

THE EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTER CONTINUUM HYPOTHESIS
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF
BELIEF MATERIALS

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Introduction

Most studies of UFOs have confused their structural and phenomenological natures due to inadequacies inherent in both the definition and classification of the subject matter. The acronym "UFO" in popular usage means "flying saucer," that is, a hardware product of an extraterrestrial technology. This reduction of the UFO question to the study of only "flying saucers" has negative effects upon the study of belief materials with regards to 1) definition, which determines our academic levels of involvement and the formulation of research priorities; 2) taxonomy, since our classification systems define the anatomy of the subject matter at hand; 3) epistemology, because encounters with nonordinary entities raise the issue of the nature and means of knowledge and "knowability"; and 4) ontology, around which revolves the question of socially discovering alternate realities through various cultural experiences and modes of being.

Current definitions and taxonomies do not display an appreciation for the complex interrelatedness of "flying saucers" with numerous folk belief traditions. A hypothesis that sees "flying saucers" on a continuum with numerous other cultural manifestations is offered here as an alternative to the conventional exclusionist's argument that "flying saucers" are completely discrete and self-contained. The continuum hypothesis provides a viable explanation of the occurrence of a specified group of human encounters with the extraordinary. This proposition,

based on substantial ethnographic data, is asserted as a provisional conjecture (working hypothesis) to guide investigations in the area of folk beliefs.

The Problem of Definition and Taxonomy

The term "flying saucer" did not come to hold its present position in popular usage until after the June 24, 1947, sighting of nine discs over Mt. Rainier, Washington, by pilot Kenneth Arnold of Boise, Idaho. A problem of terminology developed when numerous reports of other-than-disc-shaped phenomena were likewise termed "flying saucers." The military preferred the term "Unidentified Flying Object," UFO (pronounced Yoo-foe) to distinguish reports which sounded to them more like fairy tales from those reports which they believed to be reliable. Thus the key terms used to distinguish among uncertain aerial phenomena possessed an evaluative and qualitative nature rather than serving an accurate taxonomic function.

A major obstacle involved in securing adequate definitions of unorthodox phenomena like UFOs stems from the failure of the present terms to discriminate between descriptions and interpretations of events. For example, each word of the term "Unidentified Flying Object" contains an inherent confusion. "Unidentified" simply contains too broad a spectrum of possible phenomena, and thus it is too vague. "Flying" is also problematic because of its mechanistic connotation. We do not describe all aerial phenomena as "flying"; clouds and stars are not rightly said to "fly." "Object" begs the question, assuming what needs verification from case to case. Douglas Price-Williams (1974:224) maintains that in the term "Unidentified Flying Object" we find an assumption disguised as a description. In the case of the equally unsatisfying term "flying saucer" we have an explanation disguised as a description.

In addition to the confusion of terms discussed above there is an even greater challenge to accurate definition and taxonomy. A formal morphology indicating the primary, invariable features of the UFO experience eludes us at this time. As a result, there exists no precise definition that absolutely distinguishes UFOs from other phenomena and which assures the credibility of data embraced within the conceptual boundaries of the term. This imprecision undermines the effectiveness of our taxonomies which seek to establish order among the data by grouping together features shared by members of the same class of experience.

The most influential and most widely utilized classification system for UFOs was created by a Professor of Astronomy at Northwestern University, the late J. Allen Hynek (1974:31-32, 98-99). Hynek's typology includes 1) nocturnal lights in the sky; 2) daytime discs; 3) radar visual reports; 4) Close Encounters with space-craft or their occupants.¹ This schema has worked well for the obvious physical manifestations of UFOs, but it does not address the important issue of psychological and paranormal features (Schwarz 1980: 184-286, 400; Vallee 1975:6), nor the complex and plentiful descriptive and phenomenological connections among the above mentioned categories and related folklore traditions (Vallee 1969; Rojcewicz 1984), a weakness that the continuum hypothesis is intended to correct. Although people have different things in mind when they use the terms "Unidentified Flying Object" or "flying saucer," we can nevertheless assume that these terms do communicate something significant. This same problem of definition can be observed in other disciplines with reference to their major subject matter. Physicists have not defined the elusive properties of the atom, yet few deny its descriptive validity. Biologists have not defined the cell nor geneticists the gene. Anthropology has never

agreed upon a definition of "primitive" (Diamond 1974:118).

