does-it-mean-for-the-transformation-of-human-consciousness/>

Mack, J. E. (2002). *Anomalous experiences and the transformation of consciousness* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/5I2KX9ercFQ>

Mack, J. (2011). *Passport to the cosmos: Human transformation and alien encounters*. White Crow Books. (Original work published 1999)

Mazolla, M. (Director). (2020). *Close encounters of the fifth kind* [Film]. 1091 Pictures & Star Contact.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Archetype. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/archetype>

Metzner, R. (2011). *The roots of war and domination*. Regent Press.

Moore, R. L. (2001). *The archetype of initiation: Sacred space, ritual process, and personal transformation*. Xlibris.

Ring, K. (1990). *The omega project: Near-death experiences, UFO encounters, and mind at large*. Quill.

Roszak, T. (1995) Where psyche meets gaia (pp. 1-17). In Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A.D. (Eds), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth healing the mind*. Counterpoint Press.

Sirius Disclosure. (n.d.). *About Dr. Stephen Greer*.
<https://siriusdisclosure.com/about-us/>

Strieber, W. (1987). *Communion*. Beech Tree Books.

Strieber, W. (1999). *Whitley Strieber interviews John E. Mack, M.D.* [Interview]. John E. Mack Institute. <http://johnemackinstitute.org/1999/11/whitley-strieber-interviews-john-e-mack-m-d/>

Strieber, W. & Kripal, J. (2016). *The super natural: A new vision of the unexplained*. Tarcher | Penguin.

Tart, C. (2009). *The end of materialism: How evidence of the paranormal is bringing science and spirit together*. New Harbinger Publications and Noetic Books.

Tedlock, B. (2005). *The woman in the shaman's body: Reclaiming the feminine in religion and medicine*. Bantam Books.

Thompson, K. (1989). Wrestling with angels: The mythic dimensions of the UFO phenomenon. *ReVISION*, 11(3), 35-47.

Thompson, K. (1989). The UFO encounter experience as a crisis of transformation. In Grof, S. & Grof, C. (Eds), *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Tarcher | Putnam.

UFO Evidence. (1997). *Canadian UFO poll: 3 million Canadians have seen UFOs*. UFO Evidence: Scientific Study of the UFO Phenomenon and the Search for Extraterrestrial Life. <http://ufoevidence.org/documents/doc996.htm>

Woodman, M. & Dickson, E. (1997). *Dancing in the flames: The dark goddess in the transformation of consciousness*. Shambhala.

Zerban, J. (n.d.). *Archetypal masculine & feminine forces – The keys to creation*. Gestalt Reality: <https://www.gestaltreality.com/2013/02/03/archetypal-masculine-feminine-forces-the-key-to-creation/>

Appendix A

The following chart compares a sample of the qualities of Archetypal Feminine and Masculine. This information was collected in part from *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Human Consciousness* (Woodman & Dickson, 1996). It is, however, a mostly intuitive list gained through experience and personal research. Similar comparisons such as the Gestalt approach taken by Jonathan Zerban (n.d.) are simply found through search engines.

Archetypal Feminine	Archetypal Masculine
Yin	Yang
Flow	Structure
Dark	Light
Symbolic	Literal
Receptive	Giving
Communal	Individual
Internally oriented	Externally oriented
Instinctual	Procedural
Earth	Sun
Moist	Dry
Wild	Tame/Controlled
Creative	Destructive
Birthing	Achieving
Nurturing	Protective
Macroscopic	Microscopic

Appendix B

Following is a chart comparing some aspects of shamanic journeys to the abduction phenomenon. It is a composite, not comprehensive. The shamanic journey criteria come from Christina and Stanislav Grof (1986, pp. 10-11). The abduction phenomenon criteria come from years of personal research and are discussed in great detail in two books by John E. Mack, M.D., including *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (1994) and *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformations and Alien Encounters* (2011).

