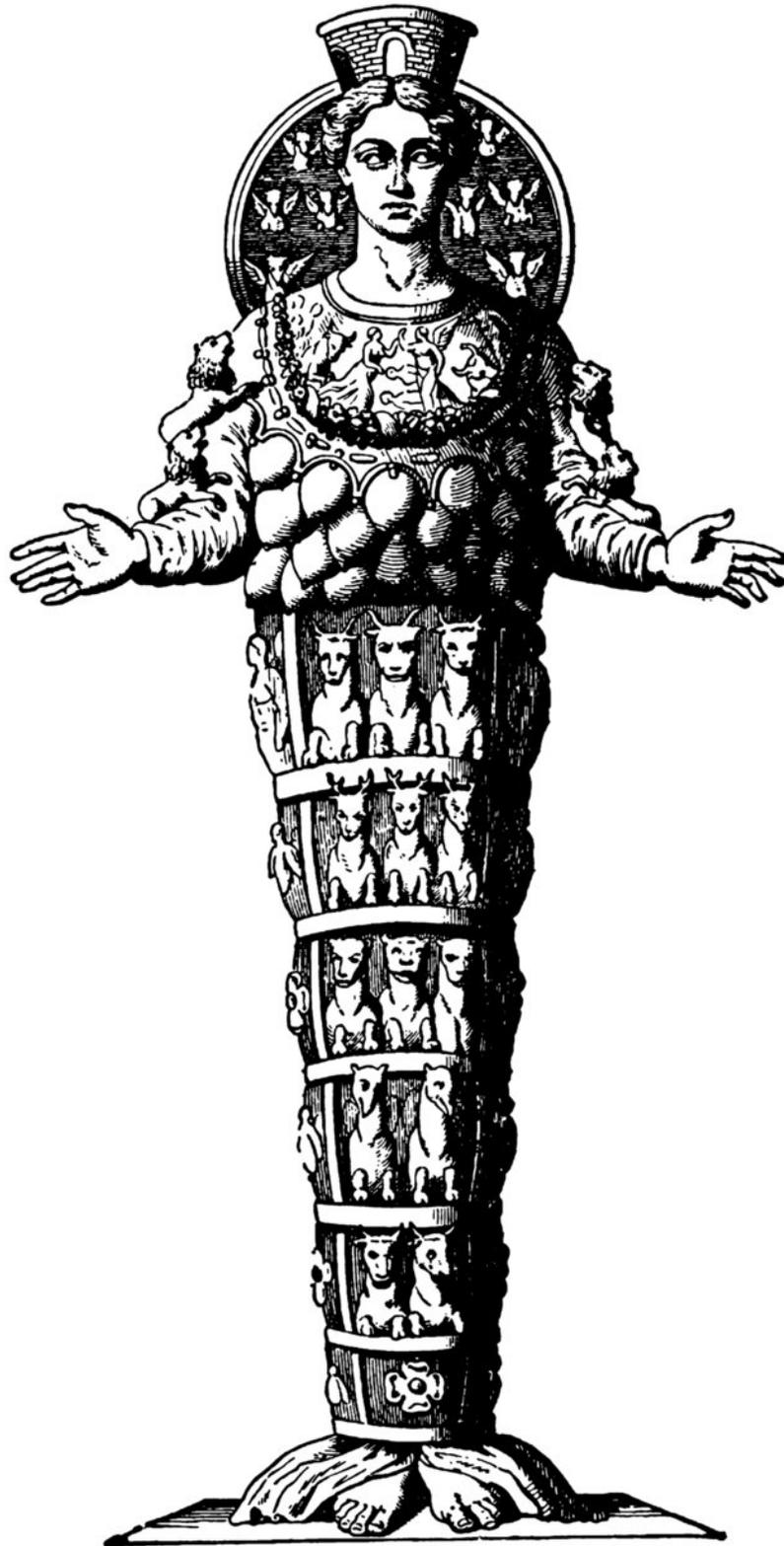


MAKING OF OURSELVES A LIGHT:
ENGAGING ECOLOGICAL CRISES AS AN INITIATION



by
Dr. Renée G. Soule

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RENÉE G. SOULE

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

PSYCHOLOGY

MERIDIAN UNIVERSITY

2017

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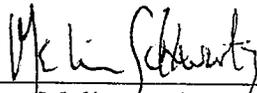
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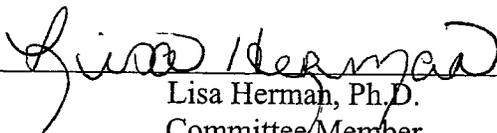
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To activists, teachers, and healers birthing the ecological Self.

This Earth, What She Is To Me

As I go into her, she pierces my heart. As I penetrate further, she unveils me. When I have reached her center, I am weeping openly. I have known her all my life, yet she reveals stories to me, and these stories are revelations and I am transformed. Each time I go to her I am born like this. Her renewal washes over me endlessly, her wounds caress me; I become aware of all that has come between us, of the noise between us, the blindness, of something sleeping between us. Now my body reaches out to her. They speak effortlessly, and I learn at no instant does she fail me in her presence. She is as delicate as I am; I know her sentience; I feel her pain and my own pain comes into me, and my own pain grows large and I grasp this pain with my hands, and I open my mouth to this pain, I taste, I know, and I know why she goes on, under great weight, with this great thirst, in drought, in starvation, with intelligence in every act does she survive disaster. This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how loved I am how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me, what I am to her.

—Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*

ABSTRACT

MAKING OF OURSELVES A LIGHT: ENGAGING ECOLOGICAL CRISES AS AN INITIATION

by

Renée G. Soule

This research framed environmental crises as an initiation, presaging a new level of maturity commensurate with and demanded by the challenges we face. It explored how the ecological Self can be formed, tempered, and sustained via directly addressing ecological dilemmas. Initiatory thresholds, challenges, and insights experienced by seasoned activists were revealed and reflected upon. It was hypothesized that engagement in environmental crises can initiate a mature ecological belonging that embraces and embodies the essential unity of civilization and wild nature.

The review of literature links perennial purposes of initiation as a pressing contemporary need to live in dynamic balance with our more-than-human world. Initiations evoke death, confusion, and rebirth as integral to future-oriented transitions. Proposing that environmental crises require this caliber of transformation highlights the possibility that making necessary changes could be subjectively experienced as an initiation. Little is understood about the initiatory potential of environmental crises and how to make use of this opportunity.

Imaginal Inquiry allowed participants to explore initiatory dimensions of activism by experiencing the archetypal contours of severance, liminality, and incorporation

within a distilled version of their lives as activists. Challenges and potentials of each stage were evoked, expressed, and reflected upon.

The cumulative learning refers to the process whereby environmental crises call forth responsive healing capacities of a mature ecological Self. Four learnings illuminate the initiatory terrain of this process. The first reveals that the severance phase can mark a permanent divergence from the values and aspirations of dominant culture. The second states that challenges of taking action can foster strategic and spiritual dimensions of mature ecological identity. The third points to the need for dynamic incorporation strategies that stabilize ecological belonging in the tumult of ongoing societal change. The last learning reveals how responsive attunement to an ecological context can guide and ripen ecological identity.

Environmental crises present us with a crucial inquiry: Who are we invited to become? This research indicates that responding to crises directly and honestly answers this question. As we respond, we come to trust our innate belonging and are transformed into whom and what our world needs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Saying grace at dinner often begins with honoring the fresh food, warm aromas, and all that is required to create a meal. One may branch into sun, soil, and bugs. If honest, we remember the wisdom of seeds and their lineage. Before long, a hungry family may be contemplating the Big Bang. Acknowledging everyone who has made this project possible would be equally inclusive. Believe me, it takes more than a village!

Thank you, thank you, thank you to my family, friends, colleagues, students, healers, spiritual companions, lovers, mentors, the homeless who hang out in parks where I write, and the community of living beings I call my body. Each, in your unique way, supported and inspired my long dissertation journey and I am grateful.

A special hearty thanks goes to Gabriel and Trevor Soule. Their youthful wisdom, humor, patience (and impatience) graced and informed my journey to become Dr. Soule. At one point they suggested skipping getting a Ph.D. altogether and simply writing “witch doctor” on my business card. Now that I am finished, I just might do that!

To those close to me, more than gratitude, I want to offer relief. Finally! I am done! I am moving on!

In “The Messenger,” Mary Oliver speaks to what calls me now:

My work is loving the world.
 Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird – equal seekers of sweetness.
 Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
 Here the clam deep in the speckled sand...

Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work,
 which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.

May we tend what truly matters and shine together.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

The Great Work before us, the task of moving modern industrial civilization from its present devastating influence on the Earth to a more benign mode of presence, is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves.

—Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Initiation happens. For nearly all of us at some point in our lives, forces seemingly beyond our control sweep us toward a beckoning future, compelling us to leave the familiar and endure a time of uncertainty, chaos and wrenching sacrifice. Then, if fortunate, it is possible begin afresh in ways that better serve others and the world. This is initiation. Might current environmental crises present an initiatory imperative? This research reframes environmental crises as an initiation into a new level of maturity commensurate with the challenges they present. How might environmental activism facilitate and embolden the initiatory development of post-modern ecological identity?¹

According to Mircea Eliade, initiation is an archaic, even primitive, approach to change.² Why pick an ancient theory and practice of transformation when dealing with distinctly post-industrial dilemmas? There are many successful contemporary methods developed in modern fields of psychology, medicine, and social sciences that promote psychological change. Changing the way people think and behave is a vast undertaking that engages professions and people of all stripes, including politicians, advertising

agencies, spiritual guides, corporations, rehabilitation enterprises (prisons, drug treatment centers, etc.), teachers, not to mention parents and couples. Who among us has not attempted to change others (or themselves) and cobbled together at least a rudimentary theory of change based upon personal experience, religious tradition, trainings, or various self-help books? Even among environmentalists, there is no single strategy that promotes psychological and cultural change. There is a hodgepodge of many.

Initiation is an ancient approach to necessary change. Steven Foster and Meredith Little have explored why human beings create ritual to evoke and intensify natural cycles of death, rebirth and renewal observed in nature.³ They postulate that ritualizing inevitable, and often challenging, periodicities of life celebrates and empowers humans to be willing and knowing participants in nature's relentlessly renewing transitions.⁴ Purposes and principles of this ancient practice may still be relevant. When narrowing in on a research topic, Foster came in a dream.⁵ He handed me the Zero tarot card, which is "The Fool."⁶ Eye to eye, he said, "Renée, when dealing with too much complexity, it's best to go back to the beginning." What I identify as "ecological initiation" is a fresh approach to our modern environmental crisis but it goes back to the beginning, to the ancient praxis of initiation and a return to early roots of human culture. It may be a sufficiently archetypal and comprehensive rubric for navigating radical changes faced by our post-industrial modern civilization and each individual in their unique way.

Eliade describes initiation as a "birth to a higher mode of being."⁷ He elucidates:

The term initiation in the most general sense denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is the equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*.⁸

Bill Plotkin says initiation includes any passage between life stages that represents both a gain (rebirth) and loss (death) for oneself and one's community.⁹ Partnering loss with gain is fundamental to initiatory change. Victor Turner describes initiation as an "inner process of growth and individuation [where one] must leave old ways behind, divesting oneself of ego's claims to rank and social function, in order to attain a more highly individuated stage of growth."¹⁰ Initiations do not foster small changes; they affect one's entire life. Is this the tenor of transformation required to adapt to what Bill McKibben now calls our new planet, "Eaarth?"¹¹

A guiding question for this initiation is: What are environmental crises inviting us to become? Joanna Macy believes it is the birth of what she calls "ecological identity" or the "ecological Self."¹² Coined by Arne Naess, this identity is inclusive of all life.¹³ He notes that a traditional view of self-development includes three stages—from ego to social self, to metaphysical self. But, he asks, what about the organic relational self, the one related to our earthly home and immediate environment? He states:

I therefore tentatively introduce the concept of an ecological self. We may be in, of and for nature from our very beginning. Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations. These relations are not only relations we have with humans and the human community, but with the larger community of all living beings.¹⁴

A deep sense of ecological belonging is a core subjective experience of the ecological Self. For the purposes of this research the ecological Self includes, but is not reliant upon, a cognitive understanding of ecology. This belonging can be scientifically substantiated, rationally grasped, and viscerally experienced.¹⁵ For example, Meg Chadsey teaches audiences about ocean acidification by having them hold their breath.¹⁶ Long after participants are uncomfortable, she points out that the elevated levels of CO₂

in their blood, which is the cause for their discomfort, is at a much lower level than what oceanic life is experiencing today. Audiences who have this experience may cognitively and emotionally grasp the effects of climate change on the ocean, but even this somatic and cognitive understanding is an insufficient basis for a mature ecological Self.

The ecological Self, as Macy describes, requires moving from “earth as lover” to “earth as self” because mature ecological identity is a highly energized felt-sense of *being* the Earth in human form.¹⁷ Macy elaborates: “The ecological Self... is a metaphoric and dynamic construct of identity that embodies a profound interconnectedness to all life, which brings into play wider resources and capacities—courage, endurance, ingenuity—like a nerve cell in a neural net opening to the charge of other neurons.”¹⁸

John Seed exemplifies this development. When protecting one of the few remaining rainforests near his home in Australia, he describes how his love of the forest enabled intellectual and creative capacities to emerge in all his interactions, whether with loggers, activists, or the living forest. “I was gripped with an intense, profound realization of the depth of the bonds that connect us to the Earth... I knew then that I was no longer acting on behalf of myself or my human ideas, but on behalf of the earth, on behalf of my larger self, that I was literally part of the rainforest defending herself.”¹⁹

The development of the ecological Self is a crucial factor in Plotkin’s work as a rite of passage guide. According to Plotkin, a goal of initiation is expanding one’s sense of self, which he refers to as one’s “circle of identity” or the portion of the animate world one actively embraces as essential to one’s existence.²⁰ A related concept is “psycho-spiritual center of gravity” which is “the hub of a person’s life, what her day-to-day existence revolves around.”²¹ Both concepts indicate a person’s level of maturity. The

more mature the self, the wider the web of life in which person feels a kinship.²²

Traditionally, initiations foster leaps in maturity by fostering a larger sense of belonging to earth and cosmos. Modern initiation guides still emphasize this aspect of the ancient tradition. “The onset of genuine adulthood,” says Plotkin, “coincides with the appearance of ecocentricity [because] the more mature the self, the wider the web of life in which we feel our membership.”²³ Mystical affiliation, he says, is the very core of maturity.²⁴

Mystical life is often perceived as rarified and distant from the problems of modern life. Karen Armstrong maintains this distance was not valid for ancient cultures, because linking practical concerns with mystical knowledge was a primary purpose of initiation rites.²⁵ Contemporary guides and teachers try to make the mystical connection with nature real. Robert Greenway enjoyed reminding Wilderness Psychology students, “Consider earwax and ejaculation. The wilderness is right here!”²⁶ Foster like to joke about having a vision of a great Eagle and then getting hit by a big eagle turd.²⁷ On a more serious note, Thomas Berry holds the numinous powers of nature as “primary and necessary for every significant human endeavor,” including the scientific and economic.²⁸ A primary focus of Thomas Hübl trains his students to be “mystics in the marketplace.”²⁹

These leading thinkers lead me to reframe environmental crises as an initiation for humanity. Besides fostering maturity by promoting mystical belonging while engaged in practical matters, initiation is a path of change that honors sacrifice, humiliation, and symbolic death by requiring them. Initiations do not sugarcoat the costs of true and lasting change. Reframing and engaging environmental crisis as an initiation is not, to borrow one of Barack Obama’s favorite phrases, “putting lipstick on a pig.”³⁰ Walter Burkert points out that initiations tend to be humiliating and even dangerous.³¹ Instead,

they incorporate hardships and personal sacrifice as part of a tempering ordeal. Macy, who has worked for over thirty years promoting the development of ecological identity, observes that travail is part of awakening to an inclusive sense of self.³² She says, “Processes of growth and transformation that arise from re-membering our collective body require a letting-go of outmoded ways of being, old assumptions and old defenses...[and] this letting go can be a passage through darkness, what systems thinkers call ‘positive disintegration.’”³³ Initiations honor and utilize positive disintegration by going through difficulties, not around them.

Bringing the ancient praxis of initiation to bear upon complexities of modern ecological crises—including intransigence in the face of these crises—requires lifting initiation out of the realm of ritual and into the imagination because informal or life-based initiations can and do occur outside ritual settings. Eliade postulates that obfuscated or improvised initiations are present in cultures where ritual has disappeared.³⁴ Ecological initiation, the focus of this research, occurs primarily outside ritual settings. Passages that occur in the absence of formal initiations (like ecological initiation) are made visible via what Michael Meade calls the “initiatory imagination,” a psychological construct that sustains an ability to perceive initiation in the midst of one’s life, especially when undergoing major life changes or traumatic experience.³⁵ Meade asserts that an initiatory frame is the only way to make sense of trauma.³⁶ Within an imagined initiatory framework, one is not a hapless victim being forced to change but rather a participant in a difficult but meaningful and transformative process. One learns to surrender to the initiatory imperative of any given crisis. Perceiving ecological crisis as an initiation could forge an honest and generative approach to facing and contending with

the environmental changes we face—from the inside-out and the outside-in. Perhaps then, as Paul Hawken contends, environmental crises do not happen to us, but for us.³⁷

Ken Wilber maintains that environmental crises are primarily developmental, because not enough people have a world-centric level of consciousness that naturally cares for the global commons.³⁸ We might be, he suggests, facing an outmoded level of consciousness and not a genuine pathology. We are not insane, only immature. Initiation, says Eliade, fosters the death of an individual's habitual or outmoded way of life in order to be reborn to a new and more complex level of maturity.³⁹ Initiations do not fix pathologies, they foster and support leaps in development. Might the challenges inherent in engaging ecological crises become an initiation that fosters development of the ecological Self? I explored this possibility with a group of seasoned activists screened for having a well-developed ecological Self. As a participatory research group, we learned how activism itself may shape and temper ecological identity.

Relationship to the Topic

Every generation throughout history lived with the tacit certainty that there would be generations to follow. That certainty is now lost to us, whatever our politics. That loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time.

—Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*

I remember watching a ladybug crawl slowly to the tip of my index finger. A curious four-year old, I touched its shiny red shell and feelers, asking, “Do you know you are crawling on a finger of a girl named Renée?” I described a few aspects about myself. “I like my preschool, pollywogs, mayonnaise...” Seemingly oblivious, she continued crawling down my finger and up the next one. “I bet you have no idea about preschool,

mayonnaise, or a girl's fingers!" I continued this one-way conversation, watching her crawl up and down and upside-down. Suddenly, I noticed my own feet standing on green grass and wondered, "Who am I crawling on?" At first, I found the idea funny, but then I felt an inner sense of falling and not landing. "I am just like the ladybug! I have no idea!" A visceral sense of being part of something infinitesimally bigger than I could perceive was dizzying. This disorienting vertigo may have been a beginning realization of ecological identity.

As a kid, I liked to crawl around watching bugs and the intimate lives of small things, which I called *Little Land*. I enjoyed observing their entire amazing world. I believe this practice gave me bird's eye perspective on the world itself. With unnerving sensitivity, I have peered down upon the unraveling of Earth's living systems all my life. Viewing from a distance is accompanied by the same warm and curious intimacy that I experienced when viewing Little Land. This over-viewing perspective fosters profound sensitivity. Together, sensitivity and a larger perspective inform how I view reality. This may be why the loss of diverse life on earth is a pivotal psychological reality for me.

Along with joy and delight in life's intricacies, sensitivity also fuels despair, wretchedness, and helplessness. I suffer low ecological esteem. Sometimes I hate being human and feel like a cancer upon the earth, devouring its beauty to create repetitive patterns of sameness. Other times it fosters the opposite. I feel as if my struggles are the earth herself waking up, facing her planetary reality and moving toward conscious participatory evolution. In these times, I take great joy being the earth in human form. While skiing in the Alps at fifteen, surrounded by a sweeping range of crystalline mountains, I exulted, "The Earth, she loves skiing!" Truly, she does! This realization

remains an enduring awakening for me. I am inwardly devastated that we humans are energetically expensive for the planet and life. Yet, earth enjoys being human.

As an activist, I experience myself as fulfilling a planetary immune function. Along with nurturing Earth's living systems, I also protect this conversation, the one we are having right now, reader and writer. From my perspective, all complex human relations and endeavors (like this reader/writer one) are expressions of life; like roses, millipedes, clouds, hummingbirds, and frosty mornings. As precious flowerings on the tree of life, they require particular organic conditions to develop and thrive. Like rainforest frogs and soaring condors, sensitive features of complex life, which include this conversation, are endangered—threatened by the same forces that threaten all life (pollution, loss of habitat, climate change, etc.) The human soul is also prone to exploitation and needs space for its wild creative expressions.

A subjective sense of being the earth—living as the earth not on the earth—often leaves me alone and disoriented in a culture that ignores what matters most to me. My biggest challenge has been finding a clear professional path within this culture. Ecopsychology is more likely to be a profession in our future. Now it is a bit outlandish. However, I made a conscious choice to take this less-travelled outlandish path. In my 20s, I studied to be a family doctor. At that time, modern medicine ignored environmental dangers. While studying, I kept asking, “What does it mean to be a healer in the context of our times?” My fellow students and professors steered away from exploring healing of our larger context. Working in medical institutions broke my heart. Almost everything we touched was thrown away. Medicine ignored environmental degradation and contributed to it! Plus, none of the windows opened. Gasping for air, I

realized that medicine would not help me be a healer in the context of our times. I left chemistry in the middle of a class (when the teacher said that all life could be boiled down to enzymes). I left medical institutions and turned to wild nature and Buddhism.

My Master's thesis in Wilderness Psychology applied Buddha's Four Noble Truths to the essential problem of ecological suffering.⁴⁰ I sought to understand the psychological roots of human-caused environmental degradation. I discovered that human beings have a problem with suffering itself, not only the complexity of systemic problems. This doctoral dissertation attempts not only to befriend suffering, but to let suffering become a tough friend. Initiation serves this goal with its clear commitment to honor and undergo what Meade calls the right kind of suffering; the suffering of growing up, the suffering dying to be reborn, and the suffering that arises when being accountable for one's mistakes, even terrible unintentional mistakes.⁴¹

This research explores whether the right kind of suffering is the initiatory pain of evolution. When studying in India, I found myself disagreeing with the focus on ending suffering. Instead of ending, what about attending to suffering?⁴² I wondered if the teachings would be different if Buddha were born a woman. A mother does not ignore the cries of a baby though she knows that the universe is in constant flux and change is inevitable, but gets up and responds, even if responding means a loss of sleep and health (suffering).⁴³ I wondered about the spiritual and developmental fruits of responsiveness. How might responding to suffering soften ingrained habits of greed, selfishness, and domination? Until now, these habits helped humanity survive, but no longer. I want to explore ways to change these habits and, by doing so, heed what Mary Oliver imagines as "Buddha's Final Instruction," which is to "Make of yourselves a light."⁴⁴

I glimpsed the possibility of doing so when I read an invitation to attend a daylong workshop hosted by Karen Jaenke called *The Ecological Imagination*:

We are living in a time of unimaginable extinction of life forms and disruption of ecosystems. It is tempting to turn away from the mounting environmental facts, inhabiting stances of denial, numbness, apathy, or to descend into states of overwhelm. . . . The day will provide a space for cultivating the mythic, cultural, and personal imagination need to turn toward the individual and collective initiation evoked by the ecological crisis.⁴⁵

The flier invited participants to cultivate “the ecological imagination” by sharing mythic stories of earth’s destruction and renewal while giving space for participants to express their emotional responses to environmental crises. What really piqued my interest was the phrase, “turning toward the individual and collective initiation evoked by the ecological crisis.”⁴⁶ I had never thought of reframing ecological crisis as an initiation. Can responding to suffering be an initiation? How? This line of questioning became the focus for my doctoral thesis.

Writing this dissertation has been my arduous, unpredictable, messy initiation. Early one morning, when I thought I was nearly done with this work, I ran up our local sacred mountain on Lasqueti Island in Canada. Before reaching the top, I did our family ritual of opening the magic of the mountain by touching a protrusion on the ancient red arbutus tree and making a turning gesture as if turning a knob, giving thanks for being nearly done. At that moment, a forest butterfly dive-bombed straight into my ear. It was deafening and terrifying inside my head. I could not get it out. Pressing my ear closed with fingers, trying to suffocate the butterfly. I stumbled to the top and the butterfly continued its inward journey. Panicked, I ran headlong down the mountain, crying out, “Die! Die! Die! Just please die!” I plunged into the sea. My ears filled with salty water. The butterfly finally ceased its terrifying inward squirming and became still. I could not

take time to remove it from deep in my ear because it was time to catch ferries and small planes to California. It stayed plugged up in there, muffling my world. A few days later, its crushed and wilted body emerged after I was finally able to flush it out with water.

During the days I felt its dead body deep in my head, I contemplated its presence. The butterfly is the mythic mascot of this dissertation. Plotkin observes, “The caterpillar is to the butterfly as the uninitiated ego is to an initiated one.”⁴⁷ Further, *psyche*, in ancient Greek means both the human soul and butterfly.⁴⁸ Why did it die inside my head? One message I got: “Stop thinking *about* initiation. *Become* initiation.” I then realized even my name, “Renée (meaning rebirth) Soule (akin to soul) evokes the spirit of initiation.”⁴⁹ I thought I was nearly done, but I had three more years of hard work ahead.

Another major influence on this research are the eleven years I have taught Nonviolent Communication to men serving life sentences in San Quentin. I have witnessed over and over again that, yes, people can and do change. I also learned that changing is very hard work. My students taught me that coming to terms with mistakes, metabolizing shame, and working to repair what was broken can be an initiation into becoming a mature human being who is starkly honest, forgiving of self and others, and even has a sense of humor.⁵⁰ My students give me tempered hope in humanity. Tempered because most human beings do not have the benefit of serving life-sentences. Nor do they have the need to ponder harm they caused for years on end. Most of us do not have an opportunity to face a Board of Paroles and prove our care and integrity before being set loose on the world.

I do not mean to use the terms “benefit” or “opportunity” lightly, but honestly and soulfully. For my students, healing and redemption are not freely plucked from sunny

fields like daisies, but are hard-earned and require sacrifice. What about ecological awakening and integrity? Can humans achieve this generous and tempered maturity? How? Could it be a path of redemption be similar to that of my San Quentin students? If so, in what ways can we help each other? These questions haunt me. Though not completely resolved, this research helped me live into them more deeply.

Theory-in-Practice: Ecological Awakening Theory

A finely tempered nature longs to escape from the personal life into the world of objective perception and thought.

—Albert Einstein

This dissertation draws upon “Ecological Awakening Theory,” a term that is meant to describe an integration of theoretical perspectives that arise from the need for a lens that perceives the transformative potential of ecological crises. This perspective is drawn primarily from the work of Berry, Macy, and Plotkin who each teach that ecological crises can be an impetus for positive change. Other thinkers, like Meade, Hübl, Foster, among others, also helped to shape Ecological Awakening Theory.

Berry’s work provides the context for ecological initiation. Traditionally, initiation requires the context of a creation story. Berry and Brian Swimme provides this cosmological context, which they calls “the universe story,” maintaining that such a cosmology enables humans to “enter fruitfully into the web of relationships within the universe.”⁵¹ Berry’s work rests upon the excitement that life is a “numinous experience wherein we are given to each other in the larger celebration of existence in which all things attain their highest expression, for the universe, by definition, is a single gorgeous

celebratory event.”⁵² Swimme and he use insights of modernity to forge a creation story based upon a scientific understanding of the cosmos wherein humans are an integral part. Within this story humans stop seeking a human answer to an earth problem and find an earth answer to an earth problem. Developing the capacity to become earth’s answer is the heart of ecological initiation, if humans can awaken into what Berry poetically describes, “the dream of the earth.”⁵³ Further what Berry calls the “Great Work of our time” is “The Great Work now, as we move into a new millennium, is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”⁵⁴

Macy describes the potential of our time as “the Great Turning,” whose three dimensions include stopping ecological harm, understanding and addressing the systemic causes of environmental destruction, and transforming consciousness that is the root cause of environmental crises.⁵⁵ Similar to Berry’s Great Work, Macy teaches that our primary task is to turn away from an “Industrial Growth Society” toward a “Life Sustaining Civilization” which requires what she calls the “great unraveling.”⁵⁶ Turning away and unraveling is heralded by feelings of despair, fear, helplessness, and rage that arise when one honestly faces threats to life on earth.⁵⁷ Macy sees the ability to be affected as a sign of interconnectedness and health.⁵⁸ We need this energy of authentic emotional connection to attend to the Great Turning.⁵⁹ What Macy brings to Ecological Awakening Theory is her discovery that the pain people feel in response the larger suffering of our world is a hallmark of ecological identity. Therefore, pain is a good sign.

Plotkin brings the wisdom of initiation to bear upon ecological crises. Like Berry and Macy, he understands that the problems we face present opportunities to grow and

mature psychologically.⁶⁰ His map of human development is based upon initiatory stages in which the capacity to promote ecological balance is the apex of human potential in our historical moment.⁶¹ He says the primary focus of his work as an initiation guide is to further Macy's Great Turning and Berry's Dream of the Earth. He holds that this furthering can, and should, arise via maturation. He describes this development: I do not mean something implausible or fanciful. I mean what simply amounts to growing up. Rather than become something other-than-human or superhuman, we are summoned to become *fully* human.⁶² Ecological Awakening Theory does not use Plotkin's developmental map of maturation, but it does rest upon his insight that contemporary initiation naturally leads to a sense of "earth citizenship," where one's identity and core values are recast accordingly.⁶³

Ecological Awakening Theory reveals and highlights initiatory dimensions of ecological engagement, with an eye to discovering ways to support and encourage this "Great Turning" and "great work of our time." Via this theory's lens, insights gleaned from real-life experiences and reflections of seasoned environmental activists might shed light on the initiatory terrain and potentials of ecological crises.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

Now it can dawn on us: we are our world knowing itself. We can relinquish our separateness. We can come home again—and participate in our world in a richer, more responsible, and poignantly beautiful way than before.

—Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*

Is it possible to engage current environmental crises as an initiation into a new level of maturity and wakefulness rather than a disaster to avoid or hope others resolve?

Environmental activists embody this possibility. How might their long term-engagement and sense of accountability constitute an initiatory rite of passage? I hypothesized that seasoned environmental activists may, through their years of perseverance and facing the culture's ecological crises, undergo an initiatory journey that correlates with archetypal patterns of initiation. Over time, the fruits of this engagement could result in the ongoing development of and commitment to a post-modern ecological identity. More than proving the validity of this hypothesis, this research explores the initiatory contours of ecological engagement. Increased knowledge about this terrain could lead to surer footing in the territory of ecological initiation occurring during massive environmental upheavals.

It could also shed light on what is missing for devoted activists who are not experiencing positive developmental shifts. If, indeed, seasoned environmental activists undergo an initiatory journey that leads to a tempered ecological maturity, then one could then say, with some degree of confidence, that willingly turning towards environmental crises should be a developmental path of awakening, maturation, and psychological development. If not, what prevents the initiation from occurring? Practically speaking, how does one engage ecological crisis as an initiation into ecological identity?

Methodology and Research Design

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

—Albert Einstein

Imaginal Inquiry, a participatory research methodology developed at Meridian University, requires that one's research topic be evoked in real time. I could not talk

about the initiatory journey of activists; I had to evoke this journey in real time. This allowed participants to speak from, rather than about, their experience as activists.

To this end, I gathered 11 seasoned environmental activists (selected for having a well-developed ecological identity) to participate in a daylong outdoor experience that was structured to be an initiation. This mini-initiation included the three phases of initiation, severance, liminality and incorporation. Two weeks later, we met to reflect upon initiatory thresholds (challenges, turning points, insights) revealed in their condensed daylong ecological initiation.

Day One began with the initial phase of Severance, or what I called, “taking leave of an old way of life.” This led to exploring the liminal experience, which I referred to as “carrying hard truths” that are not readily accepted or believed by dominant culture. Each activist shared their “hard truth” with “dominant culture.” Dominant culture was role-played by the rest of the group. This exercise intended to evoke the hardships of liminality. The passage out of the liminal phase was a solitary blindfold journey through a tunnel contemplating, “What carries me through dark times?” Incorporation took place in a public rose garden, where activist-participants contemplated and shared in dyads “the thorns and roses” of one’s daily work as an activist. At the end of the day, everyone gathered on a lookout to review and catch a glimpse of “new horizons.” The day concluded with a gathering around a fire, sharing a meal, and recounting key moments.

The second meeting was a chance for participants to understand the purpose and nature of the research and participate in its meaning-making phase. We openly discussed the overall purpose of the research: initiatory development of ecological identity via a path of ecological engagement. I also shared preliminary learnings (findings) with them.

We then delved into the secondary research question: How might environmental crises be engaged as an initiatory path of awakening and development? An important part of Day Two was providing participants a chance to re-do the “truth-telling exercise.” I offered them this chance after they understood the initiatory potential of activism and after relaxing into a group definition of ecological identity (cobbled together from their journal entries of Day One). The differences between truth-telling experiences of Day One and Two were significant and contributed to the learnings.

Significance and Relevance of the Topic

“Make of yourself a light,” said the Buddha, before he died.

—Mary Oliver, “The Buddha’s Last Instruction”

When beginning this research, I had a dream. I am sitting at my desk (which is near the floor), cross-legged on my cushion. Writing on my computer, I am draped only in wet cloak of long gossamer sheets of silken slime. The cloak is silvery in the light but transparent, embedded with what appear to be countless small shimmering jewels of different sizes. Realizing these silken robes of slime are alive and they need to stay wet, I get up occasionally and go outside. As I walk, I hold out my arms, spreading the veils of gossamer slime so that they gently brush through rain-splashed foliage. Fresh wetness coats the slimy jewels and drips upon my warm skin. Enjoying the moment (and the break from typing), I lift my arms to look more closely at the slime, gazing upon the lovely jewels of varied sizes. As I look carefully, I see they are eggs! Many, many *eggs*! Countless thousands of unborn creatures are embedded in my slimy silken cloak. I am spellbound. In each jeweled entity, is an eye—a shining, clear, mobile dark eye—peering

consciously into the world, fixing itself upon my movements, watching me silently, unblinking, awake, as if pleading with me. These are the yet-to-be-born, those watching knowing eyes in our not-so-distant future. Perhaps (as it seemed in my dream) they are silently praying for us to wake up and engage the environmental crises as an initiation.

On a less dream-like note, this research has the potential to address evil as clarified by Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig. He sees evil not as a sin in the religious sense, but a lacunae or empty place in a person's psyche. Evil arises from lacunae in the human soul where Eros, the energy of life loving life, is simply absent, a "particular form of invalidism of Eros."⁶⁴ In his song, "Anthem," Leonard Cohen invites this possibility with his lyrics, "Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."⁶⁵ If true, then perhaps the empty, fearful places within us that obstruct our capacity for deep ecological relatedness can also be spaces for ecological identity to emerge. What is required is a willingness to be present to that vacuous emptiness, to feel and give affectionate attention to the numbed emptiness of indifference, avoidance, blame, and cold-heartedness.⁶⁶

It is easier to see others as evil, rather than oneself. In this habitual shift of blame, humans tend to miss the initiatory potential of accountability. Guggenbühl-Craig asserts, "Quite possibly, the task of Eros is to help us to accept our own monstrosity and that of others, along with that of psychopaths."⁶⁷ As teenager, I lived in Germany and explored how an advanced civilization descended into primitive cruelty. I wanted to understand evil. Eventually, I found myself looking into a mirror. Am I not participating in an ecological holocaust? Do I hold the ubiquitous belief in human superiority? Do I lust for material comfort and social status? What about my careless daily actions?⁶⁸

This research seeks to redeem a path of ecological accountability and stop seeing others as the problem or solution. Often, I imagine that my San Quentin students tell the shame-ridden and guilt-stricken part of me: “Hey! Wake up! Stop shirking! Look at your crime! Take full responsibility! Grow up! You can do it! It will be healing!” And I remember what I teach them when working creatively with shame: “Repair is possible.”

I imagine reframing crises and ecological trauma as an initiation could be useful for activists, teachers, psychologists, and all people seeking to adopt a more wholesome and sustainable lifestyle. Yes, it will be arduous, but who said initiations were easy? Further, the passage toward ecological identity may already be underway for many of us, but in a semi-conscious fashion. Knowing the basic structure, purposes, and terrain of ecological initiation could support our journey and enable us to help each other with skill, compassion, and a sense of humor. Those devoted to ecological healing could recognize hardships, resistance, and failure may be part of initiatory development and take heart.

The greatest significance of this research is the possibility that this research may encourage one to love life, to really love life. This love is palpable when witnessed in teachers like Macy, Seed, and Foster. It transmits to their students and colleagues. This love, in my experience, is energizing and infinitely creative.

Norse Mythology paints a picture of the end of the world. Everything dies, including even the Gods! In a tiny shed, amidst the smoking ruins of total destruction, huddle two entities. They emerge from the dust of utter destruction and look around. Their names: Life and Love-of-Life. From their dance, all may be born anew.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Overview

“The world has not ended,” says McKibben, “but the world, as we know it, has.”¹

This assertion not only necessitates societal adaptations, but inner development may also be required. If crisis could be viewed as an invitation to evolve, what and who are we invited to become? Environmental philosophers suggest the invitation is to step into a larger identity able to take an ecological perspective that is not only human-oriented, but inclusive and caring of all life, including humans and culture. How then might activism itself—the daily work of responding courageously and creatively to environmental challenges—constitute an initiatory rite of passage into a system-oriented ecological identity? Could understanding the transformative potential of activism help people engage ecological crisis as a rite passage rather than submit to a tragic disaster?

This inquiry rests upon three theoretical footholds.² The first, carved in Section One, “The Primordial Roots of Initiation,” traces transcultural indigenous roots of initiation and develops an understanding of its perennial structure and purposes. Initiation is an ancient ritual designed to help human beings understand, attend to, and participate in the transformative initiatory change inherent in life. Initiation is undergoing a renaissance. Contemporary approaches to initiation provide a second foothold for reframing environmental crises as an initiation. Section Two, “Contemporary Approaches to Initiation,” looks at ways this ancient method of change is being reinvented for modern

people. Section Three, “Sketchy Responsiveness to Environmental Limits,” stretches into the sobering environmental realities of our time. What underlies the dearth of responses to a life-threatening situation? Rather than reiterate a litany of dire environmental facts, Section Three explores the puzzlement of personal and societal intransigence in the face of ecological disintegration. Activists contend with this sluggishness on a daily basis. What is the role of resistance, and dealing with resistance, in ecological initiations? The final section, “Forging Generative Approaches to Ecological Crises,” explores what Meade calls the “initiatory imagination.” This mode of perception, says Meade, is deeply embedded in the human psyche and naturally allows us to perceive tumultuous shifts in identity that occur outside ritual settings as initiations.³ He also says this frame helps us make sense of trauma in all its forms. Perceiving initiation as a formal ritual and archetypal pattern or map of transformative change can help constellate radical necessary change, even for modern secular people.

These four sections lay the groundwork for researching the possibility of healing our world and transforming ourselves as a seamless forward movement.⁴ Initiation is an ancient path of change that brings personal and collective healing together. Drawing sustenance from a deep understanding of the principles of initiation could help us work honestly and fearlessly with environmental challenges facing us today. This research may also provide a fresh approach to exhausting and demoralizing ecological dilemmas. Framing activism as an initiation does not offer solutions, but it suggests how to swim in rough waters.

Section One: Primordial Roots of Initiation

See up there? Two canyons. One is Sacred Canyon and the other is Thunder Canyon. Go up there, and don't come back until the voices have stopped.

—Steven Foster

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “initiate” (which comes from the Latin *initiara*, to begin and *initi-um*, beginning) as “to begin, commence, open, instigate, give rise to, and originate.”⁵ The root of the word “nature” comes from Latin, *natura*, which means “birth” and refers to “everything, everyone, all creation.”⁶ This semantic root implies that at its core, nature is endlessly birthing, commencing, and instigating, which parallels the central meaning of initiate. *Psyche* means “soul” or “breath” in ancient Greek, and pertains to life or “the animating principle of man and other living beings.”⁷ For ancient Greeks, *psyche* also referred to the butterfly, a creature whose signature attribute is a radical transformation from hungry grub, to cocooned pupae, to winged butterfly.⁸ Thus the semantic roots of the word *psyche* refer to the soul’s affinity with initiation and nature. The *Oxford Dictionary* illuminates this connection, “The poor grub expands into a beautiful form with rainbow wings. The Greeks called it Psyche. A manifest emblem of the soul.”⁹ As a manifest emblem of the soul, a butterfly’s life-passage is uncannily congruent with the three phases of initiation, which involve dying to an old way of being and suffering the dissolution of the cocoon to be reborn into a new form (severance, liminality, and incorporation). Themes of death and rebirth, core to the ever-renewing essence of nature, run through and link initiation and the soul.

Ancient people appear to have understood the congruence between soul, initiation, and nature. Scholars who studied intact indigenous cultures speculate that the

need for humans to align with the ways of nature gave rise to rituals of initiation.¹⁰ These rites reach into deep roots of human culture, back to our earliest beginnings when adhering and surrendering to the regenerative cycles and rhythms of nature were required to survive. Contemporary indigenous teachers of initiation taught Foster and Little that initiation is not a human invention at all, but arises from observing and imitating rejuvenating cycles of nature.¹¹ They assert, “From the beginning of human time, the union of human and Nature has brought forth a healing mythos for the collective woes of the people. ... You would be helpless indeed if you completely ignored your ability to hear the roaring of the Sacred River....”¹² A contemporary purpose of initiation is to reestablish the ancient bond between humans and nature.

Creation myths were also a thematic foundation of ancient initiation rituals. Assuming one’s part in a larger creation story gave initiates an embodied understanding of their place in one’s culture and the cosmos. Extreme experiences of deprivation, loss, and humiliation within initiations reveal that a sacrifice of a smaller or limited identity was required to fully play one’s part in a larger eternal story. Karen Armstrong notes that as subjects of the cosmos, initiated humans also came to understand and respect nature’s ruthless rhythms of birth, death, and renewal.¹³ Along with situating individuals within a cosmic context, respect and understanding provided the foundation for a tempered maturity required for survival.

Armstrong directly connects primordial survival needs in harsh untamed wilderness environments to the development of initiation myths and rituals.¹⁴ She asserts that these rituals were mythic, but not escapist. A call to larger belonging was also a call to come to terms with life’s hardships and align with the power of nature. She traces the

evolution of ritual along evolutionary lines of culture from hunter-gatherer, through agriculture, up to urban industrialism. She postulates that the Neolithic revolution (when agriculture became the basis of culture) heralded a growing awareness of a fecund creative energy that pervaded the entire cosmos, an energy that invited, and demanded, cooperation. At this point, she writes, the mythical imagination “becomes more concrete and circumstantial; what was originally amorphous gains definition and becomes particular.”¹⁵ Forces of nature became manifestations of the Great Mother, a feminine energy that was not gentle or consoling, but powerful and commanding respect. Honoring her meant surrendering to death as part of renewal. In ancient myths, all consorts of the Goddess are “torn apart, dismembered, brutally mutilated, and killed before they can rise again, with the crops and new life.”¹⁶ Consider the seed buried underground or the trammeling of grapes to make wine.¹⁷ The brutal nature of initiation rites, says Armstrong, imitated what ancient people observed in nature. They helped people cultivate courage and make sacrifices required by life.¹⁸

What is primordial is frequently derided as outmoded by modern peoples, Omer notes.¹⁹ Initiation’s connection to wild nature is a case in point. Because these rites have their roots deep in human history, back to our days as hunter-gatherers, they appear to embody an antiquated and regressive reliance on the numinous powers of nature. Scholars like Wilber might instinctively place my research in the company of what he calls “descenders” or “flatlanders” who attempt to elevate earlier stages of human and cultural development to a higher level of development and importance than is warranted or accurate.²⁰ Honoring the roots of initiation is not an attempt to romanticize or inflate an ancient practice, but to honor the deep history of coping with the imperative to change

when required by our habitat. Modern people are rediscovering our dependence upon, and vulnerability to, the forces of wild nature. We can use of dose of ancient wisdom.

Wilber also points out the benefits to exploring the “archeological layers of our own present awareness.”²¹ He notes the generative power of honoring our past. “There is a rush of energy released when reading Carl Jung or Joseph Campbell or Eliade or even Robert Bly—we are watering our roots, and they help us send forth new branches.”²² Still, Wilber would likely consider a framework for change developed by land-based peoples, who were wholly dependent upon adapting to the rhythms of nature, to be ineffective in regards to problems of urban-based modernity. We are no longer agricultural people, so what is the point of aligning with the powers of nature?

This research does not attempt to regress to outmoded practices of initiation. Nor does it espouse copying ancient ceremonies. Rather, it is an attempt to allow an ancient understanding of change to shed light upon individual and cultural leaps in development and reveal how such developments might be intentionally supported. More specifically, this research seeks to discover the ways in which engaged activism might parallel the patterns of change ancient peoples observed in nature and which were then woven into their initiation rituals. Wilber, in his most current work, postulates that each line of development has its flowering extending into the present and even out into the future. The practice of initiation might flower into its post-modern expression.²³ He also maintains that environmental crises are primarily developmental, because not enough people have a world-centric level of consciousness that naturally cares for the global commons.²⁴ We might be, he suggests, facing an outmoded level of consciousness and not a genuine pathology. We are not insane, only immature. Again, initiation addresses

both developmental and evolutionary challenges facing people, individually and collectively.

Armstrong postulates that even as modern people gain more control over their environment, the vivid necessity of initiatory ritual has not faded from collective memory.²⁵ Its primordial purposes, she says are still pertinent. Why might these purposes remain vital? A clear sign of relevance of initiation rituals is the very fact of their enduring existence. Michael J. Murray and Andrew Goldberg conclude that religious rituals serve an evolutionary purpose, not because beliefs are correct or scientifically verifiable, but because religious belief itself seems to be adaptive and favorable to human flourishing.²⁶ The simple durability of religion's presence in human cultures the world over is proof of its survival value, argue these theorists. Religious rites also have moral value, which could also aid in human survival. Similarly, David Sloan Wilson summarizes, "There is a universal human nature that transcends cultural differences. This nature is moral and believing."²⁷ In a similar fashion, initiations may also serve universal aspect of human nature.

Is it possible bring a modern understanding to wisdom traditions like initiation and evolve them in appropriate ways? Wilber points out, "A Zen master might have a profound intuition of oneness and be dedicated to not harming a single living being, but that doesn't mean that the Zen master will automatically know that Styrofoam will kill life."²⁸ Ancient practices may require updating, though their essence and primal purposes will remain steady and enduring. An exploration of initiation's archetypal form and purposes provide the backbone for a post-modern revival of initiation.

Enduring Structures of Initiation

The meaning of ritual is deep indeed. He who tries to enter it with the kind of perception that distinguishes hard and white, same and different will drown there.

—Xunzi

It is important to note that many studies of indigenous cultures took place as these cultures were rapidly being lost in the age of imperial conquest. This loss leaves modern people (myself included) solely with an intellectual understanding of indigenous approaches to initiation. We clumsily follow in the footsteps of perhaps equally clumsy scholars, seeking to understand an ancient practice that dynamically links transformative change, the human soul, and wild nature in ways that are relevant and revelatory.

Traditional rituals are still practiced in indigenous cultures but traditions can break.

The perennial structures and purposes of initiation rites appear to abide, even in our modern era, when rites of passage are being reinvented and reconstituted. Ronald Grimes insists that the process of reinventing rites of passage be done humbly, by letting go of one's cultural arrogance.²⁹ By observing ancient cultures, even as they came under colonial control, Arnold van Gennep, Turner, and Eliade created conceptual understandings of initiation that are still in use today.³⁰

Van Gennep was the first to attempt an objective trans-cultural understanding of initiation. In 1909, he assembled “all the ceremonial patterns” that guide participants through major life changes.³¹ He noted that all rituals of initiation required that “the individual pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined.”³² Because he noted the particular importance of these transitional rituals, he singled out “rites of passage” as a special category.³³ His main method, as an early anthropologist,

was to observe rituals and ceremonies of pre-industrial societies. Swept up by the spirit of the late nineteenth century, he systematically organized and dissected religious and ceremonial practices of ancient cultures and created what he considered a trans-cultural conceptual understanding of initiation.³⁴ He also showed that what appeared to Europeans to be outlandish and often drastic ceremonies of primitive peoples, actually served specific and rational functions that sustained individual and group life.

Though insistent that these “life crises ceremonies” needed to be examined in their entirety and in the social setting in which they were found, van Gannep emphasized their cross-cultural similarities. He coined their general description, *rites de passage* (in English, *passage* means transition).³⁵ His other lasting contribution to our modern cross-cultural understanding of initiation was to map the stages of these rites. He identified the three experiential “schema” or themes within these passages; the first being “separation” (*separation*), followed by a “transition” phase (*marge* or *limen*) and concluding with “incorporation” (*aggregation*).³⁶ Because many rites of transition marked a passage from one tribal territory to another, he chose to use physical metaphors for these stages, even for those rites that were social or psychological and did not involve physically passing into another community’s territory.³⁷

Van Gannep observed that a primary purpose of ritualizing life passages was to recognize, honor, and widen the often confusing and chaotic segues between stages of development.³⁸ This intentional broadening and intensifying the nebulous place in-between stages of development appeared to him to be essential to initiation rites. He noticed myriad ways rites are ritualized and highlighted the nowhere land between stages, the here and there time. He named this segue territory *limen* (Latin for threshold) or

marge (whence comes our word margin). Though *limen* refers to a narrow piece of wood marking the threshold of a doorway, this neither-here-nor-there threshold space becomes ritually and experientially significant in initiations. This space, observed van Gannep, embodies the heart of initiatory experience in part because liminal experiences are considered crucial preparation for an upcoming “postliminal” stage.³⁹ In other words, liminality prepares initiates for their new life.

Along with the liminal phase, van Gannep viewed the final incorporation phase as crucial to initiation rituals.⁴⁰ Initiations are complete only when one is no longer in the same physical, social, or psychological territory as before. He observed that most passages predispose a radical shift in perspective that is both practical and spiritual. One moves to a new social status while simultaneously viewing as sacred what had previously been mundane or profane.⁴¹

Van Gannep observed that a chaotic, and sometimes torturous, phase of transition exists within all natural periodicities that govern life, especially crisis. Tough transitions are inherent to existence, but if they are not ritualized, he surmised, they might be overlooked or neglected.⁴² He also came to appreciate the deep organic and even cosmic roots of initiation rituals. “It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe.”⁴³

Though van Gannep delineated sixteen types of rites relevant to different kinds of passages, he still brought to light the basic archetypal schema of separation, transition, and incorporation in all life crisis ceremonies and rites of transition.⁴⁴ Van Gannep tried not to oversimplify the elaborate rites he studied or their purposes, but his synthesis of

vastly diverse indigenous ceremonies has been characterized as an oversimplification by Grimes.⁴⁵ Even so, his broad descriptive brushstrokes of rites of passage remain the dominant lens of initiation used by contemporary scholars, ritual practitioners, and contemporary guides.

Because modern cultures have not, for the most part, maintained traditions of initiation, I would like to express gratitude to indigenous cultures with intact lineages of initiation that enable modern people, like me, to better understand this practice of transformation. Modern rites of passage guides, myself included, have been accused of cultural appropriation when doing this work. My sincere intention is to honor the integrity, beauty and power of this rite—humbling acknowledging the break in tradition that exists in my cultural lineage. As will be explored, engaging ecological crisis does not copy previous rites, but, in the words of Grimes, is an attempt to “reinvent rites of passage.”⁴⁶ He acknowledges the “damage done by universalism” on the part of scholars, and he also recommends reaching across the barriers of culture to search for connections and continuities.⁴⁷

Basic Types of Initiation

The [Eleusinian] Mysteries touched on something that was common to all men...an essential gift no one may describe or utter because [as Homer describes] “great awe of the gods makes the voice falter.”

—Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*

Another scholar, Eliade, whose life overlapped with van Gannep for fifty years, also studied rites of passage extensively the world over. Like van Gannep, he came to appreciate the profundity of these rituals and ways they served to cohere, update, and

develop the individual as well as community and society. Eliade came to describe existence itself as an initiation, noting that every human life is formed by a series of ordeals and repeated experiences of death and resurrection.⁴⁸ Along with van Gannep, he perceived that initiations occur outside the bounds of intentional ritual settings. He came to respect initiation as both an archetype and an explicit ritual. Further, he noted that even among modern people “without religion,” certain symbols of initiation can still awaken a metaphysical comprehension of the world.⁴⁹ Awakening this capacity is essential if one is to engage ecological crises as a rite of passage for humanity.

Eliade identifies initiation as the most profound and significant of all rituals. “It is through initiation that, in primitive and archaic societies, man becomes what he is and what he should be—a being open to the life of the spirit, hence one who participates in the culture into which he was born.”⁵⁰ For Eliade, initiation does not merely involve one’s personal destiny, but the religious life and spiritual grounding of one’s entire community.⁵¹ Though their structures are similar, not all initiations serve the same purposes. Eliade says the history of religion identifies three types of initiations.⁵² The first type works with inevitable transitions related to age or status. The second involves entry into elite societies. The third is shamanic, mystical, or involving a special vocation.

The first type includes community-based rituals that support individual’s transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood.⁵³ These inevitable and radical changes in a person’s (and their community’s) life are likely the most common initiation. In his photomontage of rites of passage around the world, Anders Ryman documents that ancient rites pertaining to natural life passages, like becoming an adult, husband, mother,

or elder are still being practiced in our modern era.⁵⁴ These initiations are usually obligatory for all community members and serve to preserve social order and integrity.

The second type involves people who enter secret societies, elite groups, or, in our modern era, fraternities.⁵⁵ For better or worse, this type of initiation greatly influences our contemporary understanding of initiation, where initiation equates humiliating experiences that grant entry into college fraternities, cults-like groups like the Hell's Angels, elite military units such as the Green Berets, or any number of secret societies. How fast one can gobble a roll of toilet paper while crawling up stairs or withstand the public humiliation of group spankings are seen as typical initiation experiences. The many profane and mundane uses of initiation, especially of the hazing variety, in modern society triggers suspicion for people such as my father, John Soule, as he cannot see how this concept or these kinds of experiences relate to environmental crises.⁵⁶ Though elements of these hazing rituals may share aspects of ancient rites, they are not grounded in their overarching purposes. The original purpose of humiliation was not an end in itself or meant as entertainment for onlookers, but a necessary part of identity expansion.

The third type, which is less commonly recognized in modernity, occurs in connection with a mystical role in one's community, like that of a shaman, medicine man, or spiritual leader.⁵⁷ This type of initiation involves a more select group than the first two because "deeper religious experience and knowledge demand a special vocation, or exceptional will power and intelligence."⁵⁸ Initiations to secret societies can be bought with gifts. Not so, says Eliade, for the shaman or soul-healer.⁵⁹ More often than not, the initiation is unplanned, unexpected, not orchestrated by one's community. Nor, of course, is it required. A shamanic or vocational initiation tests one's mettle in terms of

a unique calling or purpose, which is neither available to (nor desired by) other community members.⁶⁰

Of all types of initiation, this third category may be most applicable to the experience of environmental activists. Though ubiquitous deteriorating environmental conditions should call forth an initiatory awakening that leads to a radically new way of life for all of us, few human beings respond to this call (for now). Similar to shamanic rites of passage, this type of initiation tests one's mettle in terms of following a unique calling or purpose that is not readily available, or desired, by most people. Initiations that involve purpose or one's calling, observes Greg Bogart, are inherently difficult.⁶¹ Eliade clarifies further that the shaman or mystic "is not solely an ecstatic, but also a contemplative—a thinker. In later civilizations, the philosopher will be recruited among these beings, to whom the mysteries of existence represent a passionate interest and who are drawn, by vocation, to know the inner life."⁶² It appears that only a select few are able or willing to undergo the third type of initiation.

Ecological initiation fits loosely into this third category of initiations because it is not a predictable maturation passage nor does it mark one's entry into a secret society. Similar to other vocational initiations, dedicated activism is outside the bounds of normal vocational options. It is also exceedingly trying, and often heralded by a powerful calling to serve life beyond one's personal needs. Those called are also among the minority. Given ubiquitous environmental, humanity as a whole could be called to respond and transform their lives. For the time being, those called to ecological healing are rare.

Eliade helped to free initiation from being seen as a time-bound and culturally mediated ritual limited to these three types to viewing initiation's role in a broader

cosmic arena.⁶³ Over the course of his life, Eliade came to see existence itself as an initiation, noting that every human life is formed by a series of ordeals and repeated experiences of death and resurrection.⁶⁴ He pioneered the view that initiation can be seen as an archetype. Initiation, he wrote, has not disappeared, it has gone underground and “...remains alive chiefly in modern man’s unconscious.”⁶⁵ To this end, Eliade observed that although stylized rites have mostly disappeared in modern secular society, the need, hunger for, and obfuscated expressions of initiatory experience are still present via human imagination and reappear in desacralized forms via meaningful experiences, literature, and film.⁶⁶ Initiation rites that have endured in modern times, he observes, are those able to situate one’s personal dilemma and sufferings within context of an ancient story or myth.⁶⁷ Eliade was certain that the archetypal motif of initiation does not become stale or meaningless if the connection between individual, myth, and daily cultural life are made real and maintained.⁶⁸

Victor Turner also expanded van Gannep’s perspectives of initiatory structures to include cultural transformations, in particular those spawned by 1960s counter-revolution in the Western world.⁶⁹ He recognized the applicability of van Gannep’s tripartite structure of traditional initiation (separation, liminality, and integration) as a useful way to understand both ancient rituals of passage as well as the dynamics of cultural transformation and processes of societal change.⁷⁰ Turner contextualized his explorations by asking, “Where is society going?” or “Whither goes the world?”⁷¹ He came to see that van Gannep’s structure of the initiation process is applicable to situations where “undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by process of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of the old elements into new patterns.”⁷²

Societies, he observed, go through a similar process of initiation that imitate natural cycles of death, rebirth and renewal during times of cultural renewal.⁷³

Like van Gannep, Turner came to place great value on the liminal, what he called the “betwixt and between” phase.⁷⁴ Through his experimental and experiential work with larger groups, he observed the fertility of the often eerie and tumultuous liminal gap between orderly, staid social worlds and an inchoate emerging world.⁷⁵ This “fruitful darkness” is essential to social evolution, Turner thought, because within a neither-here-nor-there betwixt and between phase social norms and root paradigms can be questioned and revised.⁷⁶ Turner describes root paradigms as the “genetic codes of culture” which are invisible, directive, and instinctively accepted.⁷⁷ These root paradigms shape human attitudes, beliefs, and acceptance of particular outcomes and are difficult to change. He identified liminality as a space where radical deconstruction of root paradigms can occur, a “realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence.”⁷⁸ A surefire way to judge whether an initiation occurs, posits Turner, is to determine if root paradigms become conscious, are actively questioned, and then transformed. Or not.