This same difficulty finds another analogue in folklore itself, wherein neither the discipline as a whole nor a single one of its genres have yet to be satisfactorily defined (Dundes 1980:21; Degh 1983:38-39). This is not to say that some invariable features do not exist, but only that Ufologists and folklorists alike have yet to discover them. It may be that in the case of UFOs the definitive components of the phenomena lie not in their perceivable anatomy, but in what they express, or how and why they occur.²

Description of the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum

In order to more fully understand the nature of the full spectrum of human confrontation with anomalous entities, the operative term "Extraordinary Encounter Continuum" is offered here. These entities can be referred to as "nonordinary," "unorthodox," "nonconventional," or "supernatural" insofar as they: 1) demonstrate spontaneous activity; 2) demonstrate the ability to produce images independent of sense perception, and 3) demonstrate complete control over these images (Jung 1958:66-67); 4) represent an actual order qualitatively different from our everyday world which 5) interacts with our material world in complex ways. 6) Belief in such entities is cross-cultural.

Enumeratively defined, the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum refers to human confrontation with the anomalous, whether in the form of "beings" (e.g. extraterrestrials, fairies, monsters, etc.), "entities" (e.g. apparitions, energy forms, tulpas, etc.), "objects" (e.g. spacecraft, vimanas, fiery shields and crosses, etc.), or unusual light(s). The term "flying saucers" is but one descriptive and interpretive frame people employ after confrontations with a particular kind of nonordinary entity along the

Extraordinary Encounter Continuum of experience. Encounters with the anomalous can occur as an abduction, out-of-body travel (OBE), near-death experience (NDE), shamanic journey, or combination of two or more of these forms. No individual encounter category is more important in itself than another. The predominance of attention given in this article to UFOs is arbitrary and could easily be focused upon another category of the continuum.

All the traditions along the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum are discrete but related. They are separate but not separated, like an individual's relationship to a hand. Although the traditions can be distinguished from each other, they nevertheless display similar complex patterns of appearance and activity. The continuum hypothesis maintains that to more fully understand the complex nature of nonordinary events, one must see them in relation to the larger context of human encounters with unorthodox entities. All phenomena along the encounter continuum share at least a borderline, as do a ship's bottom with the water, the ocean with the waves, and the waves with the sky overhead. This hypothesis argues that some belief traditions are so closely related phenomenologically as to warrant inclusion under the umbrella term "Extraordinary Encounter Continuum."

Goals of the Continuum Hypothesis

The continuum hypothesis is intended to accomplish the following: 1) account for the cross-cultural distribution of extraordinary beliefs, especially in modern times when official agencies debunk UFOs, spiritual entities, and nonordinary realms, predict their demise, and relegate such beliefs to the arena of pseudoscience; 2) allow comparison of a great variety of apparently diverse and unrelated local belief systems in order to permit meaningful generalizations and syntheses; 3) predict

and explain the nature of unorthodox belief in ways that are empirically confirmable, logically consistent and pertinent to other fields of scholarly inquiry; and 4) produce an operative definition that more accurately reflects the nature of nonordinary experiences. This proposition is offered here since no hypothesis currently accomplishes all four of these functions simultaneously, although some accomplish one or two (Keel 1976; Vallee 1969; Steiger 1976).

Relationship of Definition to Tradition and Experience

The encounter with nonconventional beings often involves phenomena, experiences, motifs, and beliefs which are thought in tradition to belong in separate categories but which sometimes occur together simultaneously in actual experiences. This conjunction of anomalous factors can take the form of a "spirit guide" or "etheric master" possessing an extraterrestrial connection (Rojcewicz 1985), an encounter with a mysterious globe of light during a supernatural assault of the classic nightmare (Hufford 1982:49,217), or a UFO abduction during an out-of-body experience (Clark 1980:199). Reasons for the belief in the confluence of two or more belief traditions may include:

- 1) They are related in the culture's body of traditional belief.
- 2) They are so similar phenomenologically that they are connected by the percipients' interpretations of their experiences, even though this connection does not occur simultaneously in the same experience nor in tradition.
- 3) They occur together simultaneously in the same event independent of tradition, or close enough in time and space from the percipients' point of view as to constitute the same event.

