

Breaking The Surface of High Strangeness Experiences

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Speculative Philosophy

Project Core is a lesson in refining the questions we ask about high strangeness phenomena and those who experience them. What follows is in no way conclusive and is not based solely on the Project Core Anonymous Survey Synopsis. It is an example of what some of these questions look like—how deeply they can run—when we acknowledge that there is a depth beyond the labels and divisions we have imposed upon the unknown. It is my sole intention to illuminate possibilities that do not lend themselves to the common discussions we hear surrounding paranormal and ufological topics. Discussion which have become entrenched beliefs, and which have brought us no closer to answers, while standing as false answers in and of themselves.

The Interconnected Fields of High Strangeness

If we learn nothing else from this survey, it is crystal clear that high strangeness phenomena have a shared characteristic overlooked by most researchers: the experiencer. The glaring consistency in our data pool, which is little-reflected in the various paranormal fields and not at all in mainstream coverage, is that paranormal experience begets paranormal experience. For example, participants who experience a haunting and/or manifestation of a recently deceased relative have most likely had a UFO sighting in their lives and vice versa. UFO phenomena, haunting phenomena, psychic phenomenal, *et al.*, tend to manifest in participants' lives as separate, unrelated instances—but examined in totality, how can they be?

In many cases we do find a decisive set of boundaries to the type of high strangeness experiences in a subject's life. For example, sometimes a haunting looks just like we've come to expect a haunting to look and nothing more. However, as noted, in many other cases we see crossover phenomena that call these boundaries into question. These cases speak to the fact that paranormal and ufological happenings may not be separate fields of study but a unified field wrongly divided. If not a unified field wrongly divided, then most certainly several fields that would all benefit from sharing research.

Because there is so much crossover phenomena, we believe that experiencers are less likely to initially talk about just how strange strange can get with a researcher because they want to sound credible and sane. This would not be an issue if, for example, abductionologists didn't tend to pigeonhole the haunting-type aspects of their cases as screen memories for abductions and demonologists didn't tend to compartmentalize "alien" beings associated with hauntings as manifestations of a demonic presence trying to deceive the unlucky victim. In both instances there is the assumption that a foreign intelligence is tricking humans into believing a false appearance—an assumption that benefits the preservation of these fields in a mutually exclusive way.

If one looks one will find that abductionologists tend to scoff at the notion of demons while demonologists balk at the notion of aliens. It is fair to assume that for the experiencer who has “all of the above” in their life, whichever high strangeness aspect is prevalent determines which type of “expert” they seek and what details they will edit out of their experiences.¹

Outliers

There is one more unfortunate circumstance multiple researchers have told us happens because they do it: they create outlier data of the aspects of a subject’s experiences that they find personally disagreeable.² Proclaiming that one can recognize outlier data in fields as mysterious and, frankly, questionable as these is premature at best. At worst, it wrongly defines what the field is and sends a cue to experiencers as to what is acceptable to report.

Internal Consistencies Point To Subterfuge

Another dimension to the importance of uniting all high strangeness fields (or at least data sharing within them) is that there really is a game of appearances being played, which has nothing to do with researchers’ motives or mutual exclusivity.

In ufology we are told that there are different races of aliens from different planets and/or dimensions. The best-known are the grays (diminutive beings with large bald heads and small facial features—except for the giant black eyes), Nordics (tall blond-haired too-perfect humans), reptilians (like the grays but with reptilian skin), mantises (more insect-like than the grays, but similar template), and tall whites or tall beings of light (may or may not have hair; a Nordic/gray hybrid template with glowing body). Somehow, the majority of abduction researchers overlook the fact that these reported beings are all cut from the same physical mold with superficial differences. All are bipeds; all communicate telepathically; and all—even the Nordics whose eyes are often reported to be of average human proportion—have something mesmerizing about their gaze. They utilize the same aircraft and medical implements—much of it antiquated by human standards; sometimes they work together.

If we stick with the most superficial physical details and never connect any of the above dots, the easiest answer is that different races of beings from different planets and/or dimensions are visiting earth. But, if we connect those dots, the easiest answer is that they are all from the same place. The neurologist might suspect that place is our brain. The craftier among abductionologists might hypothesize that there’s one race creating the others in a lab. Alien scientists creating hybrid races.