Initiation-Based Communities or *Communitas*

When school and mosque and minaret get torn down, then dervishes can begin their community.

—Rumi, “Betrayal into Trust”

While working with initiation during the social tumult of the 1960s, Turner identified two liminal structures not spoken of in previous studies of initiation. He

observed that when people who are in a similar state of flux and then find themselves in liminal space together, they tend to create a special kind of liminal community; he called these temporary communities *communitas*.⁷⁹ Turner observed that shared liminal experience both requires and creates liminal culture. *Communitas* are liminal in nature and not strictly ordered, but they are not, Turner emphasized, irrational. These liminal communities create liminal social structures, what he calls “anti-structures,” where rigid or hierarchical systems of society are let go for the sake of ritual or liminal fluidity.⁸⁰ These anti-structures tend to be undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, and non-rational. Turner believed that experimenting with new ways of viewing society and culture encourage liminality within the larger culture and thereby foster cultural transformation.

Not only do these in-between-communities provide a platform for social change to materialize, they also provide a haven for those in the throes of personal liminality. Turner said initiation entails an “inner process of growth and individuation [where one] must leave old ways behind, divesting oneself of ego’s claims to rank and social function, in order to attain a more highly individuated stage of growth.”⁸¹ *Communitas* provide anchoring without hindering change. Turner observed that a lack of *communitas* can foster “an unlivable liminality and feelings of despair.”⁸² They provide a cohering sense of belonging for a group of self-selected “outsiders” who share initiatory objectives and require isolation from social norms and confining cultural beliefs.⁸³ In summary, they offer a frothy but safe container for innovation and a stabilizing sense of belonging, where individual and groups move through a “constant dialectal process that involves successive experiences of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and

differentiation, equality and inequality.⁸⁴ This type of juxtaposition, he says, is essential to the evolution of culture and can be observed in any “great society.”⁸⁵

Another initiatory structure uniquely identified by Turner is action-oriented. He noted that during times of profound social transition, small actions that challenge cultural norms take on significant symbolic meaning. He called these small but highly symbolic actions “liminoid forms of symbolic action,” asserting that they are key to cultural evolution.⁸⁶ Liminoid forms of symbolic action are similar to ritualized actions. He also refers to symbols and symbolic actions as “storage bins of information, not about pragmatic techniques, but about cosmologies, values, and cultural axioms.”⁸⁷ They are imbued with a sense of larger purpose during liminal phases and later become woven into behaviors of daily life.⁸⁸ He explains succinctly, “Symbols instigate social action.”⁸⁹

Perennial Purposes of Initiation

All you're going to meet out there is yourself.

—Steven Foster

“All you are going to meet out there is yourself,” is what Foster told vision questers before they left for their time alone on the land. This could be seen as the primary purpose of initiation, but scholars understand that other needs are served as well, including needs of the community and world. Though Catherine Bell describes ritual as a “transcultural language of the human spirit,” she insists that it not be approached as “some transparent phenomenon out there in the world waiting to be analyzed and explained.”⁹⁰ Purposes vary, she asserts, depending upon the passage at hand.⁹¹ An

overarching purpose of initiation, put forth by van Gannep and agreed upon by most scholars, is to mark the transition between stages of life or a passage from one stage, location, or social role to another.⁹² Most important, these transitions need to be recognized and vetted by one's community. Quintessentially, initiation facilitates an end of a way of being in ways that prepare the ground for the birth of a new identity. This new identity is usually a more mature and inclusive self that embodies and expresses what Eliade calls a "higher mode of being."⁹³ Rites, he says, facilitate the death of an old way of being in order to be reborn to a higher life, "which is at once religious and cultural."⁹⁴ They facilitate death and resurrection because, clarifies Eliade, a new life must be embraced by a new person.⁹⁵ Finally, according to Bell, rites provide an "embracing conceptual order of cognition and experience."⁹⁶

Meade describes initiation as self-revelation, where one comes to understand one's deepest nature and purpose.⁹⁷ He elaborates, "Becoming a true individual means learning what is already seeded inside in order to properly relate to all that occurs on the outside."⁹⁸ Meade uses the ancient word "genius" to define that spark of individuality that is awakened via initiation, which is often a crisis or terrible ordeal.⁹⁹ Akin to the ancient Greek concept of *daemon*, Meade says genius is a seed that is planted deep in our souls. This seed, says Meade, requires certain conditions, even tribulations, to grow and bear fruit. Meade insists that knowing one's genius must come before responding to the calling of the world. Not having a calling "leaves a person 'on call' for this or that or the other."¹⁰⁰ Meade insists that the world needs our genius, so that "the calling from without calls to the genius within."¹⁰¹

Malidoma Somé, a teacher steeped in intact African traditions of initiation, teaches that initiations give space for individuals to ask and reflect upon timeless existential questions, “Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I here for? Where am I going?”¹⁰² Over the course of an ever-maturing life, answers to these questions require ongoing clarification, which is why Somé believes that initiations can, and should, occur throughout the lifetime of every human being. He describes maturity (a core theme of all initiations) as “the awakening into one’s gift” and “the investment of self for a good that is greater than self.”¹⁰³ Thus Somé echoes a common understanding among indigenous people that all humans are born with a purpose, a mission they must carry out in accordance with one’s gift or destiny and this is often discovered by facing hardships in life.¹⁰⁴ He maintains that the “serious troubles we face in life are nothing other than initiatory experiences.”¹⁰⁵ Suffering is integral to initiation because, says Somé, because people must learn to see the potential for growth inside trouble.¹⁰⁶

What is the purpose of suffering in initiation? Somé refers to indigenous perspective that suffering serves to bring more awareness, responsibility, and wisdom to initiates.¹⁰⁷ In a similar fashion, Turner holds that dissolution, invisibility, and even the death of the transitional or liminal persona is required before one is able to enter the realm of “pure possibility” or *prima materia*; only then is one ready to be shaped into a new identity.¹⁰⁸ Somé teaches that rituals of initiation provide a sacred, and relatively safe space for this dying and suffering to occur.

Burket observes that literal nakedness, loss of pride, status, and other humiliating experiences play a key role in initiatory rites.¹⁰⁹ He supposes that cruel and demeaning practices (like flogging, fasting, and extreme physical exertions) are designed to break

down rigid personality structures as preparation for surrendering to and accepting a new and more mature identity.¹¹⁰ Burket also notes that initiation rituals emphasize unconditional surrender as essential to identity development. In his view, harrowing experiences serve to strip away one's old identity. Pain, fear, and humiliation are part of that process. Turner says initiates must be "ground down to be fashioned anew."¹¹¹

Surrender and suffering make initiation a tricky affair, especially informal peer-driven initiations. Many of my students in San Quentin are behind bars because of botched, misguided, or de-contextualized initiations that are often gang-related. They recognize informal initiations as meeting needs for belonging, respect, status, and to be seen as a trustworthy adult.¹¹² From my students I have learned that informal initiations can be dangerous and destructive. Their experience could be an example of what Grimes calls "unconscious initiatory behavior" where peers initiate each other with violence as the outcome.¹¹³ Outside the safe boundaries of a rite, the initiatory urge to attain the status of a new identity might elicit submission to false authority figures and dangerous actions that cause irreparable harm and can, for some, lead to a life-sentence in prison.

Similar to the indigenous philosophy of Somé, James Hillman considered personal destiny to be inborn and rooted in the soul, like a seed waiting for the right conditions to grow and thrive.¹¹⁴ From this perspective, initiation is less a forging of something new and more an honoring and tempering of what is already inborn and present in an individual. Initiation provides the conditions for destiny and purpose to emerge. Joseph Henderson connected the journey of individuation to the initiatory journey where one discovers the essence of a person's nature and belonging in the cosmos.¹¹⁵ He described the gradually individualized ego-consciousness that is

connected to one's "deep self" as "the true fruit of initiation" and regards this emergence as a main goal in psychoanalysis.¹¹⁶ For example, Silvia Brinton Perera helps clients track themes of initiation in their daily lives via the use of myth rather than ritual in her therapeutic practice. She relies primarily upon the Sumerian initiation story of Inanna (the Sumerian Queen of Heaven) as a map to orient clients struggling to individuate within the struggles of their daily life.¹¹⁷ She has discovered that even without an accompanying ritual, deeply exploring the myth of Inanna's initiation facilitates and promotes a genuine faith in the process of change required for her clients' individuation.¹¹⁸ The Inanna initiation story guides her clients on an initiatory journey that leads them to, as she describes, "surrender to the terrifying and beautiful wholeness of life, of what is both lovely and horrible" in the midst of their daily life.¹¹⁹

Jean Houston also teaches that, personal development and healing comes from discovering themes of a "larger story" running through one's life.¹²⁰ Houston is passionate about relating the personal self "the great archetypes."¹²¹ We live, she insists, "in a time of speciation" describing humans beings as "bulimic caterpillars" on the edge of a massive leap in development.¹²² During times of unprecedented change, she says it is essential that one's personal template connects universal templates of transformation and that the "templates for the changes we need to make are rooted in the depths of the human psyche."¹²³ She exhorts, "Look at cosmos and let it fall into you."¹²⁴ Houston enjoys living large and encourages everyone to do likewise.

Jung distinguishes initiation from the traditional hero's journey.¹²⁵ According to Jung, the hero is concerned with a struggle for individual supremacy whereas initiation involves being incorporated into a state of belonging that is in service to one's

community. The quintessential hero's journey tends to promote a vanquishing spirit of conquest, while initiation is a journey of humble surrender.¹²⁶ Mythic framings tend to have a heroic, even grandiose flare. But many initiations, including ecological initiation, may not be heroic in the traditional sense of the word. I also emphasize humbleness in my work as an ecopsychologist, "Indeed, planting a tree is very different than felling one. Cleaning up the mess is harder than making one."¹²⁷ Jung insisted that initiation remain distinct from the hero's journey because it embodies a movement away from the masculine-based hero archetype toward a more feminine mode of awakening, surrender and service.¹²⁸ In alignment with Jung, I do not frame ecological initiation as a heroic journey but rather as a journey of maturation leading to a capacity to care and repair, even if, as Meade describes, "we take mythic steps to change historical conditions."¹²⁹ The mythic steps are humbling steps, as Meade illustrates with a story of the "Old Woman Who Weaves the World," where we face the mess, bend to choose a thread, and begin weaving new designs within reality.¹³⁰

While the encoded wisdom of mythology is used as a tool to support initiatory experience, Grimes warns against wrapping traumatic or intense experiences in what he calls the "bandage of myth."¹³¹ For him, myth is insufficient and real rites are needed. He posits that the main purpose of initiation is to attend to and complete important life-altering passages that are psychological, social, and spiritual.¹³² These passages in life may occur regardless, but a lack of vetted ritual and community recognition can lead to incomplete initiation. Grimes warns, "Unattended, a major life passage can become a yawning abyss, draining off psychic energy, engendering social confusion, and twisting the course of the life that follows it."¹³³ He holds a clearly demarked "before" and

“after” as essential to ameliorate the danger of ongoing liminality.¹³⁴ Grimes is also wary of modern people adopting ancient practices and stridently warns against “stalking the rites of other times.”¹³⁵ He also warns against relying upon simplistic memorable structures of initiation. He criticizes the basic tripartite structure laid out by Van Gannep and Eliade, saying that this interpretation was invented and then superimposed, but not discovered.¹³⁶ Grimes points out that van Gannep assumed male initiations as the model for all initiations, noting that women’s experience of initiation may be different. Bruce Lincoln, observes that rather than separation, transition, and incorporation, women might follow a pattern of enclosure, metamorphosis, and emergence.¹³⁷

Grimes acknowledges the dilemma of not knowing how to meet the need for initiation in secular culture.¹³⁸ Instead of relying upon interpretations of ancient ceremonies, he invites people to re-invent rites of passage using basic elements of initiation in accordance to local needs.¹³⁹ He lists 30 elements, including learning sacred knowledge, overcoming pain and fear by being subjected to pain or unpleasant treatment, disenchantment that moves towards revelation, giving up dependencies, and being received by elders into a community after the initiation is complete.¹⁴⁰

Mystical Dimensions of Initiation Rites

Who can tell what the experience is like without having undergone days and days of fasting, purifications, exhaustion, apprehension, and excitement?

—Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*

Mystery Rites are not age-related rites of passages or shifts in social status, but designed to give initiates a glimpse of eternal and divine secrets of life. Burkert points out

that contemporary religious scholars are gradually developing a nuanced understanding of initiation's more mysterious and spiritual objectives.”¹⁴¹ Because they were secret rites, little is factually known about them. Even famous ones, like the Eleusinian Mysteries, remain shrouded in mystery. Understanding these ancient spiritual traditions, Burket calls “mystery theology,” depends in large part upon information pieced together by scholars from ancient texts, pagan mysteries, Gnostic and Hermetic literature, and even Greek romances.¹⁴² He advises contemporary scholars to preserve the mystery of these rites, doubting scholars can know the actual experience of these rites, even if the piece together elements of their content.¹⁴³ According to Kerényi, secret rites were both terrifying and redeeming.¹⁴⁴ Eleusinian Mysteries, as well as Mysteries of Samothrace and the Theban cult of Kabeiros, were reputed to have launched initiates into direct connection with divine forces.

Burket's historical research reveals that most mystery initiations coalesce around the myth of a “suffering god,” where *pathea* (sufferings) were evoked in a nocturnal setting.¹⁴⁵ Mourning was then followed by “joy in the mysteries,” which heralds the final stage of rebirth. Within this raw, dark, and mournful context, an “immediate encounter with the divine” was designed to be a life-altering experience.¹⁴⁶ Despite the lack of recorded facts, Burket notes that there is agreement among scholars that a primary aim of ancient cult initiations was to give *teloumenoi* (Greek for “initiates”) a change of mind through a direct glimpse of the sacred via a visceral understanding that in the midst of terrifying darkness and death, there is beauty and rebirth.¹⁴⁷ He quotes Plutarch who describes beauty born from a mystical dying within a mystery initiation:

At the moment of death, the soul suffers an experience similar to those who celebrate great initiations... Wanderings astray in the beginning, tiresome

walkings in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all the terrible things, panic and shivering and sweat, and amazement. And then some wondrous light comes to meet you, pure regions and meadows are there to greet you, with sounds and dances and solemn, sacred word and holy views; and there the initiate, perfect by now, set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet.¹⁴⁸

Burket is fairly certain that final stages of the mysteries (when the mystery of death and rebirth are revealed) were not devoted to “learning,” (*mathein* in Greek) but to “experiencing” (*pathein* in Greek) and cultivating a change in the state of mind (*diatethenai* in Greek).¹⁴⁹ Carl Kerényi, who extensively explored the Eleusinian rites, concurs with Burket, that *Teloumenoi* gained visceral knowledge “that a birth in death was possible!”¹⁵⁰

Gaining this knowledge had high spiritual and social value. Mystery Rites created societal divisions between the initiated and uninitiated, where those privileged to “see the mysteries” attained a blessed status ancient Greeks called *makarismos*.¹⁵¹ These initiations lent existence a “special radiance,” which existed in stark contrast to the state of being un-initiated, which Kerényi decries as “lusterless.”¹⁵² This distinctive sense of blessedness starkly set one apart from others and fostered unspoken belonging within a culture of fellow initiates. Kerényi describes how this sense of superiority could arise: “An inequality was created between the initiate and the profane, a division here and now, by virtue of which one group was blessed while the other was destined to go to their death in imperfection and uncertainty.”¹⁵³ However, even in socially stratified ancient Greece, anyone could participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries; whether slave, nobleman, or woman.¹⁵⁴ Diodorus Siculus describes both the secrecy and availability of secret initiatory knowledge: “Now the details of the initiatory rite are guarded among matters

not to be divulged and are communicated to the initiates alone; but the fame has travelled wide of how these gods appear to mankind and bring unexpected aid of those initiates of theirs who call on them in the midst of perils.”¹⁵⁵

Practiced for over 800 years, Omer says, this essentially democratic rite provided the spiritual glue cohering the highly advanced culture of ancient Greece.¹⁵⁶ Eliade concurs, putting forth the idea that fostering a tangible trust in the abiding cycles of fertility, decay, death, and rebirth may have strengthened a vibrant spiritual confidence of ancient Greece.¹⁵⁷ All in all, the deep meaning of initiation is beneficial, according to Joseph L. Henderson.¹⁵⁸ Rites are designed, Bell concurs, to encourage meaningful participation in the mysterious sources of power that create the world.¹⁵⁹ She says, they transform “mysterious physical inevitabilities into cultural regularities.”¹⁶⁰ Kerényi concludes that “man as a whole, in his concrete reality, is sometimes helped by outward means to achieve inner light.”¹⁶¹ This is, in a nutshell, a perennial purpose of initiation.

Section Two: Contemporary Approaches to Initiation

Informative learning teaches how to make and use a sword. Initiation makes a person trustworthy enough to carry a sword.

—Aftab Omer

Meridian University is pioneering contemporary approaches to initiation. When welcoming new to students, Omer, points out that most learning is informative, but it neglects the development of capacities commensurate with what one learns. “One can learn the art of metallurgy and be able make a sharp beautiful sword,” explained Omer. “One can also learn skills and techniques necessary to competently use a sword. But

initiation is required to forge a person trustworthy enough to carry a sword.”¹⁶² For practitioners of psychology, wielding knowledge and power without undergoing initiation would, warns Omer, represent a betrayal of our vocation.¹⁶³

The power of knowledge without the tempering of initiation could be one reason our world is in trouble. Is humanity mature and trustworthy enough to carry the sword of knowledge we have forged? Judging from our present circumstances, one may wonder. Recognizing the dangers of immature adults who are cut off from mystical rootedness in the world, a main focus of contemporary initiation rites is to help humans achieve true adulthood. As Plotkin reminds us, “Mystical affiliation is the very core of maturity.”¹⁶⁴

Another contemporary focus of initiation is healing trauma. Hübl describes traumatic experiences as frozen places in the human psyche, blocking forward movement and keeping people looping in repetitive cycles that perpetuate the same trauma.¹⁶⁵ At Meridian University, psychology students learn firsthand that wounds from traumatic experience do not transform into capacities (like wisdom, courage, and compassion) without initiatory experience. In the absence of what Omer calls “rituals with authority,” he teaches Meridian students to recognize “self-initiatory processes,” where people seek difficult and even dangerous experiences to shake up beliefs that rigidify and stagnate identity.¹⁶⁶

Recognizing life-based or informal initiation is a contemporary understanding of initiation that gives credence and grounding to the hardships and fruits of initiations that occur outside ritual settings. Irene Ives taught Meridian students to use ancient myths as a reflective surface that can illuminate and honor self-initiatory processes.¹⁶⁷ As was done in ancient initiation rites, myth can be used to guide and interpret transformative and even

traumatic experiences. Kim Hermanson taught Meridian students that myth and metaphor “are the primary means by which we attempt to understand what it is to be human. They provide a means of creating new realities.”¹⁶⁸ Myth and imagination, especially those evoked via initiatory experience, help cohere and make overall sense of challenging and even traumatic experiences. For example, the myths of Pan involve both grief and rape, when something crucial to your identity is violated in some way, what Omer calls the “forceful aspect of initiation.”¹⁶⁹

Omer points out that socially sanctioned initiatory rites revitalize core values of culture and re-ignite shared purpose, especially during times of crisis.¹⁷⁰ Omer notes that the Eleusinian Rites were a vital cultural tradition for over 800 years and provided the spiritual glue cohering the highly advanced culture of ancient Greece.¹⁷¹ Contemporary approaches to initiation are not attempting to imitate the ancient practices of days gone by, but they are rooted deep in human history and may still be relevant today. This rootedness allows scholars and guides to do the careful work, to use Grimes phrasing, of “re-inventing rites of passage” in and for our modern era.¹⁷² Via this re-invention, initiations could once again serve perennial needs in terms of stability and evolution.

Bell says initiations also serve to regulate and cohere community, maintain a group ethos, and restore a state of harmony after any disturbance.¹⁷³ Thus initiations foster stability of culture and within community. Omer points out that the dynamic interaction between a culture’s center and its creative periphery is what keeps a cultural alive, adaptive, and able to evolve.¹⁷⁴ “Recreating a cultural center entails rekindling,” writes Omer.¹⁷⁵ Initiations have provided this rekindling in the past, and could continue to do so.

Crises Spawns Ritual

There must be changes. The stress of these changes can no longer be avoided. The gaudy riot of summer is over. The chill of fall is in the air. Initiation time is at hand.

—Steven Foster
“The Four Shields: Initiatory Seasons of Human Nature”

Foster describes how, in the early 1970s when he and Little founded the School of Lost Borders, they had very few colleagues engaged in rite of passage work. He goes on to say, “Now there are so many we cannot keep track of them...Now we speak at conferences and universities and our training schedules fill a year ahead of time.”¹⁷⁶ How can we account for the cultural revival of the ancient practice of initiation? Jung presciently sums up a potential reason:

A mood of universal destruction and renewal...has set its mark on our age. This mood makes itself felt everywhere, politically, socially, and philosophically. Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science.¹⁷⁷

Bly attributes the deeper cause of the dangers facing humanity is psychological immaturity that prevents people from mature responsiveness to pressing problems. He blames modern woes on what he calls “the sibling society,” a society of half-adults built on technology and affluence.¹⁷⁸ He asks, “Where have all the grown-ups gone?”¹⁷⁹ He links misguided ecological judgment with the struggles of modern youth and attributes both issues to immature thinking and the lack of mature parenting.¹⁸⁰ He also sees both chemical pollution and the impoverished learning environments of youth as symptoms of a society controlled by “childish adults.”¹⁸¹

Ralph Metzner identifies “psychic alienation from the natural world” or “humanist superiority complex” as the root cause of current global crises.¹⁸² Might the current reliance on wild nature in initiation rituals be a response to what he describes as a “malignant oppositional dualism” within the human-nature relationship?¹⁸³

Richard Louv postulates that urbanized people suffer from what he calls a “nature deficit disorder,” where modern people know a lot about the natural world but have very little direct experience of it.¹⁸⁴ Louv writes, “It doesn’t take an encounter with a mountain lion for us to recognize that our sensory world has shrunk.”¹⁸⁵ This deficit of free-time in wild nature not only shrinks sensory perception, it also stunts healthy development and hampers children’s future ability to think, imagine, and create.¹⁸⁶

Bret Stephenson, a counselor of at-risk teens and rites of passage guide, starkly states, “No, the kids are NOT alright.”¹⁸⁷ According to Grimes, one reason for the comeback of initiation rites is to address the lack of intentional cultural structures that establish a path from child to mature adult.¹⁸⁸ Not knowing how to contribute to society, says Grimes, leads to confusion and trouble for youth.¹⁸⁹ Bly holds the maturation of humans is essential for our survival, but does not believe this can occur on the necessary massive scale that is needed because, as he flatly states, “The process is messy, needs teachers, out-of-doors, and lots of time.”¹⁹⁰ This may be true, but programs devoted to this messy outdoor work are springing up.¹⁹¹

Bell explicitly connects the rise of ritual to the growing concern for environmental issues.¹⁹² Though Bell describes rituals designed to enhance and develop ecological values and ideals, there is no mention of initiation rituals intentionally created to address environmental crises. Armstrong posits out that enduring cultures have always used ritual

as a way to creatively address real-life crises.¹⁹³ From a historical her historical perspective, as new crises arise so do our myths, rituals, and philosophies.¹⁹⁴ Armstrong observes that ancient cultures, whose survival depended on a harmonious relationship with nature, worked ritually with agricultural metaphors in their rituals (as when a seed is buried in the earth in order to sprout into a fruiting tree or where grapes are trampled before becoming wine).¹⁹⁵

Images rooted in nature are resurging for contemporary rites of passage work. Foster and Little use a circular map of the four seasons of year to represent initiatory development, where each seasons (Spring, Summer, Winter, or Fall) corresponds with an initiatory stage or transition.¹⁹⁶ Even more than images, modern rites of passage guides are working directly with wild nature for their primary ritual setting, for symbolic language, and for maps of transformative change.¹⁹⁷ In my work as a wilderness student and guide, I discovered that even a brief stint alone in a wholesome place free from human influences can be powerfully transformative for modern urban people.¹⁹⁸

From 1969 to 1993 at Sonoma State University, Greenway pioneered working with groups in wilderness settings (from two weeks to a month at a time) as a way to gain direct understanding of the dualistic human-nature relationship, the psychological roots of environmental crises, and to promote what he calls the “wilderness effect” on the human psyche.¹⁹⁹ Ritual was a key component for students seeking to bridge wilderness, psyche, and culture. Greenway describes the vital role of ritual:

As much as possible, everything prior to and during a [wilderness] trip would be ritualized—driving to the trailhead, dividing the food, weighing the packs, distributing community equipment, then later everyday activities such as ways of walking or cooking. Special attention would be paid to crossing the boundary into wilderness, often in the form of a river or stream. Within a few days, participants

would speak of being “home,” and I would know that we had crossed into wilderness psychologically as well as physically.²⁰⁰

When immersed in wilderness settings within a ritual context, Greenway and his students researched the “transition point” in human thinking between where one’s mode of information processing was culture-dominated and, at the other end of the polarity, nature-dominated.²⁰¹ To give credence to the transformative effects of wild nature upon the human psyche, Greenway coined the term “psychoecology,” whence came the more semantically palatable term “ecopsychology” that is now in common use.²⁰² When exploring the wilderness effect, it was observed that “culture is about three-days deep,” meaning that after three days one’s mode of information processing switch from being culture-dominated to being nature-oriented.²⁰³ Greenway’s work illustrates how powerful psychological transformation can occur when meeting deep human needs for community, meaningful ritual, and wild nature.²⁰⁴ He explicitly did not adopt terms like initiation or vision quest but even without this conceptual framing, the simple practice of being alone for four days in a wilderness setting was powerfully transformative for participants.²⁰⁵

Greenway’s work is part of a general trend, where modern initiation guides rely upon outdoor settings for their rites, thus steering contemporary initiation toward reconnecting with wild nature as well as fostering developmental maturity. Foster and Little, who founded the School of Lost Borders, exemplify the trend returning to wild nature to remedy ailments of modern culture. They hold wild nature as the original teacher of initiation and developed a circular seasonal map of initiation.²⁰⁶ Four quadrants symbolize Earth’s four seasons (Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall) and each is associated with a stage of development that is foundational for the next stage or

season.²⁰⁷ Foster and Little's seasonal map depicts the maturation of the human psyche as well as mimicking or embodying Earth's annual cycles.²⁰⁸

Foster and Little's Native American teachers, Heyemoyosts Storm and Sun Bear, encouraged them to understand human beings as literal embodiments of nature.²⁰⁹ When struggling to clarify the psychological foundations of vision quest work, Foster and Little said, "Ultimately we realized, as we had to, that what we were trying to describe was nature itself. Our nature. The vastness of the metaphor belied its fundamental simplicity."²¹⁰ Taken as a whole, human development, social change, and nature are seen as intricately and inseparably interwoven and, in actuality, one and the same. After working extensively in wilderness settings, I have come to agree with Foster and Little and understand, "Human language, creations, music, and even our thrills, do not float above the ecological systems that sustain them."²¹¹

Plotkin's particular focus is remedying the dearth of mature adults in modern society.²¹² He observes, "True adulthood, or psychological maturity, has become an uncommon achievement in Western and Westernized societies, and genuine elderhood nearly nonexistent."²¹³ He considers psychological maturity a necessary basis for a viable human-Earth partnership and human survival. He says, "We each will learn to mature, live and love in a way that enables us to succeed as Great Turners."²¹⁴ To this end, he developed an eight-stage model that charts a path of maturity in the context of global crises.²¹⁵ Each successive stage leading to maturity involves some kind of initiation and each is linked with a specific task, related to a person's psycho-spiritual center of gravity, what Plotkin describes as the "the hub of a person's life" or "what one's existence revolves around."²¹⁶ One's "circle of identity," which he describes as the

portion of our animate world embraced as essential to one's existence, "is not merely intellectual belief or professed values about community and interdependence, but a viscerally experienced and actively embodied values system."²¹⁷ The circle of identity is also "the principle means of knowing the person's level of maturity."²¹⁸ Caring deeply for the "soul of the more-than-human-community," says Plotkin, marks the crowning achievement of human maturity.²¹⁹

Because Plotkin identifies human development (or lack thereof) as the core of current environmental crises his developmental approach involves mastering sequential stages of development.²²⁰ One must master each stage of life in his "Ecocentric Developmental Wheel" before growing into the next.²²¹ However, there is no evidence that every person must go through all the stages identified by Plotkin before one achieves mature ecological identity. Due to the pressure of environmental crises, initiations into ecological identity might follow less linear paths, where, for example, ecological awakening emerges at a much earlier stage in life rather than solely as the crowning achievement of a lifetime. For this reason, I did not use Plotkin's eight-stage path of initiation for this research, but chose the more simple nature-based model of initiation as taught by Foster and Little.²²²

Foster and Little maintain that deep familiarity with the pattern of initiation fosters maturity.²²³ They use initiation as a lens for understanding archetypal contours of crises so one can potentially move from rupture to renewal on a daily basis.²²⁴ Practiced diligently, this skillset enables people to navigate crisis gracefully and in ways that lead to ongoing initiatory development. They note that intimately knowing the pattern of initiation enables people to navigate crises with humor, grace, and as called for by.²²⁵

Familiarity with initiatory dynamics reminds people that they are, indeed, nature. Foster implies that this understanding can directly support engaging environmental crisis as an initiation.²²⁶

Incorporation Challenges

Some day, if you are lucky, you'll return from a thunderous journey,
trailing snake scales, wing fragments, and the musk of Earth and moon.

—Geneen Marie Haugen, “The Return”

It is commonly noted among wilderness guides that a chief hallmark of contemporary initiation is the lack of support from dominant culture.²²⁷ In the past, notes Bell, initiations were oriented to both maintaining cultural integrity and determining the role of individuals within a cohesive evolving community.²²⁸ Eliade came to understand that in archaic cultures, it through initiation that people became what was required by society, which included spiritual maturity. He elaborates, “Initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred—and, for the primitive world, the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe’s mythological and cultural traditions.”²²⁹ Initiations introduced the mythical history of the tribe via experiences that retraced the journeys of the ancestors (or gods) from chaos to the present moment. In this way, says Eliade, the initiates pass “beyond the natural mode—the mode of a child—and gains access to the cultural mode.”²³⁰ One’s culture was experienced being highest order or crowning achievement of humanity wherein one had a role to play. Eliade noted that retracing a culture’s creation story helped initiates

find their unique place in the cosmos and in their community, simultaneously.²³¹ Cultural and cosmic belonging embody the essence of incorporation.

What happens when one's culture is not perceived to be the crowning achievement of humanity? There is general agreement among contemporary guides that incorporation is the most difficult phase of initiation and most sight the lack of coherent cultural context as a primary reason. Rather than being embedded within and supported by culture that is highly respected and honored, most modern initiates have insights and experiences that go against cultural values, even leading them to rebel against their culture's ethos.²³² In my experience as a guide, initiates can return feeling more like outsiders rather than integral members of vibrant flowering culture that requires their gifts, power, and insights to thrive.

Plotkin acknowledges the struggle of wilderness initiates to weave larger nets of belonging, purpose, and identity that outside the norms of dominant culture.²³³ For this reason, he carefully distinguishes the initiatory revelation of an authentic self or soul versus one's cultural identity.²³⁴ He also sets forth a clear distinction between psychotherapy, which helps people adjust to the demands and rigors of daily life, and soul-oriented initiation work, which involves a descent into the underworld and does not necessarily serve ego-based needs of modern culture.²³⁵ One must learn, he says, choose authenticity over social acceptance.²³⁶ Calling his initiation-based healing practice "soulcraft," he makes clear that his approach to initiation does not serve enhanced coping and social adjustment but rather cultural change and personal maturation that goes beyond societal definitions of adulthood.²³⁷ Which, he says, takes time.²³⁸ Rather than

seeking acceptance by one's culture, Plotkin and emphasizes transformation of culture via individual paths of initiatory revelation.²³⁹

Foster encourages contemporary initiation guides to confront the sense of being an outsider by identifying who and what they serve, which often must be discovered.²⁴⁰ On his first initiation fast, Foster was invited by his teacher to stay "out on the mountain," until he answered the question, "Who are your people?"²⁴¹ He realized that discovering one's cultural identity is necessary for modern initiates, but is not a dilemma faced in traditional cultures. For today's initiates, dominant culture is rarely the answer to an identity crisis. Who I am as a cultural being is a contemporary incorporation question.

It is important to remember that traditional rites are still practiced in modern times. Ryman created a photomontage of surviving initiation rituals. Calling them "Rites of Life," he highlights the cultural diversity and colorful variations of initiatory rites being practiced the world over while noting "how intrinsically similar we are as human beings."²⁴² These rites remain integral to their cultures.²⁴³ My father witnessed a vivid example of the enduring presence of a rite of passage in a modern context. When arriving in South Africa, he noticed scrappy huts, standing alone, on the freeway divides with cars roaring by.²⁴⁴ "What are those huts for?" he asked. His taxi driver responded, "Boys live alone for a month in those huts. They are preparing to become men. Only a Medicine Man visits them, once a week, to bring a little food and water." Even in a sprawling metropolis, medicine men scoot on foot through lanes of whizzing traffic to tend young initiates; thus an ancient tradition remains intact.

Grimes insists that initiation in modern times requires both reinventing this ancient practice and reconstituting community.²⁴⁵ He says that the most successful

initiation rites do not indulge in “armchair fantasy” but are rooted in real places where initiates are required to contribute their services to community.²⁴⁶ This thinking implies that incorporation requires cultural transformation.²⁴⁷ Both Omer and Hübl agree, that lasting personal transformation entails cultural transformation.²⁴⁸ Further, Hübl teaches that when personal change is real, one’s world will necessarily change.²⁴⁹ He goes even further by insisting that the friction one meets when returning home after a transformative experience is grounding in itself and is therefore vital for incorporation. In his experience, “We need a certain amount of resistance to ‘cool’ our new transformations for incorporation.”²⁵⁰

If resistance from culture serves incorporation, this is good news for the initiation of ecological identity because friction between ecological identity and anthropocentrism of culture can be grating and diminishing. This research explored the role that encountering resistance within the daily life of activists may play in the development of the ecological identity. Rather than expecting or insisting upon an ideal warm welcome from one’s culture, this research sought to discover if incorporation challenges are necessary and intrinsic to the initiatory development of ecological identity.

Section Three: Responding to Ecological Crises

Up to now, whenever a society turned a new leaf, it had the devil at its elbow.

—Eric Hoffer, “Reflections on the Human Condition”

When walking the hills above Athens, Plato made the observation: “What now remains compared with what then existed is like the skeleton of a sick man, all the fat and soft earth having wasted away and only the bare framework of the land being left,”

indicating that even in ancient times, the press of human civilization had immediate and long-lasting negative effects upon wild nature that were clearly visible to the human eye.²⁵¹ Many experts note that wreaking ecological havoc is not new for human beings.²⁵² Environmental damage represents more than a terrible litany of physical woes but also a lackluster responsiveness to these woes. Section Three explores this central dimension of ecological crises: Denial. Diamond reminds us that “managing environmental resources sustainably has always been difficult, ever since *Homo sapiens* developed modern inventiveness, efficiency, and hunting skills by around 50,000 years ago.”²⁵³ Diamond speaks specifically to the cultural and psychological dimension of ecological crises in the subtitle of his book *Collapse* by narrowing his focus to the question: *How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. The operative word of Diamond’s thesis is the verb “choose.” His primary thesis is that ecological collapse does not happen. It is a choice.

For purposes of this research, diagnosing intransigence and the refusal to accept responsibility for of one’s complicity in environmental destruction is a primary focus.²⁵⁴ According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the root of “diagnosis” is *gignoskein*, which means “to know.”²⁵⁵ As discussed in the previous section, becoming a conscious knowing participant within the natural world is a foundational purpose of traditional initiations. Understanding resistance to reality is vital. Succumbing to ecological catastrophe without conscious engagement would not constitute an initiation, but rather passive victimization where one is haplessly swept along by forces of change wondering, “Who did this to me?” In contrast, initiations invite conscious knowing participation. Then resistance becomes a help, not a hindrance, to ecological initiation.

Climate Change: Juggernaut or Magic Carpet?

Global warming is a game-changer.

—André Carothers

The word, “juggernaut,” refers to a huge wagon bearing the image of Lord Krishna that was annually drawn in a procession in the town of Puri. Devotees allowed themselves to be crushed under its wheels as a form of sacrifice.²⁵⁶ In contrast, “magic carpet” refers to a mythic flying carpet that can take whoever is on it quickly to their most desired destination.²⁵⁷ Climate change presents these two stark options. We may turn, face climate change and choose where to go (magic carpet), or let the huge wagon roll forward crushing sacrificial victims below (juggernaut).

Climate change is complex. George Marshall describes why the human brain is not wired to “even think about” climate change, explaining, “We can define climate change as an economic problem, a technological problem, a moral problem, a human rights problem, an energy problem, a social justice problem, a land use problem, a governance problem, an ideological battle between left and right worldviews, or a lack of respect for God’s creation.”²⁵⁸ Climate change can be defined as all of these issues, which is both bad and good news. Bad, because complexity can be overwhelming. Good because no matter where one chooses to engage—whether in the realm of economics, politics, geology, sociology, psychology, or spirituality—that is the frontline (within a long an complex larger frontline) of ecological initiation. There is not one path or opportunity to engage in a relevant fashion, but many.

Though climate crises are not new for humanity, according to McKibben, current environmental crises are unique in one salient aspect: the sudden availability of cheap fossil fuels.²⁵⁹ He points out that a single barrel of oil yields as much energy as twenty-five thousand hours of human manual labor, more than a decade of human labor per barrel of oil. Further, each American uses twenty-five barrels a year, which is “like finding three hundred years of free labor annually.”²⁶⁰ A stable earth allowed for human civilization, observes McKibben, but cheap oil is the life-blood of modern economies.²⁶¹ Jason W. Moore agrees, that coal and oil are “dramatic examples of appropriating unpaid work” and that this unpaid work (including what he identifies as the “‘fertility’ of Cheap Natures”) is a primary, but unsustainable, foundation for the success of capitalism.²⁶² Ponting points out that ecological carelessness dates back to hunter-gathering days of humanity and therefore we cannot place all the blame on accessibility of cheap energy.²⁶³ Even if ecological carelessness is a long-standing human trait, most scientists agree that a century of burning fossil fuels is unprecedented and has been altering the chemistry of Earth’s largest and last remaining wilderness area: the atmosphere.²⁶⁴ Beginning in 1990, climate scientists at International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have shown that transforming carbon into a gas, carbon dioxide (CO₂), rather than leaving it bound up in a stable solid state, changes the atmosphere and raises the acidity of the oceans.²⁶⁵ As climate science evolves, increasing evidence of anthropogenic influences on climate change has been found. Correspondingly, the IPCC has made increasingly more definitive statements about human impacts on climate.²⁶⁶ Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap point out that, although a vast majority of climate scientists agree that climate change is real and caused by human activity, there exists a contrived public debate about

the anthropogenic nature of climate change put forth why who they call “cool dudes” or the “conservative white males in the United States.”²⁶⁷

To thwart clarity further, in proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists, William Anderegg, James. W. Prall, Jacob Herald, and others posit that climate change has, and will continue to have, unanticipated non-linear consequences connected to rising CO₂ levels in the atmosphere.²⁶⁸ John Worland notes that some of these might be, for example, the flaring up of old ethnic conflicts in regions of the planet that are resource-poor.²⁶⁹ For example, NASA scientists point out that the entire Mediterranean, including Syria, is suffering its driest period in 900 years.²⁷⁰ Scientists agree that wars, which appear to be ethnic or religious conflicts, may in fact arise due to a root cause related to climate change. According to Worland, Secretary of State John Kerry said in 2016, “I’m not telling you that the crisis in Syria was caused by climate change, but the devastating drought clearly made a bad situation a lot worse.”²⁷¹ Lester Brown urges modern humans to remember that agriculture depends upon a stable and predictable climate; ignoring this fact, he warns, could lead not only to increased conflicts and war, but also to mass starvation.²⁷²

Alanna Mitchel’s research reveals another often overlooked threat of climate change: Ocean acidification. Earth’s oceans are in trouble, she writes, and “as the oceans go, so goes life.”²⁷³ She warns that, along with overfishing and pollution, the ongoing acidification process of the ocean is threatening humanity’s survival. We are changing the ocean’s very chemistry. Mitchel describes many far-reaching consequences of ocean acidification. For example, many creatures, including plankton, have carbon-based shells that dissolve in acidic conditions.²⁷⁴ The Scripps Institute of Oceanography estimates

that 26% of all the carbon released as CO₂ over the decade 2002–2011 was absorbed by the oceans.²⁷⁵ Will the oceans always be able to take up that proportion of human CO₂ emissions year in and year out? “Probably not,” says Scripps marine chemist Andrew Dickson.²⁷⁶ Oceans have already absorbed 80% of the heat and 30% of the excess carbon from the atmosphere but the Worldwatch Institute concludes that as the vitality of marine systems diminish, this ability of absorb carbon will too.²⁷⁷

As the great salty bodies of water are reaching their limits, Tara Lohan points out that fresh water availability (2.5% of Earth’s water) is also shrinking.²⁷⁸ This scarcity causes profound hardship for people in poor rural areas who must carry water for long distances.²⁷⁹ McKibben tells of a poignant and unexpected result of climate change: Because women in Bangladesh have to trek further and further inland to obtain a glass of fresh water, they often drink brackish water. Adolescent girls find this makes their skin “rough and unattractive,” and this, according to them, reduces marriage prospects.²⁸⁰

Niles Eldredge says earth is in the midst of her sixth mass extinction, rivaling that of the previous five great extinctions.²⁸¹ The Species Survival Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) posits that the current rate of species-loss hovers between one thousand to ten thousand times higher than the normal background or expected extinction rate.²⁸² A vivid image of factors that exacerbate all environmental (and societal) contributions to mass extinction is the “Earth Clock,” which shows, second by second, the ongoing growth in human population, seven billion and rising.²⁸³ This visual representation shows a correlation between the rise in human numbers and other alarming statistics.

McKibben attempts to expose the delayed, asymmetrical and sometimes bizarre effects of climate change that obscure connections between everyday human behaviors and large-scale ecological collapse.²⁸⁴ But even when direct connections are made between human behavior and massive climate change, responsiveness remains sketchy. Over a decade ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a consensus statement: “Climate change is real. There will always be uncertainty in understanding a system as complex as the world’s climate. However there is now strong evidence that significant global warming is occurring... It is likely that most of the warming in recent decades can be attributed to human activities (IPCC 2001).”²⁸⁵

A study by Anthony Leiserowitz, Edward Maibach, and Connie Roser-Renouf on American beliefs about climate change shows that “solid majorities of Americans agree global warming is affecting weather in the United States.”²⁸⁶ The report noted increases of five percentage points between the Spring and Fall of 2012, linking the shift in climate-change-awareness to massive droughts, fires, hurricanes, and flooding experienced across the country in the summer of 2012.²⁸⁷ According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the rise in greenhouse gasses correlate directly with rapid changes in weather patterns.²⁸⁸ The EPA reports these are due to human activities in the industrial era. On the whole, Americans perceive the worsening weather conditions and understand that global warming is making extreme weather events worse.²⁸⁹ Among young people, denial is at an all-time low claim Amy Levin and Greg Strimple.²⁹⁰ Is climate denial over? Environmental Energy and Study Institute’s “Polling American Public on Climate Change,” exposes that awareness of these issues are rising even as professed levels of concern are falling.²⁹¹

Awareness rises as concern falls. This paradox is reflected in the U.S. news. Media Matters for America's study in 2014 reveals that the total coverage of climate issues on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox continued to increase for the three consecutive years.²⁹² However, W. R. L. Anderegg, an expert on the credibility in climate change, notes that concern remains below the highest level, which was seen five years previously.²⁹³ In 2014, United Kingdom-based Ipsos MORI, an organization that measures global trends via mass global surveys, published "Navigating the New," where 16,000 people were polled in 20 countries.²⁹⁴ The respondents were asked 200 questions about eight topics, including the environment. Compared to other industrialized countries, Americans are the least likely to agree that climate change is largely a result of human activity, along with citizens of Great Britain (the birthplace of the industrial economy). The majority of people the world over do acknowledge human involvement and hold increasingly urgent concern. Most agree that for environmental disaster to be averted, our habits need to change, and quickly. Even in the U.S., over 50% of respondents agree that immediate change of habits is crucial.

Oddly, willingness to take positive action remains significantly lower than professed levels of concern (which, again, is lower than awareness). The Environmental Energy and Study Institute, took a survey that revealed that most people (66%) believe climate change will be "extremely difficult to stop" and therefore balk at taking action.²⁹⁵ There appears to be a connection between denial of one's complicity and action. Branden Baker notes that the U.S. is lagging behind in both energy efficiency and the belief that climate change is caused by human beings.²⁹⁶ Majorities of people the world over are no

longer in denial about anthropogenic climate change but they do not take commensurate action.

The lag between knowing and acting was the primary point of interest of this research. Traditionally, initiations bridge the gap between knowing and acting, between necessary changes and one's willingness to change. Sober knowledge of oncoming climate chaos and its non-linear consequences does not appear to be a sufficient motivator for change. What impels people to make shifts in one's status, value system and sense of biotic belonging? Though not explicitly addressed in this research, exploring the experience of people who have made this shift may provide insights. Even more important, the increasing intensity of climate suffering can support this evolutionary movement forward. William Calvin speculates that climate change has been the main driver of evolution for the human mind throughout our history as a species.²⁹⁷ Current climate change holds further transformative potential because it is not only happening to us and caused by us, But Hawken suggests, it could even be happening "for us."²⁹⁸ That crises can happen "for us" helps constitute the initiatory frame of environmental crises.

Diagnosing Ecological Intransigence

Something uncanny seems to block the corrective will, not simply private cupidity or political inertia.

—Paul Sheppard, *Nature and Madness*

This section does not rule out commonly examined theories for inaction, but it seeks reasons lying beyond mainstream discourse. In the above quote, Paul Sheppard immediately rules out a possible root cause for collective paralysis by suggesting that it is

not some personal foible or tendency to look out for one's self. Nor is it the lack of political will. It is more uncanny, befuddling, and hidden in plain sight.

Diamond's five-point framework clarifies why civilizations fall into ruin, where the main one is our willingness respond to ecological limits.²⁹⁹ The five main reasons are environmental damage, climate change, hostile neighbors, unfriendly trade partners, and finally, a society's response to problems. He points out inherent tendency of humans to inadvertently inflict harm on their environments. Even the most fecund and resilient ecosystems suffer due to human activity.³⁰⁰ Climate change is frequently unavoidable and is often driven by natural forces. Relations with neighbors can be intermittently or chronically hostile, but are rarely perfect or controllable. If neighborly relations turn sour, trade is not possible and civilization can falter. These, and other reasons for collapse, are mostly out of our hands, Diamond concludes. Except one: Responsiveness.³⁰¹ Perhaps, suggests Diamond, the crux of any society's success or failure when dealing with crises or change is to know which core values to retain and which to replace.³⁰² He does not discuss how a shift in values occurs, which a problem this research seeks to address.

Knud Illeris, a pioneer theoretician of transformative learning, insists that a change in values is dependent upon internal transformation in response to new information.³⁰³ He holds internal transformation as the crux of transformative learning. More specifically, he says that a "genuine shift in identity" is required for learning to be transformative.³⁰⁴ It is identity, says Illeris, which guides one's choices, not information. In other words, knowledge alone does not give rise to new values and behaviors.

Illeris has come to understand that a reified identity is the main stumbling block to transformative learning and therefore to any real change.³⁰⁵ "People build up identities

and self-understandings which they cannot, or will not, change,” he points out.³⁰⁶ It is important to recognize the hurdles to transformative learning (and therefore identity transformation), for these are likely to be core experiences of one’s initiatory journey towards conscious ecological belonging. Activists work mostly with sharing information, so whether information is sufficient to galvanize transformative learning is a critical question.³⁰⁷

A primary tactic for environmentalists remains to flood society with fact-based information about dire circumstances. In a radio interview with Mickey Huff, I discussed the question about whether scientific truth of our situation has yet brought about the necessary changes in values and behavior.³⁰⁸ Many activists agree with David Suzuki: “Despite heroic efforts, environmentalism is failing.”³⁰⁹ To make matters worse, research shows that increased knowledge about ecological disasters leads to greater apathy. Denial withers but apathy grows.³¹⁰ How might reframing and then engaging environmental crises as an initiation uplift us from collective apathy to creative action?

In Omer’s view, initiation is a kind of transformative learning.³¹¹ Information and skills will always be important, says Omer, but humanity’s future depends on learning that awakens inner potential and transforms one’s life, behavior, consciousness, and identity.³¹² Omer teaches that transformative learning is marked by a shift in core beliefs. It is, he says, “...primarily a shift in lenses, in perception, not a shift in landscape.”³¹³

“Transformative learning” is a concept that could be used instead of initiation, especially in cultural settings where the term “initiation” is unfamiliar or inappropriate. But again, is learning alone sufficient? Learning can also promote entrenchment rather than transformation. For example, Stephan Skirmshire notes that witnessing repeated

scenarios of disaster on the news seems to incite a mesmerizing fascination similar to a penchant for horror films.³¹⁴ People could be entertained by environmental catastrophe, rather than transformed! Gill Ereaut and Nat Segnit ask, “Are we telling the climate story and can we do it better?”³¹⁵ They use the term “climate porn” to describe what attracts people to compulsive enjoy bad news about climate catastrophes.³¹⁶ Apocalyptic visions may fan the flames of voyeurism, says Skirmshire, but they fail to motivate action because they are devoid of ethical content and so “They say nothing about who we are and where we are going.”³¹⁷

It is worth noting that “who we are and where we are going” are cogent themes of initiation. Perhaps information alone, even information that elicits strong emotional responses, is insufficient to bring about the change in identity that Illeris indicates is required for a true shift in values, beliefs, and behavior to occur.³¹⁸ For if learning is to be transformative, more than information is required. Perhaps a vision of what is possible is also necessary.

Besides eliciting voyeurism, activists must also be mindful not to overly confront people with indigestible bad news. How information is conveyed appears to matter. The struggle to make difficult facts palatable while still being truthful is tricky. Many social scientists and psychologists warn that truth-tellers need to contend with “compassion fatigue” while guarding against “climate despair” and “eco-anxiety.”³¹⁹ Renée Lertzman has done ecopsychological research indicates it is not from lack of concern that people do not take action, but rather out of a sense of helplessness that arises from an inability to address their concerns in a real way.³²⁰ She has come to believe bad news must be softened with compassion because of how much people actually do care. Lertzman

observes, “How we share the truth matters. Being compassionate is crucial because environmental literacy is emotionally charged. So how, and not only what we share, matters.”³²¹

Macy and Omer have come to understand that being affected is a crucial first step towards taking action, but this step must lead to action for transformation to be complete.³²² Initiation is an approach to change that promotes helplessness and the breakdown of ego structures prior to taking fresh creative actions. But this breakdown approach may not be favored by ecopsychologists like Lertzman. Theodore Roszak also shuns flooding people with disturbing information as “scare tactics and guilt trips.”³²³ He claims shame and blame tactics can backfire. He even suggests that activists who share hard facts about looming ecological disasters “draw up a psychological impact statement” of their expository work.³²⁴ One must, Roszak says, avoid eliciting feelings of dread and shame and instead, connect people with what is “generous, joyous, freely given, and even heroic.”³²⁵ At the same time, he insists that we “Scale down. Slow down. Democratize. Decentralize.”³²⁶ Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totton advocate radical change while they struggle with potential psychological damage that can result from raising awareness.³²⁷ How might a frame of initiation untie the tight knot of this dilemma?

Donald Nathanson’s research on shame suggests that a strong message demanding downsizing or any form of reduction would evoke shame.³²⁸ Besides putting the brakes on what one is pursuing, it is also through shame that one recognizes and remembers failures.³²⁹ For example, a constant reminder of one’s daily complicity in ecological degradation, will also elicit shame, (unless one is shameless, which presents other

problems.) According to Nathanson, over time, an overwhelming experience of shame will, for most people, lead to avoidance or denial.³³⁰ He notes that any failure of mastery or competence also produces shame.³³¹ Nathanson's research shows that when "affect density" becomes too high, then other mechanisms of "affect regulation" kick in which have nothing to do with the original feelings.³³² He explains, "When embarrassed, one may withdraw, become deferential; ignore, avoid, or distract from the issue; or make it a problems for someone else."³³³ His work reveals that shame is all around and within us, but not in its naked form.³³⁴ Instead, shame hides in anger, distress, sadness, and fear.³³⁵ At the core of these avoidance strategies is the desire to repudiate the reality of having made a mistake or caused harm, especially if these outcomes were not intended.³³⁶

Though vast and complex, an understanding of shame is pertinent to this section because of its connection to denial and lethargic responsiveness to human-caused ecological degradation. According to Nathanson, "Shame, for many people the most unpleasant of affects, is by far the leading reason for disavowal."³³⁷

Is evoking shame intentional in initiation? It appears so. Burket describes ways that harassment and humiliation are built into initiation rituals because, he reasons, these unsettling experiences have the effect of "shaking the foundations of and making it ready to accept new identities."³³⁸ Meade concurs, noting that it is necessary to "break the shell of narcissism" and shatter "ego attitudes" in order to find ones true self and calling in life. Weathering shame in an initiatory context might be central any developmental leap. This is tricky territory for ecopsychologists, because shame is unpopular and often vilified. Still, ecopsychologist have the reality of ecological harm that needs addressing. Terrance O'Connor asks, "What is the responsibility of a therapist on a dying planet?"³³⁹

Is it to avoid or to find ways of working creatively with shame? Ecological accountability is delicate work, like doing racial sensitivity training with plantation owners.

Macy takes a slightly different tack on the issue of negative emotions, openly admitting that she often feels angry, guilty, afraid, and hopeless.³⁴⁰ She claims (and exemplifies) that difficult emotions do not obstruct her activism, but fuel it. She translates negative feelings in their deeper essence. For example, when working with hopelessness, she redefines hope as an action or “active hope.” One does not “have” hope; one “acts” or “lives” hope. She has built body of theory and clear methods that support facing reality in ways that heal, transform, and empower.³⁴¹ Despair, guilt, rage, and fear are healthy signs of being connected to life and should be honored as evidence of intrinsic belonging and expanded identity.³⁴² In Macy’s view, *apethia*, or the lack of feelings and responsiveness, is a root cause of an inability to respond.³⁴³ She compassionately points out that apathy and denial are natural responses when facing threats beyond one’s control.³⁴⁴ To mitigate the tendency to shut down and go into denial, Macy believes information must be empowering, connecting, and revelatory.³⁴⁵ She also says that denial is rooted in a deep spiritual malaise arising from feeling separate from life and nature.³⁴⁶

People from disparate venues shed light on the malaise of feeling separate from nature. Karl Marx named this phenomenon “alienation.”³⁴⁷ Moore has developed a contemporary Marxist perspective and identifies the “widespread cognitive habit and conceptual practice of referring to ‘the’ environment as an object, rather than a relation governed by the double internality of humanity-in-nature.”³⁴⁸ Louv says this separation causes “nature deficit disorder,” which affects mental, physical and mental health as well

as the health of the environment.³⁴⁹ Jeannette Armstrong's native Okanagan tribe concludes that modern western people are "insane" because they lack a sense of belonging to the land.³⁵⁰ Alan Watts says separateness from the world is a hallucination that dominates human consciousness and is the root cause of ignorance and suffering.³⁵¹ Greenway observes that feeling separate is the origin of humanity's massive exploitation of wild nature.³⁵² Carl Anthony and I link a sense of separation from nature to psychological structures similar to racism and sexism.³⁵³

Darker aspects of human nature could be at play. When studying Nazi doctors, Robert Jay Lifton showed that people are capable of living according to a set of morals while acting in ways that refute them. He calls this "doubling," where one literally lives in two separate realities, "one normal and sweet, the other nightmarish and horrible."³⁵⁴ He based his research on Nazi doctors who worked diligently to make their patients comfortable (giving them aspirin, etc.) while doing nothing to question or disobey the system that was destroying them. They participated in the smooth operation of death camps and then went home to be loving fathers. Lifton says that over time, emotional separation between these two worlds fosters a sense of a self that is divided into two functioning wholes whereby a "part-self" acts as an "entire self."³⁵⁵ This, says Lifton, permits one part to commit heinous acts while the other part sees him- or herself as a decent citizen, parent, and professional.

When doubling occurs, detailed irrefutable facts rarely change behavior. One double does its dirty deeds apart from the other half that may agree with facts. Lifton views denial as a symptom of doubling. Barry Spector concurs. A "denialist," he says, doesn't really see data at all, even if it is in full view.³⁵⁶

Derrick Jensen holds an even darker view of this phenomenon, believing that a deep sense of separation from more-than-human beings arises a belief in our superiority over other life forms. He views objectification and exploitation of nature as covert expressions of what he calls “human supremacism.”³⁵⁷ Anthony and myself note that anthropocentrism is accepted in modern culture as normal rather than treated as pathological or a problem in the same way that racism and sexism were in the recent past.³⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Jensen stays that human supremacism, an insidious and virulent expression of anthropocentrism, is normalized in our era.³⁵⁹ Jensen makes a direct parallel between ecocide and genocide, recognizing they are both rooted in a sense of supremacy.³⁶⁰ The belief in human superiority is, he theorizes, the main obstacle to caring about our more-than-human-world.

Another popular diagnosis of intransigence is developmental. Duane Elgin asks audiences around the world, “What age is the human species?” He reports that there is near unanimous agreement that the human race is at the “life stage of adolescence.”³⁶¹ As discussed earlier, Bly also identifies Western culture as trapped in a dangerously immature state of development.³⁶² Omer suggests that destructive immaturity of humanity be understood as a form of narcissism, where personal needs naturally eclipse the needs of everyone and everything else.³⁶³ Narcissism is less a developmental glitch and more a negative psychological trait.