An example of the first case listed above can be seen in the Middle Ages when a number of late medieval writers fueled the belief that fairies and elves were "either devils or diabolical illusions." This hostility toward the fairies was supported by the Reformation whose writers argued that fairies could only be good or evil, with the latter the more likely possibility. The official doctrine of most Protestant teachers of the time was that it was useless to attempt to distinguish good fairies from bad since the Devil was behind them all (Thomas 1971:610). The usual academic response to accounts that link the fairies to the devil is "Those events took place - or seemed to take place - because you hold that belief." Similarly, it has been argued (Lowe 1979: 69,71) that UFO legends display a continuity of described features because "the narrators are drawing from a common language" and otherwise "share a frame of reference which enables them to appropriately set up similar narrative structures combining similar contents." David Hufford (1985:119) refers to this conventional academic position as the "cultural source hypothesis." This perspective maintains that descriptive continuities among accounts of extraordinary encounters are always generated from a common tradition rather than a formally consistent experience.

An incident from the UFO abduction experience of Betty Andreasson indicates how one's interpretation of an event can lead to the apparent involvement of two or more belief traditions. Under hypnosis Betty described and drew pictures of her alien captors. These creatures had large pear-shaped heads, grey clay-like skin, and hands with three thick fingers. Their mongoloid-looking faces had large wraparound catlike eyes, holes for noses and ears, and fixed scarlike mouths. Despite the fact that Betty verbally described and drew pictures of entities that are

clearly consistent with the appearance of alleged extraterrestrial beings as found in numerous UFO accounts, her interpretation of her experience led her to believe that her abductors were "angels" (Fowler 1980:13). We can clearly see here the fusion between experience and belief, description and interpretation. Betty's Christian beliefs color her interpretation of the appearance of her abductors, calling them "angels," despite her verbal and pictorial descriptions to the contrary. This is most likely an example of the "reflective principle" in operation, although it is possible that description of appearance alone is a necessary but not sufficient factor in determining whether any two or more belief traditions intersect in the same experience.

The Reflective Principle: Symbiosis and Short-Circuit

Proponents of the "reflective principle" argue that a percipient's personal and culture-bound values significantly shape their nonordinary experience. The coloring of experience by a percipient's psychology or cultural beliefs does not invalidate the potential reality of the event; it merely complicates it. A familiarity with the generic conventions of accounts of human encounters with the supernatural in general, and the specific folk belief tradition in particular, should reveal pressure-points, as well as values, within the generic frame. A psychological profile of the informants should indicate how much of their community's belief traditions are mirrored in their individual accounts. Cognizant of the framing structure and conventions of the witnesses and, if the account has made its way into print, the conventions of thought and style of the popular or academic author(s), we can measure the potential for individual variation and elaboration. Measuring personal or cultural reflectivity allows the

phenomenology to come through.

The reflective principle often plays a role in how a witness identifies and interprets a nonconventional experience, but it does not always do so. Some good data now exist indicating that people completely unaware of a traditional body of beliefs undergo recognizable anomalous experiences (Hufford 1982:15; Moody 1976:123-24). Michael Elliot, conducting initial research on "flying saucers" in 1980, never heard or read about the esoteric UFO tradition of the "Men in Black" (MIB) when he encountered a MIB in a library in Philadelphia (Rojcewicz 1987). Encounters with manifestations of the Virgin Mary are not limited to Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, or Coptics. J. Gordon Melton (1980:316), a Methodist minister and Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in Evanston, Illinois, admits to having a Marian sighting. Ramakrishna, founder of the Vedanta Society, has likewise testified to having had a similar vision. Witnesses to anomalies like UFOs often find that their experiences contradict rather than mirror their values and beliefs, and yet they still insist upon the validity of the events (Hall 1974: 215-216).