Shamanic Journeys	Abduction Phenomena
Guidance of ancestral spirits	Often assume these are spirit guides
Attacks by demons	Often perceive the entities as demons
Exposure to unimaginable emotional and physical tortures	Often experience unimaginable emotional and physical tortures
Ascent to supernal realms	Many are taken aboard ships high in the sky and to worlds far from Earth
Share a general atmosphere of horror and inhuman suffering	Typically struggle to put into words the terror and excruciating pain they often experience
Obtains supernatural knowledge and power to heal from various beings in human, animal, or other form	Often receive supernatural knowledge and ability to heal themselves and others from beings in human, animal, and alien form
Elements of ascent or magical flight	Often lifted off the ground and pulled aboard a craft through a beam of light
Special connection with elements of nature and experience communication with animals or animal spirits	Typically develop special connection to (and a fierce desire to protect) nature, communication with beings presenting as animals
Feel an upsurge of extraordinary powers and impulses to heal	Often gifted with psychic and healing powers with a compulsion to heal people and Earth

Appendix C

Now that the academic requirements have been met, I am compelled to explain some of the struggles in both writing this paper and my experience. What follows is an informal letter regarding some of the practical application of the above information to my own experience. Like me, you may be left with more questions than answers and that is a good thing. Everyone has to figure this out for themselves.

Dear Reader,

When I began writing this paper, I thought my initiation was over. It spanned years in various stages and I truly thought I was done. I wrote it with my experiences in mind up to that point and it made sense according to this context. However, as I came to the last two sections of the paper where I addressed the Solution and Conclusion, I was thrust into the final phase of initiation which started on August 11, 2022 and did not end until November 22. The entire experience was like a dream that kept shifting and yet, was so profoundly real that it catapulted me into a cacophony of energetic, physical, emotional, and mental chaos that included both profound beauty and excruciating pain...a mixture of “Heaven” and “Hell.” It was as if the process of writing the paper itself was tied to the initiation and I had no choice but to go through it before the paper could finally be completed. During that time, it was like “I” was gone, somewhere else, in some other space or dimension akin to what Rod Serling brilliantly termed the Twilight Zone: that liminal space where one is not quite awake but not fully asleep either. And yet, I was always aware, always consciously awake...somehow. Like shamanic initiates, I was kept in an altered state (i.e., Grof’s “holotropic state”) through most of the process via malnourishment, sleep deprivation, and plant medicine.

My academic foci have been grounded in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and nature, most of which include an enormous amount of writing. Of all the papers I have written and struggled through, none of them compared to writing this one. I had a misguided idea that it would simply write itself, but it was the most

grueling intellectual, emotional, and spiritual process I have encountered, despite necessarily leaving out so much more information that could easily be compiled into a book. I often compare writing papers to giving birth. This was, hands down, my biggest baby. It is better that I nearly completed the paper before the last phase of initiation began, a months-long waking nightmare, because I would not have had a clue what to say in the aftermath. Interestingly, since my initiation ended, I reread my paper three times and have been flabbergasted by how much of my experience aligned even more with what I previously wrote. As if I had only partially known what I was talking about, but having read it afterward, it is more like I wrote my own therapy, my own medicine that I would need to get through this with some semblance of sanity.

I suppose the most impending question on your mind is whether my experience aligned with abduction phenomenon. The simple answer is no. There is an important factor in my overall experience that shaped it in a different way than those described above: I do not have mental imagery. This neurological condition is referred to as aphantasia, the inability to see images in the mind's eye. When most people close their eyes and imagine an apple, for example, they can "see" the apple. I cannot. I have an *idea* of what it looks like but I cannot visualize it at all. As you have read above, mental imagery is a substantial part of the initiation process, as is imagination. However, I do not ever recall having used my visual imagination in my life by virtue of the fact that I do not have mental imagery. Not ever. Indeed, I have always been baffled by the concept of creating a new image, sound, or idea that has never existed, such as the case with music and story. Yet, in my initiation experience, I was flooded with ideas of images, but never able to actually *see* anything...in part. During my experience, my eyes would be closed and I could see something like wisps or outlines of shapes, including faces, animals, mythical creatures, and a *lot* of tunnels. But I have not experienced that since my initiatory experience ended. As I explained above, the Feminine speaks to us through imagination and intuition. A good way to think of this is through the Arts: music, film, storytelling, dance, sculpting...these are just some

examples of the creative Feminine that pours out of us through imagination. One way to identify that is through *feeling*. How does your favorite song make you *feel*? Have you ever looked at a painting and been *moved* somehow? Has a book or movie ever spoken to you in such a way that causes you reflect on your own life, to be touched by it profoundly and to somehow see your own reflection in that story or a character? That is the Feminine speaking to you. It is vastly different than working through a scientific formula or gathering facts from historical records, for example.