Shepard diagnoses adult childishness as a form of “ontological crippling,” a developmental block that occurs early in life which leads to ecological recklessness.³⁶⁴ In his view, hunter-gatherer societies possessed a special kind of sagacity that supports harmonious relatedness with all forms of otherness.³⁶⁵ Sheppard believe this crippling is

due to the loss of genuine initiatory processes. He observes, “The West is a vast testimony to childhood botched to serve its own purposes, where history, masquerading as myth, authorizes men of action to alter the world to match their regressive moods of omnipotence and insecurity.”³⁶⁶ While maturity is undeniably an issue, Metzner emphasizes the need to acknowledge that the wisdom and nature-honoring practices of all indigenous peoples (including Europeans) has been trampled by modernity.³⁶⁷ There is a tendency among scholars to romanticize pre-modern indigenous cultures. It should be noted that, as Robert Wright points out, “a bad smell of extinction follows *homo sapiens* around the world.”³⁶⁸ Human history is not a shining example of ecological maturity, for primitive people also failed to live respectfully within environmental limits. Even when facing ecological demise, says Wright, people tend to dig in their heels and carry on doing what had been successful, squeezing out the last drops of nature’s bounty rather than shifting course.³⁶⁹

Wilber vehemently opposes the tendency to romanticize humanity’s pre-modern past.³⁷⁰ He posits that current ecological intransigence is not historical forgetfulness, regression, or a psychological pathology but a failure to evolve.³⁷¹ Wilber emphatically maintains that not enough human beings have developed post-conventional, world-centric, or global levels of consciousness and notes that this level of consciousness would not have been available to primitive people.³⁷² Sean Esbjørn-Hagens also points out that the nature-dominating agency of our era is appropriate within our contemporary modern context.³⁷³ This being the case, Wilber concludes that humans need to leap forward, through, and beyond modernity, to achieve world-centric consciousness, not backwards to a more primitive pre-modern state.³⁷⁴

Stanley Milgram's infamous Stanford Prison Experiment reveals a horrific flaw in human nature that is relevant to ecological intransigence.³⁷⁵ His research exposed a tendency in most people towards obedience and cultural conformity rather than obeying one's own moral instincts. He concluded, "Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process."³⁷⁶ His research shows that people are capable of being profoundly cruel in order to conform to the expectations of others, especially to those who are perceived to have authority. Most, his study revealed, leave moral decisions up to those whom they perceive to be in charge. Obeying or trusting authority while ignoring one's own moral compass can also lead to what John Pilger calls "normalizing the unthinkable," where doing terrible things in an organized and culturally-accepted way rests on normalization.³⁷⁷ In this way, ugly destructive acts, like severe environmental exploitation and abuse of animals, become routine, acceptable, and ordinary.

Hanna Arendt identified the normalization of heinous behavior as the "banality of evil."³⁷⁸ After observing Adolf Eichmann on trial for masterminding Nazi genocide in World War II, Hannah Arendt observed that he was not a horrible monster (or even anti-Semitic), but a stunningly boring and normal fellow.³⁷⁹ "It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us—the lesson of the fearsome word-and-thought-defying banality of evil."³⁸⁰ She observed that great evil is perpetrated by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil, but simply do their jobs without thinking.³⁸¹

In terms of ecological intransigence, people tend to view a grossly large ecological footprint as unavoidable and part our normal (banal) existence.³⁸² Even when,

as Madison Powers points out, typical US and EU levels of resource consumption show that we would need five to six more planets to sustain everyone at that level.³⁸³ Rather than stop short, most people continue a, like Eichmann, to do their jobs. The banality of evil also exists in the business world. Christian Perenti observes that those in the upper echelons of the economic sector are acutely aware of environmental consequences for humanity and that they are “planning for Armageddon” rather than working to avert it.³⁸⁴ For example, according to the Artic Institute, large corporations maneuver to exploit environmental crises for greater profits.³⁸⁵ Business goes on, as usual. Sustainability investor, Gautam Barua, wryly advises clients to, “invest in land a hundred feet above sea level, for it is only a matter of time before it becomes valuable ocean-front property.”³⁸⁶ A root cause of intransigence is adaptation that is conforming and seeking personal advantage rather than considering the good of the whole and changing. Military planners are actively preparing for worsening environmental conditions by strengthening what Perenti labels the “armed lifeboat ethic” rather mitigating or slowing the disaster.³⁸⁷

Another reason for intransigence is the need for collective broad-spectrum change, not just individual piecemeal change. Van Jones exhorts audiences, “This [environmental] movement is deeper than a solar panel. Don’t stop there! We’re not gonna put a new battery in a broken system. We want a new system! We’re gonna change the whole thing!”³⁸⁸ Exciting as this sounds, the idea of collective change is bandied about, but is difficult to achieve. Randy Hayes compares our situation to shifting the course of a fully loaded supertanker going full tilt.³⁸⁹ According to him, a larger part of intransigence is the inertia of habitual collective behavior. Slam the mighty engines in reverse, and it still takes seven miles to come to a full stop and change course.

Part of intransigence is the need for large-scale economic change. Marxist economists maintain that capitalism itself perpetuates environmental crises. In a capitalistic system, says Joel Kovel, each unit of capital must grow or die.³⁹⁰ Moore exposes the inherent problems of an economic system of that requires endless commodification and infinite growth while depending upon a fragile and finite web of life.³⁹¹ Addressing environmental crises is huge because, as Moore reminds us “*all* human activity is environment-making.”³⁹² Murray Bookchin proposes that civilization chart a path of survival where people radically decentralized into communes devoted to an equal give-and-take with nature.³⁹³ Though there are movements afoot, like Transition Towns, attempting to do this, Bookchin’s ideas remain a distant possibility.³⁹⁴

Clearly, there are good reasons for ecological intransigence but even better reasons to deal with it. Perhaps these many obstacles will force people to seek deeper wellsprings of power. In darkness, observes Macy, lights shine.³⁹⁵ Seeking light in dark places is a perennial purpose of initiation.

Perils of Catastrophism

We are in the midst of an Apocalypse.

—Derrick Jensen

Framing environmental crisis as an initiation for humanity walks a precarious edge between doomsday alarmism and the bracing freshness of truth. Yes, we are in a dangerous situation and alarm bells are ringing. James Hansen (a mainstream climate scientist) trumpets, “This our last chance to save humanity!”³⁹⁶ Global climate change is now labeled “climate weirding” or “climate catastrophe,” a startling shift away from the

pleasant connotations of global “warming” which may infer pleasant images like fresh buns in grandma’s oven.³⁹⁷ William Patton coined the term “overshoot,” meaning that humans have exceeded the maximum load that Earth’s ecosystems can carry.³⁹⁸ E. O. Wilson thinks it should be obvious to anyone not in a “euphoric delirium” that we have reached a “bottleneck.”³⁹⁹ Jensen calls modern civilization an “endgame.”⁴⁰⁰ McKibben renames Earth as “Eaarth” because it is not the planet we have adapted to over the past ten thousand years.⁴⁰¹ He observes, “Forget the grandkids; [this crisis] was a problem for our *parents*.”⁴⁰² In other words, we are the grandkids.

Sasha Lilley, Eddie Yuen, and James Davis advise against doomsday stridency, saying that even if based on facts, trumpeting catastrophe runs the danger of becoming “catastrophism,” which they hold as extremely counterproductive.⁴⁰³ Their premise is that catastrophism rests upon a false assumption that a new society naturally and inevitably emerges after economic, ecological, and/or social collapse. Lilley warns, “Worse is not always better. Worse can just be worse.”⁴⁰⁴ The underlying assumption of catastrophism is that breakdown is considered necessary before breakthrough, so why not accept or hasten the breakdown? Thus, Lilley describes, “Catastrophism clings to the desire for a better world, while halfheartedly expecting to reach it through shortcuts.”⁴⁰⁵

Slipping into catastrophism is hard to avoid, says Yuen, because we really are facing a catastrophe.⁴⁰⁶ Can we sound the alarm without indulging the age-old human end of the world fantasies and their accompanying assumptions? Yuen says people presume, with no evidence, that a linear certainty of rebirth always following disaster.⁴⁰⁷ Davis challenges this presumption by pointing out that catastrophism can lead to delaying the imperative to take action and there is no guarantee that hitting bottom will

automatically lead to renewal and rebirth.⁴⁰⁸ Even worse, this assumption develops into a kind of “bring it on” attitude. Historical evidence counters the belief that this approach is effective. Lily points out that out of the ashes of failure and destruction usually arise hardship and drastically worsening circumstances rather than bright new world.⁴⁰⁹ Breaking points, says Lilley, are rarely breakthrough points.⁴¹⁰ There is nothing automatic, they insist, about crisis. Yuen sums up, “Catastrophism feeds a predisposition to be passive, which robs people of the participatory agency required to create change.”⁴¹¹

Catastrophism’s acceptance of disaster may tap into an instinctive urge towards initiation, where, as Foster taught, difficulties can lead to breakthrough and rebirth.⁴¹² Although catastrophism resembles initiation by honoring demise, Yuen points out that the comforting thought that catastrophe will bring transformation offers no method, structure, or context to bridge the tumultuous gap between death and rebirth.⁴¹³ Hence, it is what Caroline Casey might call a “toxic mimic” of initiation.⁴¹⁴

The key difference between catastrophism and a frame of initiation is that the former is not linked to rituals of transformation rooted in an ancient understanding of how to foster and support beneficial transitions. Initiation also requires awakened participation not unconscious passivity. Initiatory change does not happen to a person; it requires consciously enduring the suffering of change within a coherent structure. Yuen has said that it is vital to “offer something positive to go with the cold porridge of climate catastrophe,” something which must offer a way out of alienation and exploitation and holds a prospect of building something new.⁴¹⁵ Yuen asks, “What narrative might engender compassionate, egalitarian, and radical movements that could bring a new world into being?”⁴¹⁶ The final section is a response to his question.

Section Four: Generative Approaches to Ecological Crises

Literalism is the great spell that binds and blinds the modern world.

—Michael Meade, *The Water of Life*

As discussed in Section One, the concept of initiation has expanded beyond the realm of ritual. Meade asserts that the lens of initiation helps to navigate all types of traumatic change.⁴¹⁷ This capacity, he says, arises from an instinctive understanding of initiation that lives in human imagination. We know how to forge something new from broken parts.⁴¹⁸ This final section explores approaches to change that do not sugarcoat reality, indulge in victimization, or promote catastrophism but that reveal our instinctive capacity to perceive and undergo initiation.

Initiatory Imagination

It is not too hard for an indigenous eye to notice that initiations are taking place at all times and in every town and city in the west.

—Malidome Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*

An ability to perceive and engage initiations that are embedded in daily experience requires awakening to a mythic or imaginal dimension of personal and collective transformation, what Meade calls the “initiatory imagination.”⁴¹⁹ “With the phrase ‘initiatory imagination,’” writes Meade, “I am combining the sense of initiation as an archetypal pattern embedded in the psyche with the power of imagination that continually shapes new visions for our lives.”⁴²⁰ He teaches ways initiatory re-framing

is used to perceive struggle and hardship as necessary and beneficial. “Initiation,” he states succinctly, “is the way the psyche changes.”⁴²¹

Meade has learned that the soul processes any dismemberment and suffering as an initiation experience.⁴²² He says that even reckless behavior that leads to danger and breakdown can be understood as a semi-conscious attempt to break free of outmoded structures (psychological and cultural) into a new way of life.⁴²³ He has come to see that failing to acknowledge a mythic understanding of life, especially of life’s hardships, leads to being crushed by literal circumstances.⁴²⁴

Campbell pioneered the practice of linking personal dilemmas and suffering with mythic themes of existence.⁴²⁵ He taught that myths are not cartoonish hooey, but expressions of universal truths that can guide and inform individual lives today, just as they have throughout time. Though Jung identified archetypal movements within the human psyche, Campbell linked archetypal themes of ancient stories to experiences of everyday people within their daily modern life. He showed that these themes are readily discernable outside a therapeutic setting. In his seminal book, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, his central message is that every human being can—and indeed should—undergo a heroic initiation, what he calls “the hero’s journey.”⁴²⁶ To this end, he promoted the importance of reading and understanding mythology: “Mythology is an organization of metaphoric images of experience, action, and fulfillment of the human spirit in the field of a given culture at a given time...It helps you identify the mysteries of the energies pouring through. Therein lies your eternity.”⁴²⁷

Campbell exhibited a flare for translating mystical perceptions into a poetic vernacular that moved easily into popular culture. He describes phases of the hero’s

journey (a contemporary form of initiation) in catchy clear ways, for example, describing severance as “heeding the call to adventure” and liminality as “the road of trials.”⁴²⁸

Campbell placed a huge emphasis on the return, insisting that completion requires returning from the journey with a “gift or boon that redounds to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet or the ten thousand worlds.”⁴²⁹

Both Campbell and Bly view life through what they call the “mythic imagination,” by which one gains an awareness of how life becomes responsive to one’s “spiritual readiness.”⁴³⁰ A mythic perspective grants, as Lévi-Strauss describes, an ability to perceive universal themes within daily experience. He views this perception as a uniquely human capacity and describes it as more sensory-oriented, understanding the world in its totality rather than in discrete bits.⁴³¹ He observed that sensory-based thinking uses patterns in nature as symbols of a mythic reality.⁴³² This perception—call it primitive or mythic—that can perceive patterns of initiation in daily life.

Houston uses a mythic approach to personal and cultural change that requires dying to one story to be reborn to a larger one.⁴³³ “Transformation occurs in the discovery of the Larger Story,” claims Houston.⁴³⁴ She posits that seeing one’s personal dramas embedded in a larger story imbues difficulties with meaning and implies directionality in ways that can be beneficial.⁴³⁵ She teaches how to live in constant dialogue with myth. For her, myth provides a template, a guiding map that elevates one’s struggles. “Once you answer the call to a larger life, there is no turning back,” she says.⁴³⁶ Myth not only provides avenues to living what she calls “our greater story,” it also helps to recognize pitfalls and potentials that are likely to arise.

Grimes, in contrast, is less enthusiastic about relying upon what he calls “the bandage of myth.”⁴³⁷ He insists that a mythic understanding of incidental initiation is far from sufficient. Ritual, he says, is required and, as mentioned in Section One, his alternative to relying upon myth is to understand and implement basic elements of successful initiations.⁴³⁸ He recommends avoiding what he calls “armchair fantasy.”⁴³⁹

Omer supports the importance of a mythic perspective and also points out that myths without accompanying ritual become inert and meaningless.⁴⁴⁰ He says, “Without ritual, myths are a lie to us. For example, without rituals associated with Athena, she does not exist for us. She is a fiction from another time, like Daffy Duck.”⁴⁴¹ Omer notes mythic imagination enables one to become what one perceives, enabling movement into direct participation with life.⁴⁴² Still, without what he calls “rituals with authority,” even a refined mythic imagination may not be sufficient to move towards this depth of participation.⁴⁴³ Somehow, says Omer, myths must become a lived experience.⁴⁴⁴

According to Foster and Little, awakening the initiatory imagination was, and to some degree still is, a primary purpose of initiation.⁴⁴⁵ It provides direct experience of enduring mythic themes. Traditionally, initiation rituals are embedded in a guiding story, often a creation story of one’s community or culture. This may not be the case in modern culture, where one’s personal experience and transformation is likely not explicitly situated or contextualized within a culture’s shared story of reality and the cosmos in an active and intentional manner. However, scholars of myth (like Campbell, Meade, Jung, and Houston) still believe mythic contextualization is required. We need to become reacquainted with old stories to find their applicability in our personal lives. Justin Barrett discusses research revealing that humans have the ability to link local experience to

larger cosmic themes.⁴⁴⁶ This capacity, he postulate, may even be built into the way humans are cognitively organized. This presents a possibility that, mythic imagination, they postulate, is an inborn capacity. Though not been nurtured in secular societies, the capacity to engage life in a mythic context could be available.

It is also important to remember that mythic imagination is not inherently positive. Environmental historians point out that ancient peoples steeped in mythic consciousness were ecologically destructive.⁴⁴⁷ Hunter-gatherer human communities were myth-oriented, yet they hunted mega fauna to extinction. Historically, everywhere human beings have shown up—even those with strong a mythic foundation— native species go extinct, wild animals perish in mass numbers, and forests are destroyed.⁴⁴⁸ Even modern people who adopt a mythic perspective may use it to justify destructive violence. Nazism, for example, was steeped in Germanic mythology. What matters, according to Campbell, is which myth one chooses. In a similar fashion, initiation itself is not inherently positive. Like any mythic perspective, the lens of initiation could be (and often is) appropriated for what some might consider nefarious purposes. Initiation always requires asking, “To what end?”⁴⁴⁹

Existent Initiatory Reframes of Ecological Crises

I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty,
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

—William Stafford, “A Ritual to Read to Each Other”

Contemporary guides like Meade, Foster, and Plotkin believe these ancient practices have modern relevance not only as rituals, but also as conceptual frames. Even

without a guiding myth or story, reframing crisis or transition as an initiation helps people know what occurs and, as Stafford puts it, to “recognize the fact.” To some degree, these frames already exist, running the gamut from total apocalypse to the phoenix-like flowering of a new civilization. As with signs over the Gates of Delphi, “Know Thyself” and Auschwitz, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, (which means, “work will set you free”) signposts and reframes signify what lies ahead as a possibility, not a fact, though they can shape one’s journey.

Like signposts over the ritual initiatory grounds of ecological crises, mythic themes run like a storyline through literary works focused on environmental crises. Often, they indicate both a perspective and a prediction. Anodea Judith says that current crises have the power to “awaken the global heart.”⁴⁵⁰ She calls it “humanity’s rite of passage from the love of power to the power of love.”⁴⁵¹ Willis Harman says global crises “fuel global mind change.”⁴⁵² Rebecca Solnit speaks explicitly to human potential brought to life in what she calls “paradises built in Hell,” and describes disasters where “constellations of solidarity, altruism, and improvisation,” qualities that are within most people, emerge in times of disaster.⁴⁵³ One reason for these qualities coming to the fore, says Solnit, is that disaster “votes them in” because altruism and collaboration work while fear and divisiveness do not.⁴⁵⁴

Cosmologists Brian Swimme and Berry frame the universe itself as a story whose trajectory leads from the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic, when humans live in a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth and the Earth community because almost every aspect of nature will involve human beings.⁴⁵⁵ The ecozoic, they say, will emerge “from the ruins of the cenozoic.”⁴⁵⁶ These thinkers present is mythic frame is different than the

one that is currently popular, where our era is darkly referred to as the Anthropic Age, inferring that it is (and will remain) human-centered. Houston views the pace of modern life not as a problem, but a symptom of “jump time” which indicates an acceleration of evolution through reaching critical thresholds that allow us to “jump to a new dispensation of humanity.”⁴⁵⁷ Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman describe changes occurring now as “spontaneous evolution.”⁴⁵⁸ Morris Berman’s book titles speak to mythic changes that involve “re-enchanting the world” and “coming to our senses.”⁴⁵⁹ Rachel Carson’s seminal book alerted people to the unexpected effects of pesticides. She observed: “Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song. This sudden silencing...has come about swiftly, insidiously, and unnoticed.”⁴⁶⁰ This evocative mythic image of silent springs halted the use of DDT. Evocative frames are often the titles of environmental books intended to startle people awake and into action.⁴⁶¹

Nothing in the literature (that I found) explicitly speaks to the mythic frame of initiation. Some speak to the initiatory imperative of our crises, but they do not explicitly use the word initiation or ecological identity. Charles Eisenstein comes close to this possibility when describing “the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.”⁴⁶² The primary focus of his work is the transition from what he calls the “old story of separation” to the “new story of inter-being.”⁴⁶³ His fundamental message is that individuals are inseparable from the universe and everyone partakes in the lives of everyone and everything else.⁴⁶⁴ This means experiencing the pain of others is natural because what befalls them also affects one’s “extended self.” Realizing the “new story”

of interrelatedness occurs via a series of initiations where one overcomes doubts.⁴⁶⁵ He does not, as far as I know, link activism itself as an initiatory path that births the ecological self. Gary Horwitz, a collaborator with Eisenstein, links his transformational work in economics to a process of change that lead him to a sense of vast interconnectedness.”⁴⁶⁶ But he does not describe this experience as an initiation.

The most direct reference to ecological initiation was put forth in an essay by Rick Tarnas titled, “Is the Modern Psyche Undergoing a Rite of Passage?” in which he cogently discusses the possibility of modern crises promoting initiatory change within the human psyche.⁴⁶⁷ However, he does not discuss the dynamics or content of this initiation, nor does he relate this rite of passage to direct and honest engagement in ecological crises.

Initiation of the Ecological Self

Blessed are those who soften the emotional rigidity of their hearts, for they shall have all the power of nature.

Jeshua

Naess emphasizes self-realization as essential to environmentalism. But he means “self” in a slightly different way than traditional psychologists, suggesting that we underestimate a person when we limit his or her identity to the narrow confines of personal ego.⁴⁶⁸ According to Naess, “Human nature is such that with sufficient all-sided maturity we cannot avoid ‘identifying’ ourselves with all living beings, beautiful or ugly, big or small, sentient or not.”⁴⁶⁹ He views this larger self, the “ecological Self,” as a far more stable basis for ecological ethics than any law, social contract, or societal norm:

If reality is experienced by the ecological Self, our behavior naturally and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics. We certainly need to hear about our ethical shortcomings from time to time, but we change more easily through encouragement and a deepened perception of reality and our own self, that is, through a deepened realism... It will clearly be more a question of community therapy than community science: we must find and develop therapies which heal our relations with the widest community, that of all living beings.⁴⁷⁰

Naess sees that an ecological ground-of-being as both practical and mystical, asserting that “profound cherishing of free and natural landscapes” influences behavior more than a sense of moral duty.⁴⁷¹ He attempts to simplify this broad and deep sense self by saying, “The ecological self of a person is that with which this person identifies.”⁴⁷² Robinson Jeffers speaks to the spiritual dimensions of ecological identification:

I entered the life of the brown forest
 And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of stone,
 I felt the changes in the veins
 In the throat of the mountain...
 and I was the stream
 Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking;
 and I was the stars,
 Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord of his
 own summit; and I was the darkness
 Outside the stars, I included them, they were part of me.
 I was mankind also, a moving lichen
 On the cheek of the round stone...⁴⁷³

Along a similar vein, Berry promotes the possibility that humans beings, with our vast creativity and imaginations, can become “the dream of the earth.”⁴⁷⁴ It is from this felt-sense that one participates in “the great work of our time.”⁴⁷⁵ If people are aligned with the earth, he puts forth, they naturally act on behalf of all life.⁴⁷⁶

Macy posits that wider identification “brings into play wider resources and capacities—courage, endurance, ingenuity—like a nerve cell in a neural net opening to the charge of other neurons.”⁴⁷⁷ She teaches that this connectivity is the source being

empowered. Based upon her personal experience, she says ecological identity is about “opening to the web of life and its self-healing power.”⁴⁷⁸ Macy’s work supports different stages of ecological identity.⁴⁷⁹ She begins by experiencing the earth as “beloved” and charts paths of experience that lead to experiencing the earth as “self.”⁴⁸⁰ Fear, anger and depression about what is happening in our world are signs, she says, of an expanding identity. People can celebrate having these difficult feelings. Furthermore, turning away from the industrial-growth society and toward a life sustaining society is the subjective experience of the “Great Turning.”⁴⁸¹

Macy, Berry, Naess and other deep ecologists promote a shift in identity, but they do not show ways this shift may result from the trials and tribulations of taking action. For them, activism is more of an effect of awakening rather than the path. How might ecological identity be fostered via a path of activism? If one feels separate from wild nature, can taking action on behalf of life open doors to larger belonging?

Elizabeth Bragg, who worked for an extended period of time with Seed teaching and co-leading Councils of All Beings, concluded in her doctoral research that experiences of deep ecological belonging (which can occur while participating in deep ecology workshops) are powerful but ephemeral.⁴⁸² Her research showed that unless people regularly express ecological identity, this new and fragile consciousness is difficult to sustain. Bragg concludes her research: “I have been blessed with a new optimism and faith in people, and a realisation [*sic*] that if the change which *is* occurring is to *continue* it must occur ‘from within.’ It cannot be pushed from the outside.”⁴⁸³

What sustains this inner motivation?

No one can be pushed or forced to develop. Some kind of dedication is required. This research aims to discover how activism itself, a dedication to serve life, becomes a path of initiation that radically changes one's sense of self. Einstein reminds us, "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."⁴⁸⁴ How might the myriad challenges endured by activists change their level of thinking and their sense of self? Might their service to more-than-human nature expand their thinking to be more-than-human? When standing in front of a line of charging bulldozers, John Seed, expressed this potential: "I try to remember this is not me protecting the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking."⁴⁸⁵

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

—Rumi, “The Breeze at Dawn”

The main objective of this research was to explore how grappling with intransigent ecological crises over a prolonged period of time constituted an initiatory rite of passage for seasoned environmental activists. If inclusively extrapolated, my hope was to explore this possibility for all of us. Steadfast activism should, I hypothesized, lead to an ongoing development of, and commitment to, capacitated ecological identity. This also includes a dynamic sense of self that embodies a profound interconnectedness to all life. Initiatory development of this larger and more inclusive identity should bring into play wider resources and capacities inherent in wild nature itself—like courage, endurance, ingenuity, creativity—which Macy says naturally empower activists to continue, even in the face of immense resistance, failure, and loss.¹

Reframing long-term activism as an initiation implies that this development has specific stages and includes completion. Completion for what I am calling “ecological initiation” may move one beyond a purely intellectual (and popular) understanding of radically interconnectedness of all life. It moves people to into a lived experience of being the earth and expressing its essential-wildness as a modern human being.² This

research seeks to discover in what ways activism itself could be path of an initiation that leads to a tempering and maturing of a post-modern ecological identity. If so, then the hard and courageous work of directly responding to environmental crises could, in and of itself, become a path of evolutionary development.

Invoking the experience of activism itself as a path of initiation required developing of a theory-in-practice called “ecological awakening theory.”³ Research data was viewed through this theoretical prism. Its concepts and principles are gleaned via combining the deep ecology work of Macy, cosmological insights of Berry, and Plotkin’s synthesis of initiation practices and cultural transformation.⁴ Others who contribute to this theory include Foster, Little, Meade, Hübl, Omer, and scholars of initiation.

Reflections and learnings based upon a theory of ecological awakening could be pertinent to people in all walks of life because of a growing awareness of and concern for our environmental situation. Though everyone is dependent upon a living habitat, the outcome of this study will be most beneficial for those willing to face the growing crises, asking (in their own way), “Who or what is this crisis inviting me to become?” This theory seeks to understand what psychological changes occur when people say “yes” to direct engagement and then persevere in the face of challenges and even failure.

This research was participatory, which means that participants’ perspectives were accounted for, including mine. It also required that I evoke the experience of engaging environment crises as an initiation rather than talking to them about it. I considered avoiding the use of the concept of initiation, or even mentioning the word, in all written or verbal exchange so as to not overly shape or steer the research outcome. Secrecy is aligned with traditional psychological research, but a participatory research is

collaborative and requires transparency. In the end, I shared the purpose of the study openly. I am glad that I did.

The heart of the actual research was a daylong outdoor experience that followed the contours of the four phases of initiation discussed at length in the literature review. Three weeks later there was another half-day gathering, where preliminary findings were made available for collaborative reflection, further interpretation and potential revision. Between meetings, I transcribed journal entries and group discussions. After mulling over the data of Day One, I decided to add an exercise that had not been planned. As will be discussed, this change was essential to solidify the final learnings.⁵

For the half-day gathering, we met at the same outdoor location to discuss the purpose of this research. After sharing core concepts and principles of the study and the theory-in-practices I used to evaluate the data, we discussed what we did during our daylong and why. Throughout, participants had the chance to ask questions and make their own additions. I recorded and transcribed the conversation. We concluded with a closing circle emphasizing gratitude for activism as a path of healing for self and others.

Framing ecological crises as an initiation and then attempting to evoke this complex experience in a single day with a small group of activists had serious limitations and inherent delimitations. One obvious limit or restriction was that I perceived an experience that is difficult to measure or prove as real. I believe that ecological initiation is underway and happening on a collective level. This perspective was narrowed down to exploring activism as a path of transformative development. But what truly captured my curiosity is the possibility that ecological crises—which are global in scope—represent an initiation for humanity. That means all of us. The scope of this inquiry is, obviously,

difficult to contain in any research methodology. But it is an attempt, like scooping a cup of water from the sea to see the state of the world's oceans.

Another delimitation was the artificiality of condensing years of complex experience into a truncated daylong experience. Further, focusing solely on participants' activism ignores the potential contribution of other life-changing events that could contribute to ecological initiation.⁶ Another delimitation is choosing to work with activists. Like scouts, they have gone further up the trail than most of us and then report back.

What they reported might not be applicable to the rest of us. I chose people who I saw as being ahead of the curve, but that curve could change for those who follow. Would insights gained from a handpicked elite group of activists be generalizable to the rest of humanity? Devoted activists are not average citizens. They could be heralds of budding human potential or might be evolutionary misfits. But I doubted they were willful rebels at a lonely leading edge of humanity. There is too much at stake for that.

Finally, the frame of initiation may be limiting, like a too-sharp cookie-cutter. If ecological initiation is different for each individual, the frame of initiation itself, with its clear phases and demarcations, could oversimplify real-life experiences. Taking an overarching view also runs the risk of flattening the unique individual experience. Further, the danger of projecting our findings from this limited study disregards the ongoing nature of personal, societal, and ecological evolution.

In spite of limitations, a participatory approach to research worked well with informed and thoughtful activists. They exhibited a keen eagerness to make meaning of the experience of activism, both for themselves and others. This style of research gave

them a rare opportunity to reflect upon activism as a path of transformation and share perceptions. As will be discussed, their insights significantly shaped the findings.

Participants

Because I wanted to discover if and how engagement in environmental crises constitutes an initiation into mature ecological identity, I sought people whom I perceived as having been initiated in this fashion. Of course, they did not describe themselves as “ecologically initiated,” but they spoke clearly about what I perceived as experiencing non-dual relatedness with (and within) our more-than-human world.

My primary criteria were simple, but they narrowed my pool of participants significantly. One, they needed to have been engaged in some form of environmental activism for at least ten years and they needed to still be engaged even if their activism had changed over time.

Areas of activism could include environmental justice, political and direct activism on behalf of the earth’s biotic communities, efforts to change policy, and work focused on shifting consciousness and raising environmental awareness. Secondly, they would have thoughtfully described their relationship to nature. I selected people who spoke at least somewhat in non-dual terms about this connection. The third eliminated a number of great candidates, namely “Do you have two free weekends?” Most people, especially activists, are very busy.

Using my personal network of connections in the environmental community of the Bay Area and posting an invitation on my Facebook page, I sought eight to twelve “adventurous research participants to join me in a collaborative exploration that

engages ecological crises as an initiation.” (See Appendix 4.) I found four men and seven women, ages ranging from mid-thirties to mid-seventies. I did lengthy phone interviews with those who met the three criteria for participation. I asked if they would feel comfortable doing a collaborative exploration of activism that would involve writing, dialogue, and creative expression with a small group of fellow-activists. Could they commit to a full day-and-a-half for this endeavor? Were they curious about the transformative effects of long-term activism? This call also gave them a chance to get to know me. My final selection of participants was made to achieve gender balance and a degree of diversity in terms of culture, age, and types of environmental activism.

I was not screening for professionally polished people, but more for those who, through their activism, had become more nature-oriented and less culture-oriented in terms of gauging their success and sense of well-being. I was not selecting for fame or prominence, but for depth and commitment. Commitment was required because the type of initiatory change explored in this study occurs via long-term engagement.

I was also looking for a quality of depth, a kind of spiritual depth. Depth is a fruit of initiation and is difficult to gauge. I used my intuition.⁷ In the end, I gathered a mix of activists from different walks of life, cultures, and arenas of environmental engagement. Different realms of activism were represented, including politics, performance art, nuclear issues, social justice, plant medicine, restoration work, cosmology and storytelling, as well as more traditional expressions of environmentalism that simply protect what is wild.

Along with the final 11 participants, I did a preliminary walk-through or pre-test of my research day in a one-on-one session with Paul Hawken, a seasoned activist who

was not part of the group experience (he was busy but wanted to participate).⁸ I walked him through each phase, as if he really did Day One. Macy also donated two evenings to pre-test this research. These two preliminary try-outs with seasoned activists, who are also leaders at the growing evolutionary edge of activism (in my estimation), helped shape my Theory-in-Practice, Ecological Awakening Theory. Working with them influenced the methodology for this research and how I interpreted the data.

Participatory research intends to benefit participants. The main motivation and potential benefit participants had for volunteering to participate in this research was the opportunity to reflect on their experience as activists in an in-depth manner with a group of other thoughtful activists. I offered them, in the words of Bell, an “embracing conceptual order of cognition and experience” in regards to their years of environmental activism.⁹ Often, informal or life-based (not-ritualized) initiations are recognized in hindsight. Perhaps an embracing conceptual order of their experience would honor the rewards of their sacrifice as well as the hardships and heartbreaks.

This kind of reflection is not generally part of activists’ busy schedules. I want to shed light on the value and beauty of their journeys. I wanted, in the spirit of Houston, to situate their experience in a larger story. I also wanted to give them space to reflect and make meaning. Many years operating on the fringes of a dominant culture (whose center-of-gravity is not wild nature) and looking directly at issues a majority of people want to deny or avoid can leave activists with a sense of being permanent outsiders or lone warriors.

This prolonged sense of exile may not only render their initiation incomplete, but may also have led to ongoing destabilizing liminality stemming from a lack of cultural

incorporation.¹⁰ Given these possibilities, I hoped to offer them a mild kind of incorporation. Of course, this was not a workshop. So the benefits they may have incurred took place as part of a research project.¹¹

They also had the chance to explore the same question that occupies me: In what ways might long-term engagement in ecological crises constitute an initiation where we become what the world needs by responding to it? Mahatma Gandhi offers his reflections on this possibility:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.¹²

Participants in this research responded creatively to the suffering and were changed by their commitment. Often in psychological research, the researcher is in some way superior to their subjects because of more training, experience, or in terms of mental health. However, I see myself as a fellow traveler with participants in this research. They have become the change they were seeking to make in the world. Not only do I respect their hard won maturity and insights, I am on the same arduous journey of ecological awakening. I am glad to be a fellow traveler and not on the sidelines or mountaintop.

Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star

—William Stafford, “A Ritual to Read to Each Other”

This day-and-a-half long participatory research was an opportunity for a group of activists to experience their years of devoted activism as an initiation. Each phase of initiation was evoked in the first day-long experience and each phase included some aspect of the four phases of Imaginal Inquiry. Experience directly provides a rare opportunity for people to speak from intense experiences of their lives as activists, not talk about them.

Participants are invited to embody and then express from this place in various ways. Real time information can be gained during these phases. Only later do participants, myself included, interpret and integrate the experience. Day One emphasized the first two phases of Imaginal Inquiry. The final meeting was dedicated to interpretation and integration.

Both gatherings took place out-of-doors in a local Berkeley park, where microenvironments within the park provided symbolic representations of participants' initiatory journey as activists. Codornices Park is an unusually large urban park, offering many varied micro-ecological zones.¹³ For example, there is a rose garden, redwood groves, an oak forest, grassy flats, and gathering places for people to have a fire. There are also vistas that offer sweeping views of the city and bay.

I had already taken several days to contemplate, map and plan the outdoor experience. After first arriving and during the orientation, each participant chose a “wilderness name” for himself or herself. These became their pseudonyms for the research. They were also given bound research journals, where questions and directions were included. Here they recorded their reflections, which I collected at the end of the day. I tape-recorded all pertinent verbal interactions.

After Orientation, Day One began with the initial severance phase of initiation called, “taking leave of an old way of life.” Here, participants came to a line drawn on the ground between two redwood trees in silence. They were invited to contemplate their early beginnings as activists.

For activists, severance involved leaving an old way of life behind reaching toward something new. What brought them to this imaginary line? Per Meade, Campbell and Plotkin, what beckoned or pushed them to directly engage our environmental situation?¹⁴ What called them to cross the line and become an activist? One at a time, participants expressed their calling: “What calls me to cross this line is....” Then they stepped over.

Looking back, participants were again invited to speak aloud, “What I am leaving behind is....” Because initiation refers to a passage between life stages and usually involves both gains and losses, these verbalizations evoked the gains (what calls me) and losses (what am I leaving behind) of severance. These verbalizations were recorded.

After “crossing the line,” participants were given index cards and invited to write, “At this early point in my venture, my goals as an activist are....”¹⁵ At the end of the day’s journey, participants had a chance to revise, update, and change these goals. Any

changes in goals would indicate whether or not long-term engagement tempers or changes one's overarching objectives. A shift in goals over time is one way to gauge maturation of ecological identity. Participants then paired up to have private (unrecorded) dyad conversations focused on the question, "what happened after you left your old way of life?" This provided a chance to interpret and integrate the severance phase of ecological initiation.

The next phase was designed to evoke the liminal phase of initiation, where one has the experience of being "between worlds" but fully grounded in neither. In traditional rituals, liminality is designed to be uncomfortable, humbling, and disintegrating. For that reason, the evocative phase of Imaginal Inquiry included experiences that were difficult. At this point, things were still fairly relaxed and moving toward greater intensity. After the dyad conversations, participants were given time alone to stroll and contemplate, "What hard truth do I now carry? How does this make me different from most people in my culture? How do I feel at this point in my venture?" This contemplation evoked a sense of exile, finding one's mission, and feeling the fire of a higher purpose. These are aspects of liminality.

Time-alone contemplating the truths one carries was also preparation for the main expressive experience of liminality: Living and sharing one's core ecological truth in the face of resistance. After returning from time alone, we created a ritual where each activist was invited to share his or her core truth to those who express resistance.

Participants alternated between roles of being an activist sharing their hard truth with dominant culture and being a member of dominant culture who received (or resisted) this information. Thus, one was able to speak the truth of our ecological

situation and then step into the place of resisting realities of ecological crises. Each participant had the chance to become those with whom they normally communicate. In liminality, one experiences the affects, tension, and stress of spanning disparate stances. One is betwixt and between liminal territory that exists between different worlds. One is fully at home in neither. This exercise was designed to evoke the fluidity of identity, a hallmark of liminality.

Following this evocative experience, there was journaling-time to reflect and write about what it is like to carry a hard truth that is not readily received by dominant culture. Conversely, speaking as a member of dominant culture gave participants the empathic experience of being someone with another point of view. Being both activist and a normal citizen emphasized the divisions between two different perspectives and ways of life. Again, bridging these is the liminal activity of activists that they do on a daily basis, though of course they might not call it that.

The next experience for the now tired-out activists (truth-telling was intense) was a long dark “Tunnel Walk.” This solitary blind walk symbolized the late-liminal transition that proceeds the completion phase of initiation, incorporation. The tunnel was real, a round narrow passageway under a busy road that connects Cordornices Park to the Berkeley Rose Garden. Whispering in each of their ears at the entrance, I invited them to be guided by internal knowing rather than solely by signals from their outer world. This pedestrian tunnel provided a safe passage where participants to navigate with closed eyes, reflecting the question I had whispered to them, “What carries me through dark times?”

After the tunnel, they opened their eyes and, again, took time to reflect and journal. They were asked to describe what carries them through dark times. If the “hard

truth(s)” they carry are an invitation or vision for the future, what would that vision or invitation be?” Thus they translated their hard truth into a positive vision of what is possible and necessary.

From this inquiry, I not only discerned some of the initiatory imperatives of ecological crises, I also developed a deeper understanding of ecological identity itself. Not surprisingly, a crucial source of strength is the truth of larger ecological belonging. Learning more about the ecological Self was not an explicit intention of the research at this phase, but it ended up being essential for a key revision in methodology that occurred on Day Two, which will be discussed shortly.

When finished with this reflection, participants followed instructions in their journals to maintain silence and then proceeded, at their own pace, to nearby picnic tables where art materials were waiting. They were invited to create an image of what carries them through doubt and difficult times they experienced as activists. Creating images of what “sustains them in dark times” was designed to be a form of liminal integration.

When done, they followed directions in their journals to enter to the Rose Garden, where I stood waiting for them at the gate. Passing through a clearly marked gateway evokes the return phase of initiation. As they passed through, I greeted each participant warmly and invited them to return to their “daily life as an activist, tending to roses amidst thorns.” After time strolling alone in the Rose Garden for a time, “contemplating the thorniest and rosiest parts of your life as an activist,” participants paired up and took turns interviewing each other. The interviewer asked question written in the journal and recorded salient aspects of their sharing in that person’s journal. Then they switched.

This incorporation exercise had two purposes. One, to evoke the experience of been seen, heard, and received by another human being and two, to express and reflect upon the “rosiest and thorniest aspects of making one’s vision real in the world.” With another activists, they evaluated and rated their sense of personal congruence with their vision—meaning how much one’s personal life (including network of friends, colleagues, and daily activities) was in harmony with their larger ecological vision for humanity. They also rated their “overall success as an activist.”

Contemporary initiation guides tend to agree that the incorporation phase of initiation is, of all phases, the most challenging. I wanted us to explore if this is true for ecological initiates. I also wanted them to have an experience of being seen, heard, and honored for their sacrifices as environmental activists from colleagues who truly understood the full implications of long-term activism. Needless to say, everyone enjoyed this part of the day and the interviews.

After these dyad interviews, I called participants up to a lookout point above the Rose Garden, a topographical symbol of continuing one’s climb to the top of the mountain. At this reflective juncture, we turned to survey the entire terrain of the years of activism. The index cards, filled out at the beginning of the journey, were given back for revision. Fresh cards were available to write down any new visions for their activism that were alive and calling them. After standing in silence, I invited them to listen for “new callings.” They expressed out loud, “The future that calls me is....”

This final “mountain top” experience evoked the initiatory phase of Rebirth or “beginning-again.” From this springing-off place, each person had an opportunity to verbally share next fresh steps (if any) into the unknown. I wanted to discover whether

there was a willingness to start over and begin again, which is a sign of being in tune with the demanding but organic process of initiation as a way of life. Does long-term activism forge initiatory capacities, which include a willingness to let go of what has been achieved, take on new challenges, and undergo what Coleman Barks calls “the necessary pain of changing” in an ongoing fashion?¹⁶

I suspected that ecological initiation might require one to keep walking into the unknown rather than rest upon one’s laurels. This fourth phase of initiation (which is not always emphasized, especially in van Gannep’s tripartite map) is important for ecological initiation. There are currently no absolutely correct answers to ecological dilemmas facing humanity (and all life on earth). Therefore, willingness to stand constantly corrected, and surrender to begin again and again, might be as sign of mature ecological identity.

After reaching this “mountaintop,” the hard work of Day One was complete. We returned to where we started and mindfully crossed the line back to what I called “ordinary reality.” I smudged participants with burning cedar, one at a time, when crossing the line back into normal Sunday life. This final crossing evoked completion and incorporation of ecological initiation.

Afterwards, we sat together in a relaxed way, partaking in a meal I had prepared for everyone, and taking time for “Post-Initiation Reflections.” Here participants had an opportunity to identify “Key Moments and Omissions,” as well as “any surprises” in their journals. Though integration happened throughout the day, this final phase of eating together and relaxing was the final integration. I had prepared a nutritious lunch, a bean soup (which I had kept warm), fresh local bread, artisan cheeses, fruit, and salad. I

intended the closing of Day One to be somewhat festive because celebration and sharing good food is a traditional part of integration and incorporation.

The bulk of interpretation and integration occurred on Day Two, three weeks later, which was shorter and spent together as a cohesive group of eight participants, four men and four women, due to cancellations. I shared preliminary findings from the daylong experience and the overarching purposes of this research. Participants freely gave feedback from their perspectives as well as stories and other forms of input. This conversation was recorded and transcribed. Together, we explored key concepts and principles of this research, as well as the concept of initiation, all of which were not familiar to them. The conversation was open, lively, and generative.

After completing this phase of reflection, participants had a much better idea about what it means to engage environmental crisis as an initiation. They also gained a better sense of the overarching affect long-term devotion to the earth and nature (in a time where this devotion is not valued or respected by their culture) can have upon a person. For most, the concept of initiation was familiar but not in terms of their experience as activists. By the end of Day Two, they were explaining (to each other and me) in what ways this framework fit and did not fit their experiences as activists.

During the time they fully took over the conversation and I was no longer taking the lead, I offered them a chance to re-do a liminal exercise, the one that most of them found to be extremely difficult. I hoped they would say yes, especially since they better understood the meaning of initiation and had reflected upon embodied qualities of ecological belonging. At the beginning of the day, I was not sure I would offer them this chance. But after our lively conversations and demonstrated to me (informally) that they

understood initiation as a group, it felt right. A further sign was the way they had taken over the discussion and level of enthusiasm and understanding reflected in an informal group conversation, where participants answered each other's questions. As a group, we held the container for a deeper exploration and experience of the ecological Self.

The re-do was the participants' choice. Even though it would make Day Two 30-60 minutes longer, there was unanimous agreement to try again. The group quickly chose the spot for our final experience, a peaceful place by the creek. The only difference between the two liminal exercises of Truth Telling was be a brief meditation and group focus on remembering the qualities of ecological belonging prior to the exercise. These qualities were gleaned from their journals, which meant that everyone contributed to the definition. All I did was weave the words together into a flow that I read aloud. "This is," I said, "our group's definition of ecological identity." (See Appendix 13.)

Take two of the liminal truth-telling exercise was radically different than first day, the implications of which are discussed at length in the Learnings and Reflections chapters. The beauty of Imaginal Inquiry is that it allows the wisdom of the group to emerge and shape the research as it happens. Research becomes a dance between participants, research, and the Research Problem. We all swim in the mystery of discovery together, and ideally, we find a collective growing edge where refreshing knowledge is generated and shared.

Chapter 4

LEARNINGS

Introduction and Overview

“Malady Begets Medicine” sums up the overarching, cumulative learning of this study. This phrase can also be understood as the primary dynamic of initiation, via activism. This dissertation’s supposition was that responding to environmental crisis affords initiatory development outside of ritual settings. Environmental crises startle some people out of an anthropocentric slumber. People awaken into caring because there is a problem. Pain invites attention. Problems invite solutions. Crisis spawns activists. Malady begets medicine.

This research explored the possibility that activism itself promotes development of post-modern ecological identity and postulated that this development occurs via an initiatory process. Here findings are presented based upon the two-day participatory research experience with 11 seasoned environmental activists who were screened for having a well-developed ecological identity. Each Learning highlights specific initiatory dynamics that are linked to each phase and were experienced by these activists, shedding light on how their ecological identity may have been formed, tempered, and sustained via years of devoted activism. As this research was participatory, the learnings are examined from the point of view of research participants. Finally, each of the four learnings is assessed with respect to validity and reliability with caveats about imaginal structures that could influence how I ultimately viewed and assessed the data.

Cumulative Learning: Malady Begets Medicine

Where lowland is, that's where water goes. All medicine wants is pain to cure.

—Rumi, “Cry Out in Your Weakness”

“Malady Begets Medicine” refers to the dynamic between a problem and its solution. “Beget” means to produce as an effect. It bridges malady and medicine. “Malady” is ecological unraveling occurring on Earth at this time and the “medicine” is akin to an immune response. By turning and facing environmental crises directly and creatively, activists themselves become human-medicine for the malady of our historical moment. This learning was drawn from exploring the initiatory process of change that environmental activists undergo—psychologically, economically, interpersonally, and existentially—after many years of committed responsiveness to ecological maladies.

The effect of malady producing or drawing forth medicine is an evolutionary dynamic that is difficult to understand, much less prove. However, healthy feedback loops redress imbalances and achieve a renewed homeostasis that occurs in healthy biological systems. Barry Richmond, who coined the term “systems thinking” in 1987, describes a feedback loop as a:

series of connections causing output from one part to eventually influence input to that same part. This circular flow results in large amplification, delay, and dampening effects, which is what causes the gross behavior of the system. Every part is involved in one or more feedback loops. Systems have more feedback loops than parts, which causes unimaginable complexity.¹

Feedback loops are the main reason a system’s behavior is emergent and not easily predicted. Because there are more feedback loops than individual parts, these dynamics are also unimaginably complex, a vast orchestra of multitudes. “Malady Begets

Medicine” posits that human beings who respond to massive imbalances in living systems will undergo an initiatory process of change that comes about by finding their unique ways to redress these imbalances. By participating in the need for healing within living systems, individuals become the medicine needed by the larger system.

The four other learnings address a stage or dimension of this initiatory process. Learning One pertains to severance, a moment or period of time when activists let go of and leave a situation that is no longer congruent with their values or aspirations. Hence its title, “Tight Shoes are Discarded.” Learning Two, “Liminality Tempers Ecological Identity,” illuminates beneficial ordeals that arise following exile from one’s culture of origin. Learning Three, “We Will Never Have Dessert,” implies that incorporation of ecological identity needs to be creative and fluid. The final learning, “Context Capacitates,” points to the power of a larger context to capacitate and embolden an expanded identity in an ongoing manner. Just as sunflowers follow the sun throughout the day, seasoned activists cultivate ongoing attunement to the teleology of wild nature for refuge, sustenance, and guidance. This final learning refers to the interactive intimacy between identity and expanded sense of belonging within the web of life.

Though activists are the focus of this research, it is my hope that its cumulative learning will have a broader significance. As maladies worsen, the initiatory movement of begetting medicine via needed responsiveness will likely increase in intensity. Activists are surrendering to the initiatory imperative of environmental crises before most people, but the initiation is underway for all people. Those who are unwillingly initiated identify as unfortunate victims rather than dynamic, curious participants partaking in a collective healing journey that is global in scale and trans-generational.

Learning One: Tight Shoes Are Discarded

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began.

—Mary Oliver, “The Journey”

As discussed in the Literature Review, the severance phase of ecological initiation requires leaving the comforts of home, one’s known community, or an old way of life. Along with a desire to address problems in the world, a personal feeling of no longer fitting in drove most participants to leave an old way of life behind and devote themselves to activism. Hence the title, “Tight Shoes Are Discarded.” Sensitivity to the suffering in the world appears to be precondition for chafing of not fitting in to occur. However, sensitivity and chafing alone did not constitute the radical leaving required for activism to be an initiation into a whole new identity. For most participants, physically leaving a comfortable home base or radically changing careers was required. Since none of the participants returned to where they had been, severance has been permanent, so far.

What Happened

Eleven seasoned environmental activists (seven women and four men) gathered early on a beautiful summer morning under a grove of dawn and coastal redwoods to experience reframing their long-term engagement in ecological crises as an initiation.² Ages ranged from mid-30s to early 70s, and all were active in environmental work for at least 10 years, some 40 and 50 years! Their activism covered a broad range of issues,

including environmental education, native rights, social justice, nuclear issues, art, the ceremonial use of medicinal plants, ritual leadership, and green politics.³

A line drawn between a dawn redwood and a coastal redwood tree marked an imaginary line of severance.⁴ This line represented leaving an old way of life behind and crossing over to a life devoted to environmental activism. As we stood in contemplative silence before the line, bagpipes started playing from across the misty field. Bagpipes! One at a time, participants crossed the line, speaking aloud, “What calls me to cross the line is....” Then upon crossing the line, participants were asked to turn back to where they had come from and complete the sentence stem, “What I am leaving behind is....” (See Appendix 15.) The haunting sound of bagpipes accompanied severance.

When discussing this crossing-over experience of severance on Day Two, a few participants expressed being disturbed by the artificiality of the strict line that marked severance, noting that it was hard to find a specific beginning point of their activism.⁵ People spoke to their sense that they had “always felt sensitive” and “different,” long before they “crossed the line.”⁶ They agreed that sensitivity set the stage for leaving.

Most agreed that severance was an absolute necessity for them. “Dragonfly” (pseudonym) described her pre-activist situation as “in no way true to who I am” and that staying in her prior circumstances felt “like self-destruction.” “Phoebe” (pseudonym) was even more explicit, “Severance for me was like this: I am going to kill myself if I stay here. I hate this life. There was no other alternative.” No one expressed regrets about choosing to leave their old life behind, which for some included a secure career, spouse, children, extended family, having a normal “private” life, and being seen in a positive light by others. Most of them physically moved to a new town, state, or country.

Everyone had big visions of possibility.⁷ For everyone, severance required leaping into the unknown. Phoebe expressed this shared sentiment: “I cast my life into Fate....”

On Day Two, I explained the purpose of Day One’s activities and clarified severance. After the group voiced confusion and critique at the notion of severance, I decided to read the list of “callings” and “leavings” for clarification. Silence followed. “Maybe this is why people don’t cross the line,” we joked.⁸ There was a general sentiment that severance might be most difficult initiatory stage for most people.

How I Was Affected

I had prepared the gathering space in a ritual manner long before participants arrived, so the trees, creek, insects, fresh air, and serenity of the place all were with me.⁹ Ecological synchronicities occurred throughout the day, beginning with bagpipes playing during Severance. I was grateful though not surprised. I felt a trifle insecure when severance was critiqued on Day Two. I decided to be curious, which was exhilarating and raised the energy of the group and invited what felt like authentic shared exploration.

Interpretations

Engagement in environmental crises does not appear to “awaken ecological identity” as suggested in my Research Problem. Ecological initiation does not start from zero. A more appropriate word might be “launch” rather than “awaken.” An already awakened sensitivity appears to be a precursor to recognizing the discomfort of tight shoes.¹⁰ Most participants insisted that they were born sensitive. However, participants did not leave their small shoes for a more comfortable situation. Comfort was not the

goal. A desire to respond to suffering trumped comfort altogether. Further, no one in the group ever returned to an ecologically unconscious way of life.

At first participants questioned the concept of severance. Then I read the list of what they left behind. Following a brief pause, laughter and animated conversation followed. Had they considered their lives from that perspective? Maybe acknowledging the permanent nature of their severance and the kinds of sacrifices entailed provided a chance to laugh, integrate, and reflect on this experience.

Imaginal Structures

Omer's term, "imaginal structures," refers to refracting structures of consciousness that distort perception. My perceiving the overarching theme of initiation when viewing environmental crises points to an imaginal structure that is best described as "If-Then." Externally, it appears as chasing the sunset, never arriving, or always seeking. Subjectively, this chasing movement is experienced as a kind of twisted Protestantism. I am ever seeking grace. This structure dictates that success, a visible hallmark of grace, is achieved through arduous hard work.

Because I do not fully rest in Protestant faith (I am not really a believer), this imaginal structure carries incongruence. I must earn grace, but rationally I know that grace is not earned. Like other post-modern Protestants who carry remnants of an ancestral lineage that no longer provides internal coherence, I do not have a clear subjective experience of God. Further, I carry self-esteem issues from experiences of not being valued or wanted as a child. The resulting inner lack of self-worth, coupled with a protestant hangover, leaves me trying to prove myself to nonexistent entities.

This if-then structure is made visible by the very act of doing a dissertation that does not lead to a specific goal or job and that very few people will read. By any rational standard, this project is meaningless. It is another race to nowhere for one who, deep down, perceives herself as damned and needing redemption. The many years of working on this project expresses a semi-conscious hope that if I go through x, y, and z then I will be ready for a, b, and c. Via this ordeal of initiation, I will achieve grace. Really?

This imaginal structure has one benefit: The structure of initiation makes instinctive sense to me. This instinctive understanding, though rooted in a distorting imaginal structure, avails to me different patterns of initiation that ripple through and shape the lives of others. I see invisible dynamics of initiation at play everywhere. However, it is good to ask, “Are they real?” Maybe not! In the case of Learning One, I imputed severance upon participants’ experiences of leaving an old way of life behind. The concept “severance” was not familiar to participants. It fits my imaginal structure, not theirs. I perceive purpose in exile and feeling incongruent with one’s culture of origin. If you do not fit in, it is ok to toss belonging aside as one might toss aside a pair of outgrown shoes. Initiations require exile and sacrifice, so exile and sacrifice must be good. I perceive breakage as severance, an early step towards transformative change that requires loss and dissolution before the grace of rebirth. It may not be accurate.

Though this perception makes sense of suffering, it is still an overlay upon reality and therefore can and should be questioned. One could view leaving as escapism, but I see it as embarking upon a spiritual journey of awakening. I view the journey as necessarily arduous. Perhaps psychological ripening occurs through pleasure and ease. Perhaps staying and maintaining an ongoing sense of belonging fosters transformative

change as readily as leaving. Rebellion against the values of one's culture-of-origin may not be the severance of initiation, but symptomatic of maladjustment issues. Leaving could express the shame response of withdrawal or avoidance that is related rejection and failure. Perhaps discarding tight shoes is not first step toward birthing a new identity but avoidance rooted in a lack of maturity, internal inflexibility, and a refusal to engage with realities of daily life. Avoidance hampers maturation and is not initiatory.

Though everyone said they felt outside the bounds of dominant culture, I viewed this as exile. Was it? Several participants were highly successful within society. One participant had been the mayor of his town. Knowing I carry an imaginal structure that attempts to put a positive spin on feeling out of synch with dominant culture and the suffering of isolation is important. I should not confuse healthy severance with other problematic issues related to chronic isolation, rebellion, or lack of self-esteem.

Theoretical Concepts

Initiation refers to a passage between any two life-stages that is experienced as a death-rebirth experience, says Plotkin, and this passage will be both a gain and a loss for the community and the individual.¹¹ Turner says initiation entails an “inner process of growth and individuation [where one] must leave old ways behind, divesting oneself of ego's claims to rank and social function, in order to attain a more highly individuated stage of growth.”¹² Severance refers to the first phase of initiation and marks a symbolic death to an old way of life. Macy identifies “positive disintegration” as a part of ecological awakening.¹³ She uses an old religious term, *metanoia*—literally meaning “turning around”—to describe this inner revolution.¹⁴ This turning, Macy says, is a

fulcrum that shifts the “weight of social and ecological despair to a new way of being.”¹⁵
Being both societal and psychological, Macy’s “turning” correlates with severance.¹⁶

Validity Considerations

The validity considerations tinting this entire project, and especially Learning One, are threefold. First, I am in the midst of ecological awakening myself and may be projecting my experiences onto those of my participants. My experience of severance has been severe, so I might assume it will be this way for other ecological initiates. Even more insidious, claiming that severance requires a break from dominant culture may be an underhanded way of justifying my success in dominant culture. Thus my experience is both a projection of my own struggles and a search to redeem personal failings. Secondly, the lens of initiation has limits when identifying life-based severance experiences. This validity issue showed up during the second meeting, when participants questioned there being a definite beginning or identifiable moment of severance. Rituals have beginnings and endings, but life-based initiations are far more amorphous. Usually, one recognizes moments of severance only in hindsight, if there is a grand specific moment. Third, ecological initiation is the water I swim in. My core purpose is to serve ecological initiation. I see all world events on a steep incline, heading towards ecological awakening. Because I live on this slope, I imagine that everything and everyone does too.