However, if we examine hauntings, demon encounters, Bigfoot literature, faerie accounts, religious accounts, even encounters with deceased relatives, we find similar templates of interaction, if not the same physical mold, as the alien. (And sometimes that, too.) Now the easiest answers aren’t so easy. If these are all hallucinations, how does one account for masses of people throughout history reporting similar beings and apparitions and forming similar transcultural nar-

ratives around those mirages? For example, researchers Jacques Vallee and Keith Thompson have separately demonstrated that medieval faerie abduction lore is practically a mirror image of today's alien abduction lore.³ To make sense of high strangeness as a mere unconscious projection, one would at least have to find some logical reason for us to talk to ourselves that way. But, if we look at the through line of the “messages” of these experiences (not to be confused with any verbal/visual messages these beings have for experiencers, which are often personal, irrational, truisms, or mundane) we end up in metaphysics and mysticism—not a place the average neurologist wants to be.

Ufological researchers who are open to other interpretations often end up in deeper theories than alien doctors or brain abnormalities—theories like the one mentioned above, that high strangeness phenomena are masks of a singular intelligence masquerading as different characters. Or that we live in a much larger, more diverse ecosystem that includes sentient nonhuman intelligences and the dead. Still another theory is that there is a race of beings here whose advanced technology includes inner space, not just outer, and so their science and actions would appear more ethereal, perhaps more like shamanism than advanced physics. Another is that traveling through dimensions might warp or cause tears in the fabric of our reality through which other beings may manifest. (In this case haunting and psi activity for an abductee would be the equivalent of insects or animals coming into their home because the window was left open.) Or perhaps there's a universal peak of consciousness where, once achieved, the lines of what's possible begin to blur because the limitations of apparent reality have been rendered moot.

We don't have answers, but to ignore the deeper questions simply because they are more obscure than when we compartmentalize phenomena into “aliens,” “ghosts,” “dead grandma,” and “Tinker Bell” is not only unscientific, it's completely irrational, inauthentic and, curiously, against the times. It is like ignoring quantum physics because Newtonian physics is easier to wrap our brains around. If these phenomena are real, it is incumbent upon us not to ignore their depths, which are the “most real” thing about them. As the Project Core survey tells us, and the breakdown to question #28 in table 7 further illustrates, that which has commonly been omitted by researchers as outlier data often *is* the experience.⁴

Terror and The Unknown

To that end, let us examine one fundamental pattern noted in the Project Core data that will come as no surprise to any paranormal researcher: how often a phenomenon would seemingly cause terror in the subject. This is as true for perceived demonic accounts as it is for aliens as it is for ghosts and so on. Although the survey explicitly stated that we did not want anyone's interpretation of events, many couldn't help but conclude that whatever they were dealing with was evil or malicious, because of the terror they felt. A closer look finds something striking, which the participants missed, perhaps because they were blinded by fear: that the phenomenon relinquished its grip when the subject stopped struggling. This happened in every instance it was reported.

We ordinarily find the act of giving up or letting go of fear and/or control an important final act to completing oneself or finding one's "true face" in Eastern religious traditions, mystical practices, various meditations, the hero's journey, shamanism, and some forms of psychological counseling. Yet here it is being induced by apparent outside agencies that are often interpreted as evil. Is the fear-equals-evil equation a religious cultural construct, an instinctive reaction, or an induced one? We don't know.

Another possible reason fear could be induced and relinquished is if it is being used for its impact on memory. On an individual level, one often commits terrifying circumstances to long-term memory. On a species-wide level, repetitive fears become engrained in the genetics. They become instinct and reflex. "Fire bad." "Run from snake."

Fifty-one percent of Project Core participants said they have an exceptional long-term memory compared to other people they know, and 19% are not sure. If true then we could deduce that fear is unnecessary to imprint on the already excellent long-term memories of experiencers. However, it is worth considering that a terrifying anomalous experience would stick out amongst the others—perhaps as the thing to ponder through the years.

If fear is being used as a tool for memory, then we must ask why another intelligence would etch its presence into us on an unconscious level. Perhaps it is as some have speculated: the intelligence needs us to perceive it to exist here. Is it possible that it is building a sustainable bridge between worlds through us in a way that we do not understand?

DMT

A more down to earth possible answer to the rise of fear that lets go when the experiencer does might be found in the release of dimethyltryptamine (DMT) by the pineal gland. DMT is a hallucinogen that has been found to be naturally produced in rats and is hypothesized to be produced in humans.⁵ One consistent quality people who have been under the influence of hallucinogens report is a deep fear associated with lack of control and/or the diminishment of their sense of self. This fear grows the more they try to hold onto themselves and dissipates the more they relax into their altered state. What role, if any, naturally occurring DMT plays in high strangeness experiences has yet to be determined. In fact, it has yet to be determined what DMT-produced hallucinations actually are. Does DMT produce unreal illusions, give a glimpse of a broader reality to which our senses are normally cut off, or grant access to other realities?⁶

If naturally occurring DMT does play a role in high strangeness experiences and it proves to produce more than unreal illusions, then we have to reconsider how down to earth an answer it really is.