I spoke of the importance of sitting with the ambiguity of the topic, avoiding “projecting the supernatural and realizing it as the supernatural, that is, as *us* on some deeper level than the constructed ego – as consciousness itself” (Strieber & Kripal, 2016, p. 203). And yet, now that my experience has closed, I struggle to follow my own direction. The ambiguity has been more turmoil than helpful; but I also recognize that my mind, influenced by Western thought and society in general, wants desperately to find clear-cut answers to explain what happened to me. Was it real? Imagined? Did I do it to myself? When I examine it at the micro-level, that is through the lens of the Masculine, it is utterly absurd and nonsensical, if not delusional. But when looking at my experience through the lens of the Feminine, the big-picture perspective, a very different story emerges wherein I was seemingly dragged through hell to become healed on physical and spiritual levels in ways I never thought possible.

Recall John Mack’s explanation that despite the internal quality of universal archetypes, “the nature of their expression for human beings varies with the evolution of culture and shifts in the collective unconscious” (Mack, 2011, p. 308). This is something to which I can profoundly relate. Possibly because I do not have mental imagery and because I had never been able to use imagination, it is as if my experience was a convergence of ancient and modern myth alike, including Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Norse, and Christian myths as well as new myths that are expressed in modern forms of music, books, and film. Like abduction experiencers, mine was essentially focused on the return of the Feminine through destruction. Meaning, whether you call

it Armageddon, Ragnorok, or the Age of Aquarius, it all came down to the same thing: the ending of the age of domination through the Archetypal Masculine and the beginning of the new age of balance through the Archetypal Feminine, of Mother Nature. The information I learned during this time and its delivery method – often absurd, utterly fantastical, terrifying and traumatizing, and yet incredibly real – included layer upon layer of meaning that I had to explore and work through. My experience was very much like this passage from above:

Jung explains that the unconscious mind uses metaphoric language; that is, language that has multiple meanings, so rather than the “intentional clarity of conscious language[,] it is a condensation of numerous data, many of them subliminal, whose connection with conscious content is unknown” (Jung, 1959, p. 89)...Because the information comes from the unconscious mind and is heavy with seemingly nonsensical imagery, Stanislav Grof coined these non-ordinary states of consciousness *holotropic* states where we “encounter a rich spectrum of transpersonal experiences that help us to reclaim our full identity” (Grof, 2008, p. 48). The identity Grof refers to is that which is found within the Unconscious where the darker parts of the Self get buried due to influences like trauma and societal structures that determine acceptable behavior. When encountering the darkness of the Unconscious in holotropic states, the imagery and overall experience can seem fantastical, often terrifying and traumatizing, and include a powerful realization that despite one’s inability to reconcile the reality of the experience, it is somehow “realer than real” (Tart, 2009, p. 190).

In my extremely bizarre, traumatizing, and genuine experience, it was as if the rebalancing of the Cosmos was happening *through* me, a concept for which the word “absurd” does not feel remotely adequate. Was it really happening through me or was it a metaphor, something taking place within me as an expression of what’s happening on a cosmic scale? From an indigenous perspective, I believe the answer to

that whole question is simply “yes.” But from a pragmatic perspective, the latter makes the most sense.

Perhaps the best explanation of my experience can be summed up with this passage from above:

As with all mythology, it is the act of peering into the dream to recognize the dreamer’s vulnerabilities, “...the surrendering of all ego-pretense and the acceptance of one’s own neediness – [that] opens up deeper resources in the psyche/world. “Angels” appear. In psychoanalysis, dreams appear in which non-ordinary or miraculous “presences” materialize” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 300). Consider the possibility that this is also what happens during shamanic initiations and alien abduction phenomena: initiates are confronted with their unconscious Self that expresses as powerful psychic projections in the forms of magical animals, spirit beings, what we currently identify as “aliens,” and other “strange and monstrous” (Eliade, 1975, p. 19) images associated with spiritual transcendence...”