Just as traditional understandings can influence descriptions and interpretations of one's experience, so also the repeated encounters with nonordinary entities can influence a body of traditional beliefs. From this perspective, people hold particular beliefs because certain extraordinary events take place. Proposing that experience influences tradition at least as often as tradition influences people's interpretations of their experiences, the continuum hypothesis can account for and predict belief in the presence of two or more folk belief traditions in the same experience. Most present belief-related definitions and classification systems have not led investigators to appreciate the complex connections among folk traditions. Be-

fore examining some of these important continuities, a statement about methodology is needed.

Methodology

The Extraordinary Encounter Continuum represents the full spectrum of human interactions with anomalous phenomena through time and space. It is, first, a descriptive phenomenology which systematically organizes parallels between human encounters with nonordinary beings regarding such features as their appearance, powers, and effects; and second, a hermeneutical method drawing upon salient ideas from several disciplines and relying primarily on cultural and historical data, proposing specific patterns to better explain the nature of inexplicable encounters. Neither method, it must be stressed, necessitates the researchers' acceptance of all informants' accounts as true, but it does presuppose a refusal to reject a priori their potential validity.

An important theoretical assumption of the continuum hypothesis inherent in both the phenomenological and hermeneutical methods is that not all reports of anomalous encounters are products of hysterics, hoaxes, or perceptual and mental impairment. UFO abductees, for example, attend school to some degree (Lorenzens 1977: 155). These abductees tend to be policemen, businessmen, schoolteachers, and other respectable citizens (Hynek 1974: 34). Recent studies of unorthodox phenomena such as supernatural assaults of the classic nightmare (Hufford 1982) and near-death experiences (Moody 1976; Greely 1975) indicate that a significant percentage of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observation analyzed rationally.

Frequently Recurring Traits

An examination of the Betty Andreasson UFO abduction experience reveals significant connections among several folk belief traditions.

The Andreasson affair displays continuities among "flying saucers," near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, and shamanic journeys. This case offers good evidence that two or more traditional systems of unorthodox belief occur simultaneously in experience. The key feature of the Andreasson experience from the continuum perspective is her confrontation with extraordinary beings. It is this encounter with the anomalous, whether in the form of beings, entities, objects, or unusual lights, that is the invariable feature inherent in all the discrete belief traditions of the past and present comprising the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum.

Despite wide variation in the circumstances surrounding a person's encounter with the extraordinary and in the kind of people undergoing them, there are nevertheless striking similarities among the reports of the experiences themselves (Lowe 1979:67-79). These continuities are so significant that one can easily pick out ten elements which appear again and again in published and unpublished accounts of "flying saucers" and their occupants, near-death and out-of-body experiences, and shamanic journeys.

The Encounter Experience

- 1) Feelings of friendliness, love, fearlessness.
- 2) Being Chosen: "mission" motif.
- 3) Instruction/Enlightenment.
- 4) Passing through material objects.
- 5) Beings of light/Unusual lights.
- 6) Journeys to nonordinary realms.
- 7) Tunnels/Enclosures/Paths and borders/Limits.
- 8) (Nearly) Ineffable.
- 9) Revelatory moments.
- 10) Psychic manifestations.

Only four of the above listed traits will be explored in this article. The remaining features will be developed in a future publication.

Bright or Unusual Lights and Borders and Limits

Like many UFO witnesses, Betty Andreasson, her father Waino Aho, and her daughter, Becky, saw a peculiar pulsating light shine through their kitchen window immediately before the aliens walked literally through the kitchen door. Transcripts of the hypnosis session indicate that Betty said:

I can see a light, sort of pink now. And now the light is getting brighter. It's reddish orange, and it's pulsating... (Fowler 1980:3)

The single feature that Betty recalls most vividly about her abduction experience is light. Betty associated the aliens and their spacecraft with a luminescent light, a common descriptive motif not only of "flying saucers," but also of fairies and fairy boats, the aerial cars of the Mahabharata called "vimanas," and numerous other entities in folk belief traditions (Rojcewicz 1984: 421-39). Betty also experienced light in a more mystical manner. While she underwent physical examination at the hands of her captors - a common feature of UFO accounts - Betty was told:

We are going to measure you for light... You have not understood the word you have... You are not completely filled with light. (Fowler 1980:44)

Betty interpreted "light" to mean the light of spiritual grace and faith, that is, the presence of God within her: "I believe I am filled with the light! I believe -- I believe that I'm filled with the light" (Fowler 1980:44). The light motif is ever present in accounts of out-of-body travel, near-death encounters, and shamanism.