Learning Two: Liminality Tempers Ecological Identity

She chooses the path of full resistance, tempering herself to the finest mettle.

—Krow Fisher, “The Healer”

Tempering is a metallurgic process akin to the liminal phase of initiation.¹⁷ In order for steel to become strong and flexible, it needs to undergo the stress of extremes. Suffering ridicule, enduring ongoing heartbreak, and engaging in a never-ending struggle to build bridges of connection are all intrinsic to environmental activism and, together, they create tempering experiences essential to liminality.

In traditional initiations, the ordeals of liminality prepare initiates for a successful passage to a new level of maturity and responsibility. As explored in the Literature Review, liminality is a space between worlds, what Turner calls “betwixt and between.”¹⁸ Initiation rites emphasize and intensify this phase by requiring stupendous effort, focus, and commitment. Humiliations and setbacks can be integral to this phase. “Liminality Tempers Ecological Identity” suggests that the daily challenges of activism itself, rather than an orchestrated ritual experience, can also provide the liminal tempering necessary to ripen ecological identity and attain a more complex order of being.

What Happened

After crossing the line of severance, participants took time alone to contemplate the hard truths they carry “about the earth, humanity, and our environmental situation.”¹⁹ Journal entries reflected the pain of “carrying a burden no one wants to share,” “feeling like I am too loud, a bummer, and unpopular,” “never knowing enough,” “losing

friends,” “being a wet blanket,” and saying what “no one wants to hear.”²⁰ When returning to the group, I instructed them to take turns “presenting the hard truth(s) they carry” while the others were to listen and respond as “dominant culture.”

Despite explicit instructions, nine out of 11 participants did not directly speak their hard truths (which they wrote in their journals). Most activists presented solution-oriented ideas about connecting to nature in ways that are beneficial to people. They reminded people that harming the environment would be harmful to them personally. A couple themes were tame and even off-topic, like gun control or saving money on one’s electric bills. Before speaking, a few activists said they felt excruciatingly uncomfortable when facing dominant culture directly and literally backed away from their audience while speaking, protesting that they generally “avoid speaking with dominant culture altogether” or “I just want to live in peace and work in my garden.”²¹

Only two activists spoke their hard truth directly. “Sun” (pseudonym) went first, and with Zen calm (almost inaudible on the recording), said the planet will soon uninhabitable for complex life. He seemed impervious to critique and almost distant. Acting as dominant culture, other participants said such things as, “Hey, don’t scare us,” “Yea, that message is such a bummer,” and “So, what are your solutions?” Seemingly unaffected by these comments, he calmly replied that he did not have any solutions, shrugged, and stepped away. Later, in his journal, he described that sharing his truth has been hard in his life as an activist. “The particular truth I share is very difficult to speak with others about—dominant and progressive culture equally—because it is about a dire prospect that no one, myself included, wants to hold, let alone endure.” But he also said he found the truth-telling exercise easy and enjoyable.

The other unabashed truth-speaker, “Otter” (pseudonym), instigated uproar when he described activists as “a bunch of people running around not doing anything useful.” That comment hit a sensitive spot, causing participants to slip out of playing the role of dominant culture and back into personal identities as activists. “Sequoiah” (pseudonym), who tended towards being reserved in the group, was outraged as she said, “So you have a wonderful philosophical understanding, while icecaps are melting, sea levels are rising, people are starving, and you are not doing a damn thing about it?!” Undaunted, Otter replied, “If you run the numbers, they are moot.” Unlike Sun, he said the truth-telling exercise was “painful” and seemed upset by the critique.

In stark contrast, Phoebe (who went after Otter) sugarcoated her hard truth, literally. She spoke of the currency of life being sugar and the sweetness of connectivity. People listened, clapped, and she bowed. However, her private hard truth is not about sugar. Inwardly, her hard truth is dire. “Love may not prevail for humanity.... The world is headed for dark times.... Many people are going to die and other species too,” she wrote in her journal. This is not what she voiced aloud. Along with eight other participants, she chose not to speak her hard truth directly to the group playing dominant culture. Her sharing was entertaining, disarming, and humorous.

Even as other activists strived make their hard truths palatable and enticing, the rhetoric of dominant culture remained derisive and aggressively ignorant. Though all participants acknowledged that speaking their truths to dominant culture has been extremely difficult, they described key benefits in their journals. When answering the question, “How does the reception of dominant culture affect you?” they described maturing effects of not being believed or respected by others. Most participants look to

nature, not culture, for sustaining their confidence. Several described how critiques have made them thoughtful, wily, and grounded in what they know is true. Otter claims the resistance “guides where I search to have influence.” Sequoiah carefully chooses what he says to specific audiences. The person who inspired the title of this learning, “T. officinales” (pseudonym) said, “You have to be critical in assessing the effectiveness of your action....Strategic, that’s the word. Which is good. It’s like tempering steel.”

My notes on Day One, I wrote that evading hard truths was an avoidance of conflict and criticism. But later, when carefully listening to the audio recording of the truth-sharing excise, I noticed that most activists attempted to share their love of nature rather than bad news. Most chose to report about possibility or a new way of living in harmony with nature. Even though Sun’s demeanor while sharing his honestly hard-truth expressed calm surrender, wrote in his journal that he sees himself as a “joyful bringer of bad news.” Even Otter tried to back-pedal from his critical stance by begging for “more creativity and imagination” on the part of activists because he thinks the current tactics of mainstream activism need to be revised. Everyone, in their own way, promoted the physical, economic, and spiritual benefits of living in harmony with wild-nature. If the message failed to penetrate the defenses of dominant culture, most took a breath and tried again. Even “Pricilla” and “Chance” (pseudonyms), who claimed to not communicate with dominant culture, won over their audience by vulnerably admitting their desire for real communication rather than arguing. The group, as dominant culture, urged Pricilla to stay in dialogue, “Come out of the garden, we need you in the world!”

Though this group of activists steered away from catastrophism and toward love of life, they described facing the barrage of aggressive resistance and ridicule as

exceedingly difficult. Several struggled to find words. Chance, who recently published a book about cosmology and ecology within the context of the Christian faith, said, “I do not speak my truth to dominant culture.” I wrote in my notes, “Is that true?” Though attempts faltered in the face of being ridiculed, most persisted in expressing the truth of ecological belonging. Intrinsic ecological belonging appears to be the most important “hard truth” they carry, even if it was not what they wrote in their journals.

On Day Two, there were strong protests when I said my first impression of people evading hard truths (written in journals) was “namby-pamby.” I admitted this perception changed after coming to realize that they were attempting to speak from a place of non-dual belonging to nature, though a few continued to be defensive.²²

A final initiatory test was the blind “Tunnel Walk” which required walking with closed eyes through a long tunnel. A roaring generator-powered bouncy house at the entrance of the tunnel and screaming children, neither of which were part of the original research plan, added to the stress of liminality. One at a time, participants were invited to find inner grounding in the midst of noise, noticing “what carries you through dark times.” Afterward, they drew images portraying what sustained them through difficult times. Written responses described benefits of dark times (a metaphor for liminality). “Little Bear” (pseudonym) summed up the group’s reflections, “Darkness teaches, enforces discipline and learning.” “Zoë” (pseudonym) also echoed a response from several, noting that dark times have given her faith that she can “live and embody her truth, even without other people.” Pricilla reported that that dark times fostered her “connection to the earth” and helped her “feel connected to the past and the future while remaining firmly rooted in the present moment.” Liminality concluded at the gate to the

Rose Garden. I welcomed them to “the real world of roses and thorns,” which symbolized returning to daily life as an activist.

How I Was Affected

My personal struggles with liminality were triggered during the liminal stages of this research. I was intrigued by the unique challenges of participants, wondering if they were connected to personal imaginal structures around identity, culture, and belonging.²³ I was somewhat distressed by people’s struggle to find their ecological center of gravity when trying to share their truths with dominant culture. I have wrestled with Cassandra-like hysteria arising from not being heard, taken seriously, or believed. The often shrill and defensive tone of participant-activists during the truth-telling exercise reminded me of my own struggles. I felt embarrassed for the participants, wishing they would find their grounded clarity. The confident vitriol of dominant culture also disturbed me, which again, was likely due to my own difficult experiences of truth-sharing. I admit to feeling somewhat vindicated to see how hard it was for participants to share their truths. Did their difficulties justify my own challenges? Perhaps. Perhaps this project has been, in part, a way for me to meet a need for empathy. Truth-telling can be hard and ostracizing.

My immediate interpretation when participants did not share their hard truths was that they were evading hard truths. Were they ecological initiates? Later I wondered if evasiveness was an attempt to communicate from a place of ecological belonging, which should not have been surprising, considering I screened participants for this capacity. When listening to the recording later from this perspective, I felt both relief and pride at their attempts to convey the real truth, and not just the hard truth. When reading the

beautiful lessons learned from facing challenges within dominant culture, I realized difficulties are indeed beneficial and perhaps required for ecological initiation.

Interpretations

Several elements of liminality inherent in activism were evoked by being ridiculed, facing resistance, enduring failure, exhaustion, burn-out, touching one's broken-heartedness, and living betwixt-and-between worlds. Being challenged, ignored, scorned, or treated cruelly are central experiences in the liminal phase of traditional initiations. The gist of this learning is that these challenging liminal experiences may foster, strengthen, and stabilize (or temper) ecological identity.

Struggles to cope with activities that are inherently part of activism (e.g. speaking one's truth to others) on Day One might indicate that ecological identity is still being developed. One coping strategy was not to tell one's hard truth directly. Though I explicitly directed them to "share your hard truths with dominant culture," most participants did not. Instead, participants shared what could be called their soft truths of human-nature interconnectivity and the benefits of caring for this relationship. Only one laid out the hard cold facts of certain ecological demise (which most claimed to be their hard truth.) Another one pointed out how ineffective activists are in addressing the crisis. The remaining nine attempted to win their audience over to a new way of thinking.

In light of a still-developing ecological identity, evasive strategies like these deserve a second look. Those who are ecologically identified will, over time, imitate the ways of nature. Could it be that is what I observed rather than ungrounded evasion? Paul Hawken shared a crucial principle with me, "nature sucks."²⁴ Nature can be erotic and

magnetic, using sweetness to tempt life away from danger and towards actions that are sound and beneficial. Poison is usually bitter and what is edible tends to be tasty. Most participants steered way from bitter terror and chose the magnetic sweetness of a positive potential, emphasizing their love of life rather than fear and doom.

Overall, they exhibited coping strategies coherent with ecological identity. Even when stumbling and fumbling for this coherency and not always sustain a clear transmission of ecological belonging in a stressful public forum, they stayed true to the values of ecological belonging. Communication styles were more like wild nature and less like dominant culture. They never shouted or lost their cool or reverted to insulting their audience. Several times they took deep breaths and attempted to find new ways to find common ground with dominant culture. No one battered their audience.

When watching how they coped with resistance, I wrote in my notes, “Riptide swimmers swim sideways!” When caught in a riptide, the only effective way to reach the shore is to swim sideways and never directly against the current. Swimming directly into a current leads to staying in one spot, exhaustion, and eventual drowning (the equivalent of burnout). Strategic struggles of riptide swimming during the truth sharing were indicated by pauses, deep breaths, and observable shifts in tack—from over-earnestness to enthusiasm, grimness to humor, and alienation to seeking common ground.²⁵ Failure to communicate one’s truth may carve out territory for liminal tempering. Nature does not give up, but constantly seeks new avenues for life to express itself. This constant seeking slides sideways along a dominant riptide current.

Burnout, a loyal companion of failure, appears to have led these activists to contemplate the ephemeral nature of existence itself.²⁶ Rather than give up, this group

takes a long view. Conversations repeatedly took unprompted philosophical excursions that explored the spiritual foundations of life and death. Everyone agreed that spiritual practices are essential to long-term activism. They reported that taking a broad view of time helps them guard against brittle despair and frustrated exhaustion. Macy says a sense of “deep time” is a hallmark of ecological identity.²⁷ Most agree that the invitation of environmental crisis is “to awaken and be part of Gaia—the consciousness of Gaia.”

Participants reported having their hearts broken again and again, which Macy says is inherent to activism.²⁸ This ongoing “shattering, as Chance labeled it, appears to have both a tenderizing and wizing effect. They see pain as a symptom of interconnectedness and therefore as wholesome and empowering. Living with constant tension of uncertainty and impending doom calls for what Chance describes as a “bigger story” to provide buffer against existential fears.²⁹ When asked, “What sustains your activism?” everyone agreed that “feeling part of a larger story” is crucial.³⁰

Besides ridicule, resistance, failure, and living with heavy sadness, these activists appeared have had another liminal experience: Exile. When asked to rate their overall relationship to dominant western culture “on a scale of 1 to 10” (where 1 represented being “In Synch with Dominant Culture” and 10, “Totally Outside the Bounds of Normal”), the group average was 8.8. This sense of being an outsider may foster ecological, rather than cultural, belonging. Most participants reported a shrinking need to be acknowledged, seen, or even remunerated by a culture that does not share their values or aspirations. Most also reported that being out of synch with the norms of dominant culture has made them less dependent on the opinions of others and more connected to larger truths of nature and the cosmos.

Participants seem to have one foot in dominant culture and another in ecological identity, but are fully grounded in neither place.³¹ I witnessed a healthy authenticity to being neither here nor there, but in-between. Purely intellectual expressions of ecological identity (that were not embodied) sounded flat and boring. These expressions seemed to be the least effective. This discrepancy may be what occurred in Otter's sharing, where he said all the so-called right things but his audience did not resonate with what he was saying. Hübl might attribute this failed communication to speaking "about" possibility rather than "from" it.³² Presenting ideas about possibilities that are not yet one's personal experience lack authenticity. Similar to Wilber's "pre-trans fallacy," presenting ideas of ecological unity is different than fully realizing this unity.³³

Traditional liminality often involves eating crow by facing one's shortcomings, failures, and wrongdoings. Add to this being stripped of status and even one's clothes. Initiates in traditional rites deal directly with the affect of shame.³⁴ Though all participants acknowledged their complicity and contribution to the ecological suffering and sincere remorse, not one exhibited shame avoidance tactics. They face this complicity and look honestly at its affects on a daily basis. At no time during the research did the group move into shame avoidance strategies of blame, anger, self-deprecation, or denial of complicity. Chance expressed a healthy relationship to ecological shame when he said, "I am part of the ecology. I am part of the problem. The problem is part of ecology. I'm finding myself on the verge of tears right now."³⁵ I believe this aspect of liminality is a rich vein of discovery and healing, and more research could be helpful.

Imaginal Structures

Learning Two is rooted in a particular psychodynamic structure of mine which could be described as masochistic. It views hardships within the daily life of activists as beneficial and integral to psychological maturation. Liminality itself is a term coined by anthropologists to discern phases of traditional initiation rites of indigenous cultures. It was not a word used within the cultures themselves. Imputing the concept of liminality upon the daily challenges of activists leads me to reframe struggles (like suffering ridicule, failure, grief, shame, and perceived-exile) as benefits rather than impediments. The concept of liminality emphasizes one set of possibilities over others and it colludes with an imaginary structure within me that views suffering as a path of redemption.

When T. officinales said, “it’s like tempering steel,” the word tempering lit up for me. Tempering makes sense in my world, where extreme conditions forge strength and flexibility. Tempering implies that one can become like hard cold steel. I did not choose to frame activists’ liminal challenges as pulverizing, disorienting, or softening. The choice of this quote and the concept of tempering expose my unconscious commitment to redemption. I want urgently to prove that turning to care for our world may be harrowing—like liminal experiences of traditional initiations—but tempering.

While this learning supports my hope for humanity, sifting activists’ challenging experiences through the sieve of “liminal tempering” shuts out other possibilities and expresses a fervent bias rooted my imaginal structures. Perhaps challenges faced by activists are symptoms that point to the need for training in communication related to others. Even more sobering, perhaps challenges point to the failure of environmental activism itself, signifying that humanity is digging itself into hole of ecological collapse.

Struggles faced by activists could then be seen as symptoms of cultural decrepitude or imminent societal collapse rather than the pain maturation. Way outside the boundaries of my perception is the possibility that ease and flow are hallmarks of ecological awakening.

Theoretical Concepts

The primary concepts of this learning are ecological identity and liminal tempering. Ecological identity points to a future-oriented relatedness between self and wild-nature. Also called “the ecological Self,” Macy describes this sense of self as a metaphoric and dynamic construct of identity that embodies a profound interconnectedness to all life, where one viscerally experiences being interwoven within vibrant and creative web of life.³⁶ One might say that this identity is a dynamic subjectivity spanning the living space between the culture-oriented human ego and wild-nature of the cosmos itself. Rilke’s phrase, “living one’s life in widening circles,” aptly describes fluid ongoing development of ecological identity, which is why Macy chose the phrase “widening circles” as the title of her autobiography.³⁷

Liminality, from the Latin *limen*, refers to a narrow piece of wood marking the threshold of a doorway, the space between two distinct places. Described by Turner as “betwixt and between,” this neither-here-nor-there threshold space becomes ritually and experientially significant in initiations.³⁸ This space, observed van Gannep, embodies the heart of initiatory experience in traditional initiation rituals, the rigors of a neither-here-nor-there phase between the old and new are carefully designed. Somé teaches that the liminality of initiation emerges as the challenging aspects of one’s life.³⁹ A key difference between life-based and ritual initiations is that the latter the ordeals of

liminality clearly come to an end. Real life lacks clear demarcations between phases of life, so, one can linger too long in a swampy betwixt-and-between place.

Validity Considerations

Both crises and initiations are ordeals, but the two are not synonymous. Not every ordeal is an initiation. Believing that the ordeal of environmental activism offers a path of initiation specific to our historical moment is an assumption that is difficult to assess as valid. Bay Area activists may not represent typical activists. Further, initiatory development of post-modern ecological identity could occur in any number of other ways besides activism. Further, activism as a path of initiation may be unique for this moment in history. As environmental problems worsen, dealing with immediate needs for water, food, political stability and health will provide the conditions for initiation rather than the cultural-change work of activism. This might already be the case for many people. Activism is, in some ways, a luxury. I did not work with personal obstacles, what my son's high school coach calls "race demons."⁴⁰ Inner hindrances arise and hamper progress as one surges forward.⁴¹ Working with personal demons can be tempering, but they are not part of activism.

Seeking patterns runs the risk of oversimplification. As a guide, I have witnessed uniqueness of individual initiations. Within a similar landscape, people have entirely different experiences. Likewise, the initiatory journey of each activist will be unique, even in the same arena. Mapping the liminal terrain of activism does not honor the uniqueness of individual journeys. The map is never the territory.

Learning Three: We Will Never Have Dessert

O nameless spirit that is not done with us,
 let us love without a net beyond the fear of death
 until the speck of peace we guard so well becomes the world...

—Mark Nepo, “Earth Prayer”

“We Will Never Have Dessert” refers to the incorporation or return phase of initiation. Unlike carefully designed rituals, ecological initiation does not offer a sense of completion or mission accomplished for several unavoidable reasons. Nonetheless, participants accomplish a creative kind of incorporation by redefining notions of success (and failure) by understanding that theirs is a long journey whose destination is unknown and long-range, finding community who share their aspirations, situating themselves in a larger story, and celebrating small victories along the way. Since dessert is not on the docket, they decide to fully enjoy the main course.

What Happened

Entering the “Garden of Roses and Thorns” symbolized the incorporation phase of initiation and tending to one’s day-to-day life as an activist. At this juncture on Day One, participants took solitary time to stroll and contemplate the thorniest and rosiest parts of their lives as activists. Did they make their visions real? What were their major struggles? What sustains their activism? How do they rate their success? Dyad interviews took place following a solitary stroll. (See Appendix 11.) This conversation itself was designed to evoke incorporation, for telling one’s story of initiation is a key aspect of returning home. As expected, everyone seemed to enjoy animated dyad conversations.

One question involved rating one's success on a 1 to 10 scale. I expected this inquiry to elicit protest or confusion. But it did not. However, most people chose two ratings ranging from two to eight, which might indicate understanding success as a relative term.⁴² On Day Two's debrief, I referred back to this question and wondered why rating one's overall success as an activist was not protested.⁴³ Otter jumped in, saying "I find the notion of 'success' VERY triggering." Voices clamored in agreement, several chiming in saying, "We're never going to see results. So how can we measure success?" Chance mused, "Success would be getting rid of the desire to have success." Dragonfly pointed out that most activists are "tortured by ideals of success." Sequoiah spoke in a more serious tone, "The question of success is rooted in there being an end. And the story never ends." He defined success as succession, referring to an abiding continuity of life.

All participants referred to developing a broader perspective of time in their journals. They soberly, even somberly (but not at all gloomily) measure success with a ruler that stretches far beyond their individual lifetimes. Everyone appeared cheerful when discussing the long-term nature of their work and aspirations.⁴⁴

Situating oneself in a larger story was a central theme in dyad interviews, group conversations, and journals. Sequoiah shared, "Our human chapter in the story may end, but the story goes on." A quality of ecological identity is sensing one's ancestral lineage extending back into beginnings of life on Earth. Sequoiah described being comforted by knowing that most of his ancestors have been bacteria. Laughter and nodding followed.

Discussing the importance of a larger story became explicit when discussing success. Phoebe summed up the group's thoughts by musing, "So, when we stop being

separate [from the earth], we stop having goals of success. That's total success! Wow!" Otter concluded, "Thinking 'I've gotta see the results' is part of the success trip. We will never have dessert."

The group exhibited a natural devotion to fun. Throughout the two days, they joked, cheered, and took time to appreciate our natural surroundings. Without my prompting, a conversation about celebration ensued. Pricilla spoke up, "At some point we [anti-nuclear activists] stopped and said, 'Now wait a minute. We just had what would be considered in our culture a major victory and nobody is naming it or congratulating anybody or having a party.' So our group made a decision to stop and celebrate whenever a shift happens, no matter how small." Having a party regardless of the size of one's success brought forth hoots of laughter, enthusiastic agreement, and more examples.

I also noticed the group's natural affinity for community in the way they immediately formed community and supported each other to engage with enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, and kindness. It was a joy to be together. They also mentioned the importance of community in-group conversations. When rating the importance of a community, where one represents not mattering much and 10, absolutely vital, one participant chose the rating seven and the rest responded with an unequivocal 10.⁴⁵

At the very end of the day, participants revised or updated the initial goals they identified for themselves as activists on Day One, using different colored index cards. These revisions are relevant in terms of measuring one's sense of completion. Were their goals realized? Did they have the same goals? Participant's initial goals were lofty and idealistic, which was to be expected. However, their revised goals were even more complex, lofty, and difficult to gauge as succeeding or failing.⁴⁶ Several said they have

the same goal and added a few more, including self-care, tending to one's personal connection to the earth as an integral part of activism, and studying healing arts.⁴⁷

Phoebe describes herself now as “more of a spiritual activist than an environmental activist. I can't possibly separate them.”

How I was affected

A counselor once told me that a symptom of low self-esteem is picking unattainable goals. I am relieved that my participants prove her wrong. Most have huge goals yet seem confident and relaxed. I was happy for them in this regard, and I wondered why I often am haunted by a sense of failure in terms of my work as an ecopsychologist. They had high goals but did not beat themselves (or each other) up for not achieving them.

During this research I discovered, also to my chagrin, that incorporation is possible because it is doable. This group showed me that incorporation does not happen, it is created. I have long held the belief that incorporation is the most difficult phase of initiation and subtly used this as a pretext for not fully grounding my visions in reality. I confused the hardships of intentional incorporation with low self-esteem and accepted defeat in the face of what I come to call “Monday Morning.” I have high hopes for humanity, but low hopes for myself, which blocks my work in the world. Further, where I rate community is far below a 10 (which was the rating for all but one participant), which leads me to be curious about my sense of relatedness to human beings.

I have often described myself as being stuck in liminality. It was both sobering and inspiring to observe participants not being stuck and even resisting the possibility.

Phoebe insisted, “I am not stuck in in-between place. I know where I am. I feel solid and I am not in a liminal place. I simply help people connect!” At this point in my life, languishing in liminality is a form of passive indulgence or perhaps a bad habit. This learning, “We Will Never Have Dessert” has had a shaking affect, rather like a dog shaking itself when emerging from water. It reveals that incorporation is not a mythical completion, but steady ongoing movement with *compañeros*. It is a verb, not an event. This learning brought a sense of relief, but it was also unnerving.

Interpretations

The lack of culturally sanctioned incorporation (as there would be in traditional initiations) makes the incorporation phase of ecological initiation especially challenging for activists. Further, the finality of severance (Tight Shoes Are Discarded) means they can never go back to an ecologically unconscious way of life. There is no real return in the sense of going back to a familiar place. And, as discussed in Learning Two, the tempering of liminality is ongoing. Nonetheless, incorporation remains a vital component of initiation. Learning Three clarifies how participant-activists developed creative incorporation strategies that enable them to thrive in the midst of change, uncertainty, and even failure. Creative incorporation requires cultivating and inner equilibrium within ongoing liminality. Activists in this research accomplish this by finding community, situating themselves in a larger story, and celebrating small victories along the way.

Most participants have been engaged twenty, thirty, and even over fifty years—and are still going strong. A lifetime spent challenging the anthropocentric hub of modern human civilization has given them a broad sense of ecological belonging, but it has also

led to a sense of being cultural outsiders. However, for this group exile does not mean isolation. Ten out of 11 participants said community is “absolutely vital” and key to their stamina.⁴⁸ Most included the search for like-minded others in their initial goals as activists. Indeed, most found (and created) sub-communities within dominant culture, perhaps similar to Turner’s *communitas*.⁴⁹ Referring to the hard truths that she carries, Zoë made an important connection, “These truths will not come alive until I can collaborate with others.” *Communitas* arises when a sense of personal exile combines with the need for companionship.⁵⁰ In terms of community, several reported that like-mindedness is not as crucial as mutual respect and durable friendships.

Long-haul activism appears to require a long-haul perspective. Perhaps the vast scope of environmental problems forges an expanded context. Maybe a large-scale vision of time is a natural expression of ecological identity.⁵¹ Realizing one is, to borrow Berry’s phrase, “a dream of the Earth” may soften a need for cultural acceptance.⁵² Whatever the cause, the sense of being players in what Chance calls “a larger story,” is shared by all participants. For them, an expanding sense of cosmic belonging and work that serves life indicate success. All participants stressed the importance of seeing their efforts within the context of earth’s wild communities, not just human civilization. Mystical affiliation, maintains Plotkin, is a hallmark of successful initiation across time and culture. If this is true, then these participants are true initiates.

Mystical affiliation appears to stimulate a natural urge to celebrate. Everyone laughed, cheered, and high-fived the idea of big celebrations for modest (and even doubtful) successes and shared stories of these kinds of celebrations. Rather than ruminating on ways that their efforts fell short, they described how to make a big deal of

small successes. According to the participants, this requires seeing the larger significance of small actions, which is also a by-product of mystical affiliation. (Recall Turner's "liminal forms of symbolic action.") Victories are beneficial here-and-now and symbolically significant.

Celebration includes self-care and a commitment to enjoy wild nature. Seasoned activists appear to understand the need to be exemplars of health, harmony, and hope. Regarding the Cumulative Learning, they have learned to become medicine for the malady in ways that are enticing for others and self-sustaining.⁵³ To this end, stamina matters. Joy helps. Exuberance is attractive. The medicine for earth-destruction is earth-celebration. Along with community and mystical affiliation, ongoing celebration and gratitude for life supports creative incorporation of ecological initiates who are activists.

Imaginal Structures

This learning actually challenges an imaginal structure within my psyche that insists on the redemptive role of hardship and suffering which, to be true, must yield results. Results prove redemption. This learning negates a belief that one can (and indeed must) return to culture renewed and then renew one's culture. One must have dessert. Forgoing dessert undermines this core imaginal structure.

However, the notion of ongoing initiation still gussies up what might actually be fruitless commitments, masochistic tendencies on the part of activists, habitual poor strategizing, or idealism. Just as we questioned assumptions of catastrophism—that catastrophe automatically leads to renewal—a notion that ongoing hardship simply means

forgoing dessert should also be questioned. I may perceive benefits of not eating dessert and never-ending hardship, even if they are not really there.

This learning challenges my success-oriented view of incorporation and sheds light upon a lingering demoralization within me, one that may have grown in the shadow of a bright fantasy of incorporation, rather like the happily ever after of fairytales. It exposed an idealized image of incorporation (based on a notion of redemption) that I carry and measure myself against. This inner assessment has caused me to overlook the possibilities of creative incorporation in a time of radical cultural, environmental, and political change. In terms of ecological initiation, humanity itself may be in a liminal phase. Maybe imperfection is perfect! Habitual grasping for an image of perfection can dampen possibility for a good enough initiation.

Notice, too, that I choose to quote Otter directly and include the word “never.” This kind of finality could indicate an imaginal structure rooted in Protestantism, where a lack of success in life indicates eternal damnation. How deep this imaginal structure runs in my psyche is difficult to track. Can I even imagine having dessert? To heal this imaginal structure I may need to constantly recall Mary Oliver’s poem, “Wild Geese”:

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.⁵⁴

It is also important to for me to remember that incorporation itself is a concept coined by western anthropologists. Constructing imaginary beginnings and completions helps solidify the sense of successfully passing from one stage of life to another. But tidy demarcations are less obvious when marking stages in the bootstrapping dynamics of evolution, where consciousness, culture, and wild-nature endlessly bounce off and shape

one another. Seeing the final phase of initiation as ongoing honors experimentation, being unsettled, and still searching. This is less congruent with my imaginal structures and more congruent with Hübl's advice to those on a path of awakening: "Keep walking."⁵⁵

Theoretical Concepts

Macy's "Great Turning" and Berry's "Great Work of our time" are pertinent concepts for creative incorporation of never having dessert.⁵⁶ They provide a sense of ongoing purpose without time-specific goals.⁵⁷ Both the Great Work and Great Turning are works-in-progress and, barring immediate environmental and social collapse, will not likely be completed in the lifetimes of activist-participants for this research. In order to be relevant for itinerant ecological activists (whose development is ongoing), incorporation needs to incorporate the forward momentum of the Great Turning.

Berry's "Dream of the Earth" is important because it points to a mystical experience of embodied ecological belonging.⁵⁸ The Earth itself is integral to Plotkin's "circle of identity," which he says is not mere intellectual belief or professed values about community and interdependence, but a "viscerally experienced and actively embodied value system."⁵⁹ Incorporation becomes of a fluid experience of bringing one's larger circle of identity to bear upon all aspects of life.⁶⁰ Over time, daily actions that arise from world-centricity strengthen and foster ongoing creative incorporation. Rather than a fixed endpoint, ongoing incorporation is a practice and way of life.

Validity Considerations

The main validity issue is a biased selection from the data to support this learning. Of all phases of initiation, incorporation is the most complex. I have severely oversimplified an intricate and tangled personal experience that can take years, even a lifetime, to understand. My biggest validity concern is oversimplification. In-depth interviews might be a better way to understand how activists' hard-won mystical awakenings are incorporated into their daily personal and work lives via creative and ongoing incorporation. If I had started this research with a better understanding of "creative integration" (enjoying the main course and not waiting for dessert), my inquiry may have taken a different course and I may have asked different questions. For example, I could have asked about struggles with addiction, personal health, self-image, loneliness, the role of personal therapy, spiritual aspirations, and current body-oriented practices.

Learning Four: Context Capacitates

This final learning points to the potential of larger ecological context to draw forth and hone innate capacities. A larger context may provide energy and wisdom which can ripen ecological identity and, as a result, promote more effective activism. Unlike Learning Two, where tempering occurs by wrestling with outmoded habits of the past, this final learning sheds light on the tempering effects of a beckoning future and of a larger circle of belonging. It implies that both potential and belonging create a force that sculpts who one is becoming. A context larger than one's current identity appears to call forth new insights and capabilities, hence "Context Capacitates."⁶¹

What Happened

Ten (of 11) participants reported that sharing their truth with dominant culture was a key moment and very challenging.⁶² The exercise of speaking one's hard truth to dominant culture was designed to be evocative, but stark experience of stress, the overall lack of enjoyment, and outright resistance to truth-telling seemed out of synch with their long-term commitment to being activists.⁶³ This incongruence further puzzled me because I selected participants solely based on two criteria; that they have been engaged in environmental activism for at least ten years and they identify wild-nature as their core orientation.⁶⁴ I did not experience their full ecological belonging in the truth-telling exercise. How, I wondered, could they have sustained this level of stress in their work for so many years? I expected them to be more grounded and ecologically capacitated.

When reflecting upon the data, I found myself wondering if these seasoned activists experience ecological identity more as a fluctuating state of consciousness as opposed to a stabilized stage of development. If so, perhaps they would benefit from explicit support. I decided to find out by offering them a chance to re-do the exercise, but with intentional grounding in ecological belonging before the act of truth-sharing.⁶⁵ I gathered a list of qualities describing ecological belonging from journal responses, especially drawing from "what keeps me going in hard times" and "what is this crisis inviting us to become." Tying these together with a few additions from the literature and my reflections, I created a definition of ecological identity unique to this group.

After the lively and interactive debriefing conversations on Day Two, I asked, "It is possible that ecological identity itself is guiding this initiation." Sequoiah responded immediately. "Yes, I would agree." Everyone was silent, and Sequoiah explained:

Heretical to most biologists, I would suggest there *is* a direction to evolution, but it may not be something that is really apprehensible to us. (Nodding amongst the group.) But there is an unfolding.... (Sequoiah paused.) Medievalist would say that destiny is calling us, is shaping us, at least as much, maybe more, than our history or our past.

Otter then added, “The pull of the future is greater than the push of the past!”

Then the conversation moved into an excited animated back and forth about this possibility, with people talking over each other. In the midst of this excitement about the power of ecological identity to be a guiding force, I asked, “Are you willing to try the Truth-Telling Exercise again?” (I did not tell them about my plans to evoke ecological belonging beforehand.) They made a unanimous decision, “Yes!”

The group chose to gather by the tinkling creek. Standing in a circle, in meditative silence, I read the group definition of ecological identity. We dropped into silence. Before disbanding and speaking hard-truths to dominant culture I said, “Remember, we are the earth having a conversation with itself.” The same set-up was created, with dominant culture responding to a solitary activist speaking their hard truth to them. The second round of truth-telling was radically different than the first. All activists stepped forward to speak their truths without hesitation. Unlike Day One, authentic hard truths were shared, including truths some people said they would “never share with dominant culture.”⁶⁶ These truths were conveyed in a manner that was sobering but connecting, firm, and vulnerable. No one was pushy or trying to convince. Gone was the energy of right and wrong. Poetry and singing were woven into presentations.

Activists steered away from presenting simple solutions. Tough questions were still asked by dominant culture, but from a place of genuine confusion rather than derision. These questions yielded reciprocal conversation rather than aggressive

confrontation. Unlike Day One, haranguing and heckling did not occur. This change did not mean there was a party. On the contrary, the atmosphere was palatably more sobering with far less laughter than on Day One. What laughter occurred was not raucous or inspired by jeering, but rather an expression shared befuddlement about our impossible predicament. Several remarked how different the two truth-telling exercises were.⁶⁷

How I was affected

The first and second truth-sharing exercises affected me very differently. On Day One, I wrestled with a mixture of disappointment, impatience and sometimes a bit of boredom. I noticed myself tuning out when speakers were overly intellectual or theoretical about ecological belonging, even if they were factually accurate. I felt slightly impatient when activists sugarcoated their hard truths. Higher pitched voices and faster talking made me feel a trifle off-center and shaky. I was annoyed that the participants' as dominant culture exuded smug confidence. Feeling flustered when confronting derision or pandering to dominant culture and trying to be convincing (as if selling a product) felt incongruent with an authentic ecological identity, which should have charismatic and connecting energy. During the exercise, I wrote in the margins of my notes: What's going on? Aren't my peeps initiated?⁶⁸ To my relief, expressions of ecological identity were rampant in their journals. Everyone spoke unequivocally about their abiding connection with earth and wildness as the foundation of their identity and work in the world.

The differences between these private reflections and their public expressions was puzzling and disturbing, leading me to doubt the hypothesis that sustained creative engagement in environmental crises facilitates, quickens, and emboldens the initiatory

development of postmodern ecological identity. Rather than give in to doubt, I sat with the incongruence between what I know these participants are capable of (and who they themselves claim to be) and what actually happened. I knew they could do better—and enjoy themselves more. I had an emotional resonance with how easy it was to lose one’s ecological grounding when under initiatory stress. I also felt curious. Can one stay grounded in ecological identity when in heated dialogue with dominant culture?

This question led me to create conditions on Day Two for Learning Four to arise. Even though I was excited about the potential, I also felt nervous—would they be willing to try again? Would intentional grounding in ecological identity make any difference? I was thrilled when everyone agreed. Evoking the embodied experience of ecological identity was empowering. The experience of participants’ truth-sharing from grounded ecological identity inspires me even now, as I recall the experience. I also found myself tearing up during the second truth-telling, which did not happen on Day One.

Interpretations

Wes Jackson describes human beings as “a species living out of context.”⁶⁹ Learning Four, “Context Capacitates,” suggests helping other to experience living in context may have the effect of creating space for the teleology of this larger context to expand a small encompassed entity. Thus the mysterious force of context itself appears to offer refuge, power, and guidance commensurate with activists’ circle of concern.

On Day Two, deliberate and humble attunement to qualities of this larger context linked or activated capacitating force of a larger context in ways that supported participants’ ability to speak their hard truth to dominant culture. Truth-telling on Day

One, where there was no conscious attunement to a larger context, was markedly less capacitated or enjoyable for participants. When we took time to drop into the capacitating force of wild-nature before interfacing with dominant culture, participants' expression, experience, and effectiveness underwent a radical change. A more accurate phrasing of Learning Four might be, "context capacitates if or when channels are opened."

Concern for the world had already expanded the context of participants. By definition, ecological identity rests upon contextual expansion that extends one's circle of concern beyond the individual and dominant culture and into wider reaches of our more-than-human world. But experientially, the capacitating force of this larger context may require more than a felt sense of belonging and care. It may require deliberate attunement. Even for those who claim to be fully embedded and identified with our more-than-human world, maintaining a grounded ecological identity that transcends bounded subjectivity (especially when interfacing with a culture that does not share this larger belonging) can be difficult.⁷⁰ It appears that expressing from a place of expanded identity benefits from attunement to the capacitating force of a larger context.

For these activists (who were already familiar with this larger context), dropping into context was done quickly and with ease. Slipping out of human-centricity into earth-centricity may have been easy with this group because going back and forth between culture and wild-nature is a practice all of them claimed to engage in on a regular basis. It is this connection, they said, that supported their activism—and sanity. Along with spending quality time in nature, most had another regular spiritual practice of some kind as well. Their ability to drop in to a larger context and be immediately supported was powerful and natural. This leads me to conclude that a regular earth-connecting practice

would support the ability to drop into the larger context under stressful circumstances, where the capacities of expanded identity are needed. I did not need to explain what I was doing when I did the grounding exercise. They all closed their eyes, breathed, and relaxed into what I was inviting us to do without any comments or questions. Further, I was reading a definition compiled from the group's own words. Hearing their words woven into the words of the group in a coherent and beautiful fashion may also have potentiated our relaxing into a larger ecological context. Perhaps the high value they placed upon a supportive community in constant struggle for effectiveness also primed them to participate in fostering a field of ecological mutuality. Perhaps they simply trusted me.

The main gist of "Context Capacitates" learning is that it is active, ongoing, and participatory. For this group of activists (and perhaps for most modern humans), ecological identity is likely more a willingness to attune to the capacitating force of potential rather than a stable, fully expressible identity. As Rumi reminds us, "Where lowland is, that's where water goes. All medicine wants is pain to cure."⁷¹ Ecological identity is an ongoing humbling experience similar to being lowland or pain open to receiving water and medicine. For this group, ecological identity is a stretching and ever-expanding experience. The challenges of activism itself promote an ongoing relatedness a larger context for support, inspiration and belonging. An ongoing sense of belonging within a larger context leads activists to a sense of participating in the ongoing evolution of life. Participation promotes an expressive and generative ecological Self.

Gradually—with a great deal of surrender, effort, and integration—context may cease to be an imagined *external* structure that surrounds or encompasses individual identity to become a larger subjective identity. Until subsumed as identity (as "me"),

context will likely remain a guiding imaginal structure external to oneself. Once subsumed, quite likely a new imaginal context will emerge that is larger than what would be subjectively experienced as “me.” And again, that larger context can exert a capacitating force that appears to be initiatory.

At Meridian University, psychology students are taught that healing involves the cultivation of innate human capacities (like compassion, courage, self-reflection, wisdom, accountability).⁷² Students learn that capacities can be wrought or brought online via trials and tribulations of initiatory experiences. This learning puts forward the possibility that context itself calls forth and ripens capacities and is therefore itself a force that initiates. “Context as initiator” is a concept that arose during this research. Opening to the larger context of a living earth will exert an initiatory force on people and culture.

Context requires imagination.⁷³ One might argue that initiation is, in essence, a ritual practice that expands and reifies an imagined larger context wherein one’s culture is nested. Context gives one a sense of larger belonging, meaning, and purpose. One might even say maturation is promoted by the expansion of one’s context. What this learning suggests is that an imagined structure of a larger context can exert an activating, empowering, and capacitating force upon development, values, and behavior. This larger context may be a more reliable guide for ecological initiation than human beings.

Imaginal Structures

Why does context matter so much to me? When I was a baby and young child, my mother was unhappy and longed for freedom from the burdens of motherhood. She was also caught up in the exciting fervor of the Women’s Liberation Movement, where

freedom meant freedom from the traditional role of mother and wife. Being highly intelligent and too young and ambitious to be saddled down with children (in the days before *Roe v. Wade*), she left family life for wider horizons when I was five. Perhaps I compensated for the lack of a physically present mother by opening to a larger sense of more-than-human belonging. I also think my sensitivity to earth's suffering has been increased by being sensitive to my mother's suffering. Indeed, it is possible to exploit and abuse one's source of life. And there are consequences.

A sense of a larger nurturing context is vital to my sense of belonging. This was revealed to me during a Meridian class on death and dying.⁷⁴ We did a guided journey and wrote on pieces of paper ten things that were most important to us. Visualizing falling ill and finally dying, we were asked to mindfully give up (one at time) our deep loves; like children, vitality, travelling, and all that one had acquired during well-lived life. Taking one's last breath, one is left holding the last thing to be given up. After many years, I still carry this tattered scrap of paper in my wallet. It reads: "The Universe is my eternal home. I am here forever, along with everyone and everything else." Larger context is a mother to me. This reification of context reveals a compensatory imaginal structure that may have comforted me as a child and still provides me with a sense of belonging. However, this may also make up for a lack of relaxed warm belonging within normal human relationships and local physical places.

When this learning revealed itself, I literally jumped for joy. Is this because it proved the reality of an inner imaginal structure that reifies a larger context, almost moving it into I-thou inter-subjective reality? I noticed how excited I was to share this possibility with the group, and nervous too. I thought long and hard about how I would

share it beforehand, inventing many scenarios, but ended up doing so at the last minute, in a more casual conversation with the group (during a break), and with feigned calmness in an offhand manner. I waited to see if this learning could be shared and understood. I did not want it to get undermined by doubt and rational questions.

When I felt participants might be open to the notion of a larger capacitating context, in a musing tone of voice, I asked, “Is it possible that ecological identity, or the subjective experience of a larger context, is itself guiding this initiation?” Though I appeared to be casual, I was also afraid it would make no sense. People looked quizzical and were silent. Oh no! This is too crazy! To my relief, the elder of the group understood exactly what I meant and spoke up. If he had not, I might have been devastated. This hunger for acknowledgement from others reveals the fragility of an imaginal structure.

There is no way to prove or disprove if context exerts a magnetic capacitating force, or even if it exists. Perhaps I am trying to prove the validity of my own Eros-saturated experience of wild-nature as my larger context.⁷⁵ Right or wrong, this imagined sense of belonging (which may be based upon my unconscious seeking for a more-than-human mother) leads me to personify, and even deify, ecological context. While this is unlikely to be the daily experience of others, for me this larger belonging is as real as rain. Having a second-person relationship with an encompassing context may not provide the same inspiration, strength, and reassurance to others as it does to me. This imaginal structure leads to a bias and point of view I will stridently protect. Ecological belonging, as the reader may have noticed, is core to this research.

The near-reification of context could be a fundamental flaw of this research. It is also important to recognize that an imaginal structure that compensates for personal gaps

in belonging may underlie my approach to ecology, environmental crises, and ecopsychology. It shapes the way I move, breathe, and experience myself every day. It also affects the way I read the news, work with others, and think about life. My love for and belonging to a larger context colors my reality completely.

Theoretical Concepts

Nature, as a concept, is broad and has many meanings. Webster's offers a versatile definition for nature. The first refers to its synonym, "essence" while the second definition is the foundation of Learning Four; that nature is "(a) a creative and controlling force in the universe" and "(b) an inner force or sum of such forces in an individual."⁷⁶ In these definitions, nature is both an external and subjective experience of a "creative and controlling force in the universe." The common understanding of nature as "the external world in its entirety" is the sixth definition, not the first or second. It is also important to remember the semantic root of nature is, *natal* meaning "birth."⁷⁷ From this perspective, nature is a force of the universe that begins over and over, endlessly. Participants in this study had, over their years as activists, developed a sophisticated understanding of the word "nature" (which I inquired about for the intake interviews), one that included a heuristic sense of belonging within a mysterious more-than-human context that is alive, ever changing, and creative. Because of participants' sophisticated understanding of nature, its use was appropriate for our inquiry.⁷⁸

"Capacitates," literally meaning to "make capable," refers to the mysterious force of evolution that facilitates adaptation called forth by circumstances.⁷⁹ One rises to, or is pulled forward, by the occasion. Macy, holds that expanding one's circle of identity to

include our more-than-human-world is empowering because it literally opens energizing pathways of connection.⁸⁰ Her use of the word, “empowering” correlates with, “capacitates” because wider and more-connected identity leads to a greater capacity for caring and action. In a similar fashion, Plotkin says a wider circle of identity “is not merely intellectual belief . . . but an actively embodied value system.”⁸¹

For a larger context to be capacitating, participation is required. Participation includes an inner attunement to this larger context, an attunement that becomes central to one’s navigating one’s daily life. Plotkin refers to this as one’s “psychospiritual center of gravity,” which identifies the “hub of a person’s life,” what “her day-to-day existence revolves around,” and it is, he adds,” the principle means of knowing the person’s level of maturity.”⁸² Affiliation is another aspect of participation and appears to be necessary for context to capacitate.⁸³ Perhaps affiliation needs to be conscious, or even celebrated, to be capacitating, because even the most ecologically insensitive and careless among us is never separate from our larger living world. They are connected, but not affiliated.

“Capacitates” also refers to the potential effect of any crisis. As Solnit describes, any crisis can potentially push people to rise to the occasion.⁸⁴ Though nature mysticism has a long history, the birth of ecological Selfhood can occur via heartbreak. Being heartbroken may not feel mystical, but its inherent connectedness can inspire transcendent action on behalf of life. An emotional meltdown in response to environmental suffering does not alone capacitate or empower. Moving from helpless grief to empowerment occurs via actions that repair, replenish, and revivify. Macy teaches that moving from despair into action, what she calls “active hope,” is capacitating, even if these actions are clumsy.⁸⁵

“Capacitates” is also pertinent to the cumulative learning, “Malady Begets Medicine.” “Context Capacitates” describes the initiatory dynamic inherent within the verb “beget.” Acting when connected to a larger context, says Macy, activates potentials like courage, endurance, ingenuity, creativity, and confidence.⁸⁶ Crisis and heartbreak (malady) disrupts insularity and the resulting expansion brings new capacities online.

Validity Considerations

The essence of this this learning, “Context Capacitates,” is that the larger context of wild nature (subjectively experienced as ecological identity) is the initiator rather than the human world or even other human beings. This has serious validity considerations because causal lines within mystical affiliations are difficult to draw and verify. If applied to all humanity, privilege comes also into play. Refugees fleeing from floodwaters might experience a larger context of wild nature as devastating rather than capacitating. Besides of the effects of consciously attuning to a larger context before truth-telling, other factors might contribute to the differences between Day One and Two. These include a greater sense of familiarity between participants, excitement to have the day soon be over, and having a second chance to correct past mistakes and do a better job.

Understanding the purpose of the research, (reframing and exploring environmental activism as a path of ecological initiation), may have deepened participants’ ability to share their hard truths from a more ecologically grounded place rather than the collective act of recalling our ecological identity. A larger conceptual context of initiation could have been what exerted a capacitating influence. If true, this would speak to the power of myth, ritual and intention rather than ecological belonging

alone. “Context Capacitates” allows both possibilities to be true. Knowing which is more capacitating (ecological belonging or a larger conceptual frame of initiation) would require further research.

Differences between truth-telling exercises of Day One and Two do not provide absolute proof that context capacitates, but only point to that possibility. A one-time occurrence does not assure reliability because it may not be replicable. This research was with a unique group and done under unique circumstances. Day Two was important for the validity of this learning. As a group, we discussed whether my learnings were a real and accurate in terms of what happened. We did not have a chance to discuss or review differences between the two Truth Telling exercises. This learning emerged when reviewing the journals, but was tested on Day Two. Had I anticipated the differences, I may have created more validity-constraints and left time for discussion. Repeating this research with other activists, and allowing time to review the differences between truth-telling exercises, would increase the validity of this Learning.

Conclusion

So bring your malaise, your dullness, your callous ingratitude.
As we meet you, the coming together itself will be medicine.
We are the cure, the look that opens your looking.

—Rumi, “The Look That Opens”

Twenty years ago, in the jungles of Mexico, a local *curandero* told me that the antidote for every poisonous plant could be found growing within three feet. The cure is nearby, he said, if one is trained to see. The overarching learning of this research, “Malady Begets Medicine,” takes the lesson he taught a step further. Perhaps solutions to

problems (poisons) are not only found nearby, but problems themselves invite and even create their solutions—if, as the *curandero* said, one has eyes to see and if, as this research suggests, one is willing to turn towards suffering and respond. Following the dictates of problems is what begets medicine from malady.

Begetting is not likely to be an abracadabra moment, moving straight from intellectual understanding into full realization. Becoming medicine is likely to be an initiatory ordeal. Those willing turn and face malady (activists) and follow its dictates (activism) may undergo the initiatory ordeal of becoming medicine. Though this research does not provide an unequivocal confirmation engagement in environmental crises automatically quickens and emboldens the initiatory development of ecological identity in all cases, all learnings point to this possibility.

Like most initiations, choice is involved—to some degree. The passage from childhood to adulthood will occur whether it is consciously engaged as a rite of passage or not. Humanity's passage toward ecological harmony will also occur, one way or another. I suspect facing passages willingly, including the ecological rite of passage presented by our current historical moment, is more likely to call forth the tempering and maturing benefits of initiation. But being overtaken by change unwillingly could result in victimized regression or a sloppy transition that is not easily integrated and might result in reverting back to old habits with the pressure to change is removed. Further, refusing the initiatory invitation of crises could result in missing the golden opportunity to become the medicine. Instead, humanity might succumb to environmental changes via passive or even regressive adaptation rather than making the passage to a more complex and inclusive identity. Refusing the call can have serious negative consequences.

Saying yes also has serious consequences, but they lead to greater possibilities. Each learning gives pertinent information about what these might be. Learning One, “Tight Shoes Are Discarded,” lets us know that habitual modes of thinking, relating, and being will be left behind at the beginning point of this initiation. A sensitivity to suffering in the world may have led to a chafing discomfort within what they perceived as a stagnant culture, community, or family sensitivity and chafing alone appear to be insufficient to launch the initiation.⁸⁷ Severance requires a permanent divergence from values and aspirations of one’s previous culture. For this group, this sacrifice meant letting go of the comfort of conformity and making strident commitments to actions commensurate with their concerns and values.

Learning Two, “Liminality Tempers Ecological Identity,” fleshes out the word *beget*, by exploring how liminal conditions inherent in environmental activism can temper and mature ecological identity. As with traditional initiations, tempering is the heart of ecological initiation. This learning illuminates specific ways that activism itself—the daily activities of attempting to move individuals and culture towards and ecologically sane way of life—ripens the capacities of mature ecological identity.⁸⁸ The adventures (and misadventures) of one’s unique responsiveness to suffering create the rugged terrain required by initiation. These difficult experiences include holding the creative tension of conflict, overcoming the fatigue of uphill battles, enduring ridicule, facing failure, and suffering heartbreak. Along with these liminal challenges lurks the undermining uncertainty about the outcome of one’s life-long efforts.

Liminality is ongoing. Even the most dedicated activist must live betwixt-and-between 100 percent complicity in the destruction of life and 100 percent devotion to

generative ecological mutuality. Activists have one foot in the culture they are trying to reform and the other foot in (or constantly reaching toward) a beckoning future.

The territory of liminality is activism itself, where one wrestles with the malady of environmental crisis day in and out; within oneself and culture and as a problem and an opportunity. In the daily lives of devoted activists, malady begets medicine. Their normal challenges resemble experiences evoked by ritual initiations. Over time, they appear to exert a tempering force (in the sense of making one strong and supple via exposure to various extreme conditions) on the ongoing development of ecological identity. An activist's work requires full and constant exposure to initiatory conditions created by responding to the malady of environmental crisis. Ongoing attentiveness to this malady means abstaining from indifference and enduring challenges of authentic responsiveness. Together, these steadily beget the medicine of eco-identity, the veritable root of a mature and capacitated post-modern indigenous person.

Learning Three pertains to Incorporation of ecological initiation. In the context of our times, ecological initiation is ongoing. "We Will Never Have Dessert" means there is no final completion. One might swing back and forth from being grounded as a post-modern indigenous person to being a selfish human-oriented person—all in one day. Likewise, the dynamic of malady begetting medicine is ongoing. We are all in the midst of this initiation. Still, initiation requires incorporation to be successful. Learning Three lays out the possibility that creative incorporation strategies are possible for this ongoing initiation. First, activists redefine notions of success (and failure) by understanding they have undertaken a long journey whose destination is unknown and long-range. They sustain their momentum by finding community, situating themselves in a larger story, and

celebrating small victories along the way. And finally, since we will never have dessert, why not enjoy the main course? They are surprisingly unattached to outcome.

Ecological identity itself also supports creative incorporation and the ongoing journey of becoming medicine. For those who are more eco- and less ego-identified, incorporation is naturally creative. Why? Because nature is an ever-birthing dimension of the cosmos. Participants described feeling integral to nature. Their activism, they said, is part of a systemic response to an ongoing systemic problem. Like nature itself, they seem themselves as participating in a large synergistic adaptation to a rapidly changing environment. Ecological identity rests in knowing we are nature even as we are individuals. A deep and active embodiment of knowing one is nature (or an expression of nature) automatically makes incorporation an ongoing creative process.

If incorporation is a moment-by-moment experience of deeper belonging, what sustains this movement? Here we come to the fourth learning, “Context Capacitates.” This learning involves a fourth phase that is excluded from the tripartite framework laid out by van Gannep. Represented by Spring or East in Native American maps of initiation, this final phase represents rolling rebirth or the future-oriented nature of life. When the fourth phase is included, initiation is less an experience and more a capacity or way of living that is distinctly future-oriented. This requires an ability and willingness to surrender to the death and rebirth cycles of evolution as a way-of-life. Increased fluidity within perpetual initiatory change may be a hallmark of mature ecological identity.

The dance of malady begetting medicine is a future-oriented shift away from anthropocentrism and toward ecological and even universal belonging. “Context Capacitates” suggests that a capacity to be guided by a larger ever-changing context is

central to becoming medicine. Attunement to an encompassing creative context catalyzes and hones responsiveness commensurate with one's circle of concern and the needs of the moment in ways that may be unpredictable and fresh.⁸⁹

This final learning points to the possibility of conscious participation in evolution. A chosen context can magnetize capacities appropriate for a larger context.⁹⁰ However, it appears that this dynamic does not happen automatically just as dancing does not always happen when a band plays music. One has to hear the music, get up, and dance. The Learnings convey the possibility that traversing the rugged and exalted territory of environmental activism can provide the initiatory conditions required to awaken, temper, stabilize, and then sustain the momentum of post-modern ecological identity, but some form of active participation is required to instigate the initiatory process of identity expansion. It will not happen to or for us, but *as* us.

Even though ecological initiation is not being undertaken in a formal ritual fashion, this research aligns with an ancient understanding of major life-passages: Conscious tending to leaps in development may support and stabilize initiatory transitions. Ecological initiation is no exception. I have learned that there is nothing automatic about ecological initiation or any initiation. Perhaps this is why initiations have been carefully envisioned and executed throughout human history. Malady does not automatically beget medicine. Crisis itself is not initiatory. Responding to crises is also not inherently initiatory. Nor is loving nature. Nor is a broken-hearted caring about the suffering of others. Rather, a path of conscious responsiveness illuminated by nature's wisdom is what can provide the larger context required for ecological initiation to occur.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

Initiation is the necessary pain of changing.

—Coleman Barks, *The Soul of Rumi*

To reflect on this research, I return to the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries.¹

Around me, sullen industrial ruins stretch to the sea, angry graffiti scrawled on cracked brooding smokestacks. In the middle of this wasteland is the ancient ceremonial ground. Massive toppled pillars mark the edges of well-travelled marble roads bearing deep etchings from chariot wheels. The remnants of statues and altars, some intricately carved, lie in piles.² Stonework of giant fountains record imprints of bare feet and hands, alluding to ritual bathing that took place. “Mindors” on the site now prevent any ritual activities.³

Sanctioned and honored initiations rituals are no longer part of dominant cultural practices and we don’t elevate direct participation in life’s great mysteries in this intentional manner. We no longer have culturally sanctioned initiation rites on the scale of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Great passages continue to occur in life, but without rites to deepen our experience of them or celebrate changes in status, attitude, and identity. Without these rites, are we able to take advantage of their power to transform? In the absence of authoritative rites, can a cognitive or imaginal frame of initiation support radical personal and cultural change in the context of massive environmental change? These final reflections illuminate this possibility.

Benefits of an Initiatory Frame

We shouldn't follow our bliss, we should follow our heartbreak.

