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THE CRYSTAL SKULL NARRATIVE

Developing theory and methodology for the study of composite myths in new religious movements through the analysis of an exemplary narrative

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by

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Chapter I: Introduction

If anything is established in the study of new religious movements, new age spirituality, neopaganism and other 'transformed' varieties of religion, it is that they flourish, at least in North America and Western Europe.¹ This has led to a lot of research into these non-conformative types of religiosity, from sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives. There is however little research done into the mythology of new religious movements². Some movements use already existing mythologies and bend them to their purposes, some movements invent whole new narratives by taking seemingly unrelated elements and forging them together to create a new grand narrative where first there was none. Little is known about this process of composing new mythology and its role in the development of new religious movements. Was there a story first and then a movement? Or was it the other way around? Where do these mythical elements come from, how are they selected and what binds them together? Who does the composing? Questions like these have remained unanswered. A theoretical framework and a practical methodology to research composite myths and make comparing them to each other possible seems to be missing. I experienced this lack of tools when I became interested in the crystal skull movement, a very new and until now barely studied religious movement with an extremely colourful central narrative. I wanted to study its myth in its narrative, ritual and social aspects. I failed to find a methodology to guide me through this type of descriptive research. So I decided to write my own. In this thesis I aim to develop a preliminary theory on the process of composing a modern myth and to develop a toolkit to study these myths in their totality, not just their literary qualities but also how they work within the community and within the individual adherent. I have taken inspiration from Paul Ricoeur and his work on 'narrative identity' for the theoretical substantiation of this thesis. I am indebted to Loyal Rue for his outline of 'ancillary strategies' to support a central narrative: he provided me with a framework I could use for the methodology I was looking for. Both authors will make their appearance throughout this thesis.

Parts of this paper are the result from thought processes I have entertained in an earlier stage of my research into mythology and echo bits and pieces of a short paper I wrote on the subject.³

On Method and Sources

This thesis is for the main part based on written sources. Virtually all sources on the subject of the crystal skull movement are of a primary nature. The only secondary source as of yet

¹ For the Netherlands this has been researched in 2006 by the WRR (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid) resulting in the publication *Geloven in het Publieke Domein*.

² As pointed out by: Tumminia, Diana G. & Kirkpatrick, R. George, "The Mythic dimensions of New Religious Movements, Function, Reality Construction, and Process", Oxford, 2004.

³ Jong de, H, *The Study of Mythology and its Relevance for Understanding Neopagan Movements in Western Europe and the United States: Developing a Toolkit for the Study of Neopaganism*, Leiden University, 2015.

available on this subject is a small article in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Phenomena*.⁴ The written sources I have used fall into two categories: books and online sources. The books are all written from an emic perspective, even the ones that claim to be objective. The online sources consist of commercial websites as well as private website of crystal skull owners and adherents to the crystal skull narrative. There are a handful of scholarly articles on the crystal skulls as artefacts some of which have been proven to be useful in the analysis of the crystal skull narrative.

In the preparatory phase of my research I have visited two workshops on working with crystal skulls and a crystal skull convention in the Netherlands⁵. Although hardly deserving of the term 'fieldwork', these experiences gave me the opportunity to connect with some people involved in the crystal skull movement. Through some other projects I have come in contact with a large number of druids and wiccans and a smaller number of neo-shamans. I have used these contacts to explore the reception of the crystal skull narrative within the more established neopagan circles in England and the Netherlands.

On Terminology

- *Religion*. Research into religious phenomena is historically burdened with the question of *defining* religion. Over the last century authors on religious studies tried to come up with definitions that encompass religious ideas and practices as well as pay tribute to the individual and collective benefits reaped from the particular worldview at hand. Substantive and functional definitions have been proposed and vigorously defended. I will not repeat the lengthy and often circuitous discussions about defining religion here. I believe it is an academics prerogative to make a choice - any choice- to what her point of view is as long as this is clearly communicated. I prefer an understanding of religion as being a worldview attributing a lot of power to a supernatural being or supernatural beings. The first known definition of religion by the famous Edward B. Tylor: 'religion is the belief in spiritual beings' voices this starting point and I consider this as valid today as it was when he wrote it. To allow for the intentional aspects of religion it needs to be elaborated to include the deep felt need to form a relationship with those beings. To incorporate the ritualistic aspects of religious life one might add a short reference to the practicality of religion. Thus I try to combine a substantive view on religion - that what religion is - with a functionalist view on religion - that what it does. In my view the incorporation of 'deities' (or in a more neutral term 'supernatural beings') is essential to any definition of religion. This not proof of a hidden theological agenda, this is just the acknowledgement of the particular nature of that which we call religion. With some tweaking I arrive at a simple but workable definition:

Religion is the belief in the existence of supernatural beings and the perceived necessity to form a meaningful relationship with them through acts of reverence.

All ghosts, gods, spirits, demons, ancestors and other invisible entities fit into the category 'supernatural beings'. It is the 'perceived necessity to form a relationship with them' that makes the difference between for example a deity in a religion and a dragon in a fairy tale.

⁴ Melton, J.G, 'Crystal Skulls', *The Encyclopedia of Religious Phenomena*, Canton 2008, pp 67-69.