During an out-of-body experience, Robert Monroe (1977:24) reported that he witnessed "A ring of sparks about two feet in diameter," with the axis of his body as the center of the ring. On another occasion, as Monroe (1977:23) prepared to induce "astral travel" a "beam or ray

seemed to come out of the sky" and struck him, a motif not uncommon to UFO accounts. This warm light caused Monroe to vibrate violently. He became "utterly powerless to move" as if "being held in a vise." It is interesting that Kenneth Ring (1980) has found "Seeing the Light" and "Entering the Light" to be two of the five fundamental elements of a close encounter with death. The Ojibway shaman called the "tcisaki" hears voices of the manitou spirit and sees light sparks within the ceremonial shaking tent. "Hearing voices and seeing bright lights are traditional signs of a visionary experience among the Ojibway" (Grim 1983:155). Light is a key element of religious and mystical experiences in general.

Journeys to Nonordinary Realms

Humans abducted or invited by extraterrestrials to visit distant planets usually travel by "flying saucer." However, when Betty Andreasson obeyed a command to stand directly behind one of the entities, she found herself "floating" several inches above the ground with a "rolling motion" that matched the movements of her captors as they traveled in a single file. As she approached the spacecraft, Betty noticed odd sensations throughout her body.

My hands and my legs are asleep or something... I feel weightless. Oh my feet are pins and needles or something -- even my arms and my hands. (Fowler 1980:27)

This "pins and needles" sensation has often been described by mystics, mediums, and visionaries. Betty spoke of a force that held her body rigidly in check: "They seem to have controlled my body somehow so I'm fixed in place" (Fowler 1980:30). Robert Monroe (1977:24) has published personal accounts of this same catalepsy with its accompanying vibrations. It seems reasonable to claim that Betty Andreasson traveled out of her physical body, an experience sometimes re-

ferred to as "astral travel." Betty constantly complained that her body was "weightless," but "rigid," pulsing with "vibrations." Betty Andreasson, it seems likely, described two bodies: her physical and her astral.

Sylvan Muldoon and Hereward Carrington (1970: 50-51) have described in full the characteristics of the corporeal and etheric bodies, and their findings support the claim that Betty left her physical body. The rigidity of Betty's physical body finds a parallel in the following statement from a case reported by Celia Green in *Out of the Body Experiences*:

... then I was back in bed, but I couldn't move hand or foot, my scalp prickled, starting at the top of the head and the prickling sensation spread all over me... (1968:61)

The words "enstatic" and "ecstatic" are helpful in describing the Ojibway shaman's cognitive condition that facilitates his dangerous soul journey to the ghostly underworld, according to John A. Grim:

Ecstatic describes that type of trance in which the shaman's consciousness is said to leave the body. Enstatic applies to that inspired state in which the contact with the sacred is decidedly interior and meditative. (1983:144)

The continual beating of the shaman's drum effects the shaman's passage to the numinous world.

Peculiar noises and the sensation of floating have been otherwise noted by Raymond A. Moody (1976: 37-38). People who have "died" report having traveled through a tunnel, enclosure, void, or cylinder before contacting souls of the dead. Betty Andreasson herself floated through a cylinder or tube.

It looks like a silvery tube... slowly lowering down. We are going down... we are going down. (Fowler 1980:34)

Moody (1976:70) found that people who have "died" have described what could be called a border or limit in the form of a body of water,

a gray mist, a door, a fence across a field, or simply a line. Similarly, Betty Andreasson told Raymond Fowler how UFO occupants took her to the "Green Realm," a sunless land or island of fog and mist. This place was inhabited by lemur-like creatures (i.e. the living dead) and contained a pyramid with crystal walkways and bridges over water. When Fowler asked Betty if she had actually left the Earth, Betty replied: "I believe we were in space, and somehow we were in the center of the earth (sic). Now how can that be?" (1980:80). Betty's account of her journey to the mysterious "Green Realm" touches upon several traditional folklore motifs such as "Wonder Voyages" (F 101.1) and "Rivers in the Otherworld" (F 161.2).