Terror as an Artifact of Evolution

Natural selection provides a good argument against fear being used as a tool at all. Natural selection may have favored the survival of humans in whom a state of terror produced a set of physiological conditions that gave rise to efficient long-term memories. If that is true then finding reports of fear and terror in experiencers may not represent the manipulations of an external agent, but are an external artifact. Experiences sufficient to induce fear are simply encoded in memory with high efficiency.

Again, this is all speculation—but speculation that illustrates the need to unpack the boxes in which researchers have placed tidy answers. There are no tidy answers, only an abandoned inquisitive nature.

Importance of Preserving The Purity of The Experience: An Experiencers' Perspectives

I found that the stories related in the Project Core Anonymous Survey which most peaked my interest—most exemplified what it is to experience this broader reality we call *high strangeness*—were not necessarily long, but were of specific detail that rang true to my own experiences and the deep wonder they produced. Importantly, the subjects often professed little interest in studying this stuff and did not identify their feelings of terror, confusion, or loss of control as evil or malevolent.

One avenue this points to for future study is a comparative analysis of how subjects interpret their experiences based on the amount and type of media coverage to which they have been exposed. If there is an openness, a state of innocent questioning, which is vital direct contact with mystery, how does media exposure shape the interaction for the experiencer? That purity grows increasingly rarer as we pre-formulate suppositions and derive answers divorced from the experience. Perhaps the very fact that these phenomena have generally been presented to us through the interpretations of researchers and not directly from their subjects has an effect on the experience itself. If there is an outside intelligence (or coordinated movement of several) involved, perhaps this forces it to up its game in order to get its intentions across. If true, we can expect it to evolve its appearances against our cultural expectations, not with them.

Nowhere Left To Hide

It's equally possible that if there is a singular intelligence behind all or most high strangeness phenomena (or multiple intelligences working in conjunction with each other), it actually welcomes our cultural and personal interpretations as a hiding place from which to maneuver in secrecy. It does appear that the intelligence has thus far evolved its presentation with our cultural expectations, not against. This supports the common notion that it hides in them, showing us what we want or expect to see. In that case, we can anticipate it will continue to evolve its appearances with our emerging expectations, *if we can decide on them*. Our knowledge and theories of the universe and our technology are expanding at a rapid rate; there may be no solid an-

chor left in how we think the future will look. For example, by the time a nonhuman being appeared wearing an advanced form of Google Glasses, that technology might already be nearing irrelevance.

Of course if the intelligence has been evolving with cultural trends throughout history, it hasn't been mimicking technological advances in the times when there were none; we just happen to be living in a forward-thinking, high-tech age. Perhaps what it has been mimicking is our mind, not the specific toys such a mind produces. If so, look for high strangeness phenomena to evolve with our paradigm shifts, not our technological advances. As Newtonian physics continues to give way to Quantum physics—and as physicists continue to question whether the universe works by immutable laws or by habits and tendencies—perhaps we will see encounters trending toward something even more mercurial, less solid and materialistic than aliens and spaceships. Perhaps the link between “ghosts,” “phantoms,” “aliens,” and the like will become that much more undeniable.

High Strangeness as The Face of Evolution

The reasons we have seen given for this idea of hiding in expectations imply some sort of covert or malicious activity on the part of the intelligence, but another possibility exists. If it hides in our expectations, welcomes all of our evolving wrong assumptions, and refuses to clarify what it is and what its intentions are, perhaps it views these as obstacles that make us stronger. Meaningful contact for all involved demands equality. Perhaps we have to do some work to earn that equality. That work is always on ourselves, never the other—but the temptation is to only work on the other as a mystery to be solved.

A clue that points to this being the case is the fact that when an experiencer digs deeply enough into the mystery and doesn't settle for a convenient answer, she inevitably ends up back with herself. She asks questions she likely started with, such as, *Am I crazy?* or, *Am I delusional?* And more sophisticated ones like, *Why do I keep trying to define the undefinable?* or more broadly, *Why do humans insist on answering the unanswerable?*

Unable to solve the riddle of an intelligence that seems to interact with us on both external and internal levels, we tend to try to modify and refine the only tool we have to examine it: ourselves. We mainly do this through epiphanies, insights, applicable media, and feedback from others with whom we have trusting relationships. If that response is not provoked by design, it is also not discouraged. One may assume that an intelligence working this intimately and extravagantly on or with us knows the effect it is having on us.