Now, however, after going through the last phase of initiation – a process that was both real *and* not real – I am truly uncertain as to whether my experiences were merely psychic projections of my unconscious Self or if it was something more. I have no idea how to synthesize what happened to me because the level of bizarre, of “strange and monstrous,” was so over-the-top, so ridiculous, and “crazy” sounding that it seems like it may be something more. And this is coming from an agnostic. Was I *simply* dealing with parts of myself? One essential component of my experience included the recognition that I no longer understood what love actually was. And yet, through this process I came to experience love in a way so profound, so expansive, that I do not yet even know how to deal with it. Was I just finally showing love to myself in ways to which I had previously kept shut? Or was I being *given* love from something beyond me entirely? I am struck by the above passage where I added Tart’s comment:

Transpersonal experiences are typically profoundly transformative, “both inspiring those experiencers with an

understanding of great love, compassion and nonordinary (sic) kinds of intelligence, and also making them more aware of the distorting and pathological limitations of their ordinary selves *that must be worked with and transformed for full psychological and spiritual maturity*” (emphasis added) (Tart, 2009, p. 372) – the very heart of this paper.

Now that my initiatory experience is over, with no tangible shaman to guide me through the trauma, I find myself where Tart (2009, p. 227-228) explains:

“...however, it’s often not a simple matter of starting out “ordinary,” having an extraordinary experience, and then “living happily ever after.” Years of confusion, conflict, and struggle may be necessary as you try to make sense of the NDE [and similar extraordinary experiences] and its aftermath, and to integrate this new understanding into your life. Part of that struggle and integration takes place on transpersonal levels that are very difficult to put into words, another part on more ordinary levels of questioning, changing, and expanding your worldview” (Ibid., pp. 227-228).

And as fantastical as my experience was, something I will never share publicly, I’m still left with Grof’s question: “Can [extraordinary experiences in non-ordinary states] be interpreted and dismissed as meaningless phantasmagoria produced by the pathological process afflicting the brain, yet to be discovered and identified by modern science, *or do they reflect objectively existing dimensions of reality, which are not accessible in the ordinary state of consciousness?*” (Emphasis added) (Grof, 2008, p. 49). Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath, I have struggled in this space as well: “In extreme cases, the reaction can be so intense as to become pathological, producing a state of depression and even despair, with suicidal impulses...an acute sense of unworthiness, a systematic self-depreciation and self-accusation, which may become so vivid as to produce the delusion that one is in hell, irretrievably damned” (Assagioli, 1986, p. 26). So, now, the thing to do is follow my own solution to the problem: I have to connect with

a shaman or psychological professional intimately familiar with initiation experiences to help me synthesize the trauma. And yet, I find myself so very reluctant to do so because that involves me actually sharing my experience. I'm in the same position as Bernstein's "Borderlanders" who never want to say what happened to them because it sounds so crazy.

My experience included two Awakenings, a wealth of spiritual development and growth, ceremonial instructions, a new name, and I learned ways to heal myself. My fibromyalgia is gone, something that should be impossible. A back injury I sustained in Crossfit about ten years ago was finally healed. Excruciating menstruation wherein I was essentially going through labor every month for a several years came to an end. Debilitating scar tissue throughout my torso has seemingly disappeared, also an impossibility from the perspective of Western medicine. In fact, if it wasn't for the profound healing I experienced, I wouldn't have a single "rational" explanation for what happened to me. While those close to me have witnessed profound changes in my overall being, the development, growth, and power I experienced also feels like it left me somehow. It's like it's there within my grasp but I'm so traumatized by what happened that I can't get back to it. Here I am reminded of the way Mack defined the pathogenic role of trauma in human development as "a fundamental state of helplessness and vulnerability and an inability to define, experience, express, or integrate disturbing effects that are brought about by such hurtful or threatening events. Trauma is thus the outcome of a relationship between the intrapsychic and the external worlds" (Mack, 1993, p. 361). I'm wallowing in ontological shock, my concept of "reality" *completely* shattered. I walked into my initiation fearlessly and came out terrified, feeling helpless and vulnerable without the ability to define or explain it. Recall Robert Moore's (2001) description regarding the core of initiation and the concept of the initiate being transformed into what is meant: a full human with keen awareness of all that has been buried in the unconscious body-mind. Am I simply terrified of what I found in there?

Regarding shamanic illness: Eliade explained that initiates become shamans *because* they are healed from a serious, often

inexplicable illness that is typically healed through the power of the beings by which one is being initiated (Eliade, 2004, p. 28). Western medicine has no explanation for fibromyalgia whatsoever. It is wildly debilitating, painful, with no apparent source and is therefore rendered incurable. Eastern medicine and holistic approaches lean toward muscle toxicity or neurological disfunctions, curable but with a lot of effort and time. This is why I came to see fibromyalgia as an opportunity in that it could easily be cast in the light of inexplicable, and thus, possibly a “shamanic illness.” Furthermore, Kripal explained shamanic illness as “a severe psychological trial or physical illness that effects a transformation of the future shaman’s being, that spiritually mutates him” (Streiber & Kripal, 2016, p. 193) – but healing does not begin until they acknowledge and surrender to the experience (Eliade, 1975, p. 88). My experience included both of those features wherein healing did not fully begin until I acknowledged what was happening to me and *surrendered* to the experience.