Could Betty Andreasson have undergone a near-death experience while abducted by extraterrestrials despite not having "died"? Moody (1976: 67-69) acquired two accounts of near-death experiences in which no clinical death actually took place but real psychological stress or injury existed. Betty had been under severe stress for several years. Her marriage to James was problematic from the start and eventually ended in divorce. James' severe car crash and subsequent hospitalization forced Betty into the demanding role of breadwinner while she cared for her elderly father and six children. Despite being physically worn, Betty travelled several hours to hypnosis sessions which she hoped would unlock the mystery of the UFO encounter. Faced with cases as complex as the Andreasson affair it seems likely that no absolute criteria exist by which one can precisely classify every experience as OBE, NDE, or UFO abduction. There will always be borderline cases. This is the *raison d'être* of the continuum hypothesis.

Revelatory Experience

To conclude the discussion of the four selected features that appear with great frequency

among accounts of "flying saucers," OBEs, NDEs, and shamanic journeys, let us now turn to an examination of the lasting life impression that such encounters have upon many percipients. Betty Andreasson believes that her abductors "awakened" something in her when they touched her forehead during the physical examination they conducted upon her. Like the shamans of many cultures, Betty had her own revelatory visions.

It was as if the infinite opened up on me... I was seeing inventions so far advanced - thousands of years advanced - and yet it seemed just a scratch in the infinite. (Fowler 1980:186)

Betty Andreasson's confrontation with the aliens, particularly her interaction with her two "teachers," "Quazgaa" and "Joohop," seemed to have a stabilizing effect upon her volatile emotional condition. It has been argued elsewhere that Betty's abduction experience served as a useful "tool" facilitating her mental and emotional competency (Rojcewicz 1984: 640-670). Shamans also undergo personality adjustment or reorganization resulting from their encounters with guardian spirits and animal powers of a transcendent reality. Both the shaman and the patient receive a new identity through the healing process. Sometimes this experience occurs to non-shamans after undergoing a visionary quest for the purpose of receiving a guardian spirit power, or it may occur after a serious illness as among the North and South American Indians, as well as the natives of Siberia. "Such a radically profound and revelatory experience often encourages the individual to take up the way of the shaman" (Harner 1982:63). People who have lived through close encounters with death have stated that they subsequently feel their lives deepened, their perspectives expanded. They are more reflective and interested in issues of a philosophical nature. Life contains much for them to learn. One informant told Moody

(1976:83): "I felt like I aged overnight after this happened, because it opened up a whole new world for me that I never knew could possibly exist." The most common characteristics of revelatory experiences are a sudden transformation of the percipients' personality and experience-ordering systems (Hufford 1983:311; Steiger 1982:148).

While many of these personality and life transformations are positive, many are not. John A. Keel has observed from his fieldwork that:

The Illumination experience changes their lives, but it has no effect on this world. In many instances people are changed for the worse instead of the better, just as the majority of all supernatural manifestations are harmful or at least senseless. (1975:20)

Whether we can agree or not with Keel that a majority of all supernatural manifestations are harmful or senseless to the percipients, he has nevertheless documented cases of emotional collapse and mental disorder (1976:229). According to mystical tradition, whether a confrontation with nonordinary realities is harmful or not depends largely upon skilled guidance and appropriate preparations (Hufford 1985:109).