Scientific and Pseudoscientific Reductionism

Some Project Core participants described events so incredible that they do not easily fit into a category. Blue monkeys in the closet. Elves in the bathroom. Old, broken machinery that one day is brand new again. A cognitive scientist might call such experiences hallucinations. An ab-

ductionologist would balk at the notion because such a diagnosis does not account for the cases where it happens in successive instances and then abruptly stops. To the abduction researcher this accounting sounds suspiciously like a screen memory masking an alien event. But what if it's neither?

Could brain scientists be wrongly reducing many such occurrences to the status of hallucinations that are treatable with therapy or perhaps will be outgrown at childhood's end? If that is what they are, where is the entry on, for instance, Haunted House Syndrome in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM)? The DSM is like the bible to mental health practitioners. Nowhere within its pages will you find Alien Abduction Disorder or Phantom's Disease. We have heard much made of sleep paralysis over the years as a catchall answer to abductions and phantom phenomena. While that may play a role in some perceived sleep time encounters, it obviously does not in instances where the experiencer is wide awake, not paralyzed, or experiencing an ongoing and evolving narrative or extensive relationship with something "otherworldly" over a span of years.

On the flip side, could abductionologists wrongly assume that a weird clip of memory is a screen memory for aliens and then "finish the story" by co-creating or outright implanting the alien conclusion via hypnosis? This surely is happening and begs for the medical establishment to set limits on the use of hypnosis. *Altering the memories of a person is altering the person.* The harm done here cannot be overstated.

Normal or Paranormal?

Since most participants reported more than two paranormal experiences in their lives—which is consistent with other paranormal studies—how many make a pattern? How many patterns are needed to imply normalcy? Does the prefix "para" represent our personal discomfort in acknowledging that these are normal experiences in the same way that the term "alien abduction" represents our personal discomfort with open-ended questions?

We Who?

And here we are again at that most important question when asking about the other: who are we? When I write *our* who am I talking about? Non-Westernized First Peoples the world over don't have qualms with the so-called paranormal and aliens to the extent that they, too, see the flaws in our terminology. What we call *high strangeness* they might call *interesting*. It's not that there is no mystery for them here, it's that it is all natural and accepted and perhaps to a large extent, understood. They don't need studies about what else shares the natural environment, because they live in it.

This *we* that is so scared and confused and chomping at the bit to find a space brother, fight an alien invader, battle demons, be guided by angels, struggle to plant a flag in the living room and declare it "my territory" from intruding ghosts... this *we* that defines sides to pick one to hunt the

other is a holdover from the pioneer/colonialist mindset. The *we* is the Western mind scared and alone and making stuff up. Telling stories. The intellectuals in the crowd know this and so they often won't entertain the stories as nonfiction. But what if the only aspect of these particular stories that is fictitious is the interpretation? What if beyond the fear and confusion lies a completely different relationship with this intelligence (or these intelligences)? What if that is how Non-Westernized First Peoples experience these things? And what if there is a relationship waiting to flower beyond even that?

What if the only difference between those who refuse to take this material seriously and those who have pioneered answers within it is the length of time it took them to decide not to look?

What if "discovering" any of this for oneself requires not the loud proclamations of the pioneer but the silence required to listen to what the mystery is saying? Complete openness and the ability to take subtle direction from the unknown is a technique comprised of both art and science that straddles the line of faith uncomfortably. Still, we must listen; we must look. We must because no amount of answering answers it. It is still there begging the question, tantalizing us with facades.

It is daring us to examine it. It is daring us not to examine ourselves. It's like a living, breathing reverse psychology. However, let us remain cautious because saying it is *like that* is not saying it is *the same as that*. What it is, we still have yet to fully understand. That is the most anyone can say with certainty.

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¹ See, The abduction Enigma: An Investigation of The Alien Abduction Phenomenon. Randle, Kevin D., Russ Estes, and William P. Cone. New York: St. Martin's, 1999. Print.

² Personal conversations with author. Also, see podcast, Culture of Contact Episode 38: Smokin' Budd Hopkins.

³ See, Passport To Magonia. Jacques Vallee. Chicago: Contemporary Books. 1993 Print. And, Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination. Keith Thompson. New York: Ballantine Books. 1993. Print.

⁴ Project Core Anonymous Survey Question 28: *Have your experiences been accurately portrayed in the media and/or literature on the subject matter?* Table 7: *Experiences Accurately Portrayed in Media*

⁵ <https://www.cottonwoodresearch.org/dmt-pineal-2013/>

⁶ http://www.rickstrassman.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54&Itemid=54