—Andrew Harvey

This research does not advocate the revival of massive initiation rites. They are admirable and beautiful, but initiation today occurs in different forms, including the one suggested by this research. When people are pummeled by ecological realities, they may be startled awake to a larger belonging and sense of responsibility. To find one's true path, advises Harvey, turn towards suffering.⁴ Long ago, great rites of initiation helped humanity dance with relentlessly renewing forces of life and fortified communities with a sense of belonging and purpose. Understanding initiation may help humanity continue this dance creatively and together as we turn towards suffering, even without great rites.

This research reveals that initiation's indelible pattern of transformation is alive, vibrating within frightening specter of environmental crises and embedded in paths of creative responsiveness. This research maps the potential initiatory territory of activism. The journey of ecological awakening is made by walking, and will be unique to each of us. But there is a terrain whose contours follow the archetypal phases of initiation.

Knowing the terrain of initiation is key to supporting initiations that occur outside ritual settings. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who worked with dying patients for decades, created a map for those navigating the terrain of dying and death.⁵ She learned that people passed through specific stages of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression before arriving to the final stage of accepting the inevitability of death.⁶ Sharing these stages of death and dying with her patients and their loved ones did not mask the terrible

challenges of death and dying, but recognizing the qualities and purposes of each stage fostered acceptance, wisdom, and peace. Might knowing the phases of initiation could provide a similar service?

Similar to the difficult transition of dying, attaining a higher and more complex maturity requires passing through sometimes difficult but highly meaningful stages. As Kübler-Ross taught her patients and their families, difficulties have a salutary purpose in and each phase presents specific challenges. In a similar fashion, if people undergoing transformative change are familiar with the qualities of initiatory phases, then this could help them undergo the necessary pain of letting go of an old way of life and beginning afresh with dignity, as well as a healthy dose of trepidation.

The frame of initiation still holds power in the human imagination. Initiations are scary, but also exciting. Despite a dearth of fun and promise of suffering, the promise of initiation still carries a whiff of mystery and allure. Its magnetic attraction can transform drudgery into an adventure and crisis into a daunting but fascinating invitation to change.

Another benefit of an initiatory frame is a sense of service and shared purpose. One may not feel ready for this initiation, but that does not really matter. Initiations are undertaken on behalf of others, not just for oneself. Initiation exposes one's community. To whom and what is a person dedicated? As discussed, tumultuous periods of cultural transformation and crisis reveal a powerful need for liminal communities (*communitas*). An initiatory frame allows this need to be addressed directly.

Finally, initiation situates crises and individual responses in a greater story or mystical context. The wide frame granted by initiation helps people understand they are

part of a larger movement of collective transformation. Every small actions counts. Brick by brick, we are not just building walls; we are constructing a cathedral.

Significance of Learnings

We are the first kind of living beings we know of who have the potential to live in community with all other living beings.

—Arne Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom*

Each learning carries implications for how to engage environmental crises as an initiation. Though the primary focus of this research was the initiatory development of ecological identity via environmental activism, a mature ecological orientation matters immensely for all of us, not just activists. The wisdom and energy afforded by a larger sense of self could be crucial to creative solutions to yet unimagined problems. Arenas for awakened action are likely to appear everywhere. As habitat changes, everything changes. The intelligence of the ecological Self, which has access to the mysterious power and wisdom of wild nature, could prove useful to people in all walks of life.

Wise Approaches to Severance

Learning One “Tight Shoes Are Discarded,” described the severance phase of initiation, when activists let go of a life that that no longer suited their expanding identity or value system. Explicit in this learning is that one naturally lets go of a life that no longer fits. Implicit in this Learning is that one is unlikely to move if the shoe fits. A tight-fit is perceived when the needs of a larger system become more pressing than

personal comfort. If one is indifferent to this pressure and expansion does not occur, severance is unlikely—or is unlikely to be a willing severance.

The challenge of severance should not be underestimated. It cannot be forced. Flooding people with information and good reasons to change will not launch an initiation unless there is conscious and willing severance. No severance means no initiation and no lasting change. People do not even begin to make change. A way of life comes to an end, yes, but willingness to leave this old way of life is still lacking. This means one hankers after a bygone era and does not embrace the challenges or opportunities of a new life; hence no initiation.

The research alludes to two strategies that may promote the severance: One can shrink the shoe or foster expansion. Shrinking the shoe means accentuating the sensation of a tight fit by showing how humanity is hitting ecological limits. This has been a favored strategy of activists. As discussed, this shoe-shrinking strategy has not brought about changes in attitudes and behavior required to live in dynamic balance within our living world. For this reason, this research indicates that shoe-shrinking strategies should no longer be a dominant method of prompting change. Though it has been effective for those who are sensitive and willing to change, it is less likely to work with those who are comfortable or clinging to the possibility of an ideal life promoted by commercial interests.

Even more harmful, change strategies that emphasize environmental limits can stimulate a sense of helplessness, guilt, and negative shame. These emotions can themselves have a shrinking effect, not of the shoe but of the foot. At the risk of overusing this metaphor, shrinking the foot rather than the shoe is counter-productive.

Instead of experiencing tightness, people who lack the capacity to weather these challenging emotions may curl into tight familiar spaces of defensiveness and conformity where they can hide, blame others, or conclude that everything is fine in their little world.⁷ Given the difficulty human beings have with facing limits, their complicity in causing harm, and strident demands for accountability, an approach severance that favors expansiveness (of the foot) and possibilities (of a larger world) might be more effective than shrinking strategies. Responding to the possibility of a better future is an expansive strategy that will not abort the journey of initiation. On the contrary! All participants in this research began their lives as activists by responding the allure of a better future.

This research indicates that the prospect of a better future can more effectively promote severance than facing limitations. In the context of a terrible crisis, potential and possibility foster excitement, a sense of purpose, and forward-momentum while countering the shrinking effects of despair, fear, and negative shame.

Another keen advantage of reframing ecological engagement as an initiation is the power of a future-orientation. Initiation actually means to begin, start afresh, commence. This frame helps the difficulty of severance be experienced less as leaving and more as moving toward with a sense of excitement that can be contagious. This enthusiasm supports activists in when communicating and listening to others. Listening amplifies the whisper of new possibilities. For the Cumulative Learning, “Malady to beget Medicine,” listening is key. Much lies unspoken between human beings at this time. Authentic conversations that enable the often-quiet voice of a beckoning future to be heard and can ease people into an ecological transition appropriate to them. In other words, those who

have discarded tight shoes could help others make the same transition; not via earnest exhortation but by beaming possibility and embodying the excitement of positive change.

As discussed in the section on ecological intransigence, most people hobble along in tight shoes rather than trust the liberating potential of deconstruction. As witnessed in nature, destruction is an essential, even vital, aspect of creative construction. But perhaps not all destruction. What kinds of deconstruction are necessary for rebirth? Those interested in an initiatory frame must be wary of catastrophism. An understanding of initiation behooves change-agents to develop the art of discerning and dismantling outmoded survival structures without participating in careless destruction.

Initiation provides a structure where severance is recognized and can therefore be willingly undertaken. In times of massive environmental change, old ways of life may be shattered without conscious severance. This change could be experienced as a terrible tragedy rather than as a new beginning. Without creative and conscientious participation in leaving an old way of life behind, we are likely to become victims rather than initiates. Promoting conscious severance is one crucial benefit of an initiatory frame.

Embracing Liminality

Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare.

Shakespeare, "Sonnet 64"

Learning Two points to the possibility of moving from willful resistance to difficulties to willing engagement with them. Over time, benefits of this engagement are revealed. This may be why the liminal phase of initiation honors the transformative power of degrading, dangerous, and difficult situations. Traditional rites link liminal

challenges to cosmic and mythic dimensions of existence. Suffering does not occur in a contextual vacuum but makes sense within the frame of initiation. Could a similar contextualization be applied to initiatory challenges of environmentalism?

One such way of contextualizing is to view myriad responses to ecological crisis through the lens of initiation, specifically with the intention of honoring liminal experience. For example, those affected deeply by the tragedy of ecological destruction may have instinctively sought out initiatory experiences (perhaps of the shamanic or heroic variety) in order to tolerate the ordeals of expansion and awakening. Intuitively, they understood their need to develop inner strength and stamina commensurate with the truths they were embracing. Activists may seek out experiences that evoke humiliation, dismemberment, deprivation, and danger as a way of creating an initiation for themselves. Understanding liminality not only gives a context for risky behavior, it also highlights the need for boundaries, mentoring, and purpose. Validating previous or ongoing efforts to develop and self-actualize could accentuate the benefits of semi-conscious liminal behavior and provide a safety net for the necessary risks of liminality.

For those timidly facing environmental crisis (or any crisis), a conceptual understanding of the benefits of liminality could be encouraging. Trusting that a salutary tempering occurs via changing outmoded habits could soften resistance and quicken positive change. One should not expect a fluffy passage into a new way of life, but one can certainly expect a meaningful one.

Clarifying liminality as a concept can contextualize challenges inherent in transformative change. Challenges particular to initiatory change would then be acceptable without being normalized and watered down. For example, a journey through

shame in some form will likely be a part of liminal experience.⁸ This is good to know, both for oneself personally as well as for one's audience or the people one wishes to reach. If one begins to realize the full extent of environmental harm caused by everyday actions, shame arises. In order to remedy this harm, people need to evolve healthier coping mechanisms for the powerful but socially, and ecologically, beneficial affect of shame. Initiations are explicitly humiliating. Perhaps sanctifying experiences of shame and humiliation help initiates weather the toxic effects of shame as well as harvest its benefits. A keenly developed approach to working through shame—which naturally arises when facing limits and one's complicity in causing harm—will be crucial to reaping the benefits of liminality.

Omer teaches that the primary need underlying shame is to heal broken belonging.⁹ He also reminds students that this affect will arise when challenging the taboos, the unwritten rules of culture.¹⁰ A path of healing is the heart and soul of ecological initiation, and facing what one has broken through careless actions will likely elicit shame. One needs a wide embrace to hold the great sorrow of ecological crises, and a wider embrace to retain the dignity of one's shame. If held in this wide embrace, shame carves inner spaciousness within the heart for self and others, knowing we are all in this mess together. While there is an irrepressible need for transcendence in the face of heart-wrenching complexity, loss, and failure, but this should not become avoidance. Transcendence is not disassociation, but association. Weathering shame in a supportive context (like initiation) supports the embodied transcendence of genuine accountability.

If the tempering effects of liminality are beneficial, intentionally evoking liminal experiences could be included as part of a cultural change strategy. For example, Turner

compares the qualities of liminality to what he calls the “status system” or dominant culture.¹¹ The status quo emphasizes structure, stability, secularity, distinctions in status and wealth, regard for personal appearance, technical knowledge and maximizing personal benefits. Liminality gives space for chaos, questioning norms, freedom from cultural habits, humility, sacred knowledge, silence, depth, equality, and unselfishness. Turner calls the betwixt and between period of liminality a “fruitful darkness [where] king and people are closely identified.”¹² He urges those interested in initiation, including collective cultural initiation, to focus on the “phenomena and processes of mid-transition [liminality]” because whatever is revealed here exposes the basic building blocks of culture. For this and other reasons previously discussed, liminal elements could be evoked and respected as the strategic backbone for work that promotes initiatory development.

A deep and explicit study of liminality would flesh out the possibility of evoking liminality as a strategy for cultural change. One obvious challenge is remembering that initiation has clearly defined stages. The tempering of liminality has a beginning and it has an end. Rituals mark the boundaries of liminality for many reasons, a crucial one being the avoidance of prolonged liminality. Remaining mired in wrenching emotions, doubtful situations, or unwanted exile constitutes a potentially harmful and unproductive incompleteness of a transformative or developmental process. This suffering could be partially resolved by understanding that liminality is purposeful and still has coherent and clear boundaries. However, perfect liminal competence and clean predictable boundaries would defeat the purpose of this chaotic stage.

Satiated Without Dessert

Those on the path of awakening are committed to walking forever.

—Thomas Hübl

Fairytale endings are not a likely outcome of ecological initiations. The ritual-based tripartite structure of initiation that concludes with an orderly sense of completion may not be applicable to a life-based initiation that is underway and multigenerational. Consider the initiatory potential of climate change. Though our petroleum-based economy is no longer viable, we may continue to follow the capitalist imperative and burn the 27 trillion dollars worth of fuel that is still underground.¹³ Or we could ignore immediate profit and find other ways to sustain modern civilization. Whether we burn all available oil reserves or leave it in the ground, we put ourselves into an initiatory free-fall. As Foster predicted, “The gaudy riot of summer is over. The chill of fall is in the air. Initiation time is at hand.”¹⁴ Incorporation and dynamic stability in a time of radical climate change requires devotion to change and transformation as a way of life. A focus on who or what people (or societies) are becoming is them more important than who they are. People can help each other live into our ever-renewing potential rather than letting each other fall back into outmoded dysfunctional habits.

This learning implies that it is important to be committed to one’s vision and relaxed about outcome. Some habits, like anthropocentrism are ingrained and lucrative habits for humanity. For most of us, ecological identity is a remote possibility, a theoretical prospect, or sporadic experience rather than a fully embodied way of living

and thinking. Until dominant culture absorbs and expresses the values of ecological belonging, those devoted to ecological inclusivity will likely feel out of step, lonely (in terms of human camaraderie), and perhaps disgruntled with the pace of change. Why not remain curiously free from the desire for immediate success or accolades? Remaining purpose driven and future-oriented protects forward movement from sticky attachments to immediate results and a desire to be admired. Incorporation still requires creative engagement in culture, but this engagement might need to drop its list of demands.

While contemplating this research, I notice two kinds of change. Each requires a different attitude. Some change is about remembering what has been learned from past mistakes. When reminding others (or oneself) of what is already known, a heart-centered attitude is more inviting than being factually correct. Partly because it is not a lack of knowledge or truth that blocks forward movement, but something else. People are, for the most part, exceedingly well-informed about unsustainable lifestyles. Haranguing is rarely effective. Instead, the truth that is already known needs room to vibrate in the living space between people. Nurturing this living space between us, and magnetizing or transmitting the eros of possibility within that space, is a capacity rooted in what are generally regarded as feminine strengths.¹⁵ This is not manipulation, but compassionate resonance with the whole situation—including hidden yearnings. The art of sharing difficult truths will be explored shortly, when discussing the myth of Cassandra.

Besides change-work that involves remembering and staying on track with what one knows is good, true, and beautiful, there is another kind of change afoot. This change is more about *not-knowing* rather than reminding others or having one's facts straight. Unprecedented planetary changes herald unprecedented changes for humanity and,

indeed, all life on earth. Perhaps the only exempt creatures are those who live on the rims of hot sulfur vents deep beneath the sea. This means everyone is facing an ecological initiation where individual paths and collective outcomes are unpredictable. We trundle forward together. Malcolm X pointed out that rehabilitation requires one to have already been habilitated. Who among us is ecologically habilitated? Some may be farther along, but we walk together into a future where none of us has been.

What strategies support this uncertain kind of change? Gandhi suggested to his followers that they be the change they want to see in the world and not wait to see what others do.¹⁶ Rather than being convincing or judgmental, one is fresh air at the end of a tunnel. The ecological self is strengthened when a person can radiate the vibrant intelligence of ecological inclusivity, even if that persons is still discovering what that means. Camaraderie requires companionship. Why not transmit a sense of adventure rather than certainty. I advise my students in San Quentin to make mistakes when learning something new. If we stumble, I remind them, we stumble together. Still, we keep each other heading in the same general direction. In the context of the larger ecological initiation that beckons humanity, surrendering to the mysterious forward momentum of life, means learning to enjoy free-fall, the vulnerability of a blank canvas and the disorienting vertigo of an unwritten page.

Another important skill for ongoing incorporation is the art of bridging seemingly disparate worlds. In terms of ecological identity, straddling the awkward gap between wild nature and modern civilization is a kind of bridging. Having a foot in both worlds, an inherently liminal stance, requires thinking, feeling, and behaving like an individual “I” and a collective “we” simultaneously. At times one may feel homeless, incomplete,

imperfect, muddled. Such feelings are part of the process. Perhaps the Earth herself is learning through us, and as us, how to balance self-reflexive awareness (me) and ecologic-reflexive awareness (we).

Bridging is a hallmark of the ecological Self, who exists in a synergistic balance between human civilization and wild nature, recognizing there is no essential difference between the flowering of humanity and the flowering of Earth. Though rooted in indigenous philosophy and way of life, I intentionally do not think of the ecological self as traditionally indigenous. When attempting to describe the difference between being indigenous and having a mature ecological identity, Omer suggested using the term “post-modern indigenous person.”¹⁷ This phrase is accurate because the modern ecological self is neither a primitive state of regressive innocence nor an unquestioned surrendering to the glamor of modernity. It fully embraces, transcends, and needs both. Further, a post-modern indigenous person has consciously contended with the environmentally rapacious temptations of modernity and has, through this tussle, been inoculated against ecological excess. A bridge person honors the benefits and limits of modernity as well as primitive ways-of-life. She or he is disciplined enough not to indulge either extreme, but to find a wholly new synergy between both. For example, all peoples, even the traditionally indigenous, need be disciplined about the over-use of natural capital (wild nature). Disciplined restraint requires both a tempered “we-consciousness” of and a post-modern understanding of ecological belonging that includes restraint, even in one has bulldozers and the technology to catch every fish in the sea. Post-modern indigenosity is an update of the deep indigenous nature within all people. John Trudell reminds people, “Deep down and way back, we are all indigenous.”¹⁸

Post-modern indigenosity requires conscious ongoing effort; what, in spiritual traditions, is called “having a practice.” “Our internal sage requires sage activities,” teaches Sarah Powers.¹⁹ In a similar fashion, budding ecological identity may require practices that facilitate deep belonging, especially if radical inclusivity is not yet a fully embodied state. Intentionally evoking the depth of ecological belonging supports incorporation.²⁰ Omer posits, “One needs transformative practices that are part of one’s normal life to preserve what is actualized during initiatory experiences.”²¹ This learning suggests the necessity for activities that relax rigid ego structures and support timeless ecological belonging.

Ongoing incorporation does not offer the sweet finality of dessert. Nor does it require passive acceptance of relentless change. Developing internal coordination that sustains groundedness within a fluidity of constant change enables one to rest in a state of “becoming,” what Lifton calls the protean self.²² Thus the protean self walks hand in hand with the proto-self, what Taoists refer to as the face before you were born. Rather than being paralyzed by change, as described in Alvin Toffler’s, *Future Shock*, or its current cousin, identified by Douglas Rushkoff as “present shock” (where everything has to happen NOW), ecological belonging lives in dynamic equilibrium of past, present, and future.²³

Actions that benefit our more-than-human world are especially potent incorporation strategies. Effectiveness may not be as crucial as intention. Like Turner’s “liminoid forms of symbolic action” even small actions are potently symbolic and may exert great influence.²⁴ For our purposes, they would express a maturing ecological identity—day, by day, by day. Woven into one’s life (with clear intention), even simple

actions are powerful. Recycling, choosing organic food, and mulching street trees in front of one's urban home are all actions that embody the world we want. Real acts can be ritual acts. Liminoid forms of symbolic action are imbued with intentionality and embody a larger purpose. Internal psychological changes fostered by such actions are as important as their external beneficial effects in the world.

Harmonizing self-awareness and systemic well-being might be tricky evolutionary hurdle throughout the universe. Enrico Fermi, who has been dubbed the “architect of the nuclear age” and the “architect of the nuclear bomb” (he was a lead scientist for the Manhattan Project), posed the question, “Where is everyone?”²⁵ Looking up into vast space, he wondered why we are alone. Given the infinite possibilities of the cosmos, the universe should be full of life (and visitors). Spaceships from other planets should be flying around. Hence, “Where is everyone?” One response to what is now called Fermi's paradox, is this: Perhaps at certain level of development, complex life self-destructs. Fermi wondered if we could be facing this possibility. Towards the end of his life he ruminated, “What is less certain, and what we all fervently hope, is that man will soon grow sufficiently adult to make good use of the powers that he acquires over nature.”²⁶ A difficult incorporation implies that making require change real in the world is pushing the envelope of evolution. Ongoing incorporation requires fortitude, humor, and a broad perspective.

The Art of living In a Larger Context

I am large, I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

The final learning, “Context Capacitates,” leans into the possibility that wild nature herself is guiding ecological initiation. Context can be a larger crisis imposing upon individual lives, like environmental crises. Or context can be who or what this crises effects, in this case, our larger more-than-human world including an awareness that one’s next breath is ultimately a gift from the sun via photosynthesis. When crisis is the larger context, it is less numinous and inviting than a larger more mystical belonging. But it powerful nonetheless. Meade concurred in a private conversation, “Crises in the outer world draws out genius.”²⁷

Having crisis as the larger context is like having an unwanted stranger crash your party. Is this an intrusion or exciting opportunity? One might has, “How do I get this crisis to go away?” Or, “What is this crises inviting me to become?” Welcoming crisis as an invitation allows it to support a leap in development. Perhaps the most important question to ask is, “Why should I care?” This final question leads one to think long and hard, similar to when Foster struggled to discover, “Who are my people?”²⁸ In terms of this learning, “Context Capacitate,” whether one awakens to a larger ecological context via crisis or a mystical sense of belonging may not be important. What appears to be important is an attitude of curiosity and willingness to slow down, refrain from habitual responses, and listen. This listening allows a larger context to inform and guide one’s life. One cannot prove that ecological initiation is guided by a larger context; whether in the

form of terrible crises or mystical wild nature. Gary Larson's *Farside* cartoon expresses this conundrum in which one flea turns to another and asks, "Do you believe in Dog?" It may not matter if the flea believes in dog or not. My sense is that context exerts a force that pulls people up to their next level of development, which one can feel as a bothersome pressure or a mysterious invitation.

As mentioned, a larger context is not always welcome. Sometimes expanding one's circle of concern brings up feelings of guilt, incompetence, or a sense of being small. Of course, these feelings are founded in reality. Humans are causing harm to our larger context, even if unintended (e.g. climate change, mass extinction, a massive dislocation of people due in part to climate change). Feeling shame and fear (guilt) is a healthy response. And yes, humans are small. But seeing one's larger context as a kind of evolutionary pressure turns these challenging emotions into positives. They are, as Macy teaches, signals of our larger belonging.²⁹ Difficult emotions, if one responds to their underlying needs, are doorways to action and awakening. Seen in this way, a larger context can shift from showing up as nagging set of fears and problems outside our sphere of influence to a larger field that fosters the development of our full potential. Guilt, incompetence, and feeling puny can be doorways into larger belonging. "For this to occur" says Macy, "the main thing is not to be afraid to have your heart broken."³⁰

For context to be a genuine force of positive evolutionary change, conscious participation appears to be required. In their intake interviews and journals, activist participants in this research said they turn to nature for guidance, inspiration, and wisdom. Whether wild nature guides their activism was not assessed. This research did reveal that the suffering they perceived in the larger world galvanized them to acquire

skills, make new connections, and take concrete action. Is such galvanization a form of being guided? Perhaps. Their responsiveness honed abilities, resilience, and commitment. Responsiveness (and the learning acquired by responding) that is called forth by crisis can be seen as expressions of the capacitating force of a larger context.

Though ecological initiation is occurring outside a ritual setting, I learned how context can provide a kind of ritual container for this initiation to occur. A larger context promotes the development of capacities commensurate with one's heightened concern. In other words, whatever one serves, in turns serves that one, but one should not expect this to be easy. As I contemplated this learning, I recalled what happened when I was in my early 20s and told one of my vision quest teachers what I was most committed to. "The Earth," I told him. He paused, and then startled me, "LOOK OUT!" he breathed, as he put both hand in front of my face and stepped closer, "The Earth will help you and whatever is in your way will come up!" Indeed, it has. Hence, perhaps, this research.

Participation in a larger context can be increased by cultivating an attitude of surrender, what might be called "bowing down" in spiritual traditions.³¹ Just as sunflowers follow the sun, one can surrender to the dictates of a life that is larger than human affairs. The energy of a larger context may ignite and empower one's unique spark of life. Opening to a larger circle of concern is not only a symptom of maturity; it may also promote it.

Shifting allegiance to a larger context has other benefits. Paul Watson, captain of the Sea Sheppard, is often criticized for the radical tactics he uses to stop illegal whaling, even by environmentalists. His response? "I don't work for them."³² He knows whom he serves. He works for the whales. Similarly, Buddhists sustain the arduous journey of

awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. Surrendering to a larger context can also ease attachment to worldly success. Resilience founded upon worldly success (fame, riches, or recognition for accomplishments) may not be as sustaining as a deep sense of service to a something larger than oneself.

Initiations require guidance, usually by those already initiated. In terms of achieving a fully ripened ecological identity, people are all learning together, mostly as equals.³³ There is no charismatic guide but the wisdom of context. Perhaps being a guide on this journey requires abilities to heed and be guided by a larger context. Can guides bow down and listen, and can they help others do likewise? Discerning and heeding the dictates of what lies beyond our current level of evolution may be a skill one can learn. When humans are humble enough to listen and learn, especially leaders, it is a great benefit to all living beings. As Berry reminds people, “The earth will solve its problems and possibly our own. We need only to listen to what the earth is telling us.”³⁴ A Berkeley bumper sticker points out, “We are not saving the earth, the earth is saving us.”

A larger context can exert a capacitating force in practical ways. Imagine the river nearby, habitat for many creatures and a source of drinking water, is in trouble. When working to protect a river, one needs to develop different skills and abilities. Some are political (garnering support from local businesses and cities), ecological (working to restore riparian habitat), and psychological (knowing how to speak with people and encourage them to care.) These are practical ways that a larger context—in this case, one’s river and watershed—capacitates. Another aspect of being capacitated is realizing that the river itself is one’s teacher, guide, and support. One feels like an extension of the river in human form acting on behalf of itself. Once this shift is realized, even the way

one dances, plants trees, or relates to others may change! The larger context of the river capacitates by imbuing one's entire being with river-ness.

Capacitating has another expression: Healing. A fundamental tenet of ecopsychology is that healing the earth fosters personal healing.³⁵ As we heal, so does the earth. The reverse is equally true: As we are wounded, so will the earth suffer. At this critical juncture, where modern civilization meets ecological limits, the boundary between self and world is blurring. Our pathologies, addictions, and bad habits are earth problems, not just personal problems. For better or worse, personal and planetary healing seamlessly unites. A felt-sense of a larger context can enhance a generative seamlessness. Every person matters. This seamlessness is also cultural, because all aspects of human activity—whether in the realm of politics, education, economics, or healing—have environmental consequences. Radical connectivity trumps the illusion of separateness.

Larger belonging is always available and ever present, but not everyone will acknowledge or heed this context. As discussed, expanding one's sensitivity beyond the limits of personal identity can elicit challenging emotions such as sorrow, anger, helplessness, shame, and despair. Emotional rigidity is protective. Becoming available to the capacitating force of a larger context is not like taking ecstasy. One can expect challenges, discomfort, and to be humbled if one opens to a larger context. This would be, after all, an initiation.

Alternative Frontiers of Ecological Initiation

There are vast realms of consciousness still undreamed of,
vast ranges of experience, like the humming of unseen harps,
we know nothing of, within us.

—D.H. Lawrence, “Terra Incognita”

The main frontier of ecological initiation is to fully embody the ecological Self amidst tumultuous change. Some might argue that ecological identity and the sense of an ecological Self has long been in existence and that no initiation is required. It is true that ancient indigenous peoples the world over had, and some still have, a vast understanding of ecological inter-being. Modern science is finally catching up. For ancient people, survival required cultivating ecological interdependence. But the felt-sense of being a collective ecological Self—where we coherently act, think, and base our daily decisions on overall benefits to life in the face of modernity’s temptations—is an ongoing developmental journey for most human beings, even indigenous people who also navigate the excesses of our consumer-oriented culture and modernity’s temptations.

Environmental activism is only one path of ecological initiation, perhaps among many. Other avenues have different points of origin and might require different strategies for support, follow-through, and embodiment. I have identified three arenas of initiation not specifically addressed in this research, though they could have been. They are also viable paths of ecological awakening and may also have played a role in the lives of participants. The first is the arena of physical awakening. The second is the emotional realm, the arena of ecological sensitivity. The third is the drive to find one’s purpose.

Bodies Awakening

Since you are asking who will save the Earth, I'll tell you right now—it won't be some holy Jehovah, or the particle physicists, or the pimping politicians, or anything high and mighty floating in the sky above you, but the earth itself lifting its frilly skirt, curling past the idiot brain, plunging clean to lung, to gut, to feet.

—Richard Shiffman, *Bird Prophet Rising*

Entering the domain of larger belonging may begin with interests in health.

Because we are a physical embodiment of the natural world (carbon, minerals, water), concern for physical vitality can be an intuitive first step toward ecological awakening. Being basic does not make it less radical or profound. Modern science is beginning to understand the profound nature of physical inter-being. For example, the vast wetland loosely called the “gut” governs much of our digestion, immune responses, and overall well-being (including brain health) houses most of the bacteria, but they actually live everywhere in and on our bodies.³⁶ This means our bodies are wilderness zones, made up of more-than-human beings, and prone to the same dangers facing all wild things.

This notion is not new in Buddhism. Awakening to inter-being is an embodied experience and the foundation of Buddhist practices and philosophy. Thich Nhat Hanh elaborates, “In Buddhism there is no such thing as an individual.”³⁷ This premise is based upon the Buddhist insight that every object, event, idea, experience, or entity is made up of other things. Even an apparently isolated thing is actually made up of combinations. “The world,” says Hanh, “is an endless web of combinations.”³⁸

Myriad practices support an ecstatic sense of physical ecological belonging. Eating, for example, transcends duality, where one literally becomes what one eats. Gardening, the organic food movement, hiking, and holistic health are avenues that

bridge physical and ecological well-being. Physical inter-being is the foundation for ecological identity because it promotes vitality, aesthetic appreciation for wild nature, and a wholesome love of life as well as an instinctive body-based intelligence. For those beginning the journey of ecological awakening, the physical arena is a logical place to start. For those well on their way, this arena is important to remember to cultivate.

Awakening Earth's Nervous System

My advice to people of today is as follows: If you take the game of life seriously, if you take your nervous system seriously, if you take your sense organs seriously, if you take the energy process seriously, you must turn on, tune in, and drop out.

—Timothy Leary

Sensitivity is necessary for survival. If one's entire arm was numb, by the end of the day it would be mangled. Living systems use sensitivity to survive and evolve. For humans, part of this sensitivity includes emotions. Becoming ecologically sensitive via emotions is our birthright and responsibility. As Macy teaches in "The Work that Reconnects," authentic sorrow and righteous anger on behalf of, or even as life, expand identity.³⁹ People are nerve endings of the planet.

Emotional responses like anger, despair, and fear are often honored as healthy normal responses, but shame still gets a bad rap. I suspect shame (and the ways we avoid shame which include anger, numbness, and excessive guilt), underlie humanity's confused responsiveness (and lack thereof) to environmental crises. A key reason I choose to reframe ecological crisis as an initiation is because intentional debasement appears to be a necessary component of initiation rituals. Shame is actually evoked and must be endured. Perhaps being lost, naked, alone, helpless, stripped of identity are

designed to soften pride and attachments to being correct, perfect, or complete. Perhaps weathering shame for these reasons is required to be die to the old and be born-again. Hübl emphasizes that a humbled person is able to listen to (and heed) the intelligence of a larger system and attune to its evolutionary potential.⁴⁰ Further, shame and debasement inhibit the insidious tendency of inflation. “World as Self” should not lead to proud strutting, but profound humbleness. A larger identity is likely to be more humble than a limited one because it requires acknowledgment a larger intelligence. An ecological identity is more like bowing down than grabbing the steering wheel.

In our final circle, activist participants agreed, “It is not our job to ‘save the planet.’” They understood that the Earth is bigger than humanity. People are not literally the earth just as my hand is not Renée. Nor is my hand not-Renée. My hand is integral to me and expresses the intelligence, love, and will of the whole Renée. Hübl’s notion of “bowing down” points the way to a new kind of leadership, one that involves a deep following rather than constantly leading. Following the dictates of a larger system requires surrender.

Earth-Based Purpose and Becoming a Light

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.

Fredrick Buechner

A crucial aspect of initiation not explored is the search for one’s true purpose. This search is a primary purpose of initiation rites. Purpose may be the inner fuel of ecological initiation because commitment and passion are fueled by a sense of purpose and are required to keep going in the face of obstacles. Further, seeking and heeding

one's unique calling can itself be a path of initiation. I also wonder if activism needs to embody one's unique calling to be a path of initiation. Being an activist out of duty rather than a personal sense of calling may compromise the initiatory potential of activism.

A sense of purpose and destiny also raises the amperage of personal power. Healthy self-esteem, effectiveness, certainty, willingness to talk risk, and charisma are signs of being aligned with purpose. Purpose may also support effortless transmission of ecological belonging to others. Eloquence, media savvy, and clarity could be boosted by an ability to beam and convey one's message without words, antics, or a barrage of scary facts. This transmission sounds mystical, and it is. A blend of passion, practical skills, and mystical acumen lead to actions that transform self and world.

Transmission of ecological belonging in one's everyday actions and words is the highest form of communication, perhaps the sweetest fruit of ecological initiation. The energetic conveyance of evolutionary potential is where, to borrow Buddha's words, all "make of ourselves a light." One shines with the awakened expression of wild nature in every action, thought, and even in one's sleep. Then, without force or cajoling, one transmits the joy, intelligence, and seamless inter-being of wild nature—just by being one's authentic self.

Shifting Our Mythological Landscape: Transforming the Cassandra Complex

Perhaps, after four thousand years, the tide is turning for the medial woman.

—Laurie Layton Shapira, *The Cassandra Complex*

This research attempts to heal an engrained myth in our collective unconscious, the tragic story of Cassandra. She was the sister of Paris, famous for choosing to give

Aphrodite the Golden Apple in exchange for fulfilling his wish to marry the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen. This choice led to the Trojan War.

When Cassandra was child, she fell asleep in a temple devoted to Apollo. While sleeping, snakes licked her ears, which gave her the ability to understand the speech of animals. This capacity underlies the gift of prophecy. She grew to be a beautiful woman who eventually attracted the attention of Apollo. When she rejected his amorous intentions, he punished her. Though he could not take back the gift of prophecy he had bestowed upon her, he twisted its power: She would always speak the truth but no one would believe her. This led to great suffering for herself and others.

The “Cassandra Complex” refers to individuals prone to a type of hysteria that arises when they speak the truth but people resist and do not heed it. Laurie Layton Schapira has observed that those who suffer from this complex are often gifted with mediality (a gift from Apollo) and speak the truth about what is to come, but they suffer Apollo’s curse and are disbelieved, ridiculed, and ignored.⁴¹ Apollo, the God of the sun, is a symbol of the age of reason and rationality, which includes our current time. Those who have the gift of prophecy and are not able to communicate clearly can sound (and feel) hysterical in Apollo’s realm. They may also feel responsible for whatever predicted disaster comes, wishing they could transmit their message more clearly or in ways that people can hear. Their frustration and guilt are tortuous.

Those on the path of ecological initiation may suffer from the Cassandra complex for at least some period of time. Being individually awake to the undercurrents of reality in a rational Apollonian culture can result in Cassandra-like frustration and hysteria. True

ecological sanity is, by necessity, collective. Suffering Cassandra-like hysteria may be inevitable.

This research reveals that developing a mature ecological Self can provide a rootedness that supports effective communication or transmission. Deep ecological belonging can avert ungrounded hysteria, even when one is not believed or understood. A deep knowing of one's truth and trust in one's inherent belonging—a belonging that is larger than one's culture and historical blip in time—can potentially transmute hysteria into calm confidence and reassurance for others.⁴² Gradually, one learns to trust one's perceptions and is, in turn, trusted by others.

Cassandra's mediality also embodies the awakened feminine, a quality that has long been suppressed in Apollonian patriarchy. The deep feminine has a timeless affinity with wild nature. Perhaps ecological grounding is crucial to awakening and embodying the deep feminine. Ecological belonging could be a fertile foundation for flowering of deep feminine power.

Schapira compares the journey from hysteria to grounded confidence to the journey of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In her view, this initiation evoked a fluid, mythopoetic quality of worship from a remote matriarchal time that allowed the individual to "circumambulate the Self" and absorb different aspects of primordial divinity. She describes this journey, "Slowly integrating her experience into ego consciousness, she repairs the fragmentation and re-members the original one-ness of the Self."⁴³ This "original one-ness" could be ecological. Over time, this felt-sense of original oneness becomes the foundation for an empathic confidence needed by those gifted with ecological mediality.

Another image for this kind of grounding is Buddha sitting, his fingers placed lightly upon the ground. This gentle gesture signifies that the Earth herself is a witness to his enlightenment. Empowered by earth-witnessing, Buddha cannot be shaken by skepticism of other human beings or degraded by self-doubt. This is a kind of ecological belonging, granting one the courage and warm confidence to notice how one is being received that allows a course correction. One can take feedback while staying open to different pathways of communication. One's deep inner knowing is unshaken by disbelief. The title of this Dissertation, "Make of Yourself a Light," expresses a commitment to heal the Cassandra complex for the benefit of life. The healing lives in gesture where Buddha's fingers gently touch the ground, an earthy connection available to all of us.

Ecological Initiation: A Final Update /Implications of Study

[In our modern world] initiatory scenarios function only on the vital and psychological planes. Nevertheless, they continue to function, and that is why I said that the process of initiation seems to be co-existent with any and every human condition.

—Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*

This research does not suggest returning to ancient rites. Instead, I asked how might engagement in environmental crisis be informed by an understanding of initiation. Might this frame of initiation (as opposed to a rite) support engagement in environmental crises as a path toward a more complex and inclusive identity? This research revealed that, despite the lack of a ritual context or even knowledge about initiation, participants experienced personal transformation via committed activism and the contours of this change resemble an initiatory rite of passage.

How can we engage environmental crises as an initiation? Based on learning from this research and the experience of research participants, I am confident that conscious awareness of initiation could support the many different avenues of ecological awakening. Recognizing that this awakening will likely embody the general pattern of initiation, which includes going through phases of severance, liminality, and creative incorporation, people can intentionally evoke and support these phases. In the context of initiation, even resistance to change provides evolutionary pressures *par excellence*. Creatively responding to challenges and failure is the heart of initiation.

I traversed the layered ruins of the Great Hall of Eleusis early in the day, before the busses of tourists arrived.⁴⁴ Gleaned from a text written by Aristotle, in this great Hall, mysteries “were revealed” and “things were shown.”⁴⁵ It is amazing that what occurred here was kept secret by many thousands of participants for hundreds of years. Maybe telling others exactly what was revealed and shown would have flattened their mystique and numinous powers. What is the reason for this kind of secrecy? Perhaps it is to protect the sacred from banality. Often, the greatest of secrets are not secret. They are obvious, so obvious that we miss them. Like the sun rising every day, or comprehending these words, or commitment to a long project. If the obvious secrets of life are revealed in a special way, under special circumstances, are people better able to perceive their shining significance? Does the act of revealing accentuate what hides in plain sight? How might plain sight obstruct the mystery shining all around us?

Rumi says, “Tomorrow you’ll see what you’ve broken and torn tonight, thrashing in the dark.”⁴⁶ After thrashing around in the dark, what brings light?

Sitting in the sun upon the broken marble ruins inside what is left of the Great Hall of the Eleusinian Mysteries, I wondered if what was hidden and then revealed in this ancient initiation rite is one's own inner hidden light, the light of clear seeing. As Turner observes, the striking feature of what is revealed as sacred in these rites is their simplicity; it is the interpretation that is complex, he says, not the outward form.⁴⁷

While working in places of suffering, like inner city ghettos, destroyed landscapes, or prisons, I have learned two fundamental principles: Garbage begets garbage and light invites light. What happens if humans dare to open their eyes and hearts to the unfathomable fullness of our ecological moment? Both loss and beauty strip away obscurations. Revealing removes. Revealing unfetters. Unfettered, we shine.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

ETHICS APPLICATION

1. Participant Population

The main criterion for participants is that they have at least ten years of engaged environmental activism under their belt. Other important qualifications include interest and willingness to delve into psychological dimensions of activism based upon their personal experiences in an open and transparent manner with group of other environmental activists. Commitment to participate in one full and one half-day in-person experiences in Berkeley is also essential.

2. Outreach Procedures

Step One: Research Invitation (Appendices 5 and 6)

I will recruit participants through personal connections in the Bay Area activist community via email. I will send out a form letter as an attachment to people who know and trust my work, with a request that they forward it to people who might be interested in participating. The form letter will have five overarching criteria that I am seeking, including availability on specific dates.

Step Two: Initial Email Contact (Appendix 7)

If activists respond with interest, I will send them an email with more information about the study. If they are still interested, they are invited to contact me in order to set up a 15-minute personal telephone interview with me.

Screening Phone Interview (Appendix 8)

On this call, we will discuss experiences they have had as an activist. During this interview, I will be scanning specific intellectual and emotional qualities. These include an expressed sense of having been changed by their devoted work for the planet, an ability to reflect upon their experiences in an overarching manner, and curiosity to learn more. How at-ease they are reflecting and discussing their experiences will also be factors in the screening process.

Welcome Letter and Informed Consent Form (Appendix 9)

If they are still interested and meet my criteria, I will send them an acceptance letter, letting them know specifics about research procedures. They will be instructed to respond to me with a firm commitment as soon as possible.

Rejection Participants

Those who do not meet my criteria will receive a letter thanking them, but letting them know it was not a good fit.

3. Part One: Data Collection Procedures (10:00am-4:00pm)

First Meeting: Upon arrival, each participant will be welcomed by me and invited to help themselves to a snack and then sit quietly until everyone arrives at 10 a.m., our scheduled time to begin. When we are all gathered, I will welcome us as a

group, introduce myself (and co-researcher) and briefly describe the day's upcoming events, including methods of data collection (journaling, note-taking on the part of researchers, and audio recording) After they complete and sign the "Informed Consent" document, I will remind them of confidentiality and invite them to take on a name for the day, a "wilderness name," perhaps associated with their activism.

- **Invocation:**

This will move us into introductions, using their new names, and a sentence or two about the kind of activism you have been and are currently engaged in and for how long. Once we feel cohesive as a group, I will invite us to begin our day together with grounding and an invocation. Transitions will be marked with a bell.

- **Severance or "Taking Leave":**

We will begin our initiatory journey with Severance, where participants come to a line drawn in the dirt on the ground.

Stepping over this line symbolizes taking leave of an old way of life and beginning one's journey as an activist. They cross over saying, "What is calling or pushing me to cross over this line is...."

Then follows a journaling exercise (Appendix 11) Afterwards, they will be giving 3 to 5 cards to write their "starry-eyed" visions as a "newborn" activist.

- **Liminal or "The Journey of Being Different":**

The Liminal Phase has four parts: A conversation about one's launching experience with another activist, alone time for contemplation, expression of a "hard truth" one carries as an activist, and an experience of finding grounding in liminality.

Liminality begins with unrecorded dyad conversations when people share “What happened to me when I began my life as an activist...” for five minutes each.

Afterwards, time is allotted for ten-minute contemplative stroll, where participants are invited to reflect, “What hard truth or truths do I now carry? About the earth. About humanity. About our environmental situation. About what is needed at this time.”

The bell rings, signaling it is time to share and express one’s “hard truth” to “dominant culture.” I will set up a focal space where each activist is invited to share their “hard truth” while the rest of the participants step into the role of being “members of dominant culture receiving and/or resisting the hard truths about our environmental situation.”

When complete, there will be time to journal on the experience of being a harbinger of a hard truth and expressing resistance to this truth as a member of dominant culture. One will also have a chance to translate ones “truth” into “vision” or “invitation.” (Appendix 11)

Following the journaling, we will have a twenty minute bio-break, where snacks are available. Participants will be asked to maintain relaxed silence.

Participants will gather for the final phase of finding one’s grounding on “the journey of being different.” In this park, there is a short tunnel that goes under a street above that leads into the Berkeley Rose Garden. It is about 20 yards long, straight, and level. If one stretches out both arms, it is possible to almost reach both sides. Thus, with eyes closed, one can safely navigate this tunnel, feeling the smooth painted sides with one’s outstretched fingers. Finding one’s center and grounding will be accomplished by visualizing being supported by one’s truth or vision, closing the eyes and walking

forward with outstretched arms. I will guide them to the entrance, “Let your vision guide you from within. Trust your truth.” Participants will not be blindfolded and can open their eyes at any time. As each will go one at a time, there is no hurry.

Explicitly, there will not be a big greeting fest when one comes to the end of the tunnel. Only a simple “Welcome and instructed to write in one’s Journal (Appendix 11). As people are complete, they will be given quiet one-on-one instructions about the Rose Garden walk, which represents Incorporation back into daily life. Without fanfare, participants will be invited to take a solitary contemplative stroll in the Rose Garden, which symbolizes one’s day-to-day life as an activist, parent, citizen, partner, friend. They will be invited to think about the thorniest and rosiest parts of their life as an activist.

When everyone has had time to journal and be in the Rose Garden for at least 10 minutes, I will ring the bell and have everyone come together for the next experience, where data is collected about the incorporation phase of initiation. This will be done by dyad interview, each participant responds verbally to questions in their journal and the listener writes down the salient points. (See Journal Question VI, Appendix 11) The purpose of the interview is for Participants to potentially have a taste of Incorporation, where another receives them and needs for belonging, being heard, and understanding can potentially be met.

The final phase of initiation is gauging participants’ overall comfort of with the process of initiation itself, exploring their ability and willingness to “revise and begin again.” We will gather on a promontory and take a “bird’s eye view” of their journey as activists. They will have a chance to review and revise their original goals, the ones they made right after “crossing the line,” on the back of the same index cards. After settling

into a place that feels future-oriented, each participant will have a chance to share with the group, “what is calling me now is....” The final question of our day is, “What keeps me going is or are....” After these sharings, we will officially end our journey. In 10 minutes, we will gather back at the fire-ring to wrap up the day.

After participants have had a chance to help themselves to food and drink, we will meet as a group for our final discussion. Taking turns, each participant will have a chance to share key moments of the day (what stood out for them) as well as what part or parts of their journey as activists was omitted and that they feel should be included. When the conversation is done, I will remind people of our final meeting. Then we will stand for our closing circle and complete our day together.

3. Part Two: Data Collection Procedures (Follow-Up Meeting 10am-2pm)

The purpose of the second meeting is threefold. First, to candidly share research objectives (because the concept, “initiation,” has will not yet have been shared). Second, to share preliminary findings I and my co-researcher have made following the daylong participatory experience in Cordornices Park. Third, and to provide participants opportunities for reflection and interpretation of that data based upon a conscious understanding of the purpose of my research. There is also a fourth reason, which will be to explore a question which has spurred on this research from the beginning: *How can we engage current environmental crises as an initiation?* This was beyond the scope of my study, but my participants may have insights into or ideas about this question.

- **Welcoming Participants and Check-In:**

The primary purpose of this day is data interpretation on the part of participants. We will briefly check in. “If you were an animal right now, who is sitting/lying/standing/flying/creeping/swimming/dozing with us, what would you be and why?” This is a fun and informative ice-breaker. Tea and snacks will be available. I will review itinerary of our half-day.

- **Reviewing Purpose of Research and Research Problem:**

I will disclose the purpose of this research project, beginning with the core Research Problem (“In what ways does grappling with intransigent ecological crises over a prolonged period of time constitute an initiatory rite of passage for seasoned activists?”) and hypothesis, “Seasoned environmental activists may, through their years of perseverance and facing the culture’s ecological crises, undergo an initiatory journey that correlates with archetypal patterns of initiation, resulting in the ongoing development of and commitment to a capacitated ecological identity.”

- **Reviewing Key Concepts:**

I will review Key Concepts and Principles and explain these as the lens through which I interpreted data, to see in what ways long-term activism resembles an initiation. These include describing Berry’s “Great Work of our Time” as the heart of Ecological Initiation, Macy’s Great Turning being an individual experience, and what I mean mby the development of an Ecological Self. I will also describe the concept of identity as including one’s psychospiritual center of gravity and how a person connected to a collective future embodies Thomas Berry’s “Dream of the Earth” I will ask them if these

concepts make sense, if they are accurate indicators of ecological initiation, and if they might have additional concepts principles. This discussion will be followed by a break and snacks.

- **Data Collection Procedures**

After the break, I will go over the four archetypal phases of initiation and how these shaped our daylong experience. I will also share preliminary findings about each phase of initiation, based upon our daylong experience. Participants will have a chance to make any additions or “corrections” of preliminary findings. I will write down their responses on a white board.

Part of this conversation will include reflection upon ones spiritual evolution as related to one’s years of activism. By “spiritual,” I mean an embodied understanding of ones view of humanity and our place in the cosmos. How I explored this during the research was to ask them, “What keeps you going.”

The final question for all of us to ponder is, after our day and a half together, “How can we engage ecological crises as an initiation? Participants will journal in response to this question and then we will share these responses in our circle.

- **Closing Circle**

We will close our day together by standing in a circle and expressing gratitude.

APPENDIX 2

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

Evoking Experience

Day One

- Evoking Severance, called “Taking Leave of an Old Way of Life”
 - Drawing line on ground.
 - Contemplative Meditation on Beginning one’s Journey. “What brings you here?”
 - Cross Over the Line.
- Evoking the Liminal, called: “The Journey of Being Different”
 - Private Dyad Conversation during Severance (not recorded): *After you left an old way of life, what happened?*
 - Alone Time. Journey as Activist. What “hard truth” do I now carry? Feel the burden. How it changes your perspective, notice your gait, your identity, feelings.
 - Imagine you ARE the hard truth you carry. When listening to others, imagine you ARE dominant culture. Take those stances. Think of what you might be wearing. Play this role, be this role.
 - Tunnel Walk: Eyes closed. Vision you hold within. (Does it carry you?)
- Evoking Incorporation, called: “Vision into Action”
 - Contemplative Stroll in Rose Garden—Tending to Life—Roses and Thorns
- Evoking Rebirth, called: “The Call of the Future”
 - Taking a Bird’s Eye View. Honoring your Journey until now.
 - Imagine this is top of mountain. Springing off place. Consider “What’s next?”

Expressing Experience

Day One

- Expressing Severance, called: “What is calling me? What is pushing me?”
 - Speak aloud, “What calls me is....” before crossing line.
 - Speak aloud, “What I am leaving behind is....”
 - Cross over
 - Write on index cards: Your (starry-eyed) goals at this point.
- Expressing the Liminal, called: “Tensions Arising from Being Different...”
 - Speaking “Hard Truths.” From the truth(s) themselves, not about.
 - Others respond as “Resistance to Hard Truths.” BE resistance.
- Expressing Incorporation Phase, called: “Vision into Action Requires....”
 - Dyad Conversation. Reflect on thorniest and rosiest parts of making vision real.
 - In each other’s Journals: Make a bullet list of partner’s sharings, as they speak.
- Expressing Rebirth, called: “Future that Calls Me is....”
 - Share with Group:
 - 1) What is next for you? (I or co-researcher write these down).
 - 2) How different is this from what you are doing now?
 - 3) What keeps you going as an activist?
 - 4) What is a key lesson you have learned, that you would tell a young activist?

Interpreting Experience

Day One

- Interpretation in the Liminal Phase
 - Journaling, “Tensions Arising from Being Different”
 - Journaling, “Your Experience as Dominant Culture as “Resistance.”
 - Journaling, Post Tunnel Walk Reflection (before entering Rose Garden).

- Interpretation in the Incorporation Phase
 - Rose Garden Dyad Interviews “The Tempering of Daily Life”
 - Rose Garden Journaling: Leichert scale—How hard to make your Vision real in the world? (1—easy to 10—nearly impossible). Grade your success from A to F (Measuring coherence of inner and outer world.)
- Interpretation in Rebirth Phase
 - Updating original goals or visions (back of index cards.
 - 1) Did you meet that goal?
 - 2) Has this goal changed?
 - 3) Is it still alive for you?
 - Fresh Cards for NEW goals.
- Closing Circle Conversation
 - What were key moments of the day?
 - What was missing?

Integrating Experience

Day One

- Closing Ritual of Day One and Warm Meal by the fire, relaxed conversation.
- Through the day, conversations and solitary time are meant to be integrating.

Day Two

- Circle, holding hands, feeling supported by Circle of Life, expressing gratitude.

APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

Location: Codornices Park (See: <http://goo.gl/mY9Tl4>)

Meeting One Total Time: 10am-4pm

I. Welcoming, Orientation at the Fire Circle and Introductions (10:00-10:30)

III. Evoking-Expressing Sequence of “Taking Leave” (10:30-11:30)

- A. The journey as an activist begins here: Drawing a line on the ground.
 1. Imagine this truly IS the beginning of your journey. Meditation and Visualization
 2. Speak aloud as one sets forth: *“What calls (or pushes) me to cross this line is...”*
 3. Crossing the Line by stepping over. Your new life begins.
- B. After crossing: Setting forth
 1. Your starry eyed dreams.
 2. Goals at this point. (3X5 cards)
- C. Journaling Page 1. “Taking Leave and Setting Forth”

IV. Liminal (The Journey of Being Different) (11:30-12:45)

- A. Dyad Conversation (private and not recorded): *“After you left an old way of life behind, what happened?”* (20 minutes)
- B. Contemplative Alone Time (10 minutes): *What hard truth do I now carry?*
- C. Expression of and Receiving “Hard Truths” (45 minutes)
 1. Speaking “Hard Truths.”
 2. Then receiving. Group responds to hard truth as “Dominant Culture.”
- D. Journaling Page 2. “Tensions Arising from Being Different”
- E. Journaling Page 3. “Your Experience as Dominant Culture”

Silent Bio-Break (with snacks) (12:45-1:00)

V. Finding Grounding in the Liminal (1:00-1:45)

- A. Meditation and Imagining
 - 1. The hard truth you carry as an invitation, a seed of potential from the future
 - 2. Notice what carries you in the dark, symbolic of “dark times”
- B. Tunnel Walk (one at a time, eyes closed—which is voluntary)
- C. Journaling Page 4. “Post Tunnel-Walk Reflection”

VI. Incorporation: Vision into Action (1:45-2:30)

- A. Rose Garden Stroll—Tending to one’s life as an activist; the roses and thorns.
 - 1. Contemplate these questions: How have you made your vision real?
 - 2. Struggles?
 - 3. Role of Community. Who has been or is still with you?
 - 4. What keeps you going, centered, connected?
 - 5. Do you have daily grounding practices?
- B. Dyad Interviews: Reflecting on the thorniest and rosiest parts of activism.

VI. Rebirth: Bird’s Eye View (2:30-3:00)

- A. Gaining perspective. An overview of one’s Journey.
- B. Revising one’s initial goals (on back of 3X5 cards)
- C. New Calling? What calls you?
- D. Onward... What, after all these years, keeps you going?

Bio-break and Return to Fire Ring (5 minutes)

VII. Integration and Completion (3:10-3:50)

- A. Cross line. End ritual. Go Back to Fire Circle (fire!). Warm food.
- B. Review of Key Moments

1. What stands out for you and why?
2. What was missing? What part of your activism journey was not included?

VII. Closing Circle (People can still hang out if they want. Recording is now OFF.)

Follow-up Afternoon Meeting—Two Weeks Hence (10am-2pm)

I. Orientation and Welcome (10-10:30)

- A. Silence (10 minutes)
- B. Brief Check in. (15 minutes)

II. Debrief via Reviewing Purpose (10:30-11:45)

- A. Research Problem and Hypothesis (10 minutes)
- B. What did we do and why? (10 minutes)
 1. Review of Key Concepts and Principles (45 minutes)
 - a. Berry's "Great Work of our Time" (describe) as the heart of Ecological Initiation.
 - b. The Great Turning experienced individually. Findings and feedback.
 - c. Development of an Ecological Self. What I found. Feedback?
 - d. Your Circle of Identity or Psychospiritual Center of Gravity. Your reflections?
 - e. Dream of the Earth. Being a person connected to a collective future. Accurate?
 2. Lens for data. Anything missing? (10 minutes)

Bio-Break and Snacks (15 min)

III. Reflection and Interpretation each Phase of Initiation (noon-1:00)

- A. Describe Purpose of Research Review each "phase" of initiation in Daylong. (30 minutes)
 1. Preliminary findings about Severance. My interpretation. Additions or corrections? (*write them down on white board—collect this as "data."*)
 2. Preliminary findings about Liminal. My interpretation. Additions or corrections?

3. Preliminary findings about “The Return.” Additions or corrections?
 4. Exploring the Call of the Future. Additions or corrections looking back...
 5. Finally, what do you consider the MOST difficult “phase” of ecological initiation? Go around.
- B. Reflection on one’s spiritual evolution. What keeps you going? (30 minutes)
1. In research, this was the question I used: What really keeps you going?
 - a. Go around: How important is this dimension of life?
 - b. Spiritual development or “mystical affiliation” with nature/cosmos/Self.
 2. Humanity’s place on earth, in cosmos.
 - a. Thoughts?
 - b. Has changed in the course of your activism? If yes, how?
 3. How important is this dimension in relationship to ecological crises?

IV. Final Question (1-1:30)

A. *“How can we engage ecological crisis as an initiation?”*

1. Final Journaling (10 min)
3. Sharing Answers in Circle (35 min)

V. Optional: Re-do of Truth-Telling Exercise (1:30-2:00)

VI. Lunch and Farewell (2:00 or 2:30)

APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To Ecological Initiation Research Participants:

You are invited to participate in a collaborative study on engaging environmental crises as an initiation. The study's purpose is to better understand how turning to face and work creatively with ecological challenges of our time is a transformative journey that tempers, matures, and is beneficial for oneself and others. We will also explore how a path of committed engagement in environmental crises can become an initiation into a grounded and capacitated ecological identity.

Participation will involve two half-day experiences. The first will be a condensed experience of ecological initiation outdoors in a local city park. The second meeting will provide space for reflection, meaning-making, and integration of the first day's experiences. The first meeting will take approximately 4 hours (possibly more), the second one 3 hours. Lunch will be provided after the research and is optional.

Written journals will be created and collected on the first day. Audio recordings of group discussions will be collected for both days. Salient aspects of recorded group conversations will be transcribed. All written materials and transcriptions will remain confidential, as will your identity. Data will be stored in a secure and private place in my home. In any future publications, any information that might identify you will be altered to ensure you anonymity.