Christina and Stanislov Grof explained the core experience of shamanic journey as “a profound encounter with death and subsequent rebirth,” adding that while there are variations in the details of each ordeal, relative to the culture into which one is being initiated, “they all share the general atmosphere of horror and inhuman suffering” (Grof & Grof, 1986, pp. 10-11). This is something to which I can profoundly relate in my experience, including a seeming near death experience wherein I actually felt myself dying. It was incredibly peaceful and beautiful, like nothing I have ever experienced before, something I could not possibly understand just through reading or hearing of other NDEs.

Part of my terror came from what happens with abduction phenomenon in that I felt I had little-to-no agency in the ordeal. Though I was conscious of my experiences, much of what happened felt beyond my control. It was more like a mixture of an ability to exercise my will and simultaneously being stripped of it, even if only mentally and sometimes physically.

Keith Thompson (1989) explored the mythic dimensions of the UFO phenomenon using the lens of the god Proteus who never gives

clear answers. This was a constant part of my experience. Much of what was presented to me would be clear at first but as I dug further I found it either made no sense or I had to unpack its meaning, discovering multiple layers, and often never really knowing what I was supposed to do with them.

In sum, my experience – seemingly detachable from my lack of mental imagery – was like a mixture of shamanic initiation and abduction phenomenon in terms of psychological and physical trauma. Nevertheless, as I have demonstrated in the above paper, my entire experience aligns with *initiation*. It changed my understanding of consciousness as it relates to Nature, particularly in regard to planetary destruction and the need to act upon it. And yet, at the end of it, I am lost with no idea how to proceed. Much of the trauma and confusion has already calmed as I continue synthesizing my experience and I know that with proper guidance I will be able to sort through the maddening and painful aspects of it for integration into daily living. I know that I was initiated as a shamanic healer and yet I currently am terrified to walk that path. What if I accidentally open someone up to an experience like mine? I'm not willing to risk it. I need to be trained by tangible shamans who can walk me through the experiences properly rather than the spontaneous way it happened to me and is likely happening to many others around the world during this stage of transition.

Mack referenced abduction phenomenon as “God’s sledgehammer approach to transformation.” Yes. *Yes...*that is accurate. I thought I was on a gentle route compared to most shamanic initiates and those who have experienced abduction phenomenon, but in the end, a sledgehammer is an excellent analogy for what happened to me. When experiencers lack context, the results can be devastating. This is where I feel like I am now. Here I am reminded of a comment by abduction experiencer Whitley Strieber who said: “On that night in December 1985, the most essentially and powerfully feminine presence I have ever known came to me and had me dragged out of the house and essentially beaten until I realized that she was real and I was not dreaming. During those horrific moments, I awoke both physically and spiritually” (Strieber & Kripal, 2016). I can say similar, only without

the known presence of so-called *aliens* attending to my transformation. Even though I have some context, it still feels like my entire body-mind had the shit beaten out of it and now I have to figure out how to mend and put it all back together again...but in an entirely different way. I feel like the experiencer who said it's now as if she has a 5,000-piece puzzle of the sky to put together.

So, were my encounters and experiences simply reflections of me, of my buried consciousness? Or were they something more? Both? I truly have no idea and am left with far more questions at the end of my experience than when I entered into the final phase. I'm left questioning my paper but also relieved by it because it does give me context. Rarely, however, do people have context for these kinds of experiences and that is why this paper is so important. We need to change the way we think about anomalous experiences and illnesses, seeing them as opportunities for transformation rather than debilitations that render one as an outcast. If you can relate to this paper in any way, seek the guidance of a psychologist who understands initiatory experiences just as I am doing. Spiritual Emergence Network is an excellent starting point. And if you feel you have experienced spontaneous shamanic initiation, seek guidance and training from genuine shamanic healers such as those who teach through The Four Winds Society (thefourwinds.com).

May you be at peace,

Tiffany