Future Research

Alvin Lawson (1980:230-31) believes that "It is likely that dreams, hallucinations, death experiences and a variety of other phenomena are related to UFO experiences." He employs the term "encounter matrix" to refer to the "extensive similarities between UFO encounters and religious and metaphysical mysticism, folklore, shamans' trances, migraine attacks, and even the operation of creative imagination." Berthold E. Schwarz, M.D., (1983) has conducted pioneer work exploring the extraordinary ability of Stella Lancing of Massachusetts to take random photos wherein unidentified globes, and rays of light can be seen, as well as the whole spectrum of psychiatric and psychic UFO-related conditions

and events. David Hufford (1982:234) has pointed out continuities between UFOs and accounts of vampirism, witchcraft, and the classic nightmare. Keel (1975:60) and Steiger (1976:39) have suggested that the same unknown mechanism behind UFOs gives rise to all mystical and religious experiences. Robert S. Ellwood (1973:131) sees a very close connection between UFO cults and American Spiritualism. J. Gordon Melton (1980:314) has argued that strong continuities exist between UFO experiences and encounters with apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

Future studies examining the links between "flying saucers" and their occupants with apparitions, spiritualist and theosophic claims, mystical ecstatic occurrences, shamanism, the classic nightmare (Old Hag), OBEs, NDEs, and other anomalies would be a tremendous help in further understanding the varied unorthodox ways people gain knowledge and access to alternate realities. There is good evidence to suggest that encounter experiences between human and nonhuman entities are fundamentally cognitive (Hufford 1985:94) or "noetic," to use William James' term, and not simply or always an emotional or "oceanic feeling" (Freud 1961:11).

Conclusion

Arguing here for the relatedness among various folk traditions that compose the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum should not be interpreted merely as a search for functional equivalents. It would be unsupportable to claim, for example, that an OBE is simply a UFO abduction of another name. Such a conclusion would be dangerous since the important differences between the two phenomena would be unjustifiably lost. In addition, it has not been argued here that because these folk traditions are related they are indicators of an objectively real order that can only be extraterrestrial. It should be quite clear, however, that extraordinary encoun-

ter reports are significant, not only for the study of folk belief, but also for studies of the acquisition of knowledge and the delimitation of realities.

This article is part of an ongoing attempt to develop a coherent hypothesis of folk belief that neither rejects a priori reports of anomalous experiences simply because they lack strict scientific verification, nor embellishes them in order to prove that the supernatural realm exists. The continuum hypothesis insists that investigation of the alleged objective reality behind beliefs in nonordinary events is an important function of the belief-oriented folklorist, despite some scholarly opinion to the contrary (Degh 1977:244; Ward 1977:216, 218). It may well prove that phenomena along the Extraordinary Encounter Continuum are not scientific problems but authentic experiential manifestations. This fact would not necessarily invalidate the significance of these extraordinary events and may instead point to the boundaries of orthodox scientific procedure and scope.³ In either case, a general consideration of the overall encounter continuum should prove the best approach to date for defining accurately the anatomy of various as yet inexplicable phenomena like UFOs, as well as for the construction of reliable belief taxonomies. It must be understood, however, that the operative term "Extraordinary Encounter Continuum" serves primarily as an explanatory context for investigation and not yet as the definitive description of confrontations with the unknown.

NOTES

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1. Hynek's UFO typology includes three kinds of "Close Encounters." A Close Encounter of the First Kind (CE I) is a "close-at-hand experience without tangible physical effects." In a CE II "measurable physical effects on the land and on animate and inanimate objects are reported." In a CE III "animated entities (often called 'humanoids,' 'occupants,' or sometimes 'Ufonauts') have been reported." Although it was not a part of Hynek's original typology, the UFO abduction experience has come to be referred to as the CE IV.

2. John F. Szwed, writing specifically about folksong, has conjectured that "It may be that the irreducible minimum in folklore is social structure, where the roles and statuses of a community are restated in one or another form as a basis for comment, whether humorous, tragic, or ironic. The community, after all, is the setting in which a song emerges, in which it is performed, and in which its meaning unfolds." (1970).

3. The Society for Scientific Exploration, Peter A. Sturrock, Ph.D., The Institute for Plasma Research, Stanford University, President, was formed in April, 1982, with 100 founding members drawn primarily from university faculties in the United States. The purpose of the society is to provide a context for intelligent examination of anomalous phenomena and related topics. The society defines "anomalous" as any phenomenon which appears to violate existing scientific understanding or is generally regarded by the scientific community as lying outside their established parameters of investigation.

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