This study is dedicated to research and the creation of new knowledge. It may offer no direct benefit to you. The published findings and any subsequent publications, however, may be useful to activists, teachers, ecologically-oriented therapists, and those working in the field of sustainability. Potentially, corporations could also benefit (fingers crossed). This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. However, some of the procedures involved that evoke challenging aspects of environmental activism may touch sensitive areas for some people. Reviewing one's life as an activist can bring up feelings of despair, frustration, and fear for our collective future. If at anytime you develop any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss these with you. I, the researcher, cannot provide psychotherapy, but at your request or using my personal judgment, I will facilitate referrals to an appropriate mental health professional, if such a need should arise.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. Please note as well that I, the researcher, may need to terminate your participation from the study at any point and for any reason.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me at (510) 558-8238. Or you may contact the Dissertation Director at Meridian University, 47 6th Street, Petaluma, CA, 94952, telephone (707) 765-1836. Meridian University assumes no responsibility for any psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

I, _____, consent to participate in the study of Ecological Initiation. I have had this study explained to me by Renée Soule. Any questions of mine about his research have been answered, and I have received a copy of this consent form. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX 5

RESEARCH INVITATION

Renée G. Soule
Ecopsychology Education Services



**** RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY ****
for
Seasoned Environmental Activists

Seeking Research Participants for a Qualitative Ecopsychological Study

I am seeking research participants to engage in a collaborative, participatory research project exploring the psychological affects of long-term engaged environmental activism. Participation in the study involves in-person exploration of the terrain of environmental activism with a group of other seasoned activists.

Requirements for participants include:

- At least ten years of committed environmental activism under one's belt.
- Openness to taking a bird's eye view of one's life as a seasoned activist.
- Curiosity about potential hard-earned psychological benefits that might arise from undaunted commitment to repair and redress the imbalances between humans, culture, and nature.
- A sense ease with like-minded others, even if one does not know them personally.
- Time!

Research Dates: Sunday (Monday?) XXX 10am-4pm and Sunday XXXX 10AM-2M

Commitment for BOTH the full and half days of this research is required!

If you are interested and meet these initial requirements, please contact Renée Soule:
renee@ecopsychologist.com

1418 Milvia St., Berkeley, CA 94709
Phone: (510) 558-8238 Email: renee@ecopsychologist.com Web: www.ecopsychologist.com

APPENDIX 6

EMAIL INVITATION (sent to select colleagues to forward to activists)

Hello XXX community--

My doctoral research is commencing, soon! I'm still looking for a few participants. Might you know of anyone?

I am seeking 8 - 12 adventuresome seasoned environmental activists to join me in a **collaborative exploration that engages ecological crises as an initiation**. This will be a small group of unique and thoughtful people who are willing to step out of the rush of their daily lives for two half-days and reflect upon their overall experience as activists. Because we are seeking fresh insights, this participatory research will be creative, interactive, and more-than-conceptual. And, hopefully, beneficial for participants and for our world.

Research Participants need to:

- Have at least 10 years of engaged environmental activism under his/her belt—my definition of activism is broad.
- Live near Berkeley (or be willing to come here)
- Be able to commit to 2 half-days, June 1st and 15th (ending early afternoon)
- Be thoughtful, curious, and ecologically-grounded.

Here is the official research invitation: (PDF of Invitation)

If you know anyone out there who fits this profile, please forward this email.

Thank you! Renée

Renée Soule
renee@ecopsychologist.com
www.ecopsychologist.com
(510) 558-8238

APPENDIX 7

Initial Email Contact to Interested Participants

Thank you for your interest in participating in research that explores the overarching effects of long-term environmental activism. Your involvement in this participatory research project would involve two group meetings on.....

Meetings will take place in an outdoor setting, at Cordonices Park in North Berkeley. (See: <http://goo.gl/mY9Tl4>) This terrain of the park will symbolize the territory of one's many years as an activist. While not strenuous, moving from place to place in the park is part of the study. Day Two will be reflective and will not involve movement.

The first meeting will be an exploration of your life as an activist via the physical territory of the park. Activities will involve journaling, dyad and group conversations, and creative enactments of salient aspects of activism. All activities will be contained and guided. Journal entries and recordings of conversations will be collected as data.

Our second meeting will take place three weeks after the daylong experience. We will discuss the overarching purposes of my research as well as preliminary findings. At this point, you can contribute to and revise initial insights. Parts of this conversation will be recorded or captured via notes. There will also be a final journal entry.

Data for this research will include research notes, journals, and recorded conversations. After the project is complete, I will send you a Summary of Learnings.

If you are still interested, please contact me to arrange a 15 minute phone interview. Please include your phone number and best times to reach you.

Thank you for your curiosity, Renée Soule

Email: renee@ecopsychologist.com

Tel: (510) 558-8238

APPENDIX 8

Telephone Screening Questionnaire

Regarding research about the effects of long-term ecological engagement and activism.

Thank you for getting this far! Answering these questions will help both of us make sure that exploring overarching personal and psychological affects of long-term environmental activism in an interactive setting with other seasoned activists is the right thing for you. Please respond to these questions in a candid fashion. I will be taking notes, so might ask you to slow down or repeat something.

1. Can you commit to 1.5 days of engagement?

Day One: Sunday May 29, 2014 10-4pm

Day Two: Sunday June, 15, 2014 10-2 pm

(Note: If you cannot commit to these two dates, there no need to go any further. Thanks!)

2. How many years have you been devoted to some form of environmental activism?

3. Would you say that your activism changed over time? If yes, can you briefly describe how?

4. How comfortable might it be for you to express and verbally share your personal experiences as an activist with a group of 10-12 other seasoned activists?

5. When you hear the invitation to “explore the deeper dimensions of long-term environmental activism” what comes up for you?

6. Is there anything else I should know about you?

Thank you for your time and interest and responses! I will contact you within the next 3-5 days. Please email me any questions you have.

Again, thank you. And good-bye.

APPENDIX 9

Welcome Letter



** ECOPSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH ADVENTURE **

Welcome Letter!

Thank you for your YES! Your participation is crucial and valued. Though previous experiences of facing and engaging ecological dilemmas of our time are the foundation for this collaborative research, our time together is designed to create fresh knowledge about *how* to engage ecological crises as an initiation. Both meetings will take place outdoors, at Cordornices Park in North Berkeley (up Eunice & right on Euclid).

Meetings: June 1st, 9-2 pm & June 15th, 10-2pm (optional celebratory lunch at 1pm)

Directions: <https://plus.google.com/109242102740089324902/about?gl=us&hl=en>

Images: <http://goo.gl/mY9Tl4>)

What to Bring: Warmer layer. Perhaps a light camping chair or something to sit on.

Sustenance: A light morning snack, drinks, and lunch will be provided for both days.

We will move from place to place in the park—leisurely. Cordornices on the weekend not be supremely private, but our activities (dyad and group conversations, journaling, and creative enactments of salient aspects of activism) do not require supreme privacy. Day Two will be more reflective. We will openly review overarching purposes of our research as well as preliminary findings. Participants are invited to contribute to and perhaps revise initial insights. Data for both days of this research will include research notes taken during our time together, journals, and recorded conversations. After the project is complete, I will send you a Summary of Learnings.

Thank you for your dedication to life and *ALL* that has brought you to this moment.

For our beloved Earth, Renée

Renée Soule, PhD Candidate at Meridian University - 47 6th St. - Petaluma, CA 94952
Phone: (510) 558-8238 Email: renee@ecopsychologist.com Web: www.ecopsychologist.com

APPENDIX 10

DAYLONG RESEARCH SCRIPT

Logistics, Introductions, and Description of Activities

Welcome to Cordornices Park and your daylong exploration of your experience as a seasoned environmental activist. Help yourself to a snack and take time to relax quietly, until everyone arrives. (Wait until everyone arrives.) Hello everyone. Thank you for showing up. Today we are going to reenact your journey as activists in present time. Our day will be spent moving through this park. Our movement will be punctuated by moments of writing, reflection, expression, and conversation; most of this will be collected as data. Before we begin, please complete the permission forms.

In three weeks, we will gather again to learn about the purpose of this inquiry and reflect upon the experiences we will share today. These reflections are important data, so your commitment to complete this research is very important.

Your identities are and will remain confidential. As you agreed in the Consent Form, the identities and experiences of other participants are, likewise, confidential. However, my identity and the identity of my co-researcher are not confidential.

Before we undertake this journey together, let's pick name for ourselves. For example, if you have been protecting forests, you could call yourself forest, tree, or frog. Please take a moment and see if a name comes to you. Now we will move into introductions, using our new names, sharing a sentence or two about the kind of activism you have been and are currently engaged in, and for how long.

Throughout the day, you will journal. Here they are. These journals will be completed sequentially. Each page is numbered and has specific instructions. First, put your name on the cover. Please keep them with you throughout this day.

Invocation

Before we move into our day together, let's take a moment to center ourselves. I invite you to close your eyes and relax into the container that we are creating for you, a special time out-of-time to explore your experience and devotion as activists. Let's take some deep belly breaths together, to gather our energy, ground ourselves, and clear our space for this journey. (pause) You are invited to leave your busy life behind and arrive fully in this place, with these particular people, who are devoted activists like you. (pause) Let's take advantage of this time out of time moment to step back and take a bird's eye view of our long-term commitment to your particular work, your love of our Earth and to all life. (pause) Take three more deep breaths. (pause) Today we do this work for the benefit of others, for the living systems earth of which we are an integral part. We now open the door to this day, to our collaborative exploration. (Ring bell)

Please stand up and let's gather at the place where our journey begins.

SEVERANCE

“Taking Leave”

This is the place where you take leave of an old way of life. Let's imagine that you are standing at the beginning of committing to activism. Where you take leave of an old way of life and begin another. Imagine your journey had a beginning, an actual point

of entry where you left an old way of life and took on a new one. Imagine that your journey as an activist begins here. (Drawing a line on the ground with a stick.)

Before you cross this line, and begin your life as an activist, consider “What is calling or pushing me?” If there is a calling (or pushing), you are welcome to say what that is as you cross over the line. Please, one at a time, cross the line into your new life.

Your new life begins here. There is no going back.

Turn to your Journaling Page 1. “Taking Leave and Setting Forth.” Briefly answer the questions on this page. (See Appendix 13)

(Pass out index cards all of the same color.) On these index cards, write down your goals that represent a place early on in your journey, what might be considered your “starry eyed dreams.” What are you setting out to do? OR, if you don’t know, what are you setting out to discover? What are you looking for? Write these down on 3-5 cards. You are welcome to do as many as you like.

LIMINAL PART ONE

“The Journey of Being Different”

Part I. Dyad Conversations: The next phase of your experience is called “The Journey of Being Different.” Please find a partner to share a conversation about what happened after you left an old way of life behind and devoted yourself to activism. You will have 4 minutes each. I’ll ring the bell to change partners.

After you thank your partner, you will have 10 minutes of alone-time to take a contemplative stroll or to relax quietly. Rather than gather back together or try to shout instructions about our next activity, I will give you instructions now.

After your conversation about what happened after you intentionally devoted your life to activism, after you have both had a chance to speak, say good bye to your colleague. Then we will have a 10 minutes or so of alone-time to contemplate, “What hard truth or truths do I now carry? About the earth. About humanity. About our environmental situation. About what is needed at this time.” If possible, find a few salient or one core truth that capture your intensity. What is it like to carry this truth? Notice your gait. Notice how you are affected. After 10 minutes are up, I will ring the bell and we will gather by the grassy area (point) at the bottom of the hill.

Please stay within hearing distance of the bell. This contemplative stroll is not a hike, but a time for inner reflection. Please, find your partner and listen for the bell. Are there any questions? (Enter Conversation activity)

Part II. Contemplative Alone-Time: (I might need to speak loudly) Please complete your last sentences and thank your partner, and take time to yourself to clarify and consider what hard truths you carry as an activist. Listen for the bell. When you hear the bell, please join us for our next exploration. (pause)

Part III. Expression of and Receiving “Hard Truths”: (Meeting in the Field)

Welcome back everyone. Now we are going be a little bit theatrical and step into different roles, the role actually representing and speaking a “Hard Truth” and the role of “Dominant Culture” receiving or resisting this hard truth. I will model what I mean. “As an activist, the hard truth I carry is “Psychologists must wake up to their role in healing the human-nature-relationship.” (I will pick an area of activism where none of my participants are active.) You will have a few minutes to share your hard truth, speaking to

us about the truth you carry, “Hey psychologists, wake up!” However you want to do this. Wave your arms. Beg. Get angry. Try to convince us, however you want.

The rest of us will be member of “dominant culture,” (gesture the quotation mark symbol) You will represent people this activist communicates with. In the role of “dominant culture,” respond to their truth. However you wish. Perhaps as you yourself have been responded to. You can share different flavors of responses. You can switch. You are welcome to get into it and give activists a run for their money. Any questions?

I would like this to be a fluid experience. We will each have at least a couple minutes as a harbinger of reality, one who bears a hard truth. When you have shared your truth and feel complete, step over this line (point out a rope laid on the grass), shake off, and slip into the role of being a member of dominant culture.

After everyone has gone, we will take some time for journaling before taking a 15 minute bio-break. Ok, here we go. Who wants to be the first ‘activist who brings home reality?’ (Do the Activity...taking turns.) Let’s complete this experience by taking time to reflect and do some writing in response to a few questions. (See Appendix 13)

After you have completed your responses, please take few minutes break to take care of bodily needs. There are also a few snacks here, if you like. We will meet back after everyone has had a decent break in about 20 minutes. Please listen for the bell.

LIMINAL PART TWO

“Finding Grounding in the Liminal”

Part IV. Reframing Truth as Invitation: Welcome back. Please have a seat and relax into silence. (wait) Feel the energy of the truth you carry. (wait) At this point in the

day you have faced resistance and you have kept going. You are still here. You are still on the Journey. Perhaps, at this point, your truth represents more than scientific veracity. Perhaps something more has emerged. Perhaps it points to a way of life. A possibility. Something beautiful, a seed of potential for you, humanity, our Earth. You might say it carries you. (wait) What for others may be experienced as a “hard truth” is, for you, it is an invitation. A seed of potential from the future. A vision. Take a moment to feel into this possibility. If something emerges, turn to the blank page in your Journal. Quickly without too much thought, create an image that carries the beauty of the truth you carry. It’s movement and promise. Write your “hard truth” beneath this image.

Part VI. Tunnel Walk: Being carried by one’s vision. We are about to make a transition to a new phase of your experience as an activist. This tunnel symbolizes a part of your journey that is dark, when the outer world doesn’t give you feedback as to where to go, and you must turn within and trust the truth you carry. Even if you have encountered obstacles, you feel grounded in this truth. From within, this truth shines a light on your path. Not guided by dominant culture, you learn to trust a deeper place inside yourself. Your vision carries you forward.

Now we are going to make a passage, one at a time, through this tunnel, with your eyes closed. As you make this passage, invite this truth to be with you and see if it transforms into something with inward momentum, a guiding vision for yourself, for humanity. Notice, if you hold this truth, how you are carried. Ask, “what carries me?” What guides me in dark times? We will all wait for our colleagues on the other side.

(I guide each participant to the entrance of the tunnel.) *“Let your vision guide you from within. Trust your truth.”* Once on the other side, participants will turn and greet

others who are making the passage. (When everyone has made the passage). Good. We all made it! (When participants have reached the other side...) Wonderful, welcome. You made it! Please take time to journal, responding the next question. (See Appendix 13)

INCORPORATION

“Vision into Action”

Part I. Stroll in Rose Garden: Back in Real Life (2:15-2:45) Welcome to the Rose Garden! This represents your life, back in culture, after you have come through the tunnel and darkness. This place symbolizes your day-to-day life as an activist, parent, citizen, partner, friends. Here you are tending to life, tending and enjoying a Rose Garden. As you stroll, contemplate the thorniest and rosiest parts of your life as an activist. Consider: How have you made your vision real? What, if any, were the major struggles? Who’s been or is still with you? Do you have community or communities? What practices keep you centered, connected, inspired?

Part II. Dyad Interviews: After 10 minutes or so—I will ring the bell—and find a partner. Trade journals. Ask your partner these questions, and take down pertinent information in *their* journal. You will interview them! The questions to ask them are in the Journal (See Appendix 13). Take about 15 minutes each. I will ring a bell to let you know that you have five minutes to finish the interview. I’ll ring again, then switch.

REBIRTH

“Bird’s Eye View” (2:45-3:05)

(Ring final bell) Take a few minutes to finish, then come up to that Promontory (point). (When everyone has gathered....) Now we will take a bird’s eye view, overview of whole day’s journey, which symbolizes your life as an activist, up until this moment, now. Let’s take a moment to honor the paths that brought us all here, to this moment.

Part I. Revising Initial Visions: Thinking back for a moment, way back, to your beginnings as an activist. Think back on what you set forth to do. Way back there, where we drew a line on the ground. Here are the goals you wrote down (pass them out). Perhaps these goals are the same for you. Perhaps they don’t exist. Perhaps they have been tempered. If these goals have changed in any way, or are no longer goals for you, write this down on the back of the cards. You will see we have labeled the backside of your cards as Revised Goals. (Wait)

Part II. New Calling... Observe your entire journey—the achievements, failures, friends, surprises, hopes, fears, good and bad times—observe them all, and let them go. Be here, in this moment, breathing in, being here now. (Silence) Imagine this is the top of a mountain, a springing-off place. Feel yourselves turning towards the future. What is calling you now, in your life? Whatever that might be, if anything. What “new” wants to be born? (Go around circle)

Part III. Onward... The final question after our long day, after moving through your entire journey as an activist, “What keeps you going?” You can respond as an open-ended question: What really keeps me going is or are..... (3:15-4:15)

(When complete) Now, we will go Back to Fire Circle to close and have some food (a fire...if there is no fire danger and if the day is chilly)

CLOSURE AND COMPLETION

Please help yourself to some food and join us by the fire circle. We will have one more conversation that revolves, in a relaxed manner, two more questions. My co-researcher and I will jot down notes. (When everyone has gathered, with food...)

1) First, what were the key moments of today, for you? What stands out and why?

2) In terms of your overall experience as a seasoned activist, what was missing from this day? What part of your journey as an activist was omitted, that you think is important?

(When conversation is complete) Let's stand in a circle and hold hands. Close our eyes. Breath. Listen to the water. Feel the air on your skin, the breath of trees all around us, the way you are and have been supported by life, but those around you, but this circle, by all the many people who have shared this journey with you. Fill this space with our presence and our love for the earth, for nature, for awakening to our larger belonging. Let's take three deep breaths together, inhaling inspiration, exhaling gratitude. (pause) A collective High Five...We are awesome! Thank you for your participation!

With this, we will close our full day of participatory research. I am/we are (co-researcher) deeply grateful for your wholehearted participation. In X weeks, on XX day the XX, we will gather for another meeting in this same place. Where will share the purpose of this research and ask for any further reflections you might have. You are welcome to jot down any ideas or impressions that arise after you go home, and you can

bring these to the gathering. It is very important that you come and complete this study together. I look forward to our next meeting.

We have plenty of food, so please relax and hang out.

APPENDIX 11

JOURNALING QUESTIONS (Day One)

Page 1. “Taking Leave and Setting Forth”

- Approximately how old are you? Where do you live?
- If true, describe a specific event, person, experience that marks this turning point in your life.
- What are you leaving behind? Are sacrifices required? If so, what?
- What are you feeling at this time?

Page 2. Tensions Arising from “Being Different”

- How were you affected by becoming and speaking AS a “hard truth”?
- How did the reception of “dominant culture” affect you?
- At this moment, notice how you weather this dynamic. Describe. (Or: In what ways did the response from dominant culture change your stance, if at all?)

Page 3. Your Experience as “Dominant Culture”

- When taking on the role of “dominant culture, briefly describe responses to the “truths”.
- Were your responses “realistic?” (Is this how you have been responded to in your life as an activist?) If not, how is your real-life experience different?
- In a few short phrases, what was it like for you to become an expression of dominant culture? (How were you affected)
- If this “hard truth” were an invitation, a vision for the future, what would that be? If you can, translate your hard truth into a message of change, a

positive force for change, an invitation—your vision of what is possible and necessary.

Page 4. “Post Tunnel-Walk Reflection”

- What carries you forward through resistance or “dark times.” You are welcome to draw an image and/or use words.
- If environmental crises were an “invitation” for humanity, what or who are we invited to become?

Page 5. Partner Interviews: “The Tempering of Daily Life”

********Please exchange journals and record your partner’s responses********

- 1) In terms of “moving into action,” what were the main struggles you faced?
- 2) In terms of drumming up effective responses to your “hard truth,” rate yourself on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is “no traction” and 10 is “full-blown success.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
“No Traction”									“Full-Blown Success”
- 3) What are the main struggles you face and contended with?
- 4) Briefly describe the “Role of Community and/or like-minded others” in your work as an activist.
- 5) Rate on a scale of 1-10, the importance of community, of belonging to a group of like-minded others. One is “not mattering so much” and 10 is “absolutely vital.”

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
“Not mattering much”									“Absolutely Vital”
- 6) Describe any sustained and sustaining grounding practices (if any) that you do.

APPENDIX 12

FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH SCRIPT

Description of Activities for Follow-Up Meeting (2 weeks hence, 10am-2pm)

DAY TWO: Follow-up Meeting 6/15/14 (10am-1 or 2 pm)

I. Welcome and Introductions: (10-10:30)

A. Get Snacks/Movement/Stretching/Grounding and Silence...

B. Introductions (2 minutes each): **(TAPE RECORDER)**

- Your activism and your current passion.
- Elaborate on what is calling you....
- What called you to come to these two days?

II. Debrief—Reviewing Research Parameters (10:30-10:50)

C. Review Research Problem and Hypothesis

D. Key Concepts

E. Key Principles

F. What did on Day One and why. Walk through Daylong Initiation Ritual...

III. Preliminary Learnings (10:50-11:30) (TAPE RECORDER!)

A. Learnings regarding Research Problem/Question

In what ways does sustained long-term creative engagement in environmental crises awaken, temper, and sustain post-modern ecological identity?

(Initiatory Correlates: Awakened = Liminal, Tempered = Liminal, Sustained = Return)

6. Preliminary findings about Severance. My interpretation. Additions or corrections?

a. *Additions?*

b. *What about activism supports Severance?*

7. Preliminary findings about Liminal. My interpretation.

a. *Additions?*

b. *What about activism support the Liminal?*

8. Preliminary findings about “The Return.” *Additions or corrections?*

a. *Additions?*

b. *What about activism supports Incorporation?*

c. *How do we evaluate “success?”*

9. Exploring the Call of the Future—being a Future-Oriented being?

d. *Additions?*

e. *What about activism support constant Rebirth?*

Bio-Break (15 min)**IV. Grounding in Ecological Identity: Re-do Hard Truths. (11:45-12:30)**

- A. Do Re-Do – Grounded fully in one’s tempered ecological identity. (10 min)
- ❖ Physical Grounding—Embodied Ecological Identity.
 - ❖ Intellectual/Imaginal Grounding—Read descriptions of tempered identity taken from Day One Journals
 - ❖ Spiritual Grounding—Trust. Speak from. Let yourself be surprised.
- B. Re-Do Dominant Culture Interaction (20 min)
- C. Alone Time—Walk—Break—Reflection (15 minutes)
Journaling—*How was this experience different from Day One?*
Jot these down on back of pages your Journal

V. Debrief Tempered Ecological Identity Exercise (12:30-12:45)—TURN ON TAPERECORDER!

- A. Purpose: Facing Dominant Culture grounded in Tempered Ecological Identity
Mysticl affiliation is the heart of maturity.
- B. How was the experience for you? How different than Day One?

IV. My REAL (big) Question (12:45-1:15)

Implications of this research:

If we are to move toward a life-sustaining civilization, awakening, tempering, sustaining ecological identity needs to be the heart of modern day environmental activism. Authentically transformative activism needs to support this initiatory journey.

“How can we engage ecological crisis as an initiation?” YOUR immediate answers...

1. Final Journaling (10 min) *Let it flow...No censorship.*
2. Sharing Answers in Circle (15 min)

V. Closing: Gratitude—The Privilege of being alive at this time--Onward (5 min)

BEFORE HANDING JOURNALS BACK TO ME!

Include your AGE and “Years as an Activist” on back of Cover....

1:20 LUNCH and FAREWELLS**V. Or—Re-do of Truth-Telling Exercise, grounded in Eco-Identity (If willing...)**

Fine spot, create circle, and introduce Re-do:

One of my hypothesis is that the ecological identity is radically inclusive. Of all beings, all experiences, past, future, current.

*Ground yourself in your most expansive, inclusive, organic, universal self.....
Read all the qualities of ecological belonging from the data (See Appendix 13)
Meditate, seep in the words.*

Feel how your body feels. The flow of ancient oceans in your veins. The breath of shared molecules throughout the ages. The warmth of the sun. The sentience of Earth.

Reach out, hold hands. Anchor yourself in this deep belonging with the touch of your companions. Trust they see and know you this way. Feel the resonance and grounding of this shared reality with other human beings, with us. With that person next to you. With that hand, a hand holding a hand.

Let go. Now stand alone. Still feeling that grounded inclusivity and organic belonging as you know it. Stabilize here.

Now. We are going to do that exercise again.

Whatever side of the line you are on, you are only another expression of nature. Of life.

We are earth in conversation with herself.

Read our Groups sense of Ecological identity. We are....

CLOSING: Make a collective flower with our hands.

Open and keep spreading the pollen and seeds—whoosh!

VI. 2:00 LUNCH AND FAREWELLS

APPENDIX 13

ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY AS DEFINED BY RESEARCH GROUP

Taken from Journals and Conversations from Day One

Every day we become more and more aware that we are nature.
 We take our natural place in this web of life.
 With our True Presence, we make each moment more sacred.
 Feel how we are evolving, as we move from an individual to a collective focus.
 We are evolving together!
 We accept the ways of nature. We surrender to her truth, “Grow or die.”
 We live in partnership with the community of all beings as responsible co-creators of life.
 We rest easily in our wisest, most compassionate selves.
 We have come to understand hardship as beautiful and necessary.
 We are the joyful bringer of sad truths.
 Our essential selves fueled by the sweetness of life.
 We are fully alive and connected to everything else, feel our community of support working toward a positive future.
 We are a Bridge Between the Earth and God. We fully appreciate the glory of creation.
 We awaken to be part of Gaia—we are the very consciousness of Gaia..
 We have come to understand that crises do not happen to us, but FOR us.
 We are a species that is deeply aware of the connection between one another, the web of life, and the cosmos. Together, we stand at a threshold of a leap in consciousness.
 We are storytellers.
 We hold paradox.
 We are people who can see into and sense the “more than” that is always happening all around us. We give voice to this dynamism and make it visible and explicit so that other people can forge relationships with it.
 We are a part of the human family that has been doing since the beginning of time.
 We are humble. We are like rocks because we come from rocks.
 At our core, we are old, wise, slower to make judgments.
 We are solid, stable, dependable, and yet we are porous, permeable, dissolving with every breath.
 We accept and embrace our mortality.

The darker it becomes, the brighter we glow.

From how responses from culture have changed one’s activism...

We are tempered by resistance.
 We are strategic and rest in the truths of reality.
 Sometimes we speak in riddles, sometimes in stories. We are nimble and full of wit.

Rather than convince, we inspire and open hearts.
 We modulate and seep like water flowing to the sea. We don't force, we flow.
 We have vision but an infinitely flexible agendas.
 We focus on that which can be done. We invest in truth.
 Like nature we are multi-lingual and speak in many tongues—to children, scientists,
 voters, skeptics, business people, each other.
 The truths that we carry are adaptable to all situations.
 We find common ground between because we all belong in this great web of life.
 We stand easily in the shoes of others.
 We engage easily and with relaxed wisdom.
 We accept being different and embrace diversity.
 Whether praise or hostility, admiration or ridicule, success or failure, we trust our inner
 knowing.

We willingly leave situations that are no longer congruent with our inmost authenticity
 and effectiveness.
 For us, darkness is a teacher, it enforces discipline, and learning.
 There is always something to hold on to.
 I know I am a tendril of life.
 I trust that I am guided by the whole system of self, community, Earth, Universe.
 We are guided by what is possible because for us this possibility already exists.
 We are future oriented people and are willing to endure the dissonance between what is
 now and what will be.
 Because we embody the future, we trust and willingly endure the process of change.
 We enjoy the challenge of being a calm center amidst chaos
 We all have a purpose...
 We embrace mainstream culture though we do not identify it.
 We are inclusive of culture, but also larger, transcendent, embracing, compassionate.
 Everything is change. Life has its own imperative.
 We know our purpose, that we each have something unique and revolutionary to share.
 We know life is sacred and have faith in its unfolding.
 We are constantly guided by life.

We surrender by softening the emotional rigidity of our hearts
 Thus we have the power of nature and are blessed.

APPENDIX 14

SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Summary of Learnings—Soule—Ecological Initiation 9/25/14

“Never give up, no matter what happens, never give up.” ~H.H. Dalai Lama

Learning One: Tight shoes are discarded.

The severance phase of ecological initiation is often marked by a chafing discomfort within a culture, community and/or family that does not share one’s values and concerns. Unlike traditional initiations, where a temporary separation is designed to update a sense of belonging and promote social cohesion, the severance phase of ecological initiation can mark a permanent divergence from values and aspirations of dominant culture.

Learning Two: Liminality tempers ecological identity.

Exile from dominant culture—suffering ridicule, enduring ongoing heartbreak, and the constant struggle to build bridges of connection—can provide the grueling conditions necessary to ripen the strategic and spiritual dimensions of mature ecological identity.

Learning Three: We will never have dessert.

Seasoned activists learn to redefine notions of success or failure, in part by coming to understand that theirs is a long journey whose destination is unknown and uncertain. They create stability and peace by finding community, situating themselves in a larger story, and celebrating small victories along the way.

Learning Four: Context Capacitates

Integral belonging within an expanding context of wild nature can provide refuge, sustenance, and guidance commensurate with one’s inclusive circle of concern. Over time and with conscious effort, attunement to the teleology of wild nature can also call forth capabilities that promote effective action, encourage empathy, and bequeath insights that ripen ecological identity and promote effective action in (and for) our world.

Cumulative Learning: Malady begets medicine

Sensitivity to the illuminating malady of environmental crises may call forth and ripen responsive healing capacities of mature ecological belonging. The adventures (and misadventures) of one’s unique responsiveness to the suffering of our organic world can create the terrain required for initiation of capacitated ecological identity and the furthering of one’s unique destiny.

APPENDIX 15

Summary of Data

Screening for Ecological Identity (initial phone interviews, from my notes)

Can you describe your relationship to nature, to our more-than-human world?

- It's sacred. Not a 'citizen,' ... connect more to dirt and trees than I do to concrete.
- Be the glacier, that's easy. But how do you be the mountain top that got lopped off?
- [I] cultivate a practice of being seamlessly connected to living environment I am part of. I tune my senses and awareness to constant change. I wake myself up.
- Nature is manifestation through spirit. Moving beyond human centered perspective. Nature is now my spiritual home, though it has taken me a while to get there....
- The fact that I would need to describe it seems silly to me. In every breath. In my bones. Nature. It talks to me. Plants tell me their medicine. Can't separate my self.
- In the last 17 years, I formed a relationship to place I am. Home for me, a home I didn't have. Now I have an enduring relationship to plants and critters, to place.
- Absolute dependency. Awe. Respect. Fear. Humility.
- Way less human oriented. A woman thinks about children. Me, I think about acorns.
- I have come to see myself as part of nature, not separate. We can communicate with all different kinds of species. We can share ideas, power, and medicine. I have come to that point over the years, especially through herbal studies.
- I feel nature is the ground of my being. Continuously nurtured by that connection. At the same time, as an express or extension of the natural world, I also bear the distress that the natural world has experienced by the over-demand and overload being asked of the earth. In terms of purifying pollutants and providing resources for form of civilization on earth. Works both ways to me.
- It's like being at home. Comfortable. In my skin. My spirit. Everything. Just being. It's home. Grew up in Andes. Complete communication. It's alive. No hierarchy. Yet I feel so humble. Trees mountains. I am the one being take care of. Much more than with people. There is a trusting part. Especially when I am in despair. I go and am just part of it. I care of them and they take care of me. There

is something so primal that wakes up. Not in the head. Slows down. Just being. Being more awake. Not so lost in thoughts feelings emotions. Just present with what is.

Transcriptions from Day One

PARTICIPANTS' PSEUDONYMS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Zoë | 7. Otter |
| 2. Sun | 8. Sequoia |
| 3. T. officinale” (Dandelion) | 9. Little Bear |
| 4. Phoebe” | 10. Dragonfly |
| 5. Priscilla” | 11. Chance |
| 6. River Oshun” | |

Day One: Pertinent Journal Transcriptions—Organized by Questions

Phase I. Severance

What called them is:

Plant Medicine.
Truth.
Defense of the Land.
Community.
Desire to live honestly.
Protect the Earth.
Love of nature and grief
Desire to know life honestly.
A Healing racial injustice.
Bigger story.
Deep injustice of indigenous people
The land and a desire to heal the land.

What they left behind is...

Traditional Medicine
Career.
Having a private life.
Everything I knew
An old world of missed connections.
Career, comfort, and being accepted.
Naïveté, ignorance, innocence.
White racism and feelings of superiority.
Externally defined pathways
Security and safety of the corporate world
A long list!
Being normal.

After crossing the line to a “new life”

“Hard Truths one carries” and “what is it like.”

SUN: It is certainly possible and possibly certain, that the Earth will be uninhabitable for complex life in a few generations. What is needed is truth telling. Facing what’s coming down. Forging bonds of love and friendship. Building resilience. Doing what we can to restore protect and enhance life.

What’s it like to carry? Grief. Courage. Poignancy. Blame/no blame.

T. officinale (Dandelion): The world we leave is the world we ruined. I will lose in my efforts to change this suicidal homicidal course...

What’s it like? Grave. I settle into this thought and it makes my heart slow down.

Phoebe: To heal ourselves—open channels to connect with nature/divine. Follow our hearts, not egos. Love. Go to light, not fear. Nature is alive, conscious, and sacred. Our collective/personal human traumas are turning paradise into hell. There is evil—and we need to fight it by transforming ourselves and our communities. The only true way to do it is love—[though] love may not prevail for Humanity. The world is headed for dark times. Many people are going to die and other species.

What’s it like to carry your truth? How do we become lights in this darkness!?

River-Oshun: We don’t have time to continue living this way, dishonoring the natural world, us. I am committed to changing myself and bring awareness about natural plants.

Otter: Time is old: Geology passing before our eyes. I feel overwhelmed and alive.

Dragonfly: We are approaching the end of human civilization as we know it. Many species will continue, many will go extinct. Humanity? Up for grabs—pockets of social cohesion—rampant suffering is inevitable. Soul, Air, Water, Climate—all changed by actions of our species. Great changes are upon us. The myths of human-centrality and separation from the rest of nature will end. These are very unwelcome topics especially among activists.

My notes: Activists live with an excruciating amount of uncertainty AND certainty.

Chance: We need a bigger story. A story that calls us back into harmony with the web of life. The basis of life is being deeply harmed. Humanity is largely oblivious. And unhappy. We don’t know and we need to acknowledge that we don’t know. “We” are going against larger flow of Dominant Culture. *His notes in sidebar:*

1. I am part of the ecology.
2. I am part of the “problem”
3. The problem is part of the ecology.
4. I’m finding myself on the verge of tears right now.

Further down he writes in the margin: What is needed is the love of story, the pain of what we’re doing to ourselves and one another and the web of life, and letting go of an egoic wanting to be of consequence. Discombobulating. I am way too much in my

head and have difficulty being somatically connected with self, others, web of life, cosmos.

Zoë: There are practices that will allow us to neural [*sic*] integrate into environment. The planet and specific places want and are waiting to interact with us. These truths will not come alive until I can collaborate with others.

Part 2. Liminal Journey and Interfacing with Dominant Culture

How is it for you speak a “hard truth”?

Sun: “The particular truth I share is very difficult to speak with others about—dominant and progressive culture equally—because it is about a dire prospect that no one, myself included, wants to hold, let alone endure.”

T. officinale (Dandelion): The topic I chose to speak about (toxics) is actually less fraught because it’s more factual. If I had talked about my truths that are deeper—like addiction and the loss of nature as matrix for human experience—that would not be useful. I wouldn’t go there. It’s too personal.

Pricilla: It is very hard, because I have been misunderstood so many times. But I have still done it and felt empowered by it. Speaking hard truths through art has been one of my preferred ways of doing it.

Phoebe: It feels like a burden to carry—and I find that I don’t want to share my truth so often although it comes out anyway. My tongue speaks it even if I try to stop it and then I feel like I am too loud or a bummer or unpopular. I tend to think I am too intense—and then retreat. I also have little patience for bullsh*t.

River-Oshun: I used to be underground about my work (with medicinal plants) and my relationship to the natural world, plant medicines, because it was in opposition to the medical field in which I was immersed all my life I am very open now about it because I have nothing to lose since I walked away from it a few years ago.

Otter: It is difficult, because the truth I carry doesn’t imply specific actions, and even the activists who care are resistant. I feel at odds with my natural allies.

Sequoiah: It is a burden on my soul, but one that I accept because I cannot “unknow” the hard truths that I know. I am grateful for those people with whom I can share these truths.

Dragonfly: Somewhat difficult. I’m vulnerable to criticisms of “not knowing enough”, “not articulate enough.” I fear losing friends if I come to be seen as a bearer of bad news.

Chance: I’ve been taught to not speak the hard truth to dominant culture to speak only when I have a sense that what I have to say will be received. It’s hard to carry....I tend to avoid such interactions or talk more superficially.

Zoë: Frustrating—but it is also a continuation of a family pattern of not feeling listened to. I really wish we had culture that honored the insights of others.

Little Bear: Unsure about truth, hard or otherwise...I carry almost secretly my truth that life is NOT precious. It just is. The meaning of life is compost. Sustaining life, nurturing it is not an imperative in a Kantian sense but it makes us feel good.

How does the reception of “dominant culture” affect you personally?

Sun: This varies in relation to the set, setting, and my own source of clarity and balance I have felt intimidated in circumstances where I feel rejection of my perspective is likely. ...Over time my reticence has receded and my courage and conviction has strengthened.

T. officinale (Dandelion): I want data in my hands to refer to, to refute stupidity. But I know that doesn't work either. It just makes me feel like I'm “right” because i [*sic*] can back up a specific claim with scientific proof. That's not what changes people's minds or beliefs, though, because we see how beliefs are manipulated in dominant culture....

Pricilla: It makes me want to get further and further away from it, and then make “forays” out into the world for specific projects and encounters.

Phoebe: I isolate—but I also try to tell people what they can handle in a kind of uplifting way like they are woven in a web of sugar from sunlight. Get people to love the Earth and love Each other—to care—there is only a select group that I talk about my projections/visions of the great unraveling.

River-Oshun: I am not trying to convince dominant culture of the beliefs I have about nature and natural plants, but I don't hide anymore as well.

Otter: ... I don't always try to confront “D.C.” directly. I don't see this as affecting me, but rather guiding where I search to have influence.

Sequoiah: There are some people to who I can say everything, and there are some things that I can say to everyone. Learning to differentiate these has been essential to my continued work in the world.

Dragonfly: Makes me very sad. Makes me want to cry out about the unfairness to other species as a result of our greed and ignorance of consequences of our choices.

Chance: I tend not to speak hard truths to the dominant culture. It's also painful to see how dominant culture is tearing into the web of life and to each other. I find myself either curling into myself and tuning out, or I try to catch my stories, and realize that I can never have the full story, to relax and see all the positive changes happening.

Zoë: I keep trying to convince and cajole, even when a good part of me knows it is not an effective strategy. The skepticism and antagonism makes me feel small, isolated. I go from that to thinking, “well, then I'll just create a separate world and live in it the way I know is possible.”

Little Bear: I spent decades working in a corporate world and knew much of me had to be kept secret from others. Always outside. Conformed enough to earn a living but, alien.

In what ways have responses from dominant culture changed your activism?

Sun: Resistance and persistence of the dominant culture have increased my skepticism that the juggernaut of destruction can be slowed enough to avert dire consequences....

T. officinale (Dandelion): You have to be critical in assessing the effectiveness of your action, because there is so f**king much (double underline) opposition to what

seems like common sense. Strategic, that's the word. Which is good. It's like tempering steel.

Pricilla: I used to be very engaged in direct action/civil disobedience, but the violence I encountered there made me want to change the way I participated. I got much more into expressing my ideas through art.

Phoebe:(can't read) ...sometimes I speak in riddles sometimes I speak in stories—I ask a lot of questions and try to let people save face. I just want people to connect to nature I try to find common ground. I don't try to convince groups of people any more. But I try to inspire them to open their hearts.

River-Oshun: They have made me stronger in my actions of what I truly believe. I don't try to convince dominant culture...

Otter: When I see dominant culture's responses to activism, it more informs my ideal of what works or does not in activism. It tends to make me identify less with mainstream activism, which I experiences as its own form of dominant culture.

Sequoiah: I have learned to modulate what I share according to my audience. I try to find the language and metaphors that people can hear. I know that not everyone will be receptive to what I would like to say, so I offer as much as I can in a form that might be heard.

Dragonfly: Made me see the naiveté of wanting to “save the planet.” Made me focus more on local issues and give support to those orgs that have managed to create a real force to challenge dominant culture like Earth Justice and Center for Biodiversity.

Chance: I tend to hang with people who are not steeped in dominant culture, with my own tribe (preaching to the choir), and talk with those who seem open to change (potential converts to the choir). If I do interact with dominant culture, I do so without much of an agenda of trying to force change or persuade.

Zoë: It inspired me to turn to neuroscience as a language that more mainstream people may be receptive to. You can say the same thing using neuroscience vocab or “woo woo” energy language—so I can adapt what I am advocating for to different audiences.

Little Bear: I seek compromise. Remaining cautious of taking too much risk...

On a scale from 1-10, rate your overall relationship to dominant western culture.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

“In Synch with Dominant Culture”

“Totally Outside the Bounds of ‘Normal’”

Average 8.18

In the activity today, how was it to be a vocal member of dominant culture?

Sun: Very difficult—hard to assume that “voice” even with irony...

T. officinale (Dandelion): Really draining and uncomfortable...

Pricilla: I felt bad to be so critical...

Phoebe: It was fun at first and then it grew tiring....I felt dumb and reactive.

River-Oshun: [Not] a vocal part of the dominant culture. Hard to be in their shoes....

Otter: A bit contrived. I don't find myself believing enough in dominant culture's attitudes to truly role play them in an effective way.

Sequoiah: Sad.

Dragonfly: Didn't feel "natural" to who I am.

My Notes: *Potentially, can't the ecological self feel all beings as "self?"*

Chance: I couldn't do it very well—I didn't want to smack people down!

Zoë: It felt good to heckle within the safety of a large group. It made me realize how angry I actually—or at least a part of me is. In my work, I never let that show.

Little Bear: Kind of regressive—have spent my whole life being different from that culture. Helpful, I suppose, to put ourselves even briefly and in maybe oversimplified ways into the minds of others; those others have to be informed somehow, that Fox News is not the Gospel....So while very uncomfortable, can be useful; thanks.

List responses from dominant culture that have affected you and/or your work:

Sun: Denial. Aggressive rejection. Un- or ill-informed counter argument. Ignorance.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Half measures and half-truths are the worst of them....

Pricilla: violence. Criticism. Lack of support. Misunderstanding.

Phoebe: Ridicule. Abandonment. Loss of jobs. Sexism. Hatred. Isolation.

River-Oshun: ...doing something illegal can harm to my well-being and my daughter's.

Otter: It doesn't matter, the earth will flick us off anyway....

Sequoiah: Ridicule. Admiration. Misunderstanding. Hostility. Praise. Success. Failure.

Dragonfly: ...my friends have said they'd like to know more too, in small doses.

Chance: You should have a "real job. You should be able to stand on your own two feet. You should be married, have kids, buy a house, settle down. Don't worry about ecology and social justice issues. You should have a more conservative point of view....

Zoë: You are not a neuroscientist. You haven't worked with indigenous people so they probably won't be receptive to what you have to say. How is this going to stop BP from drilling oil under some indigenous coastal community? I have no idea what you're talking about. This is too scientific for me. Yes, but what exactly are you offering? You're going to need to dumb this down a bit.

Little Bear: Mainly I've shrunk from revealing 'me.' Rejection from parents others...

Misunderstanding by work colleagues....Antagonism...Support from friends...

Circle ones that have hampered your progress. (most circled a few, except Phoebe.)

Phoebe: In the long run, none of the responses hamper my progress—but I have internalized a feeling that I cannot be financially successful and work for change. It is the above responses that have helped me progress into the strong persona I am.

Post Tunnel Walk Reflection--What carries you forward through "dark times?"

Sun: Knowing I am a tendril of life, of nature, probing the unknown, responding as I am guided by the “whole system” of self, community, Earth and universe.

T. officinale (Dandelion): The knowledge that things change. Everything changes, is change, all the time. And that life is its own imperative.

Pricilla: Connection to the earth, or rather feeling that I am part of it. Seeing the bigger picture and knowing that the dark times will pass. Feeling connected to the past and the future as well as being rooted in the present moment.

Phoebe: A feeling a faith and truth—knowing my purpose. Knowing life is sacred, interconnected, and conscious and tapping into this sacredness that leads me on my path.

River-Oshun: The spirit that has gone so many times through the dark night of the soul...the trusting that this will pass too, whatever “this” is...holding fear and trust at the same time and taking action.

Otter: (oops, before tunnel): Faith. Faith that I do have something unique and revolutionary to share. And the occasional person who becomes truly interested inspired by my message. Patience. Connection to deeper time. Enjoyment of the challenge of being a calm center amidst chaos...a deeper connection to spirituality and depth.

Sequoiah: Faith in the unfolding of life. Support and love from my wife and friends. The Heart Sutra. Poetry, pottery, music, my garden, beauty. Not attachment to outcomes.

Dragonfly: caring, heart, compassion, “the pain is my pain.”

Zoë: The sense that I can do this—live it, embody it—even without other people....

Little Bear: Friends, dogs, garden; humor; work that has meaning. Hard knowledge that nothing means too much. I can let go of almost anything. It feels good to let go....

Darkness is temporary. It is not all bad. Darkness teaches, enforces discipline, learning.

Chance: ...[M]y inner resilience. To examine continually the stories I tell myself when the stories are dark, to remember that many stories aren’t accurate, or even lies I tell myself. I also try to remember that dark times do not last forever.

If environmental crises were an “invitation” for humanity, briefly describe what or who are we invited to become? (A source for group definition of ‘ecological self’)

Sun: The joyful bringer of sad truths.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Deeper and more essential iterations of ourselves, which in almost every case (excepting psychopaths) (I think) are good, and “run on sweetness.”

Pricilla: We are invited to become more fully alive and connected to everything else, to be and experience that we are part of the whole, not separate from it. We are invited to be part of a community of support that is working toward a positive future.

Phoebe: Awakened Ecological Beings. I believe Humans are put here to be a Bridge Between the Earth and God, to Fully appreciate the glory of creation. But we forgot—the invitation is to awaken and be part of Gaia—the consciousness of Gaia.

River-Oshun: We are invited to become more aware that we are nature, and that we are all interconnected. We have to take our place in this web of life.

Otter: The crisis is an invitation to evolve—individually and collectively. To move from an individual to a collective focus that embraces a higher level of complexity.

Sequoiah: “Grow or die.” We are challenged to grow into a more widely understood and accepted story of the interconnectedness of all things, on in which humanity plays a role of partnership with the community of all beings, of co-creators with the earth.

Dragonfly: Our wisest, most compassionate selves. [A] collective consciousness. Earth is a beautiful and harsh training arena for higher consciousness for all species.

Chance: ...to become aware of our story of separation so we might realize how small and dysfunctional it is, and to become a species that is deeply aware of the connection between one another, the web of life, and the cosmos. It's possible that we are one threshold of unimaginable evolving leap in consciousness.

Zoë: Storytellers: people who can see into and sense the “more than” that is always happening all around us. People who can give voice to this dynamism and make it visible and explicit so that other people can forge relationships with it. What artists [do].

Little Bear: Maybe to become rocks? Older, wiser, slower to make judgments; to be solid, stable, dependable, but still porous, sometimes permeable....to dissolve eventually. To accept our mortality. To embrace our mortality?

Rose Garden #3: The Tempering of Daily Life (Incorporation)

1) In terms of “moving into action,” what were the main struggles you faced?

Sun: Cultural make-up. Reticence to engage people in difficult matters. Reticence to enter fray. Intransigence of the systemic problems. Wealth and power of the opposition. Ignorance of general population.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Identifying a place where I could be effective. Finding places where people were willing/forced to listen. Getting [info] beyond the converted...

Pricilla: Finding like-minded people. Finding community of support. Raising a child.

River-Oshun: Moving into illegal system. Fighting against medical and pharma system.

Otter: Not being satisfied with the actions provided. [Still struggling with] the accepted premise that there should be an action.

Sequoiah: Inertia. My own introversion. Unwillingness to leave what's comfortable. Fear of failures. Fear of rejection. Fear of disapproval.

Dragonfly: Sense of inadequacy. Lack of knowledge. Arguing.

Chance: Not knowing exact direction and lacking concrete story/understanding of my place in the cosmos. Realized I wasn't the problem—the culture (and its misalignment) was. Not know explicitly and specifically what my truth was—how to articulate it.

Zoë: learning to articulate coherently—bigger than issue, way of life—taken a long time. Frustrating—all the “supposed to have” hard to let go of. (this sentence circled)

Little Bear: “Everybody hates me; nobody loves me.” Fear of rejection. Not knowing what to do. Nihilism.

In terms of drumming up effective responses to your “hard truth,” rate yourself on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is “no traction” and 10 is “full-blown success.” (Would they respond or protest? Most responded! But protested on Day 2.

Most also rated a range. Expresses ambivalence? (Ranging 2-8. Average 4.6 to 6.4)

What are your core struggles as an activist?

Sun: Disconfronting [*sic*]message—assessment is dire. Feel info is unwelcome.

T. officinale (Dandelion): My own ego. Effort to expand perspective.

Pricilla: How do I support myself and stay an activist? Finding hope and optimism...

Phoebe: Making money at it. Confidence. Thinking someone else has the answers. Trusting my own journey, my own truth.

River-Oshun: Trying to educate people in traditional medical system that there are other ways of healing that are more effective. Because they cure and don't just treat symptoms.

Otter: Continuing to be open to discovering new ways of seeing. I jump to solutions is too soon because there is no patience to sit with the discomfort.

Sequoiah: Naiveté, arrogance, doubt. Arrogance—discounting the specious arguments of NIMBY's. Doubt, when confronted by people who are sure of their righteousness, it triggers my doubt. Not all bad to have to reconsider. Certitude is not a virtue...

Dragonfly: Being bearer of bad news. Not knowing enough. Feeling like a wet blanket.

Chance: Getting out of my head...I can't do it all. If I don't, the world won't collapse.

Zoe: Giving up having to convince people. Letting go of having people adopt my way (crossed out). Doing this solo thing without falling into narrative of “I have to isolate...”

Little Bear: being an outsider; don't play well with others.

Identify ways you distance yourself from or sabotage earth-centered belonging.

Sun: Partaking of fruits and comforts of society. Basing myself in city.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Not prioritizing. Consumerism is compelling....

Pricilla: Computer distractions. Driving.

Phoebe: Love my hot tub/comforts of our society. Don't listen to my gut instincts

River-Oshun: Falling into despair. Anger. Addictions (I pick them better now...).

Otter: I tend to be angry. An asshole. I will sink into my own distractions, eg alcohol. Point out the flaws in my allies...Underestimating my capacity for authority.

Sequoiah: There are ways that my lifestyle is out of harmony, eg flying, eating meat, etc. Those take some effort to reconcile. Sometimes it gets so painful to see what's

happening, esp. extinctions. I go into denial or don't pay attention to it. I prefer to be comfortable rather than uncomfortable—not backpacking/climbing, more time indoors.

Dragonfly: Spending too much time on the computer.

Chance: Don't do the things I write about: stopping and noticing, just being attentive.

A Popeye developed intellect that overpowers more presence-oriented ways of being.

Zoë: Dealing with family dynamics. My family doesn't have my worldview, fall back into old patterns that are not earth-centered belonging.

Little Bear: I don't.

Briefly describe the “role of community and/or like-minded others” in your activism.

Sun: Primary source of excellent support.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Critical!!! Support, inspiration.

Pricilla: of highest importance. I thrive in collectives, shared land, community.

Phoebe: Important! Mentorship is essential. Need for stay in power. [N]eed to move on from communities that aren't going anywhere and are holding you back—which is hard.

River-Oshun: Community is most important thing. [B]ase of indigenous communities.

Otter: It's all about community. More than taking actions.

Sequoiah: Absolutely critical. Don't need everyone in my close circle to be like-minded, but to be supportive. [Some] overlapping circles... [C]ommunity a sanctuary.

Dragonfly: Can't imagine doing it without other people. Diversity brings knowledge.

Chance: Vital. Role has been to acknowledge my accomplishments ...

Zoë: I have a group of 4 women I meet monthly for the past year. Makes it universal.

Little Bear: Absolutely critical.

Rate on a scale of 1-10, the importance of community, of belonging to a group of like-minded others.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

“Not mattering much”

“Absolutely Vital”

10 said “10,” one rated “7”

What sustains your activism?

Sun: Conviction, concern, desire to soften the blow, nature, spirit.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Community. Values, hopes, fears. Inspirational examples.

Pricilla: My friends and community. Connection to natural world. Gardening. Walking.

Phoebe: Nature. Connection to the divine. Feeling like it's my destiny. My dream-life.

River-Oshun: The love of medicinal plants. The faith that they can heal us.

Otter: faith. Sense of time on a 20,000 year scale... Taking life seriously.

Sequoiah: Sense of humor, friends, beauty of this earth, pottery, poetry... A deep faith in the unfolding of life... I am a part of the whole so what I do matters [but] I don't need to make THE difference. I can make A difference. That gives me a place to stand and a place to have more fun. Also, my Buddhist practice of non-attachment to outcomes.

Dragonfly: My husband, he cheers me on and supports me and is proud of me. Feeling like there's no other choice. I just have to be involved.

Chance: Having conversations with readers who love my book. Affirm that the message is important, valuable, needed. Having external feedbacks and interaction is reinforcing.

Zoë: Clues that confirm that I am on the right path. Meta-sense that everything I'm understanding and embodying is TRUE.

Little Bear: Love of friends who welcome me, despite myself.

What fuels your confidence?

Sun: Body of research is growing. Ideas in culture are spreading. Maturity in activism.

T. officinale (Dandelion): Purpose of life. Admiration and gratitude for fellow activists.

Pricilla: Knowing that the work is important. Community. Working for greater good.

Phoebe: God. Experience, 27 years.

River-Oshun: My direct experience with plant medicine.

Otter: What confidence? The sense that in order to be a truly spiritual person one needs to find one's center. [The] thread of humanity that is in conversation with the soul.

Sequoiah: All of the above...[his last response].

Dragonfly: Knowing others engaged in activism. Activist community. Compassion.

Chance: Feedback. Positive feedback.

Zoë: Neuroscience that gives credibility from scientific perspective—credibility...

Little Bear: Cock-eyed optimism.

Post-Initiation Reflections

List 2 or more “key moments” of Day One. What stands out?

- Speaking my “hard truth” to the group and responding to comments.
- Hearing others’ concerns and ways of responding.
- Drawing “spontaneous image”
- Reflection on my history of activism. Sensing potentialities within.
- Dominant culture dialogue. Wow!
- First line (severance). What pulls you—what you give up.
- First for the intellectual “stimulation” (shock treatment!) Second, for my heart.
- The walking and reflecting alone was powerful for me
- The exercise about the dominant culture was really hard. I had a lot of resistance.
- Realizing I have given up trying to tell the “public” about my dire perspective.
- But also being proud that I have found an important message that feels good to convey that I believe helps change the public’s engagement with nature.
- When we crossed the line the 1st time remember what we left behind.
- Walking in the Rose Garden with the thorniest and rosiest aspects of life.
- Struggling to put my worldview into a “dominant culture” vs. “activism”.
- Walking through the tunnel. Sense of darkness even among external chaos.
- Articulating how I have learned to relate to the dominant culture.
- Hearing other participants express their truths.
- Reflecting on my history as activist—gives me renewed energy for future.
- Blue damselfly that kept flitting through the group in early exercises.
- My turn on “hot seat” in “dominant Society” exercise.
- How resistant I was to the “dominant culture.”
- I enjoy the humor of the group, especially surprisingly, during the DC exercise!
- The Dominant Culture exercise—noticed [some] felt disinclined to challenge or heckle. That made me very curious.
- The tunnel. A simple experience but so evocative and archetypal. Being birthed.
- Being close to mature Dawn Redwoods.
- Hearing others speak my truth about the challenge of revealing deep eco-feelings.
- Trying to trace activism back to a starting point.
- Hearing someone else say ‘racial injustice.’

Tuolumne Highlights (We did an initial walk-through of Day One)

Severance: Questioning status quo arose from health issues, asthma in particular, which cleared up when he radically changed his diet. The success of these changes, which involved a break from dominant culture, led him to start seven natural food companies—some of which are still thriving businesses.

Liminal: What drove him onward was the “hard truth” that a tremendous amount of human suffering is avoidable. And also that “natural capital is the limiting factor of human prosperity.” Seeing what he sees “Makes you feel like an outlier... a stranger in a strange land.” When Walmart began to sell his book on the homepage, he wondered if something was wrong. He was *supposed* to be radical, on the outside. “It made me feel like I was losing my touch (*laugh*).”

Incorporation: He recognizes the benefits of ‘liminality’ and staying in inquiry. Appears to seek out places where footing is not secure and then finds firm footing. He was highly skeptical about the notion of rating one’s success, and refused. He continues to work, in collaboration with others, on the frontline of environmentalism. The dynamism of a true-heart married to a wide-ranging intellect is palpable in his presence. He is grounded in what I deem ‘ripened ecological identity.’ Hence our interview.

Highlights:

....Activism begins with a no, a protest, but then this protest needs to find a yes.

One of the things you learn is that nature sucks....Nature draws. Capillary action of the trees. Even the wind is drawn. Feminine force, a kind of magnetism.

Considers Barry Lopez to be ‘one of those people, who is fully initiated.’

Tuolumne: “Some initiations are not successful. You can be in exile and not find your way back. They’re dangerous. There is no guarantee.”

Me: Which is why people are often not interested in environmentalism. Because ecological awakening embodies a kind of change that is likely to be initiatory.”

After describing ecological initiation, Tuolumne:

“It’s the veritable string on the flour bag. Pull it, and your whole life unravels.”

SHIFT IN GOALS

1. Little Bear

Initial Goals as an Activist

Work with underprivileged people to improve their lives somehow (atone for some sense of racial guilt).

Rescue a piece of land and restore it.

To find a way to live honestly (goals are really more about self than others).

Current, after years of activism:

Current goals or intentions: Do as little damage as possible.

Let go, especially of ego; have respect, share humor.

Live long enough to see the baby oaks become toddlers.

Die soon enough that I am not a burden.

2. Zoe:

Initial Goals

1. To communicate with places through dance.

To find a context/community in which this practice we valued and contributed something of value to the community.

Current Goals:

To translate places through embodied experience into art-installation art—creating “altars” that somehow make visible my embodied experience of the more-than-visible, dynamic, energetic, always changing aliveness of the place.

Visual art offers more opportunity for dialogue and relationship for more people than dance does, I think. Stays in place over time—more people become part of the story.

These aspects form concentric "spheres" of experience: I see them as progressing from the outside in and upward through the body: ecological, sensory, emotional, cognitive, expressive, cultural/symbolic, mythological, spiritual. The realization I came to in my M.A. research is that *all of these aspects of experience are experienced in the body*, it's our culture that fragments and separates them out into different things; but somewhere in our embodied experience, somewhere "upstream" of the typical way our culture fractures and processes experience, they're still whole, still integrated. I want to create spaces where people can consciously experience not only this wholeness, but the *aliveness* of this wholeness -- the alive wholeness that links our bodies to the world.

3. Otter:

Initial Goals

My goal during departure was to live a goal-less life. I saw the methodical reduction of life to goals and plans as a part of what was destroying the magic of trees older than countries.

The goal became something of living life as a work of art and returning to a time in humanity before civilization.

I dreamt of just living on a fjord somewhere far north.

My goal became to live a unique life.

I also started seeing “metabeings” at that time—the city as an organism, and had a goal of communicating that and trying to up the level of imagination and discovery generally.

Current Goals

To serve evolution by being as evolved and evolving a human as possible.

To be deepening, discovery, and then return; providing (?) a more complex, deep understanding and relationship to life.

My goal is to have an impact on humanity on a millennial scale.

4. Priscilla:

Initial Goals

I wanted to protect the earth from further damage, to stop the rape specifically at the time.

I really crossed “over the line” for good when I was going to get arrested for the first time while trying to prevent a nuclear power plant from opening.

My goal was to “save the planet” from destruction, and to do so in the context of a caring community of support.

Current:

I still want to protect the earth from further damage, but I realize now that it’s so important to also enjoy where we are, to find balance, to take care of ourselves and families and communities after all, we are all part of the earth.

Being a part of a caring community continues to be vitally important to me.

5. Phoebe:

Initial Goals

Find people who loved life and act accordingly

Adventure

Learn indigenous ways

Cast my life into Fate knowing that I am not alone in feeling deeply for the earth and wanting to fign injustice and war—yet I had not actually had evidence that such a group existed—I knew in my hear that there were other who must feel like me...

Current

Be a light in dark days that are coming—provide leadership.

Always turn to love and not fear

Show people how to love sand connect to nature so we can change our relationship to the Earth and ourselves.

Develop my dreams and follow in Great Spirit’s plan for me---

Find warrior brothers and sisters and move through these times

Live in Joy

Get good at healing. Anti-biotic resistant bacteria with herbs because I believe this is to going to be a serious issue in 10 years.

6. River Oshun

Initial Goals My goal was to bring the plant medicine experience to people as a way of connecting to nature.

Current: Connecting people to nature by the use of plant medicine that way they can feel at home with it.

7. T. Officinales

Initial Goals

Fight for the water. Protect the water

Educate people about toxics in our food, in our world. How to avoid/and stop (toxics).

Plant seeds of love for the outside that will help young peeps find their way and place

Live in such a way as to show that another world is unfolding—create communities of radical connections.

Current:

my goals remain the same. The number hierarchy shifts, but that's still it.

The methods I use to achieve those goals changes. I'm a contextual person—tactics and needs change and I try to do what needs to be done in front of, or as, or in response to that changing.

My ability to draw connections and co...(concillations?) between different facets of the larger challenges has grown—and to see that work in one small part CAN be helpful in many places—not always but helps in prioritizing work.

8. Sun:**My early goals:**

Wake everybody up!

Stop all the pollution

Save the forests

Protect and restore native habitats

Elect better leaders to safeguard nature

Interrupt/turn around the military industrial complex

Save endangered species

Help foment a mass environmental movement

New Goals:

First, past goals still operate as a memory of love and motivation in a youthful form

Add a critical note to the growing concern about global warming

Bring rational realism and spiritual wisdom together

Provide love, support, equanimity for people in distress

9. Chance (David):**My goals at that moment:**

I don't recall clear goals. I retreated to an old career of piloting, simply because I didn't know what else to do. It took maybe 10 years to begin to be clear on what my work was.

I'm still clarifying it 20 years later; but it's become clear that it is to help challenge the larger "story" of our culture.

written on inside cover of his journal--

Stop the damage

Change the system

Shifting consciousness

10. Dragonfly (Cindy)**Goals when I recognize racism in my community, my church, my self:**

To speak against racism

To become a crusader for social justice

To stop accepting racial stereotypes

To bring some sort of racial justice into the world

To get out of Dearborn MI physically as well as psychically
 To make a contribution beyond my own benefit

Current:

Goals I listed at the beginning pertained to when I discovered activism at 13
 Current goals: Raise awareness about “end of civilization as we know it”
 Live in present moment
 Develop a vision for a possible positive future even if it doesn’t include me

11. Sequoiah

My goal was to protect my community from unsustainable development.

Current: This original goal was based on my estimate—at the time—of what I could do. My desire was to protect the Earth.

My goal has grown to be more encompassing on the one hand, and less ambitions on the other. If it is now to contribute, on balance, more to the unfolding of life than to it’s diminishment.

My Notes: Might I be observing that goals are becoming principles to live by? That one can do anywhere at any time?

e.g. Principles are more sustaining than specific goals (when success not readily achieved) or, as one participant put it, “My goal has grown to be more encompassing on the one hand, and less ambitions on the other.”

Day Two

General Transcriptions of Day II

Sitting in a circle in Cordornices, Sunday morning. Lovely. Cool. Birds singing. Quiet.

Discussing Severance: What it is: Leave an old way of life behind and open to something new.....

Phoebe: “I have a hard time with this. I was born like that.”

Otter: Wary of structured ways we understand our activism...

T. officinale: We were looking for something different. (Conversation about rebelliousness.)

Carter “Always being people who point out what is wrong.”

Jolie: Severance for me: I am going to kill myself if I stay here. I hate this life. There was no other alternative. *(She is openly impatient with non-wakers, though her work is about waking people up. I wonder if not perceiving ‘severance hinders empathy for severance.)*

Discussion: Severance, for people in our group, a necessity. Often better than what was.

Pricilla: “This was in no way true to who I am.”

Carter “We need to make the shift [for others] natural.”

Phoebe: “So that it will feel better for them.”

Shams quotes Rumi “Stay in the company of lovers...”

Rachel: “We used to say, ‘if people only knew how much fun we were having, they would want to join us.’”

Agreement, that being more tuned into something that no one wants to talk about makes you an outsider. That’s what keeps you in that exiled position. Discuss: Initiation honors exile.

Sequoia: “We see chem trails, other people other people see contrails.... There is a kind of a narcissism thinking that we have a lock on the truth.”

Sun: I remember asking Joanna [Macy], how do you respond to a broad spectrum of people, including others who don’t believe what you are saying. She responded, “Shams, there is no one who is not in grief about our world.”

Discuss: Riptide swimmers swim sideways. That only Carter and Shams both shared the heartfelt truth openly. Most others presented a softened version. We learn to swim sideways.

Someone says: “Except Carter.”

Me: Yes, it (how he ‘swims’) bugs everyone. Did you notice? *Laughter...*

Phoebe: “I notice it all the time.” *Laughter.* People generally agreed.

Little Bear: Dominant culture is too scared. In some way, I think that the DC is not worthy of my truth. Or maybe my truth is evolving. Not ready for primetime.

Phoebe: Hard truth I am also carrying is that trees talk to me and tell me what to do. I don’t share that! Because people aren’t ready to hear it. What is truthful and what is useful? How is it useful? Not that I am limited, but there is no point. I’m not oppressed. I am not stuck in in-between place. I know where I am. I simply help people connect.

Chance: I’ve had enough ridicule in my life and I am getting over it and integrating that. I translated, how does one present truth to dc in ways that they can hear it?

Me: I made it very simple: Speak your hard truths to Dominant Culture, but.....

Slight defensiveness. Then most people admit they don’t speak their hard truths openly.

Everyone agrees, that there are many people around us who know something they are afraid to talk about. This is not meant to be a judgment, I try to reassure them...

Phoebe: There is nothing wrong with not speaking truth directly. “

People slightly defensive about what I observed, agree there was nothing wrong but...

Carter “Yes nothing wrong, but look. No one is talking about what is *really* going on.

Larry: We have to gauge what emotion a group of people are capable of experiencing.”

Jolie: Based on experience...Speaking as somebody who has tried to change people’s minds, tried many different approaches,...*she feels fine about sideway swimming. Doesn’t get that this is not a critical finding. Persists on defending it. After long discussion, the group relaxes into a place of mutual understanding about the frame of initiation, severance, and liminality.*

At one point, even Little Bear nods—she is the toughest to have on board. Over the course of the day, she is increasingly involved and verbal. At the end of the day, she actually comes up and thanks me for broadening her perspective. She said that it took awhile to understand my language, but in the end she did and gained a lot from the two days.

Me: One more question. Spiritual practice: How much are we all nourished by practices that are outside of your activism, a separate practice?

Most agreed that they go outside the “built environment” for nourishment.

Chance: Get out of chatter in my head to connect with essential aspect of creation.

Sun: Many religious practices build upon the imprint of separation that we have to get “beyond.” Many practices are separative.

Me: What about yours? Are they non-separative

Sun: That’s an interesting question.

Chance: When I hear the question that our spiritual practice is the former, connected to creator and creation, not premise of separation.

Otter: Spirituality a complex topic. An I-Thou relationship.

Me: Just wondering how much cultivating a spiritual life has gone hand in hand with activism.

Pricilla: For me, it’s always been part of my activism....Eventually, I needed to be connected to earth in many ways. Gardening. Connecting to natural world spiritual world. Unless I have that balance, then I am just crazed and unhappy. I can only do my activist work if I have that balance. It is essential. I prefer to do art. Now spirituality has changed me completely, I am relating to plants more than I am relating to people! (laughs)

Me: Cindy, I see you as a case study: The more extreme one’s activism-focus (yours being nuclear, the most difficult of all), the more deeply grounded in a spiritual practice one needs to be. (*agreement in circle*)

Discussion: The hard truths one carries about terrible death and disaster pushes activist to find balance on the side of everlasting life, healing, and inter-being.

Phoebe: I would say I am more of a spiritual activist now than I am an environmental activist. I can’t possibly separate them....I feel like my work is being laid out for me. I am just following along. Now there is no separation between my spirit and activism.

Sun: My process has a cognitive dimension, unraveling things I have been taught. And undoing lenses I was taught to see through. Even though I left my family and cultural orientation and went into new dimension in Sufi community which was beautiful and vast and a much more expansive reality, still it took me time to realize there was an impinging anthropomorphic and anthropocentric structure. Essentially human triumphalism was build into it in subtle ways. We humans are at the apex. Also, with that orientation, loss of a sense of being a creature. We have left creature-hood. So I came back down, became a creature, met John Seed, and I got reincorporated into the web of life in a different way. Not that I left it, since a kid. Caldicot’s film, *The Last Epidemic*, was **my first shattering**. (*great term*)

Discussion about 'success.' Upon reflections, they are triggered by notion of success! Because we are a very success-oriented culture, this can be a triggering word or goal.

Otter: I find it very triggering.

Much laughter. General enthusiastic agreement in circle.

Pricilla: Yes, and there are important milestones that should be acknowledged and celebrated. But we often don't do it because we are trying to measure it in the traditional way. At some point we have to say, 'Now wait a minute. We just had what would be considered in our culture a major victory and nobody is naming it or congratulating anybody or having a party.' So our group made a decision to stop and celebrate once in awhile when a shift happens."

Chance: Success would be getting rid of the desire to have success.

T.Officinales: If you can get of your ass and do good things, the wwhoo-hooooo! I battled the forces of entropy!" *Much laughter...* You can have a success even if the lawsuit fails.

Little Bear: I like the idea that there are incremental successes. That for each of us we look at success in our lives and it can be as small as—oh, I plant a lot of acorns. Even if a baby tree survives even into the first couple of years, that is a huge success.... We succeed if we can give up success. *(laughter)* I like the comments about celebrating. We succeeded in creating a marshland. Small. But it was a good party. *Laughter! Hoots!*

Sequoia—The question of success is rooted in there being an end. And the story never ends. Our human chapter in the story may end, but the story goes on. ... Where I take comfort is knowing that we, as life, have mostly been bacteria *(laughter)*. That is our greatest success story so far. Succession is what follows. We don't know what follows.

Phoebe: When we wake up to the fact that we cannot separate ourselves from the earth. From that place when we stop being separate, when we stop having goals of success, That's total success! Wow! *(Insights are emerging with this question...)*

Sequoiah: There is spiritual practice and spiritual experience. Most of my practice is mindfulness and that has nothing to do with spiritual experience—every once in awhile *(laughter)* But most spiritual experience is an I-Thou experience with another person, or an animal, or the cosmos. Dogen says, "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be awakened into the 10,000 things." By which he means, the cosmos. To be awakened into that is the liberation. That, to me, where the intersection between spirituality and activism is. When those epiphanies I have had, of awakening into my larger being is where total freedom is. Now that I have had those experiences, I know I have nothing to lose. It's safe to die. And it is safe for our species to die.

Me: One gains a stark sense of mortality combined with the sense there is no dying experientially resembles ancient initiations, and also yields similar fruits. As with difficult initiations, out of necessity one comes to this awakening. *(Silence, and agreeable mutual feeling of arriving somewhere together. Conversation comes to a natural close.)*

Some go to restrooms. The circle spontaneously changes, and we huddle as a tighter group in a sunny spot. It has been chilly. I've loaned out all my jackets and

blankets. I've provided nourishing food. People stick around, hang tight with total rapt attention. Those who come back join the huddle. We don't go back to our seats again. The sense of cohesion is palpable. Comfortable. Listening. Laughter. New insights arise in a lively conversation.

Sentences begin with, "My initiation for me in my activism!" They are using the language! We discuss people's initiatory experiences. Are initiated more likely to start fresh? Then they begin to list all the new things they are starting, talking over each other.

Me—An overarching learning that I am getting is that Ecological Identity IS the initiator.

Sequoia: I would agree.

Confusion...silence, rumbling around.

Chance: Tell us more....

Sequoia: Heretical to most biologists, I would suggest there *is* a direction to evolution, but it may not be something that is really apprehensible to us (*agreement*) but there is an unfolding (*pause...thinking*)... Medievalist would say that the destiny calling us is shaping us at least as much, maybe more, than our history or our past.

Otter: The pull of the future is greater than the push of the past.

This is final conversation. We are tight group now, speaking almost as one. Completing each other sentences. Willing to ask questions and let other respond, then joining the responses. On a roll. Everyone in one-mind.

Phoebe: So the earth is waking up.

Others, simultaneously, say "...Through us!"

Phoebe: Yes yes, *through* us! We are becoming conscious (*yes yes yes in background*) and the dark place where we are headed is pushing us to remember: That "we are one."

Chance: That is the interesting thing about initiation as well. In modern culture, we associate it with vision quests or ceremonies. There the stakes are not quite as high... You can fail. It is deeply consequential. Hard to have this kind of consequential initiation in our culture.

Sequoia: Everybody wants to be reborn and nobody wants to die.

Laughter...Right!

Discuss how people ARE dying in this initiation. *The conversation has a life of its own, with initiation as a new frame. Exciting! Everyone seems in board! Now the whole conversation has elevated. Fresh inspiration rising. New ideas. Bubbling energy. Laughing, talking with and over each other. They take the idea of initiation and run with it. In a small group in the sunshine spot, speaking FROM initiation. Alive atmosphere. Creativity. Fun.*

Me: Do we want to try Truth-Telling again? From where we are now?

Uplifted atmosphere carries the moment. Everyone happy to participate in exercise no one enjoyed before. Yes is palpable. Time constraints, but everyone willing. A can-do attitude.

Final exercises testing the hypothesis that the Ecological Self IS the guide and force that can become the new center of gravity for activists. That it can and could

change our conversations with and about dominant culture, for is a conversation that the earth is having with itself.

VERY different than previous exercise. Also, ecological identity needs to be intentionally grounded. Initiation not complete for most of us. We need to set our intention to step into expanded identity. But this can happen quite quickly, because we are mostly post-liminal. Most of us have “gone to the other side.”

My Notes post Truth-Telling when grounded in Ecological Identity: Sharings brought forth creative conversation rather than aggressive confrontation. Dominant culture ceased heckling, though still asked tough questions. Altogether more caring. More hard truths spoken, even REALLY hard truths. More receptivity on both sides. More poetry. More pauses. More vulnerability, willingness to engage, and dialogue.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. As will be discussed, post-modern ecological identity is not a step back into pre-modern indigenous ways, but a step forward *through* modernity and into a future that requires the full wisdom of human experience, including the struggles and gifts of modernity. By going through modernity, we are inoculated by its terrible and tragic mistakes so we do not make them again. Ecologically-oriented maturity in our modern world is still an aspiration for most people and cultures. It is our future, not our past.

2. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 1994). Scholars do not point to specific beginnings for initiation rites. Instead they refer to “archaic” or “primitive” man [*sic*] learning to work with forces of nature in a more intentional manner. For example, in *Rites and Symbols* (23), Eliade says, “For the primitive, nature is not simply natural; it is at the same time super-nature, that is, manifestation of sacred forces an figure of transcendental realities.

3. Steven Foster and Meredith Little, *The Four Shields: The Initiatory Seasons of Human Nature* (Big Pine, CA: Lost Borders Press, 1998). The authors tie initiatory cycles of change to patterns in nature.

4. Steven Foster and Meredith Little, School of Lost Borders, course notes (Big Pine CA: July 1993.) This month-long course is still being offered; see <http://schooloflostborders.org/content/ca-month-long-training-0>; (accessed March 29, 2017).

5. Renée Soule, Personal Journal (Summer, 2010). Foster was my root teacher of initiation from 1992 until his death in 2003.

6. The Fool is shown as a young man, walking unknowingly toward the brink of a precipice. In the Rider-Waite deck, he walks nonchalantly with a small white dog. He holds a white rose (a symbol of freedom from baser desires) in one hand, and in the other a small bundle of possessions, representing untapped collective knowledge. “The Fool reminds us to recognize the path of personal development within ourselves—and the stage upon that path where we find ourselves—in order to energize our movement toward deeper self-realization.” He can be a trickster; the lowest card, or the trump card. <https://www.tarot.com/tarot/cards/the-fool>; (accessed September 9, 2014).

7. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 22.

8. *Ibid.*, 27.

9. Bill Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 64.

10. Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” in *Betwixt and Between*, ed. Louise Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1987), 3.

11. Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Times Books, 2010), 2.

12. Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991), 192.

13. Arne Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, eds. Alan Drengson and Bill Deval, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2008), 93.
14. Arne Naess, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," in *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings*, ed. John Seed and others, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Catalyst Books, 1988), 26.
15. To see the human body composition as elements and compounds, see <http://chemistry.about.com/od/chemicalcomposition/a/Chemical-Composition-Of-The-Human-Body.htm>; (accessed March 1, 2017).
16. Meg Chadsey, "Hold Your Breath Activity," (Seattle: University of Washington), <http://www.oacurriculumcollection.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hold-Your-Breath-Activity-Protocol.pdf>, (accessed February 18, 2017).
17. Macy, *World as Lover*, 184.
18. *Ibid.*, 192.
19. John Seed and others, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Catalyst Books, 1988), 6.
20. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 70.
21. *Ibid.*, 64.
22. *Ibid.*, 70.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 3.
25. Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (New York: Canongate, 2005), 44-45.
26. Robert Greenway, *Psychology* courses, 1986-1990. Greenway used to joke when leading wilderness trips.
27. Steven Foster, School of Lost Borders, course notes (Big Pine CA: July 1993).
28. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 39-47. Berry speaks about initiation rites as the main way this intimacy was made manifest in ancient indigenous cultures and is then lost during phases of colonialism and the violent onset of modernity.
29. Thomas Hübl, *Timeless Wisdom Training US*, workshop notes (Petaluma, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, September 28 2015 to October 11, 2017). I am currently enrolled in this training; to learn more about his work, see <http://www.thomashuebl.com/en/>.
30. Barack Obama used this phrase in poking fun at Senator McCain on the presidential campaign trail on September 10, 2008. To view the comment, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnKI0lyIzcc>.
31. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 102.
32. Joanna Macy, "Joanna Macy in Conversation with Renée Soule: A Life of Spirit in Action," interview by Renée Soule (California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco; April 8, 2016), *CIIS Today*, Spring 2016; <http://www.ciis.edu/ciis-today/campus-calendar/macy-sp16-lec>; (accessed date).

33. Joanna Macy, *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1983), 28.

34. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1957), 188.

35. Michael Meade, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (Email correspondence: July 16, 2013). Following is full email:

Hi Renee,

Environmental crisis as initiation seems a great dissertation topic and a meaningful way to frame necessary work. With the phrase “initiatory imagination” I am combining the sense of initiation as an archetypal pattern embedded in the psyche with the power of imagination that continually shapes new visions for our lives. In the ancient philosophy of India birth began a series of initiations that continue until the final step of death. Seen another way, initiation means “to begin,” by extension to begin again and again; thus beginner’s mind that allows us to keep imagining how to start and restart our lives by finding a fresh imagination to follow. The initiatory pattern “life, death, renewal” occurs naturally in ecological systems of all kinds; for us to engage this natural, archetypal energy and psychic resource, we must use the deepest natural gift of humankind- our instinctive imagination. Thinking about your work, I recall the old idea that only myth with its great capacity for imagination can match nature with its endless capacity for change and abundance. I hope this helps move the imagining of the work along.

Best of luck to you,
Michael Meade

36. Michael Meade, “Finding your Genius in Life”, workshop (San Anselmo, CA: San Francisco Theological Seminary, December 1, 2012).

37. Paul Hawken, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (San Rafael, CA: Bioneers Michael Meade, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (San Anselmo, CA: SF Theological Seminary, December 1, 2012). Conference, October 18, 2015).

38. Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology* (Boston: Shambala, 2000), 135-6. Wilber’s main critique of ecopsychology (and other deep ecology approaches) is that they are reductionist and overly focused on interrelatedness of all beings rather than the deep interior dimensions of ecological crises. He has always insisted that Web-of-Life theories do not transform consciousness because they don’t adequately address the interior stages of consciousness development. This critique is shrugged off by scholars like Joanna Macy (who is a devout Buddhist). In part, this thesis addresses what he thinks is most needed: To “foster these many arduous ways of interior growth, none of which are addressed by most of the new-paradigm approaches.” (138). Initiation is certainly not a “new paradigm approach.” It may be too old for Wilber’s taste, but not, I would argue, for Wilber’s “One Taste.”

39. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 187.

40. Renée Soule, “A Reconnaissance of Ecopsychology: The Psychology of Ecological Transformation” (Master’s Thesis, Sonoma State University, 1993).

41. Meade, “Finding your Genius in Life”, workshop. Meade encourages people to get into the “right kind of trouble.”

42. My intention for studying in India in 1990 was to explore the connection between the human mind and environmental crises. I did not see a way to be free from suffering when earth’s ecosystems were collapsing. I thought Tibetan Buddhists would shed light on this inquiry, which, for the most part, they did not. Before the Chinese invaded Tibet, their Buddhist culture fostered wholesome environmental ethics. For them, severe environmental degradation was a new problem as well.

43. Renée Soule, Personal Journal (India, 1990). My teachers also insisted that men had more “fortunate rebirths” than women. I asked, “When women are delegated to caretaking roles in society, isn’t this more beneficial in terms of achieving buddhahood? I did not receive satisfactory answers from my teachers. For them, the ability to study the dharma was more important than living it.

44. Mary Oliver, “The Buddha’s Last Instruction” in *House of Light* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 4. Oliver writes “‘Make of yourself a light,’ said the Buddha, before he died.”

45. Karen Jaenke, “The Ecological Imagination,” workshop flier (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, July 12, 2008). Jaenke’s workshop explored the principles and practices that guide Transformative Learning at Meridian by cultivating the ecological imagination in part by sharing mythic stories of earth’s destruction and renewal alongside giving space for participants to express their emotional responses to environmental crises.

46. Ibid.

47. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 78. Beginning as a hungry grub, it eats and eats until enclosing itself in a pupa where it completely dissolves into goo. Following directions from “imaginal cells,” it mysteriously reassembles itself from chaotic goo and emerges as a winged creature. Further, *psyche*, in ancient Greek means butterfly.

48. Aaron J. Atsma, “Psyche” (Netherlands and New Zealand: Theoi Project, 2001-2017); <http://www.theoi.com/Ouranios/Psykhe.html>; (Accessed February, 19, 2017). The word psyche is *Ψυχή* (*Psykhê*) in ancient Greek or *psyche* in Latin. *Psykhê* is also the name of the long-suffering beloved of the god Eros. A beautiful mortal princess, *Psykhê* was depicted in ancient mosaic art as a butterfly-winged woman in the company of her husband, whom she won after much suffering and many trials (including a journey to the underworld).

49. The root of the name Renée comes from the word *natal*, meaning “birth.” As in the word Renaissance (which the English pronounce Renee-sance).

50. These qualities might be the appropriate ingredients of ecological initiation. I believe that shame itself has the potential for being the prime initiator of human beings, but only if initiation is properly understood. It is no accident, I believe, that most initiatory rites of passage intensely evoke the affect of shame through various extreme means—like the loss of identity, exile, humiliating experiences that are publicly witnessed or known to occur, undeserved punishments, and the ripping away of innocence, the shattering of ideals.

51. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 23.

52. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 5.

53. Ibid.

54. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 3.

55. To learn more, go to Macy’s website: <http://www.joannamacy.net/thegreatturning/three-dimensions-of-the-great-turning.html>.

56. Joanna Macy, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (Berkeley, CA: March 18, 2014). During this conversation, we discussed the initiatory dimensions of activism, her work, and her life.

57. Joanna Macy, Presenter at the “Active Hope Conference,” course notes (San Francisco: California Institute for Integral Studies, April, 11, 2015).

58. Joanna Macy, *General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

59. Ibid.

60. Plotkin was a student of Steven Foster and Meredith Little, who passed on their understanding of initiation given to them by Native American teachers and guides. The deep roots of ecological awakening theory are indigenous. It is also noteworthy that initiation, an indigenous practice, has its own theory-in-practice that can be adapted to the needs of our modern world. Theorists, including myself, are using initiation as a frame to make sense of and guide the disintegration required for renewal and as a compass in times of loss and crisis. Initiation includes a theory of change that is stable, though methods to support that change vary from culture to culture, era to era, and are dependent upon purpose.

61. See Bill Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1991); Macy, *World as Lover*, 397-406; and Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 413-415. I want my participants to explore and identify the contours of their journey rather than rely upon, or attempt to verify another person’s map. Though Plotkin’s map is clear, concise, and detailed, using it would be like working with a coloring book that is already colored in.

62. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 7.

63. Ibid.

64. Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig, *The Emptied Soul* (Putnam, CN: Spring Publications, 1980, 2004), 28.

65. Leonard Cohen, “Anthem” on *The Future*, Columbia records, November 24, 1992. Studio album.

66. Lawrence Fisher described his personal contemplation practice, where affection and attentiveness are combined, whence got the idea of “affectionate attentiveness.” Private conversation, Lasqueti Island, June 20, 2015.

67. Guggenbühl-Craig, 110.

68. I lived and worked in Germany for three and a half years and speak the language. As a result, I developed deep admiration for Germany as a country. I have observed that Germany, as a country, works to be accountable for perpetrating the Holocaust. Work continues in this arena by individuals and institutions in publically honored ways. Perhaps this collective willingness on the part of Germans to face their shadow and metabolize shame accounts for their current political maturity and sense of ecological ethics.

Chapter 2

1. McKibben, *Eaarth 2*. McKibben notes that one tends to recoil when faced with a future different from the one we imagine, but we must make the jump to a new world even though “...we still, kind of, live in the old one.” (102)

2. A cardinal rule when free-climbing is to always have three points of connection.

3. Michael Meade, *Initiation and the Soul: The Sacred and the Profane* (Seattle, WA: Mosaic Multicultural Foundation, 2006). Two CD Collection. Meade's teaching supports informal initiations, which is the dominant theme of this recording.

4. This idea is implied in the title of the following anthology: Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner, ed. *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995).

5. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) vol. VII, 797.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol X, 247. The length of the full definition of "nature" spans 247-250, nearly four pages.

7. *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, 756.

8. *Ibid.*, 757.

9. *Ibid.*

10. These scholars include contemporaries such as Karen Armstrong and Catherine Bell as well as vision quest guides the world over, many of whom were trained by Foster, Little, and Plotkin. Anthropologists Eliade and Turner also came to this conclusion. The studies of anthropologists at the turn of the century took place even as the ancient cultures they were studying were rapidly being lost in the age of imperial conquest. In our modern world, intellectual understanding of initiation appears to be necessary for cultures no longer rooted in traditions of initiation. Where initiation is honored and experienced, theory may not be as crucial.

11. This was the theme of my month long course at the School of Lost Borders July 1993 in Big Pine CA. Foster and Little's teachers were Native Americans Heyemoyosts Storm and Sun Bear who are members of still-surviving indigenous traditions.

12. Steven Foster and Meredith Little, *The Book of the Vision Quest: Personal Transformation in the Wilderness* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1992), 25.

13. Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 44-45. According to Armstrong, as our relationship to nature changes, so do our myths, rituals, and philosophies. Lineages of initiation were lost or went underground in the modern Christian cultures of the West.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 46.

16. *Ibid.*, 48.

17. *Ibid.*, 53.

18. *Ibid.*, 57.

19. Aftab Omer, *Psychology and Community-Making*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, October 14, 2006).

20. Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, and Spirit* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1995), 454-493.

21. *Ibid.*, 246.

22. Ibid.
23. Sean Kelly, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (San Francisco: California Institute of Integral Studies, May 5, 2015).
24. Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 135-6.
25. Armstrong, 122.
26. Michael J. Murray and Andrew Goldberg, "Evolutionary Accounts of Religion: Explaining and Explaining Away," in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey Schloss and Michael Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 179-199.
27. David Sloan Wilson, "Evolutionary Social Constructivism: Narrowing (but Not Yet Bridging) the Gap" in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey Schloss and Michael Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 318.
28. Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 735.
29. Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
30. Though there may be a subtle cultural arrogance inherent in this kind of scholarly work, their intention was to be respectful and to honor the societies they studied.
31. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10.
32. Ibid., 3.
33. Ibid.
34. Van Gennep lived from 1873 to 1957. During his lifetime, indigenous cultures were rapidly disintegrating and traditional ways of life were being lost, or had recently been lost.
35. Van Gennep, vii. The author uses the word "passage," to describe "life crisis ceremonies," which might be best translated as "transition," but in deference to his original usage, the word "passage" is now used in English.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 15-25.
38. Ibid., 21
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 13.
41. Ibid., 11.
42. Ibid., 192-194.
43. Ibid., 194.

44. Ibid., 9-12.
45. Grimes, 104-105.
46. Ibid., 336-346.
47. Ibid., 8-9.
48. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 209.
49. Ibid. 211.
27. 50. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (Woodstock, CN: Spring Publications, 1994), 27.
51. Ibid.
52. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 76.
53. Ibid., 26.
54. Anders Ryman, *Rites of Life/ Les Rites de la Vie/Lebensrituale* (Koeln, Germany: Evergreen GmbH, 2010).
55. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 26.
56. John Soule, private conversation, Lasqueti Island, June 2010.
57. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 26-27.
58. Ibid., 76.
59. Ibid., 76.
60. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 27.
61. Greg Bogart, *Finding Your Life's Calling: Spiritual Dimensions of Vocational Choice* (Berkeley CA: Sawn Mountain Press, 1995), 15-20. Bogart observes that increasingly, finding one's vocation is linked to initiation. Bogart calls the search for one's vocation a contemporary form of self-initiation. This third type of initiation might be the "type" experienced by my participants.
62. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 162.
63. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 209.
64. Ibid.
65. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 202.
66. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 188.
67. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 178-179.

68. Ibid. Eliade postulates, the mysteries of Eleusis we able to remain power and guiding initiatory experiences for western culture for over 800 years because of its lived vivid mythical depictions of a path that leads from death to renewal. Thus the divine eternal retained its archetypal meaning and freshness as a direct mythical experience.

69. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 94-95.

70. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 178-179, 211.

71. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 50.

72. Victor Turner, "The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage," in *Between and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, ed. Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1987), 9. Reprinted from Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93-111.

73. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94-130.

74. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 3-22.

75. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 15.

76. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 18.

77. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 67.

78. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 15.

79. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 50; and Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94-130.

80. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 96-97.

81. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 3.

82. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 54.

83. Ibid. 51. The Arab Spring, Mexican 152, and Occupy movements that sprang up in 2012 are modern examples of classic non-hierarchical, non-sexist, and radically democratic *communitas*. If understood in this light, the press (and, indeed, members themselves) would be less disparaging and more patient with the seeming lack of demands, strategies, or leaders of these movements. If seen as *communitas*, it would be better understood that these groups are freeing themselves from the moorings of dominant culture's root metaphors that they rest on principles and cannot yet espouse clear 1-2-3 agendas, and that they are radically democratic. They liminal communities where new social paradigms are struggling to emerge. It is their nature to be chaotic. Though at times confusing and frustrating, it would be perhaps good for those involved to know one of Turner's teachings, that the creative darkness of liminality is the fertile ground for creative imagination and inventiveness where a new culture can be born.

84. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 97.

85. Ibid., 129.

86. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 55.

87. Ibid., 239.

88. Ibid., 56.

89. Ibid., 55.

90. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 266.

91. Bell, 94-95. The author includes the full range of initiations, from those of secret societies to religious orders to fraternities to that of the Marines.

92. Van Gannep, 1960, 10.

93. Eliade, (1994), 120.

94. Ibid., (1957), 187.

95. Ibid., (1994), 66-71. A common expression of initiatory death is dismemberment, which can be literally enacted (severely beating the initiate, rubbing them with nettles, or being swallowed by a beast) or it can occur in one's imagination. Dismemberment is a feared, but essential aspect of shamanic initiations, which may be most closely related to ecological initiation.

96. Bell, 94-95.

97. Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*, disc 2, #6. In a similar vein, Carl Jung recognized initiation as the arduous path of individuation.

98. Michael Meade, *Fate and Destiny: Two Agreements of the Soul*, (Seattle WA: Greenfire Press, 2010), 54-55.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 150.

101. Michael Meade, Personal Communication to Renée Soule. (San Anselmo, CA, 11/30/12). We discussed whether a "calling" can come from the world (rather than only within) and grab unripened genius to awaken it. One's authentic talents are needed. My central question to Meade was, "Can the 'call' move from two directions, both from the world without and the inner genius? He replied, "Yes, this is my experience too."

102. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999), 276.

103. Ibid., 277.

104. Ibid., 276.

105. Ibid., 278.

106. Ibid. 280.

107. Ibid., 280.

108. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 6-8.

109. Burket, 102.

110. Ibid.

111. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 11. Turner warns that complete obedience of "neophytes" and their submission to "elders" should be done "only in in so far as they [elders] are in charge, so to speak, of the common good and represent in their persons the total community."

112. I teach Nonviolent Communication in San Quentin. We learn see links between strategies (in this case informal initiations) and needs (perennial purposes of initiation).

113. Grimes, 191.

114. For an in-depth exploration of destiny or inborn calling, see James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 3-40.

115. Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl Gustav Jung (New York: Anchor Press, 1964), 128. Henderson agrees with Jung that a durable connection to ones deep Self is the fruit of initiation.

116. Ibid.

117. Silvia Brinton Perera, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women* (Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1981), 93-4. Innana's descent into the underworld, where reigns her sister and divine counterpart, Ereshkigal (Queen of Death) resembles the initiatory tussle with the darker aspects of existence.

118. Ibid., 93-4. Perera believes reframing experience in the context of a myth frees one from the dread of chaos and mortality. This might have been the power of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

119. Ibid., 45.

120. Jean Houston, *The Search for the Beloved: Journeys in Mythology and Sacred Psychology* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1987), 116. Equating the mythical hero's journey is also promoted by Joseph Campbell in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Houston considered Campbell a dear friend and mentor.

121. Jean Houston, "Integral Practitioners Lab" author's lecture notes (Oakland, CA: The Hub, October 1, 2016).

122. Ibid. I asked Houston about the possibility of templates evolving as we evolve, in a more interactive manner.

123. Ibid. Also see Jean Houston, *Jumptime: Shaping Your Future in a Time of Radical Change* (Boulder CO: Sentient Publications, 2004).

124. Ibid.

125. Carl Gustav Jung, ed. *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Anchor Press, 1964), 110-128.

126. Ecological initiation may not always be a typical heroic journey of conquest and victory.

127. Renée Soule, "Ecopsychology and Peace," in *Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

128. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 115.

129. Meade, *The World Behind the World*, (Seattle: Greenfire Press, 2008), 183.

130. Ibid. 210.

131. Grimes, 89.

132. Ibid., 5.

133. Ibid., 6.

134. Ibid., 5.

135. Ibid., 115-116.

136. Ibid. We should, Grimes advises, be suspicious of three-fold patterns in general, because they reflect an intellectual tendency to prefer threes, giving examples of the trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost) dialects (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) and the basic structure of narratives (beginning, middle, end).

137. Here Grimes cites Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Studies in Rituals of Woman's Initiation*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

138. Grimes, 115-116.

139. Ibid., 106-7, Some of these include learning sacred knowledge, overcoming pain and fear by being subjected to painful or unpleasant treatment, disenchantment that moves towards revelation, giving up dependencies, and being received, incorporated, and welcomed back by elders, a community or cohort.

140. Ibid., 106-7.

141. Burket, 67-68.

142. Ibid., 66.

143. Ibid., 102.

144. Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal image of Mother and Daughter* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 26-29.

145. Ibid., 75.

146. Ibid., 90.

147. Burket, 90. Mystery initiations were, by-in-large, pre-Christian rites, but they influenced Christianity. The deep mystery of death and rebirth are integral to mysteries centered on Demeter at Eleusis, Meter, or Isis, but then later they provide fertile ground for myths of Adonis and Christ. Burket insists that though there is a dimension of death in all mystery initiations, rebirth or resurrection is "anything but explicit," which is the case in later Christian mythology. According to Burket, mystery initiations provided a realization of life's eternal cycles of death and birth rather than a belief in rebirth itself. Rather than focus on an afterlife, pre-Christian rites fostered awakening fully to cycles of death and rebirth in earthly existence.

148. Ibid., 91.

149. Ibid., 89. Burket gleaned this information from text written by Aristotle.

150. Kerényi, 94.

151. Burket, 93. *Markarismos* might be what is missing in the environmental movement. How many contemporary people have had ecstatic experiences of the divine in nature? Lacking *makarismos* (the blessed status of those who have glimpsed the divine mystery of life and recognize its interweaving in daily life), how can we truly motivate people to care about earthly life, so caring itself becomes transformative and evolutionary?

152. Kerényi, 94. The author quotes Sophocles, “Thrice blessed are those among men who, after beholding these rites, go down to Hades. Only for them is there life; all the rest will suffer an evil lot.”

153. Kerényi, 14.

154. Visiting the ancient ruins of Greece and Turkey, one glimpses the vibrant intelligent culture mystery rites inspired. Twice I went on pilgrimage to sites of ancient Greece and took time to speak with visiting scholars, locals who worked there (some for many years), and museum curators.

155. Diodoris Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* Book V., Ch. 49.5-6; <http://eleusinianmysteries.org/>; (accessed March 19, 2013).

156. Aftab Omer, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (Site of the Eleusinian Mystery Rites, Greece: Meridian University *Greece Pilgrimage*, Spring 2006). Kerényi (16) contends the Eleusinian ritual continued for over two thousand years. At the site itself is a placard saying that ritual was practiced there since Neolithic times.

157. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 178-179. Eliade postulates that the mysteries of Eleusis retained its archetypal meaning and freshness because of its vivid depictions and direct experience of death to renewal.

158. Henderson, “Ancient Myths and Modern Man,” 157.

159. Bell, 267.

160. *Ibid.*, 94.

161. Kerényi, xvii.

162. Omer, course notes, October 14, 2006.

163. *Ibid.*

164. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 3.

165. Hübl, *Timeless Wisdom*, workshop notes, September 29, 2015.

166. Aftab Omer, *Integrative Seminar III*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, January 4, 2010).

167. Irene Ives, *Research Practicum III*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University; April 17, 2009).

168. Kim Hermanson, *Psychology of Metaphor*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, December 14, 2008).

169. Aftab Omer, *Integrative Seminar III*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, January 28, 2010).
170. Aftab Omer, *Greece Pilgrimage*, course notes (Greece: Meridian University, April 29 - May 12, 2007).
171. Omer, Personal Communication to Renée Soule, Spring 2006.
172. Grimes, 84-85.
173. Bell, 61. The author summarizes that ritual is the means by which the cultural system and the social system interact and harmonize with each other.
174. Aftab Omer, "The Spacious Center," *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness*, no. 6 (March-May 2005), 31.
175. *Ibid.*, 33.
176. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 270.
177. Carl Gustav Jung, "The Undiscovered Self" in *Collected works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Gerhard Adler, trans R. F. C. Hull, vol. 10, *Civilization in Transition*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 303-304.
178. Robert Bly, *The Sibling Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), ix.
179. *Ibid.*, 31.
180. *Ibid.*, 37.
181. *Ibid.*, 143.
182. Ralph Metzner, "The Split Between Spirit and Nature in European Consciousness," *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* 10, no. 1 (1993); <http://trumpeter.athabasca.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/407/658>; (accessed February 21, 2017).
183. *Ibid.*
184. Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2008), 65.
185. *Ibid.*, 59. It is worth noting that simply being out-of-doors, far from creature comforts, can be initiatory for modern urban people. This would likely not be true of a shepherd boy in the Basque country.
186. *Ibid.*, 86-112.
187. Bret Stephenson, *From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2006), 6.
188. Grimes, 91.
189. *Ibid.* Grimes references the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, produced by Union of International Associations in Brussels, available: <http://www.uia.org/publications>.
190. Bly, *Sibling Society*, 83.

191. If one does an online search for “rites of passage for troubled teens,” an array of programs shows up. For example, rites of passage programs in North America, will bring up: <http://ritesofpassagewildernesstherapy.com/rites-of-passage-programs-in-north-america-usa/> as well as Meade’s website about the Genius Project, <https://mosaicvoices.org/genius.html>. Meade also offers mentoring programs, which acknowledge the need for elders to help the youth find their path. See Voices of Youth, <https://mosaicvoices.org/voices-of-youth.html>. I personally know several people embarking on this work, and many more interested in doing so.

192. Bell, 224-5.

193. Armstrong, 134.

194. Ibid., 44-45.

195. Ibid., 53.

196. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 1-92.

197. Per Personal Communication with the co-director of School of Lost Borders (February 21, 2017), the School has trained hundreds of guides over the last three decades, and all are trained to use wild nature as a primary source of metaphor and psychological models of development, including Plotkin.

198. This insight is based upon my work as a wilderness guide with adults and teens.

199. Robert Greenway, “The Psychology of Wilderness Experience,” taken by me every semester from 1986-1989 at Sonoma State University. These course include 10-day to 2-week wilderness trips Yolla Bolly Wilderness Area. Later I enrolled in the Wilderness Psychology Program at Sonoma State University (1990-1992), where I earned my Master’s Degree and taught The Psychology of Wilderness Experience courses, which also included leading wilderness trips to the Yolla Bolly Wilderness.

200. Robert Greenway, “The Wilderness Effect and Ecopsychology,” in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 124.

201. Ibid., 130.

202. Greenway may have been the first official psycho- or eco-psychologist. The term “psychoecology” has since evolved into more socially acceptable terms like “ecopsychology” and “terrapsychology” or “ecotherapy.” Some people consider deep ecology a closer cousin of psychoecology, in part because both have “ecology” as the root word rather than “psychology.”

203. While earning a Master’s Degree in Wilderness Psychology, I worked with Greenway as a participant and guide for the 2-week Wilderness Trips (which were also fully recognized psychology courses at Sonoma State University) for seven years. Called the Psychology of Wilderness Experience, part of our work involved tracking the “wilderness effect,” which included how long it would take to transition to a nature-base mode of thinking. We also looked at the wilderness effect and gender relations.

204. Greenway came to understand that the two most unmet needs in modern culture are “community and nature.” His Experience of Wilderness Classes met these needs, which is one reason for lasting transformation. I learned this as his student, 1986-1993.

205. Greenway, 129.

206. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 1-92.

207. *Ibid.*, 39-74. Summer is situated in the South and represents the child, innocence, exuberance, go-for-it energy, and the body. It signifies a time of unbridled physical enthusiasm, expansion, and exuberance. Autumn, located in the West, is a more liminal phase of harvest and reflection. North requires and represents tempered adulthood, which implies having the tempered ability to care for one's larger community and survive the rigors of Winter. The East evokes the death and rebirth of Spring, spiritual awakening, and fresh beginnings. This fourth phase implies ongoing initiation.

208. *Ibid.*, This continuous circular or seasonal understanding of transformative change harkens back to a Paleolithic understanding of human nature. I also use it to map ecopsychological praxis.

209. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 16. Native American teachers Heyemoyosts Storm and Sun Bear greatly influenced Foster and Little (i-viii).

210. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 10.

211. Renée G. Soule, "Wilderness Ecopsychology: The Art of Sacred Survival" in *The Soul Unearthed: Celebrating Wildness and Personal Renewal Through Nature*, ed. Cass Adams (New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 1996).

212. Plotkin's books on this topic are *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003) and *Nature and the Human Soul*.

213. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 2.

214. *Ibid.*, 458. Plotkin borrows the concept of "the Great Turning," coined by Macy, and makes it a subjective noun. He believes people can become "a great turner."

215. A student of Foster and Little, his model expands the indigenous four-season map of initiation taught at *The School of Lost Borders*. This training center relies on this direct and experiential approach to initiation in wild and natural settings. Hundreds of people over the world trained at this school and are now practicing and teaching rites of passage from the nature-based approach to initiatory transformation. For more information about the School of Lost Borders: <http://schooloflostborders.org/>.

216. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 64.

217. *Ibid.*, 70. Plotkin's work emphasizes cultural transformation that goes hand-in-hand with tending to one's larger ecological belonging, a fundamental assumption of this research.

218. *Ibid.* 64.

219. *Ibid.*, 394. According to Plotkin, this level of ecological care comes only after years of "adult soulwork and the resultant personal transition into elderhood." His map reserves the task of earth-care for elders, not youth. While this may be true in many cases, his map does not leave room for young people who leap into caring for nature long before years of therapy and becoming an elder.

220. To view Plotkin's "Ecocentric Developmental Wheel," go to <http://www.animas.org/wp-content/uploads/Intro-to-ESDW-for-Animas-website.pdf>; (accessed May 1, 2016)

221. Plotkin. *Nature and the Human Soul*, 60.

222. This map is also the same foundational map used by Plotkin was also a student of Foster and Little's.

223. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, i-iii. According to Foster's teacher, "I-Am-A-Ghost," integration of all four dimensions of change in the four-season map of initiation (spring-summer-winter-

fall, and back to spring) gradually creates a fifth, entity, that of a whole and mature human being. “Number five means being fully human,” I-Am-A-Ghost told him, and added, “I am still in the process of becoming five.”(i)

224. Foster and Little, *Vision Quest Training*, notes.

225. Ibid. Students learn that an initiatory pattern of change that can stretch over a lifetime or take place several hours, or even several minutes. A favorite example of Fosters was a fight with one’s spouse. You shout and slam the door. (Emotional South) The adrenaline rush fades and you reflect on your contribution to the damaging situation, feeling alone and depressed. (Reflective West) After a few moments of inner debate, you decide harmony is more important than being right (a gift from initiation and a movement toward the mature North). Humbled you walk back, go to the door and knock gently, “Can we talk?” (This is the Return phase of initiation, and is a stepping toward the place of the adult, the North.) Face-to-face, you talk it through, see the other’s point of view, forgive each other, and figure out ways to repair the damage. If you both remain committed to agreements and continue to stay the northern course of mature adulthood, your relationship changes energetically; there is lightness and humor, a secret knowing together about life’s vicissitudes and impermanence, which express the eastern shield of the rebirth, creativity, and freedom.

226. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 273.

227. This was a frequent topic of conversation at the annual gatherings of the Wilderness Guides Council. I attended gatherings 1993-1998. For information about this organization, see: <http://www.wildernessguidescouncil.org/> .

228. Bell, 23-60.

229. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols*, 27.

230. Ibid., 27-28.

231. Ibid., 78.

232. This was my experience as a wilderness student 1986-1988 and guide 1988-1992. In stark contrast, Eleusinian Mysteries took initiates beyond the boundaries of normal everyday life, but this mystical journey exposed them to the sacred roots of a shared and honored culture. The sacred grounds of initiation, where the final revelation of the mysteries physically took place, is centrally located near Athens.

233. Plotkin, *Soulcraft*, 32. Cultural alienation presents a real challenge for those teaching and practicing rites of passage. The contextual purpose and approach to initiation is, by necessity, evolving and being discovered. Bill Plotkin offers another way to distinguish an initiatory revelation of an authentic self versus one’s cultural identity. He sets forth a clear distinction between psychotherapy, which helps people adjust to the demands and rigors of daily life, what he calls the “middle world,” and soul-oriented initiation work, which involves a descent into the underworld and does not necessarily serve ego-based needs of modern culture. Calling his initiation-based healing practice “soulcraft,” he makes clear that his approach to initiation does not serve “enhanced coping and social adjustment” but rather cultural change and personal maturation that goes beyond societal definitions of adulthood.

234. Plotkin, *Soulcraft*, 35-36. The author distinguishes ego-centric and soul-centric work (45-48).

235. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 43-44.

236. Plotkin, *Soulcraft*, 101-102.

237. Plotkin, *Soulcraft*, 36 and *Nature and the Human Soul*, 292.

238. Plotkin *Nature and the Human Soul*, 340-341.

239. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

240. Steven Foster, "The Morning of the Last Day," in *The Soul Unearthed*, ed. Cass Adams, (New York: Putnam Books, 1996), 44.

241. *Ibid.*, 41.

242. Ryman, 14.

243. *Ibid.*

244. Dr. Jack Soule, a visiting professor in South Africa, shared this story with me July 20, 2013.

245. Grimes, 124.

246. *Ibid.*, 148.

247. A major challenge facing my students in San Quentin who are given the chance to go home, is finding clarity about who and what home is for them. They cannot go back to the same lifestyle or community that provided conditions for them to commit crime. Either they find a new home, or work to transform the home they came from. The Board of Paroles requires them to address this issue before leaving prison.

248. Thomas Hübl and Aftab Omer at "Presencing Collective Wisdom: Transformative Learning and the Future of Culture," conference notes (San Rafael, CA: April 12-15, 2013).

249. Thomas Hübl, "Presencing Collective Wisdom," conference notes. Hübl discussed the dynamics of fostering collective wisdom.

250. Thomas Hübl, Personal Communication to Renée Soule, (Petaluma, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, October 3, 2015).

251. Plato's *Critias* as cited in Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 76-77. Per Global Forest Watch, much of the entire world now resembles the hills of Athens, with only twenty to thirty percent of frontier forest cover remaining. See <http://www.globalforestwatch.org/english/about/faqs.htm#faq3>; (accessed March 17, 2013).

252. Environmental historians point out that the tension between human appetites and natural limits is not new, but the global effects of this perennial stress-point are multiplying exponentially in modern times. See Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilization*, (New York: Penguin, 1991); Wright, Ronald. *A Short History of Progress*. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2004); Jared Diamond, "*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*," (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1989) and *Eaarth*, among many others.

253. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 9.

254. The semantic root of diagnosis is *gnosis*, which refers to knowledge that arises from mystical insight. Though not appropriate for this thesis, I have worked with diagnoses for much of my career as an

ecopsychologist, beginning with my studies of Buddhism in the 1980s. Buddhism is founded on a simple formula called the Four Noble Truths. The first is the reality of suffering, the second that there is an origin or cause to this suffering. Only from this place can one both envision the end of suffering (third noble truth) and chart a path to that eventuality. For further information, see: Soule, “A Reconnaissance of Ecopsychology.”

255. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster Company, 1977), 313, 639.

256. Dictionary.com. “Juggernaut,” <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/juggernaut>; (accessed January 24, 2015). Also called Jagannath, an idol of Krishna at Puri in Odisha, India.

257. Ancient Origins. “Magical Flying Carpets,” <http://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/history-magical-flying-carpets-006064>, (accessed January 24, 2015).

258. George Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 96.

259. McKibben, *Eaarth*, 27-31. Oil, coal, and natural gas, derived from anaerobic decomposition of organisms that thrived in warm primordial oceans of Earth millions of years ago (hence the name ‘fossil fuels’), are a powerful stimulant for human civilization, multiplying our effect on natural systems many times over.

260. *Ibid.*, 27. One may ask, did slavery end due to moral evolution or cheap plentiful oil?

261. *Ibid.*, 30-31.

262. Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015), 71.

263. Ponting, 18-36.

264. Most scientists now agree that 350 parts per million of is the safe upper limit for carbon in our atmosphere. Since the beginning of civilization, until about two hundred years ago, carbon in our atmosphere remained at a steady 275 ppm. We are now at 400 ppm of CO₂, and rising 2ppm every year, a number higher than any recorded number in history. [http://www.350.org/en/about/science.](http://www.350.org/en/about/science), accessed September 4, 2013 (ppm was 397). On September 6, 2015, carbon rose to over 400 ppm.

265. Hervé Le Treut, H., and others, “2007: Historical Overview of Climate Change” in *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis* (Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), S. Solomon and others, eds., (Cambridge UK and New York: Cambridge University Press).

266. Carbon is the building block of life. It can be coal, tree, or diamond. With its four electrons, carbon is able to combine with other elements to create myriad forms that sustain life, including CO₂, a carbon molecule with two oxygen molecules. Viewed through a mythic lens (which I did as a chemistry major in college), the element carbon can be seen as an embodiment of the divine feminine. A disembodied gaseous state is not a safe or stable state for carbon—nor, perhaps, for the deep feminine.

267. Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “Cool dudes: The denial of climate change among conservative white males in the United States,” *Journal of Global Environmental Change* (June 2011): <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/892d/fad3ffba427401a4cf294e10ce82ae4816b.pdf>; (accessed February 22, 2017).

268. William Anderegg, James. W. Prall, Jacob Herald, and others, “Expert Credibility on Climate Change,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists of the United States of America*, vol. 7, #27, <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/27/12107.short>, accessed March 18, 2013.

269. John Worland, “Middle East Drought That May Contribute to Syrian War is Worst in 900 Years, Study Says,” *Time*, March 3, 2016: <http://time.com/4246248/middle-east-drought-that-may-contribute-to-syrian-war-is-worst-in-900-years-study-says/>; (accessed February 22, 2017). In the years 2006-2009. 75% of farmers experienced crop failure.

270. Benjamin I. Cook and others, “Spatiotemporal Drought Variability in the Mediterranean over the Last 900 Years,” *Journal of Geophysical Research* 121, no. 5 (16 March 2016): 2060–2074. The authors state, “Estimating uncertainties using a resampling approach, we conclude that there is an 89% likelihood that this drought is drier than any comparable period of the last 900 years and a 98% likelihood that it is drier than the last 500 years.” They describe the problems as “anthropogenically forced drying in the region.”

271. Worland, “Middle East Drought.”

272. Lester Brown, “The Great Food Crises of 2011: And It’s Not Going Away Anytime Soon,” *Foreign Policy*, (March 18, 2013); http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/10/the_great_food_crisis_of_2011; (accessed February 23, 2017). For further information about Lester Brown, see: <http://environment.about.com/od/activismvolunteering/a/lesterbrown.htm>.

273. Alanna Mitchell, *Seasick: Ocean Change and the Extinction of Life on Earth*, (Toronto: Emblem, 2009), 2.

274. *Ibid.*, 36.

275. Rob Monroe, “How Much CO₂ Can the Oceans Take Up?” July 3, 2013, on *Scripts Institution of Oceanography* website; <https://scripps.ucsd.edu/programs/keelingcurve/2013/07/03/how-much-co2-can-the-oceans-take-up/>; (accessed April 17, 2015).

276. *Ibid.*

277. <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/6323>, accessed 1.23.17.

278. Tara Lohan, ed., *Water Consciousness: How We All Have to Change to Protect Our Most Critical Resource* (San Francisco, CA: Alnet Books, 2008), 14-34.

279. For further information, see: <http://www.globalforestwatch.org/english/about/faqs.htm#faq3>, <http://www.unwater.org/statistics.html>, and/or <http://www.climate.org/topics/water.html>.

280. McKibben, *Eaarth*, 46.

281. Niles Eldredge, “The Sixth Extinction,” *ActionBioscienc.org*, June 2001; <http://www.actionbioscience.org/evolution/eldredge2.html>; (accessed February 22, 2017).

282. ICUN Red List, *Species Extinction: The Facts.*” http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/species_extinction_05_2007.pdf, (accessed March 13, 2013).

283. Population/Earth Clock: http://www.cosmosmith.com/population_clock.htm, (accessed March 13, 2013).

284. McKibben, *Eaarth*, 37-46. Another example: A gas guzzling SUV in my neighborhood sports a bumper sticker: FOR SNOW. He does not see the contradiction of being “for snow” and driving an SUV.

285. Joint science academies' statement: Global response to climate change. <http://nationalacademies.org/onpi/06072005.pdf>, (accessed April 17, 2015).

286. Anthony Leiserowitz, Edward Maibach, Connie Roser-Renouf, "Extreme Weather and Climate Change in the American Mind," Published by Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/Extreme-Weather-Public-Opinion-September-2012.pdf>, (accessed Sept. 13, 2013), 4.

287. *Ibid.*, Principle researchers concluded that the belief that human-caused climate change plays a role is growing due to the direct experience of extreme weather conditions.

288. Environmental Protection Agency Website, <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/causes.html>; (accessed April 17, 2015).

289. *Ibid.* It is worth noting that what was once characterized as a banal topic, conversations "about the weather" are now evolutionary and controversial.

290. Amy Levin and Greg Strimple, *Benenson Strategy Youth Survey*, July 24, 2013, accessed Sept 13, 2013. <http://www.lcv.org/issues/polling/recent-polling-on-youth.pdf>; Benenson Strategy Group polled people under 30 from across the political spectrum, and 68% said they would not vote for a climate-change denier. 60% would vote for someone who says we have a moral obligation to leave behind a planet that's not polluted or damaged. Versus 35% would vote for someone who says we cannot afford burdensome regulations and new energy taxes.

291. For a full summary of recent polling data, see Environmental Energy and Study Institute's "Polling American Public on Climate Change," <http://www.usclimatenetwork.org/resource-database/polling-the-american-public-on-climate-change> accessed Sept. 13, 2013. USCanada Climate Action Network keeps track of recent polling data, <http://www.usclimatenetwork.org/hot-topics/climate-polling>.

292. Media Matters for America Website. STUDY: How Broadcast Networks Covered Climate Change In 2014. <http://mediamatters.org/research/2015/01/28/study-how-broadcast-networks-covered-climate-ch/202232>, (accessed April 17, 2015).

293. Anderegg, Prall, Herald, and others, "Expert Credibility."

294. Data comes from United Kingdom-based Ipsos MORI, an organization that measures global trends via mass global surveys. In 2014 they published "Navigating the New," <http://www.ipsosglobaltrends.com/index.html>, where 16,000 people were polled in 20 countries. The respondents were asked 200 questions about eight topics, including the environment. To see all the graphs related specifically to environmental issues, go to: <http://www.ipsosglobaltrends.com/environment.html>. Chinese are on top, with only a fraction of the population denying human involvement in climate change.

295. Environmental Energy and Study Institute, 4. For example, 74% disagree with increasing taxes on energy to combat climate change. It is worth noting that the polling group did NOT ask whether big oil companies should be taxed (as opposed to average citizens).

296. Branden Baker, *Survey Shows Americans Lead the World in Climate Denial*, <http://ecowatch.com/2014/07/22/americans-lead-world-climate-denial>, July 22, 2014 3:43 pm, accessed 4.17.15.

297. William Calvin, *A Brief History of the Mind*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34. Interview with Michio Kaku, KPFA, 2/25/14, <http://www.kpfa.org/archive/id/100416>.

298. Paul Hawken, Personal Communication to Renee Soule, (Sausalito, CA: May 29, 2014).

299. Diamond, *Collapse*, 14.

300. Civilization too is a flowering of the earth—granted, it is a very energy-expensive flowering.

301. Diamond, *Collapse*, 15.

302. *Ibid.*, 433.

303. Knud Illeris' theories of learning have been furthered by Meridian University's Education and Research Center for Transformative Learning. In their approach, learning can have three foci: Information, skill-development, and transformation. The third "transformative dimension" of learning has again three aspects: 1) An ability to reflect upon one's inner experience called "self-reflexivity," 2) the cultivation and expression of capacities like courage, wisdom, leadership, and compassion, and 3) a ripening ability to appropriately meet needs arising each moment in fresh and creative ways called "creative action." Transformative learning can be a path of ongoing psychological development and maturation.

304. Knud Illeris, Personal Communication to Renee Soule (San Francisco: 10th International Conference on Transformative Learning, November 3, 2012). Our conversation included root causes of ecological intransigence.

305. Knud Illeris, *How We Learn: Learning and Non-learning in School and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 137-143.

306. *Ibid.*, 140.

307. For some activists in this research, information alone galvanizes them into action.

308. Renée Soule, "Project Censored," interview by Mickey Huff (Berkeley, CA: KPFA, January 31, 2014). In an ongoing conversation with Mickey Huff of KPFA's Project Censored. When the show's guest, we discussed censorship and whether it is external or internal in our "information age." I argued that the primary censorship in our "information age" is internal, not external. Shame is a primary factor.

309. David Suzuki, <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2012/05/the-fundamental-failure-of-environmentalism/>, accessed Sept. 21, 2013.

310. Texas A and M University. *Increased Knowledge About Global Warming Leads To Apathy, Study Shows*, ScienceDaily, 28 March 2008. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080327172038.htm>

311. Aftab Omer, *Imaginal Process I*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, September 28, 2012). Omer stated, "The process of transformative learning is several thousand years old, but the term is only 30-40 years old."

312. *Ibid.*

313. *Ibid.*

314. Stephan Skirmshire, "Curb Your Catastrophism," *Red Pepper*, <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/curb-your-catastrophism/>, (accessed March 17, 2013).

315. Gil Ereat and Nat Segnit, "Warm Words: Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Do It Better?", Published by Institute of Public Policy Research, 2006. PDF available

http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/05/warm_words_1529.pdf?noredirect=1, (accessed February 20, 2017).

316. Ibid., 7.

317. Skirmshire. He adds that if an apocalyptic vision would frame the human story as ongoing, where each of us continue to play a vital role, then people might feel called to take part in shaping the future, rather than succumbing helplessly to apocalyptic demise and the comfort of denial.

318. Illeris, Private conversation, November 3, 2012.

319. At the “Active Hope Conference,” (April 11, 2015), the main topic was how to frame the messages about environmental catastrophe in ways that shelter people from negative emotional responses. This is one of the main foci of ecopsychologists. Ways to soften the bow of reality by providing a compassionate space for how hard it is to actually face reality was the main topic of presenters. Initiation offers a different tack, for as a practice it is less about pampering and more about strengthening.

320. Renée Lertzman, Presenter at “Active Hope Conference,” course notes, (San Francisco: California Institute for Integral Studies, April 4, 2014).

321. Renée Lertzman, book reading at UC Berkeley Bookstore on February 15, 2017 from *Environmental Melancholia*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), author’s notes.

322. Imaginal psychology, as taught at Meridian University, teaches that the first step toward creative action is “to be affected.” Joanna Macy also teaches that psychic numbing and denial are the main reasons for inaction. A first step in responding creatively to change is not only an acknowledgement of how one is already being affected, but also the willingness to *be affected*, in the sense of having an appropriate emotional response.

323. Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 35-38. In a subtle way, ecopsychologists justify a lack of responsiveness. My students in San Quentin teach me about radical accountability, which is NOT what I see out in our world beyond prison walls, and not often exhibited or promoted by many ecopsychologists.

324. Though beyond the scope of this research, I suspect it is the human inability to metabolize personal shame which turns reality into a guilt trip, not the message or messenger. Those who feel ashamed are easily shamed. Transmuting shame may be the core experience of ecological initiation. To better understand the role of shame and ecological crises, read my future article based on Donald Nathanson’s understanding of shame. There is very little, if anything written about the relationship between shame and ecological responses. Activists are simply given advice to steer clear of shame, which may be impossible. Meanwhile they batter the public with messages condemning a lifestyle that people spend every working hour to achieve without understanding or having compassion for human incapacity to metabolize shame so that it is useful, healing, and leading to embodied abilities to repair broken-belonging.

325. Roszak, *Voice of the Earth*, 38.

326. Ibid. 311.

327. Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totton, eds. *Vital Signs: Psychological Responses to Ecological Crisis* (London: Karnac, 2012). Often the word “trauma” is used to describe the effect of increasing environmental awareness. Often this is meant in more a vernacular sense rather than clinical. However, some psychologists are witnessing responses to environmental crisis that resemble trauma, or tap into previous traumatic experiences.

328. Donald L. Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992), 164. According to Nathanson's affect theory, the sole purpose of shame (as an organic inborn affect) is to put the brakes on pleasure and interest. In other words, its unique role within the family of affects is to attenuate the two positive affects. It is not a villain, but it is intense. Shame puts immediate somatic brakes on interest and excitement.

329. Ibid., 211

330. Ibid, 336-359.

331. Ibid., 171.

332. Ibidl, 414-418.

333. Ibid., 374.

334. Ibid, 312-314. Nathanson has categorized these reactive defensive strategies into four major "systems of affect management" which he calls the "compass of shame." The four points of the compass are 1) Withdrawal, 2) Attack Self, 3) Avoidance, and 4) Attack other.

335. Ibid., 459. This idea is congruent with what I have learned over the past eleven years doing Nonviolent Communication and working with emotions and needs in San Quentin. Shame is a crucial exploration in my classes. My students come to realize that they know a lot about the different faces shame avoidance.

336. Ibid, 419.

337. Ibid., 339.

338. Burket, 102.

339. Terrance O'Conner, "Therapy for a Dying Planet," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 151.

340. "Active Hope Conference," course notes, (San Francisco: California Institute for Integral Studies, April 4, 2014).

341. Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*. (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 1998; reprint, Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014).

342. Macy, "Active Hope Conference," April 4, 2014; and Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 70. Also a foundational principle in the, "The Work that Reconnects," <http://workthatreconnects.org/>.

343. Macy, *Despair and Personal Power*, 4-5.

344. Macy, "Active Hope Conference," April 4, 2014. Similarly, Nathanson observes, "Any failure of mastery produces shame." (*Shame and Pride*, 171).

345. Macy, "Active Hope Conference," April 4, 2014.

346. Ibid.

347. Marx's concept of alienation is popularly understood a complete separation between the product of one's labor and the producer. He considered alienation from the land to be the first step in complex process of alienation, where people first become alienated from nature, then from the fruits of their labor, and gradually from their own intrinsic value as human beings.

348. Moore, 294-295.

349. Louv, 3, 116-159.

350. Jeanette Armstrong, "Keepers of the Earth," in *in Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 316-17.

351. Alan W. Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (New York: Collier Books, 1966), 6. Watts points out, "We do not come into this world; we come *out* of it, as leaves from a tree."

352. Robert Greenway, email message to Renée Soule, December 26, 2012. In that message he continues, "We attempt to 'change minds' or even 'understand' what's happening without a map comprehensive enough, or 'deep' enough or graspable enough" [to explain] how we can change, let alone how we can influence others to change." See also, Carl Anthony and Renée Soule's "Race Ecopsychology, and the City," *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 26.1-3 (1998):155-61.

353. Carl Anthony and Renée Soule, "Race Ecopsychology, and the City," in *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben, (Des Moines, IA: Library of America Literary Classics of the United States, 2008), 849-854.

354. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (USA: Basic Books, 1986), 419-429. Lifton coined the term "doubling" in this writing.

355. Ibid.

356. Michael Spector, *Denialism: How Irrational Thinking Hinders Scientific Progress, Harms the Planet, and Threatens our Lives* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2010), 3.

357. Derrick Jensen, "Earth In Peril Conference," course notes (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, October 16, 2010).

358. Anthony and Soule, 853-854.

359 For example, Bolivia is the first and only country to pass laws granting Nature equal rights to humans. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/13/bolivias-law-of-mother-earth_n_848966.html Modern societies generally only recognize human beings as having rights. Notice too that we have "crimes against humanity," "genocide," "misanthropy," to "dehumanize another," and "inhumane" treatment of others but have no linguistic equivalents to describe similar attitudes or actions directed toward the natural world.

360. For more information about the power of racism, see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 417. In the same way white supremacy justifies violence against non-whites, human supremacy justifies violence against non-humans. Is supremacy alone sufficient to fuel genocide? Goldhagen comes to a grim conclusion. After studying how German people became *willing* executioners of innocent Jews during the WWII Holocaust, he places the primary blame on an extreme virulent racism. Scholars of the Holocaust generally conclude that Germans were not forced into genocide by a repressive government, but chose to destroy Jews because of an ingrained sense of Aryan supremacy. (This premise is taught at the Holocaust

Museum in Berlin, much to the consternation of some Germans who visit there.) Goldhagen acknowledges that a monocausal explanation of the Holocaust is hard to believe, but insists that a “virulent brand of German racial anti-Semitism” was sufficient to get everyone to participate in genocidal behavior. In a similar fashion, Jensen believes this is the case for ecocide.

361. Duane Elgin at “Presencing Collective Wisdom: Transformative Learning and the Future of Culture,” conference notes (San Rafael, CA: April 12-15, 2013), April 14.

362. Bly, *Sibling Society*, 83.

363. Aftab Omer, “Presencing Collective Wisdom,” conference notes, April 14. Omer countered Elgin’s idea that adolescence was the proper “diagnosis” for the lack of collective wisdom in culture.

364. Shepard, 120-20.

365. *Ibid.*, 14.

366. *Ibid.*, 37.

367. Ralph Metzner, *Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering Earth Wisdom Myths of Ancient Europe* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1994), 55-60.

368. Robert Wright, *A Short History of Progress*, (New York: Carrol and Graf Publishers, 2004), 37. Human beings often take a good thing too far, getting caught in what he calls “progress traps.”

369. *Ibid.*, 102. Even when facing ecological demise, says Wright, people tend to dig in their heels and carry on doing what had been previously successful, which results in squeezing the last drops of profit from nature and humanity rather than shifting course.

370. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, and Spirit*, 454-493.

371. *Ibid.*, 484.

372. Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 135-6. Those with more inclusive levels of consciousness naturally care for the global commons.

373. Sean Esbjørn-Hargens, *Integral Ecology* (Boston: Integral Books, 2009), 276. Esbjørn-Hargens also points out that there is no “...single ecological crises, but many different perceptions and conceptions of ecological crises.”

374. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, and Spirit*, 492. This idea is one of Wilber’s main messages.

375. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009) Milgram’s findings continue to be dominant theme of conversations and presentations at the SF Anarchist Book Fair, March 16, 2013 as well as Occupy conversations (Oakland, spring 2012).

376. *Ibid.*, 6.

377. Edward S. Herman, “The Banality of Evil” in *Triumph of the Market: Essays on Economics, Politics, and the Media* (Boston, MA: Southend Press, 1995).

378. Hanna Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

379. Margarethe von Trotta, dir., *Hanna Arendt*, 113 min. Zeitgeist Films, 2013.

380. Arendt, 252.

381. Ibid.

382. See: <http://www.earthday.org/footprint-calculator>. There are dozens of encouraging websites, for example David Suzuki's: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/reduce-your-carbon-footprint/four-places-to-cut-your-carbon/?gclid=CNDK-8_2occCFc5lfgodbSsKeg.

383. Madison Powers, "Our Ecological Footprint and the Built Environment," Food, Energy and Water website, <http://www.fewresources.org/ecological-footprints--human-impact-factors.html>; (accessed August, 11, 2015)

384. Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 13.

385. Malte Humpert, "The Future of a Northern Sea Route – A 'Golden Waterway' or a Niche Trade Route," The Arctic Institute website, <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/the-future-of-northern-sea-route-golden/>; (accessed March 18, 2013).

386. Gautam Barua, Personal Communication to Renee Soule (Berkeley, CA: December 24, 2013).

387. Perenti, 20. Also see Shaoni Bhattacharya, "Pentagon warns U.S. Military of Climate Change," New Scientist website, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn26379-pentagon-warns-the-us-military-of-climate-change/>; (accessed August 11, 2015).

388. Van Jones at "PowerShift '09 conference for youth," quoted in *Sustainable World Sourcebook* (Berkeley, CA: Sustainable World Coalition, 2010), 23.

389. Randy Hayes, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (San Francisco: Spring 1998). This communication took place when meeting with other activists to create what we called "The Five Hundred Year Plan."

390. Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 121-125.

391. Moore, 51-51.

392. Moore, 79.

393. Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom, The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002), 444-445. A hallmark of these communes is that they obey what Bookchin calls "nature's law of return," where the give and take between humans and nature is truly a closed loop.

394. To explore the Transition movement, see <http://transitionnetwork.org/>.

395. Macy, "Active Hope Conference," April 4, 2014.

396. James Hansen, *Storms of my Grandchildren: The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, (New York: Bloomberry, 2009), xii. Hansen describes himself as having been a well-respected climate scientist devoted to sharing facts from a neutral place of science, what he called "being a witness." Gradually, the information began to affect him, keeping him up at night as he imagined the consequences of climate change and what his children and grandchildren might say. "Opa understood what was happening, but he didn't make it clear," he imagined

(277). He weathers jeering from his colleagues who claim that he shifted from science to preaching (92) “Surely you are joking, Mr. Hansen,” is a common response. “Would that I were,” he replies. (70).

397. Unnamed staff writer, March 5, 2012 “Wacky Winter Weather May Be Global Weirding,” The Climate in Context Blog from Climate Central, <http://www.climatecentral.org/blogs/wacky-winter-weather-may-be-global-warming/>, (accessed February 3, 2017). A book on this topic called *Global Weirding*, by Ian Pattinson, was also published in July, 2012.

398. William Patton, *Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

399. Edward O. Wilson, “The Bottleneck,” *Scientific American*, February 2002, http://www.brown.edu/Courses/BI0020_Miller/week/14/bottleneck.pdf, (accessed March 20, 2013). Wilson calls for a “universal environmental ethic” that combines both the distant future of the whole planet and the near future of one’s family and society.

400. Derrick Jensen, *Endgame: The Problem of Civilization, vol. I*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), xi. Jensen believes that civilization is not and can never be sustainable. Civilization is “killing the world,” he says, and he devotes two chapters to exploring why, 209-248.

401. McKibben, *Eaarth*, 1. According to McKibben, Eaarth is a tough new planet “...with melting poles and dying forests and a heaving, corrosive sea, raked by winds, strafed by storms, scorched by heat. An inhospitable place.”

402. *Ibid.*, 16.

403. Sasha Lilley and others, eds., *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012).

404. *Ibid.*, 1.

405. *Ibid.*, 12.

406. Eddie Yuen, speaker at the *Anarchist Book Fair*, author’s notes (San Francisco: San Francisco Amory, May 16, 2013).

407. *Ibid.*

408. James Davis, “At War With the Future: Catastrophism and the Right,” in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*,” ed. Sasha Lilley and others (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 78.

409. Sasha Lilley, “The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth,” in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*,” ed. Sasha Lilley and others (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 1-14.

410. Sasha Lilley, “Great Change Under Heaven: Catastrophism and the Left,” in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*,” ed. Sasha Lilley and others (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 54.

411. Yuen, *Anarchist Book Fair*, May 16, 2013.

412. Steven Foster, Personal Communications to Renée Soule (Fall, 1993). According to Foster, people can seek initiation by creating troubles in their lives.

413. Eddie Yuen, "The Politics of Failure Have Failed: The Environmental Movement and Catastrophism," in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*, ed. Sasha Lilley and others (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 41-42.

414. "Toxic mimic" is a concept used by biologists when referring to animals that resemble other dangerous creatures to avoid predators. Caroline Casey often uses this term in a cultural context on her weekly radio show on KPFA, *The Visionary Activist Show*.

415. Yuen, "The Politics of Failure Have Failed," 42-43.

416. *Ibid.*, 43.

417. Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*.

418. Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*, disk 2, #6. "Self Revelation." One might recall that *psyche* is ancient Greek for "butterfly."

419. Meade, *Water of Life*, 20. Seeing patterns in nature is also extending into technology with the advent and development of a new field called "Biomimicry," a modern science-based attempt to model human systems on patterns found in nature. Archetypal psychology could also be seen as a kind of biomimicry. Jung also spoke of patterns in nature being primary archetypes.

420. Michael Meade, email message to Renée Soule, July 16, 2013. He is supportive of this research and finds reframing of environmental crises as an initiation for humanity an appropriate use of the word "initiation."

421. Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*.

422. Meade, *Water of Life*, 18.

423. *Ibid.*, 20. I work a great deal with this aspect of initiation in San Quentin. I help my students see their self-destructive behaviors in the light of initiation. For example, one of my students told the story of armed robbery. Gun in hand, searching for money to buy drugs, he kicks in the door of a random house. As he acted out kicking in the door, I asked him "WHAT DO YOU WANT? Why are you kicking in the door? What are you doing?" At that moment of enactment, he knew and said so, right away. "I'M TRYING TO GET FREE! I WANT TO GET OUT OF MY LIFE! I AM TRAPPED! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!" His actions seeking freedom took him straight to prison, and eventually San Quentin, where he is serving a life sentence---and learning what freedom means. Had he understood his impulse to kick in the door as a search for freedom and as an act of severance, he might have had the wherewithal to take another course of action. His need: Freedom from his old way of life. His strategy? A tragically tough and unintended initiation. I will not say "failed," as he is working hard to awaken, even under very difficult conditions which, in terms of initiation, can be beneficial!

424. Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*, Disk 1, #2.

425. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1949, 2008).

426. Oddly, while Campbell popularized rites of passage, he is not mentioned in van Gannep's *The Rites of Passage* nor in Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, though these works were published ten years after Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.

427. Dianne K Osbon, *A Joseph Campbell Companion*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 40.

428. Campbell, *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 50.

429. Ibid., 67.

430. Joseph Campbell (with Bill Moyers), *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 130; and Robert Bly, *The Poetic Imagination: How Poetry and Stories Can Heal the Soul*, lecture notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, January 20, 2008.)

431. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 15-24, 22-24.

432. Ibid., 24.

433. Houston, *Search for the Beloved*, 104.

434. Ibid., 116.

435. Ibid., 104-5. The heart of “sacred psychology” taught by Jean Houston is experience what she calls the “larger story” revealed by any wounding experience. For example, in his *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Eliade postulates that the mysteries of Eleusis remained a guiding ritual for western culture for over 800 years because it represented an initiation linking natural cycles to a divine eternal (178-179.)

436. Jean Houston, *A Mythic Life: Learning to Live Our Greater Story* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 92.

437. Grimes, 89.

438. Ibid., 106-7. Grimes lists 30 of these elements, some of which include the importance of elders, learning sacred knowledge, overcoming pain and fear by being subjected to painful or unpleasant treatment, disenchantment that moves towards revelation, giving up dependencies, realizing a new possibility of being, and welcomed back by elders, a community or a cohort.

439. Ibid., 148.

440. Aftab Omer, *Integrative Seminar IC*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, May 14-15, 2010).

441. Ibid.

442. Aftab Omer, *Integrative Seminar I*, (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, December 8, 2006).

443. The concept “rituals with authority” was used during a panel discussion at the “Presencing Collective Wisdom Conference,” April 13, 2013, Author’s notes, San Rafael, CA.

444. Omer, *Integrative Seminar IC*, course notes (May 14-15, 2010.) He explains further, “Without ritual, the myths are a lie to us. For example, without rituals associated with Athena, she does not exist for us. She is a fiction from another time, like daffy duck.”

445. Foster and Little, *Four Shields*, 93.

446. Justin Barrett, “Cognitive Science, Religion, and Society,” in *The Believing Primate: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Reflections on the Origin of Religion*, ed. Jeffrey Schloss and Michael J. Murray (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 85-99. Barrett and editors of this book might not use the concept “mythic imagination.”

447. Wright, 37-40.

448. There is still controversy about the extinction of megafauna, but clearly humans played a role along with climate change and diseases. See: <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20161102-what-really-happened-to-mammoths-and-other-ice-age-giants>. There is a saying in science, “An absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”
449. This final caveat is the result of conversations with Dr. John Soule (my father), who remains suspicious of using initiation as a chief metaphor for arduous journey of ecological awakening.
450. Judith Anodea, *Waking the Global Heart: Humanity's Rite of Passage from the Love of Power to the Power of Love* (Santa Rosa, CA; Elite Books, 2006).
451. *Ibid.*, 18.
452. Willis Harman, *Global Mind Change: The Promise of the Last Years of the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis, IN: Knowledge Systems Inc.), 1988.
453. Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (New York: Viking, 2009), 8-9.
454. *Ibid.*, 313.
455. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).
456. *Ibid.*, 252.
457. Jean Houston, *Jump Time: Shaping Your Future in a Time of Radical Change*, (Boulder CO: Sentient Publications, 2004), Acknowledgements.
458. Bruce H. Lipton and Steve Bhaerman, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and A Way to Get There from Here* (New York: Hay House Inc., 2009).
459. A later book explores Europe's descent into the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire. He suggests this is also our trajectory and, like in the Middle Ages, small enclaves will preserve the seeds of culture while dominant culture will descend into a phase of darkness—much like monasteries preserved writings from the ancient Greece and early Christianity after the fall of Rome.
460. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Mariners Books, 1962), 103.
461. Other books attempt to startle people awake: Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1980); McKibben's “*Eaarth*” and “*The End of Nature*,” Jensen's “*Endgame*,” Diamond's “*Collapse*,” and Hansen's “*Storms of my Grandchildren*.” Thinkers like Meade, steering away from simplistic endings, teach that perennial themes of initiation apply to crises. Meade's titles speak to life's continuity: *Why the World Doesn't End* and *The Ends of Time*.
462. Charles Eisenstein, *A More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2013).
463. Charles Eisenstein, Lecture at a Creative Commons event, Oakland CA., August 23, 2013.
464. Eisenstein, *A More Beautiful World*, 16.
465. *Ibid.*, 268 as well the final chapter called “Initiation,” 263-272. Note: I began this project of engaging environmental crises as an initiation several years before his book was published.

466. Gary Horvitz, email to Renée Soule, May 30, 2015. Horvitz is a student of Eisenstein's.
467. Rick Tarnas, "Is the Modern Psyche Undergoing a Rite of Passage?" Copyright 2001, <https://cosmosandpsyche.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/revision-rite-of-passage.pdf>, (accessed February 3, 2017). Tarnas also discussed these ideas in person at the Bioneers conference on October 19, 2012.
468. Naess, "Self-Realization," 26.
469. *Ibid.*, 20.
470. Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom*, 93.
471. Naess, "Self-Realization," 28.
472. Naess, "Self-Realization," 22.
473. Robinson Jeffers, "Not Man Apart," in *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed., Tim Hunt, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).
474. Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*.
475. Berry, *The Great Work*.
476. *Ibid.*, 19.
477. Joanna Macy, *World as Lover*, 192.
478. Joanna Macy, Personal Interview (Berkeley, CA, March 18, 2014).
479. Macy *World as Lover*, 192.
480. *Ibid.*, 183-192.
481. Macy, Personal Interview (Berkeley, CA, March 18, 2014).
482. Elizabeth Bragg, "Towards Ecological Self: Individual and Shared Understandings of the Relationship Between 'Self' and 'The Natural Environment,'" (Ph.D. diss., James Cook University, Sydney, Australia, 1995), 389.
483. *Ibid.*, 405.
484. This Einstein quote is emblazoned upon tee-shirts and posters.
485. *Ibid.*, 184. Seed and Macy developed a ritual called the "Council of All Beings" whose sole purpose is the expansion of ecological identity. Lasting an hour or several days, participants literally become some aspect of our living cosmos and show up to a council of other more-than-human beings to discuss Earth's environmental situation.

Chapter 3

1. Macy, *World as Lover*, 192.

2. Because this expanded identity is still undergoing development in humanity, language does not fully capture the essence of type of human being. I say “post-modern” to be clear that this is not a regression back to an earlier state of development, but modern people—fully engaged in science and rational thinking—coming to terms with ecological inter-being and learning to build a civilization that is environmentally generative rather than destructive.

3. There is no existing theory about initiatory transformation or psychological development/maturation that arises with facing environmental crisis.

4. Developing this theory was suggested by Aftab Omer because existing psychological theories do not specifically work with engaging ecological crises as a path of initiatory development.

5. I decided to invite participants re-do of one exercise, but in a different fashion than on Day One. After debriefing the purpose of the study, doing the re-do would be their choice. From the data, I created a “group definition” of ecological identity and wove this awareness into Day Two’s re-do of the liminal experience. I wanted to see if truth-telling would be different if activists took time to ground themselves in their understanding of ecological identity. As will be discussed, this changed the experience significantly.

6. As an ecopsychologist, I have observed that waking up into a more expansive ecological identity happens in a great variety of ways, not only via activism. However, generally speaking, this identity tends to move towards some form of cultural and ecological engagement or activism. And then the journey continues.

7. Joanna Macy exemplifies spiritual uplift born of intense commitment to healing the world. Being her student over many years has honed my ability to recognize embodied ecological belonging.

8. Hawken, Personal Communication, May 29, 2014. To see his latest innovative project call called Project Drawdown, go to <http://www.drawdown.org/paul-hawken/>. Like most of his work, it bridges a terrible situation to a field of possibilities and new horizons.

9. Bell, *Ritual*, 94- 95. This is how she describes an overarching benefit of initiation rituals.

10. Please see Chapter One for more information about the challenges of incorporation that can arise with life-based initiations. Perhaps some kind of incorporation has taken place within ecological *communitas*, but these counter-culture entities are liminal in nature. One may still feel exiled.

11. Because of the depth of inquiry that the methodology, Imaginal Inquiry, encourages, research done through this method runs the risk of straying into workshop territory. To prevent my research from becoming a workshop, I frequently had to ask myself, “Ok, what would I do if this *were* a workshop?” Then, I would not do that.

12. Joseph Ranseth shares the full quote, which is often shortened to, “Be the change you want to see.” <https://josephranseth.com/gandhi-didnt-say-be-the-change-you-want-to-see-in-the-world/>, (accessed February 28, 2017).

13. Please see: <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/contentdisplay.aspx?id=12118> , http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkeley_Rose_Garden, and <http://goo.gl/mY9T14> for further information about Codornices Park.

14. Meade, Campbell and Plotkin all point out that thresholds are often marked by events, specific heralds, or traumatic experience that, in one’s mind, marks a before-and-after moment.

15. I kept these questions in present tense because the day was a condensed version of their years of activism taking place in present time within an initiatory framework.

16. Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Soul of Rumi* trans. and ed. Coleman Barks (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 19. In his editor's comments, Barks defines initiation simply as "the necessary pain of changing."

Chapter 4

1. Barry Richmond, who coined the term "systems thinking" in 1987, describes a feedback loop as a "series of connections causing output from one part to eventually influence input to that same part. This circular flow results in large amplification, delay, and dampening effects, which is what causes the gross behavior of the system. Every part is involved in one or more feedback loops. Systems have more feedback loops than parts, which causes unimaginable complexity." Feedback loops, say systems thinkers, are the main reason a system's behavior is emergent and not easily predicted.
<http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/SystemsThinking.htm>, accessed July 29, 2015.

2. I chose specifically to gather in a grove of trees consisting of Dawn and Coastal Redwoods. At one time, these trees were the dominant species in this part of the world, extending all the way through Nevada. Dawn Redwoods went extinct and the coastal tree's habitat shrunk to a small strip along northern coastline of California. During the horror of WWII, a grove Dawn Redwoods was "discovered" in China. Because of human intervention, the trees are reunited and grow together again. We are the hominid who plants trees. We can be beneficial to larger living systems of Earth. This is our possible future.

3. It is worth noting that my participants are "seasoned" activists, and their activism has changed over time.

4. The choice of these two trees is highly significant. At one time, long ago, redwood forests dominated the vast land we call California, Nevada and Arizona. Three kinds of redwood lived in harmony in this forest; the coastal, gigantic, and dawn redwood trees. At some point, this forest cover diminished remained alive in small pockets in California. The dawn redwood went extinct. Or so we thought. During WWII, a military expedition discovered a small grove of living dawn redwoods! Now all three trees are reunited again, and all three grow together in Cordornices Park. Humans are the reason for this reunion.

5. I also explained the line in the sand was meant to be symbolic, not literal. Then a discussion then ensued about "severance" that was matter-of-fact. Once understood, severance became real.

6. "Phoebe" said, "Stepping over the line doesn't resonate with me. I was born like that [sensitive]." Stories were shared about "being different" and "concerned about nature" as a child. "Otter" (pseudonym) added by saying, "I am also wary of structured ways we understand our activism. I don't know if we all have one ah-ha moment."

7. Following Severance, participants wrote down their "initial goals as activists" on 3X5 card tucked in their journals. Eight people explicitly mentioned something about saving life, protecting the earth, or preserving nature. Ten spoke about educating others. Nine described a need to seek a community of people who shared their values. Six spoke directly about promoting cultural transformation. Five addressed the need for personal development and transformation. Later in the day, they had a chance to "revise or update their goals as activists" to see if they had changed over the years.

8. Joanna Macy, too, took special interest in this learning, both because of the compassion it offers activists and those who resist the message of "change or else." She appreciated talking about the actual process of awakening, and how hard it is to maintain.

9. When leading ritual, I follow the advice of my shamanic teacher Arkan Lushwala from, “Never act alone.” Sustainable World Coalition work retreat, March 18-20, 2014. See his book, *The Time of the Black Jaguar: An Offering of Indigenous Wisdom for the Continuity of Life on Earth* (Saskatoon: McNallyRobinson, 2012).

10. Similar to the seven levels of reflexive participation, where the first step is to be affected, and the next is to recognize one is affected. The ability to BE affected could be the starting place for further exploration.

11. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 64; and Turner, “Betwixt and Between,” 3.

12. Turner, “The Liminal Period,” 3.

13. Macy, *Despair and Personal Power*, 28.

14. Ibid., 117.

15. Ibid., 116-117.

16. Ibid.

17. Tempering is a metallurgic process of exposing iron-based alloys, like steel, to hot and cool temperatures repeatedly. Tempering makes steel flexible and less brittle when under stress. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempering_\(metallurgy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempering_(metallurgy)) and <http://smt.sandvik.com/en/products/strip-steel/strip-products/knife-steel/hardening-guide/purpose-of-hardening-and-tempering/>

18. Turner. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 15.

19. These truths revolved around a common theme expressed by “Sun” (pseudonym) “...the earth will become uninhabitable for complex life in a few generations,” T. officinales (Pseudonym), who spoke to hopelessness of activists, “I will lose in my efforts to change this homicidal course,” and Dragonfly (pseudonym) added, “We are approaching the end of civilization....”

20. River Oshun’s hard truth has made her go literally underground with her work, though she describes herself as “more open now” because she “has nothing to lose.” Having nothing to lose is a liminal state.

21. Interestingly, the two activists who feel most distant and uncomfortable with dominant culture have also taken what might be seen as the most radical turn towards ecological deep ecological belonging. In Chance’s case, “cosmic” belonging is the focus of his work. He has written a book and was on an international tour during this research. In real life, Phoebe is an anti-nuclear activist and remains engaged. She is also active around Fukushima, which is a hard truth no one around here, in the Bay Area, wants to face. But she lives way out in the country and spends most of her time gardening and in nature. She is also studying herbs.

22. Most notably was Chance, how said in a semi-joking manner, “Namby-Pamby hrumph.” He was the one least willing to share his honest assessment of ecological crisis. He also mentioned his personal experience of growing up in a conservative family, where his beliefs and sensitivity was not respected. The challenges of ecological liminality (as with most life-based initiations) may be constituted by overcoming deeply personal obstacles.

23. The purpose of this research is to find common themes of liminality for environmental activists. But I also noticed, not surprisingly, that each person’s liminal challenges had a personal dimension perhaps due to individual family histories, temperaments, and other psychological factors. Though beyond the scope of this research, I acknowledged how each person affected me in my notes

following the research. I was softened by Zoe's idealism, wanting the world to see how her activism is gentle yet radical and tough-minded. "Sun" inspired a kind of exhaustion that results in surrender to the will of God, "Life." T. officinale brought forth a kind of tender nervousness, perhaps because sensed a need for unconditional mothering. Phoebe's fighting spirit and sharp wit made me feel like a wolf meeting a wolf of similar standing, wanting to stand tall with a wagging tail. Pricilla's retreat the front line brought forth a wistfulness and sadness, like missing an old friend who no longer stood by my side. River Oshun brought forth a delightful frustration, knowing the reality I was seeing was only scratching the surface of mystery. Otter broke my heart, seeing his beautiful truths lost in the cracks of broken connection. Sequoiah brought a calming hope and groundedness that comes from seeing and being seen. Little Bear made me nervous, stimulating a desire to please or make-happy. It was not Dragonfly's public presence in the liminal period, but her written notes and personal story left me pensive with a tinge of existential angst. Chance inspired an odd mixture of hope and worry. Hope because his message was strong and worried because of the pain he shared when the toughness of dominant culture terrified then stopped him from sharing."

24. Paul Hawken, Personal Interview, June 28, 2014. We discussed implications of "nature sucks."

25. Sequoiah describes learning how to be a "riptide swimmer," "There are some people to who I can say everything, and there are some things that I can say to everyone. Learning to differentiate these has been essential to my continued work in the world." Otter was not a riptide swimmer. He spoke his raw truth and got caught in the undertow of ire from his peers. Making zero headway, he even lost ground in terms of influence and respect. Most sugar-coated their truths, literally in the case of Phoebe (who followed Otter). When I mentioned sugar coating and sideways swimming on Day Two, people were defensive.

26. I explicitly sought activists who had come through periods of burnout because I wanted to see if the frustrated exhaustion of burn-out is beneficial. At an Earth Island Retreat, September 13, 2014 at the David Brower Center, for Earth Islands Project Managers (which I am), there was unanimous agreement that the greatest problem facing activists today is burn-out.

27. Macy spoke to this balance, "Just to be clear, I want to win...Don't ask me to be equanimous! What I can give up is seeing the results myself." Interview with Joanna at her home on Cherry Street, Berkeley, CA, 3/18/14. The interview continued:

Macy: What is so great about the deep time perspective and deep time work [of role-playing future and past generations] is knowing I won't see results, but I can connect with future generations and feel connected to success in that way. When our ancestors built monuments, it took generations. They didn't have to see it. It was a poor man's enlightenment.

Me: Yes, they worked on cathedrals! Maybe a product of modernity is wanting to see results NOW.

Macy: "It's our hyper individualism and our loss of the transcendent. We just work work work [which fuels the] isolated, competitive, hyper-individualized self. Gotta have it all and gotta have it now."

Me: Limited identity is what drives business as usual.

28. Macy, Personal Interview (Berkeley, CA, March 18, 2014).

29. There was 100% agreement that ecologically grounded spiritual practices are "top priority."

30. No one mentioned money! Note: As I am writing these sentences, I look up at the blue sky to see an airplane writing the word "GREAT" with white steam.

31. When requested to "identify ways you distance yourself from or sabotage your earth-centered belonging," everyone (except one person) listed several ways. In the dyad interviews only one person claimed to "never" lose her connection to nature.

32. Hübl, Timeless Wisdom Training, September 30, 2015.

33. Ken Wilber, *Superhuman OS*, CD collection, v1.0; and Meade, *Initiation and the Soul*. Spiral dynamics also draws on a model human development where each successive level of development builds

up the other. However, it is only at the “highest” level that transcendent inclusivity is possible. One cannot authentically be at this higher level without embodying all the previous levels. Transcend and include is adopted by integral philosophers to describe this inclusive and sequential maturity. Further, at higher levels one does not lose an ability to fully embody the capacities of lower levels. For example, when one learns to ride a bike, one can still run, walk, and crawl. In terms of ecological initiation and leadership, this dynamic needs to be more fully understood.

34. Traditional initiations can involve sitting in the ashes of past mistakes, facing one’s naked helplessness, and dealing with wrong-doing. Originally, I wanted to research the core role of shame in ecological initiation. Of all experiences, finding wholesome and honest ways to cope with shame may be tempering. Again, the full impact of shame is beyond the scope of this research but remains a key curiosity for me and is core to my work in ecopsychology.

35. The tempering of shame results in the empowerment of accountability. Boiled down to its essence, accountability is the core motivation and goal of activists. No shame means no accountability. In her doctoral research, Anne Coelho explored the erotic quality of accountability and the dynamics of repairing broken belonging within relationships. Humanity is facing a crisis of accountability and Eros in its intimate relationship with wild nature. See Anne Coelho, “The Erotics of Accountability: A Psychological Approach,” *Revision*, 31, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 36-42.

36. Macy, *World as Lover*, 192.

37. Joanna Macy, *Widening Circles: A Memoir*, (New Society Publishers, 2000).

38. Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between,” 3.

39. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community*. (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999), 278.

40. Jack Cloakley, Personal Communication to Renée Soule, March 1, 2015. Cloakley, who is a coach at College Prep in Oakland says, “racing demons” are similar to what imaginal psychologists identify as “gatekeepers,” but they specifically refer to gatekeepers that arise when attempting to try one’s best and when under stress to achieve, especially in the context of running a competitive race.

41. If worked with directly, they can also be initiatory elements. In imaginal praxis, it is assumed that one cannot pass through the gate to greater identity without first dealing with gatekeepers who hinder our path. In dealing with gatekeepers, one undergoes personal healing and develops capacities pertinent to what lies beyond the gate, presumably a greater and more authentic life.

42. Coming into the Rose Garden felt like a little party, which could have influenced the way people responded to a question about rating one’s overall success. I wonder if the rating would have been different if asked in a private interview (as I did with Paul Hawken, who took immediate offense at the question and refused to answer) or as a solitary journaling question.

43. When rating themselves for “success,” several gave a range. With this range the score was 4.6 to 6.4 (scale 1-10). On Day Two, the whole idea of success or failure was tossed out as moot.

44. This stands in stark contrast to the short-term goals of corporations which were reflected in the statements of dominant culture during the truth-telling exercise.

45. Paul Hawken also had a low rating for community being vital. It could be that those who came are community oriented, and that the self-selection process influences my data on this point. This self-selected group may be more extroverted than activists who would opt out on a day doing a group exploration. I selected for people “comfortable sharing their personal experiences as an activist with a group of other activists.” Paul, for example, chose not to come but was fine with a one-on-one interview.

46. Zoe is an example of this. Her initial goal was “communicating with places through dance.” Her current goal is to “create ways and spaces in which people can experience multiple aspects of our human existence all at once, in a coherent, integrated, concentrated way.” Zoe goes on to write:

These aspects form concentric “spheres” of experience: I see them as progressing from the outside in and upward through the body: ecological, sensory, emotional, cognitive, expressive, cultural/symbolic, mythological, spiritual....all of these aspects of experience are experienced in the body, it's our culture that fragments and separates them out into different things; but somewhere in our embodied experience, somewhere “upstream” of the typical way our culture fractures and processes experience, they're still whole, still integrated. I want to create spaces where people can consciously experience not only this wholeness, but the aliveness of this wholeness -- the alive wholeness that links our bodies to the world.

Chance's current activism is devoted solely to promoting a “larger story” for humanity. Otter started with goals of a unique life that also changed the world. His current goal is to “have an impact on a millennial scale.” Sun's early goals began with plans to, “Wake everybody up! Stop all the pollution. Save the forests and endangered species. Elect better leaders to safeguard nature. Interrupt the military industrial complex. Help foment a mass environmental movement.” After fifty years of being an activist, he acknowledges these as a “memory of love and motivation in a youthful form.” His current intention is to “[b]ring rational realism and spiritual wisdom together.” Dragonfly's goals shifted from a focus on social justice to raising awareness about “the end of civilization as we know it.”

47. Pricilla exemplifies this trend, “I still want to protect the earth from further damage, but I realize now that it's so important to also enjoy where we are, to find balance, to take care of ourselves and families and communities. After all, we are all part of the earth.” She now shares herbal formulas that are radiation-protective at anti-nuke events. Further, she notes, people are more interested in this than a pure doomsday message. Sharing herbal healing along with hard truths is also an example liminal tempering, where “riptide swimmers” learn to “swim sideways.”

48. On a scale of 1-10, the group average rated community as 9.7. 10 signifies “absolutely vital.”

49. In traditional initiations, incorporation is achieved by finding one's place within a larger story that is shared by one's culture. *Communitas* offer a belonging by creating sub-cultures within society.

50. See Victor Turner's work on *communitas* and in the Literature Review.

51. If Earth is sentient through and as us, she loves glorious details AND thinks big.

52. When angrily challenged by the law and even by other activists for his strident defense of whales in the high seas, Captain of the Sea Shepard, Paul Watson, tosses back his consistent sharp retort, “I don't work for you. I work for the whales.”

53. Several participants spoke to long uphill slog and how important it is now to slow down and smell the flowers, plant trees, and watch them grow. Everyone spoke about the need to feel happy about simple contributions one makes. Art, ritual, and community celebrations have become a key part of their current activism. Everyone joyfully cheered when speaking about celebration and its regenerative effects for themselves and others.

54. Mary Oliver, “Wild Geese” in *Dreamwork* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1983), 14.

55. I first saw these words (which are Hübl's tagline), written on T-shirts at a 10-day Hübl, *Celebrate Life Conference*, in Hof Oberlethe, Germany that took place in July-August, 2013.

56. Macy, *Despair and Personal Power*; and Berry, *The Great Work*.

57. Berry, *The Great Work*, 7; Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 3-5; and Macy, *Despair and Personal Power*, 1983, 116-117. Macy uses other metaphors to describe this initiatory threshold: “Turning a corner,” “shifting of the tide,” “a fulcrum” which shifts the weight of social and ecological despair to “a new way of being,” the shift from “crisis to opportunity,” “gateway” guarded by demons that, when crossing over, we “break new ground” and discover our deep ecology.” She also reverts back to what religions call an “inner revolution” or *metanoia* – literally meaning “turning around” into a wider awareness of who and what we are. This turning, she says, alters out notions of what is possible and resources available to address the healing of our world.

58. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*.

59. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 70.

60. Another similar concept that implies creative and ongoing incorporation is one’s psychospiritual center of gravity, which identifies “the hub of a person’s life, what her day-to-day existence revolves around.” Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 64.

61. Capacity literally refers to the volume of a container, what a given space can actually hold. Context is the holding-container. Capacity is more complex than volume, having to do with one’s abilities, power, and aptitudes.

62. Comments included:

- “Dominant culture dialogue. Wow!”
- “The exercise about the dominant culture was really hard. I had a lot of resistance to it.”
- “I realized that I have given up trying to tell the public about my dire perspective.”
- “I resisted dominant culture.”

All spoke of the challenge of revealing “deep eco-feelings” and several confessed having strong resistance to speaking directly and openly to dominant culture. Only one participant (Sun) reported that he enjoyed sharing his hard truth with dominant culture and found it easy. Most participants appeared to be flustered, defensive, and pleading. Several outright refused to speak to dominant culture and only did so when stepping out of the role-play. Only two outright shared their “hard truth.”

63. I can understand that resistance verging on dread might be true of average American citizens who face resistance of dominant culture, but seasoned environmental activists who claim to be ecologically grounded? I wrote in the margin of my notes, “Truths are not being shared from an ecologically grounded place. Struggle ensues. What is going on?” I also noticed that activists spoke “about” or “around” issues, rather than “from” them.

65. In this instance, support could come in the form of understanding the purpose of this research and the role of ecological identity when engaging environmental crises as an initiation. I also wanted them to remember who they are when ecologically grounded.

66. Phoebe shared her most mystical relationship to nature, her dreams where oak trees connect with the divine. In real life, oaks are now speaking to her, giving her directions. “Nature is alive and wants to be celebrated and loved.” The she invited us to sing a song, which we all did. She said it was hard, to share this deep truth of her speaking with trees. Though beyond the scope of this research, I got an invitation from her inviting the public to explore speaking directly to nature.

67. There was no time to debrief after this exercise. Day Two had come to an end. We had lunch together and everyone was in high spirits. My interpretation is that spirits were high because to the power of ecological context upon this group of individuals for whom this larger context is an authentic place of belonging.

68. I had specifically selected activists who described having a grounded ecological identity.

69. I met Wes Jackson many years ago and remember him saying this. He restores indigenous prairies. He says if you are working on a project that will be finished in your lifetime, it's not big enough.

70. For example, all the activists still talked *about* the earth, not *as* the earth in the truth-telling exercise. Speaking *from* a larger context, or even *as* this context indicates authentic inclusive identity. Turns out, it is quite an advanced realization.

71. Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, "Cry Out in your Weakness," in *The Essential Rumi* trans. and ed. Coleman Barks (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 156.

72. Omer, *Psychology and Community-Making*, October 14, 2006.

73. Nationalism requires the context of an all-encompassing Nation, for example. Then there is the notion of "set and setting" when taking mind-altering drugs. Mob mentality is fostered by a context. Even the Buddhist notion of "emptiness" rests upon the mystery of context. The context of culture, family, or partnership can all elicit different behaviors.

74. Kimmy Johnson, *Death and Dying*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, Winter 2008).

75. Philip K. Dick gives this larger context a concrete identity, calling it VALIS, an acronym for "Vast Active Living Intelligence System" I have an I-Thou experience with VALIS. Ken Wilber suggests that integral folks have neglected honoring an I-Thou relationship to the Kosmos. Wilber has said that he begins his meditation thusly: "I submit to the presence of the Lord." (Wilber, in a Skype Presentation at Thomas Hübl's Mystical Summer School, Wardenburg Germany, August 1, 2014).

76. *Webster's Dictionary*, 766.

77. *Oxford Dictionary*, Vol. X, 247.

78. Macy prefers to use the word "life" rather than nature in her work.

79. *Webster's Dictionary*, 164.

80. Macy, *World as Lover*, 192. In *Thinking Like a Mountain*, John Seed exemplifies this, saying, "I try to remember this is not me protecting the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking" (184).

81. Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul*, 70. Here, the value system is oriented toward the flourishing of one's larger earth-family as a larger encompassing system.

82. *Ibid.*, 64.

83. Anthony and Soule, 854. I often call ecopsychology a "family psychology," where one's familiar affiliation includes all members of the vast web of life.

84 Solnit, 193-197. She describes how crises spawn "the need to help."

85. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy*, (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2012), 192, 223-227.

86. Macy, *World as Lover*, 192.

87. Even if one feels connected to nature, ignoring the malady not only leads to further deterioration but (in my opinion) also promotes a pseudo- or childish ecological belonging. However, even a worsening situation will eventually be resolved. But if this resolution happens to us (rather than with us), it may not lead to greater evolutionary complexity. Nature finds balance, even if that balance is going back to a biologically clean slate and simple life forms. Not the end of the world, but (as R.E.M.'s lyrics say) "the end of the world as we know it."

88. Aftab Omer's term, *Reflexive participation* is defined as "the practice of surrendering through creative action to the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment"). This practice requires one, first and foremost, to be affected by a situation.

89. Context matters. Different contexts foster different potentials. For example, the context of a corporation or government that values profit above all other concerns calls forth capacities appropriate to that contextual mandate. If the context of British Petroleum's drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico had been the fertile life-giving waters of the Gulf (rather than the profit-motive of the boardroom), a slew of daily decisions that prioritize safety over profit would have been easy, natural, and unquestioned. Capacities (and decisions) are not born in a vacuum, but in response to one's context.

90. Greeks understood this when coining the term *idiotus* to describe a person who refused to participate in civic life. An I-centered person who is not civically engaged lives in a smaller self-centered context, whence comes our word idiot.

Chapter 5

1. Located in the industrial port town of Elefsina, not far from Athens.

2. My travel companion, Cory Miller, manages large construction projects. He says these ruins never would have fallen into ruin. It took a great deal of effort to topple the pillars and structures. To him, it appears that people intentionally destroyed the marble structures, at risk to themselves.

3. We had a long conversation about what it has been like to work here for 25 years. He told me about Paul giving a speech to crowds from the platform, telling people that Christianity provides a definite answer to the 'nameless mystery' underlying existence, the answer explicitly NOT provided by the Mysteries. That is why, he says, Christianity is the true religion and why the Mysteries died.

4. Andrew Harvey and I discussed this when he was a guest for my online course, "*Co-creating a Thriving World: Essential Knowledge for Empowered Action*," July 6, 2012.

5. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., *One Death and Dying*, (New York: Scribner, 1969, paperback 2003).

6. According to Kübler-Ross, the most common initial response to death before coming to a place of acceptance is denial, which often manifests as disassociation and isolation. According to Kübler-Ross, one can also go to great lengths to disprove the reality of illness, by seeking many second opinions and other forms of "shopping around." One patient described this stage as an "expensive ritual to support her denial. (51) Kübler-Ross points out that denial may be a necessary aspect of facing one's death. She makes a distinction between denial and "partial denial," which is used by "all patients some of the time." (52) Kübler-Ross shares one story of a rare case, where "a middle-aged spinster" remained cut off from her experience to the end, even as cancer erupted on her breast. "As she grew weaker, her make-up became more grotesque. Ordinarily rather discretely applied red lipstick and rouge, the makeup became brighter and redder until she resembled a clown." One can see this pattern in the behaviors some of the very wealthy of our world, where instead of putting funds toward shoring up the life sustaining systems of our culture,

they invest in grotesque and garish, even clownish, displays of wealth. Even in United States, with its overkill in advanced weaponry, can be seen as a clownish display of power and form of denial. The most advanced nuclear device, or personal stash of military-grade weaponry, will not save one from true threats to our nation—grotesque wealth disparities, environmental decline, and economic refugees seething at our borders (also see, *Tropic of Chaos*, by Christian Perenti.)

Kübler-Ross's second stage is Anger, which can also be experienced as rage, envy, and resentment. (ibid 62-93) She claims this stage is the most difficult to work with and through because "the anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment almost at random." (ibid. 66) Everyone is blamed, including God and the doctor. From the perspective of the patient, no one is being accountable.

The third stage of Death and Dying involves bargaining and attempting to wriggle out of a tough situation by making sacrifices or deals with the divine. Here one shifts from being angry with others to a kind of appeasement. (93) Bargaining is an attempt to postpone death. One tries to act good, hoping for some kind of benevolent reprieve.

The final stage before death, according to Kübler-Ross, involves the doldrums of depression. When a terminally ill person can no longer ignore the ravages of illness, the numbness, rage and stoicism wear off and are replaced by a deep sense of loss. Kübler-Ross points out there are two kinds of deep grief, "reactive depression" and "preparatory depression." (98) Andrew Harvey advocates learning to love the "divine face of Kali." (Andrew Harvey, interview for my online "Thrive" course on Sustainability, Shift Network, July 14, 2012.) Existential psychologists like Irvin Yalom encourage us to face our greatest fears as a way of embracing our deep humanity. He says, "Although the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us." (Irvin D. Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 33.)

7. These are the primary shame-defense strategies on Nathanson's "compass of shame." Blaming oneself or others and hiding or cheerful avoidance all alleviate the negative effects of shame.

8. The most recently evolved of all affects in earth's biological system, the effects of shame (including the avoidance of it, namely vitriol, denial, or excessive guilt) can be overwhelming.

9. Aftab Omer, *Summer Week Intensive*, course notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, July 24, 2007).

10. Ibid.

11. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 106-107.

12. Turner, "The Liminal Period," 18.

13. Gary Horwitz, private conversation, Berkeley, November 20, 2015. He was working extensively on climate issues.

14. Foster and Little, *The Four Shields*, 273.

15. The "living space between us" came to me in a dream in my final semester at Meridian University, Summer 2008. In this vivid dream, I experienced interpersonal fields of relatedness as alive. Some, of course, are more alive than others. That dream changed my perspective on separateness. Separateness is an illusion. It was amazing to experience the space-between-us as alive, literally.

16. Joseph Ranseth shares the full quote, which is often shortened to, "Be the change you want to see." <https://josephranseth.com/gandhi-didnt-say-be-the-change-you-want-to-see-in-the-world/>; (accessed February 28, 2017).

17. Aftab Omer, Personal Communication to Renée during Proposal Defense, (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, Petaluma, April 16, 2014).

18. John Trudell, conversation while sharing a cigarette, Berkeley, CA, 2005.
19. Sarah Powers, *Insight Yoga Training*, course notes (Paros, Greece: May 30, 2015).
20. On Day Two of research, I provided a 'resting place,' where the group intentionally rooted into and drew nourishment from ecological belonging. Five minutes of grounding made the 'truth-telling' exercise more enjoyable and effective than the week before (which was executed without any grounding).
21. Aftab Omer, "Imaginal Psychology: A Distinct Approach to Transformative Learning," lecture notes (Petaluma, CA: Meridian University, September 15, 2006).
22. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
23. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970); and Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: When Everything Happens at Once*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2013). Present shock arises in response to our information age, when everything is happening at once and now.
24. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*.
25. SETI Institute, "Fermi Paradox: Could We Be Alone in Our Part of the Galaxy, or More Dramatic Still, Could We Be the Only Technological Society in the Universe?" Seti Institute website, <http://www.seti.org/seti-institute/project/details/fermi-paradox>, (accessed December 10, 2015). Fermi wondered, if humanity could be facing this possibility toward the end of his life. He said, "What is less certain, and what we all fervently hope, is that man will soon grow sufficiently adult to make good use of the powers that he acquires over nature." This quotation is from ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Enrico_Fermi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enrico_Fermi), (accessed Dec 10, 2015).
26. Wikipedia, "Enrico Fermi," at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enrico_Fermi, (accessed December 10, 2015).
27. Michael Meade, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (San Anselmo, CA: SF Theological Seminary, November, 2012).
28. Foster, "The Morning of the Last Day," in *The Soul Unearthed*, " edited by Cass Adams, (New York: Putnam Books, 1996). 44.
29. Macy, "Active Hope Conference," April 11, 2014.
30. Joanna Macy, Personal Communication to Renée Soule (Berkeley, CA: March 18, 2014).
31. Ongoing theme of Hübl's two-year Timeless Wisdom Training, Fall 2015-17.
32. Mark Kitchell, dir., *Fierce Green Fire*, 101 min. Vivendi Entertainment, 2013.
33. Radical equality is a hallmark of initiations, especially in the context of liminality. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, whether soldier, nobleman, woman, or slave, all were equal participants.
34. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 35.
35. This aspect is established by Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner in *Ecopsychology*.
36. Ron Sender, Shai Fuchs, and Ron Milo, "Revised Estimates for the Number of Human and Bacteria Cells in the Body," on Biorxiv website, posted January 6, 2016. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/>

036103; (accessed February 20, 2017). The number of bacteria in our bodies is of the same order as the number of human cells. Indeed, the numbers are similar enough that each defecation event may flip the ratio to favor human cells over bacteria (4).

37. Thich Nhat Hanh cited by Ira Chernus, *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004) online at <http://spot.colorado.edu/~chernus/NonviolenceBook/> (accessed February 28, 2017).

38. Ibid.

39. To learn more see: <http://workthatreconnects.org/>.

40. Thomas Hübl, *Authentic Awakening* (Q and A Session), course notes (Petaluma, CA: Shift Network, June 19, 2013). Though Hübl was referring to developing communication skills that promote positive change businesses, his words align with what is possible for humans aligning with the evolutionary potential of natural systems as well.

41. Laurie Layton Shapira, *The Cassandra Complex: Living with Disbelief—A Modern Perspective on Hysteria*, (BookSurge, 1988), 75. “Mediality” is a term used by Shapira to describe the capacity of a “medium,” one who can foretell the future.

42. I had a powerful dream that taught me this.

43. Ibid., 76

44. These ideas are taken from recordings I made on my phone, June 15, 2015, early morning at the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Elefsina, Greece. I had well over an hour before any tourists arrived and had the site to myself, except the Minder, who was a kind of tour guide. He was especially passionate about Paul’s speech about Jesus that took place in the Hall. Later, I also spoke with visiting professors that also had returned for a closer look and feel of the ceremonial grounds.

45. Burket, 89. This information was gleaned from text written by Aristotle.

46. Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, “Say Yes Quickly” in *Open Secret*, trans and ed by John Moyne and Coleman Barks, (Boston: Shambahla Publications, 1984), 69.

47. Turner, “The Liminal Period,” 12.

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