⁵ the Crystal Skull Event 2012, organised by Purity Events

One might believe in dragons *without deeming it necessary to form a meaningful relationship with them*. This constitutes a potentially religious idea, but not a religion. One might want to develop a meaningful relationship with her next door neighbour, *without believing him to be a supernatural entity*. This constitutes a potentially beautiful relationship but again, not a religion. When a ritual is performed to strengthen the relationship with a supernatural being it is a religious ritual. When a ritual is performed for the fun of it, it might be play or it might be art, but it is not a religious ritual. The same goes for paintings, songs, institutions and other expressions; the connection between belief and practise is made infrangible by the word 'and' between the 'believe in supernatural beings' and the 'meaningful relationship' part of the definition. The final addition 'through acts of reverence' serves to distinguish certain spiritual practices like meditation or the use of magic from religion: I judge meditation and magic to be techniques that can be used within a variety of religions, but they do not constitute a religion in themselves. The required 'acts of reverence' are linked to the religious background of the practitioner, not the practice itself.

- *Myth/mythology*. The definition of a myth is also a debated subject. For one thing, the very word 'myth' has become a normative term that means that a story is 'not true'. To avoid this normative connotation and in order to stay clear from technicalities like the difference between myths, legends and fairytales, I will use the word 'myth' whenever I mean 'sacred narrative' as is suggested by A. Dundes: "A myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form"⁶. With the term 'mythology' I refer to a body of myths that can be grouped together in one category. For example the myth 'Leda and the swan' is part of Greek mythology when we look at historical, geographical and cultural belonging of this story. In an article on the theme of shape shifting deities however I could allocate the same myth to a category that I refer to as 'shape shifting mythology' were in I look at a particular element of the myth as the defining factor and lose the historical or geographical elements.

- *Composite myth*. Composite myths are myths or narratives that consist of clearly distinguishable, separate stories or story-elements, forged together into a single narrative. In essence all myths can be suspected of being 'composite'. However some stories revolve around one theme and incorporate one coherent cosmology. Even though the different elements like wizards, dragons, kobolds and magical swords might originate from a variety of sources, the sheer ancience of their collaboration justifies viewing them as 'coherent'. Other narratives however are multistoried constructions, formed by taking aboard any number of single stories. It is those types of stories I would classify as 'composite'. Composite narratives are not to be confused with the product of syncretism: it is not the melting together of different religions or lines of thought into a hybrid variety. It is adding different stories on top of each other and encompass them in a supposed narrative that glues them together in a coherent cosmology where first there was none. Phrased in the Paul Ricoeur's terminology⁷ the prefiguration of the narrative takes place in a world already imbued by all kinds of different narrative structures and the configuration stage of the formation of the grand narrative consist out of the grasping together of any number of these narrative structures.

⁶ Alan Dundes (ed) , "Introduction", *Sacred Narrative: readings in the theory of myth*. Berkeley 1984, p. 1.

⁷ Ricoeur's work will be explained in the next paragraph.

Chapter two of this thesis is largely dedicated to the process of composing these narratives and will give clarity on this subject.

- *Intramythical and extramythical analysis.* The need to analyse a narrative not only as a story, contained within itself, but also as a working agent in the world it is embedded in, prompted me to make a clear distinction between those two kinds of analysis. Looking at the story elements and their interaction, I have named the 'intramythical analysis'. When we shift our attention to the interaction between the narrative and the surrounding world I speak of the 'extramythical analysis'.

- *Narrativism.* Finally throughout this paper I use the term 'narrativism'. I use the term to identify a scholarly discipline which main interest lies in the study of narratives, storylines and mythical elements as tools to understand religious ideas and practices. In order to validate my use of this term I need to distinguish it from the disciplines of narratology and the study of mythology:

Narratology is also the study of narratives so there are overlaps between narratology and narrativism. However, narratology is a linguistically inspired and rather technical approach of the subject. It aims to identify a set of distinctive features or dimensions that characterize a narrative and makes detailed studies of the particular narrators and narratees of a given story. The subject of research of a *narratologist* is the narrative itself. The subject of the *narrativist* is that what is accommodated by the narrative; a worldview, a religion or the coping skills of an individual for example. The narrativist studies the narrative in order to understand its effects. To make an analogy: if the story is a sword, than the narratologist is the metallurgist and the narrativist is the knight. They both know about swords, and they both should know something about each other's specialism, but where the metallurgist has intimate knowledge of the quality of the iron, the source of the ore and the process by which the best iron can be obtained, the knight is the one that knows how the end product is affecting the world around it. In this analogy the storyteller would be the smith that forged the sword.

Finally, narrativism is different from the study of mythology in that respect that the narratives involved does not necessarily have to deal with myths and legends. Personal biographies, group identity tales as well as newly formed mythical narratives are studied in their coherency. I have been inspired by Paul Ricoeur's concept of 'narrative identity' in elaborating on the concept of a mythologist as well as drawing from my experience as a social worker in which I indeed did a great deal of work with the personal narratives of my clients.

I believe that narrativism as an academic discipline will grow naturally from the study of modern myths and will breach the gap between narratologists and academics within the study of religion. It surprised me to see that the key figures in the study of religious myths - E. B. Tylor, J.G. Frazer, B. Malinowski, C. Lévi-Strauss - to name just a few, are not mentioned in the work of narratologist D. Herman⁸. Neither did he mention religious scholars as partners in the study of narratives. This shows me that as far as interdisciplinary programs are concerned there is room for improvement in the field of narrative studies. Narrativism could be such an interdisciplinary program.

⁸ Herman, D, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, West Sussex, 2009

Introducing the Narrative Identity Theory of Paul Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur (February 1913- May 2005) was a French Philosopher that we encounter regularly within religious studies for his work on narrative identity. He based part of his work on Aristotle's theorizing on the nature of the human being. Aristotle theorized that human beings create stories and works of art that represent reality, in fact *imitating* this reality, and can thus be classified as a *mimetic* being. (Ancient Greek, *mimesis* means *imitate*). Ricoeur came to a threefold understanding of mimesis in connection to creating a narrative. The three different forms of mimesis (M1, M2 and M3) correspond with three different stages Ricoeur discerned in the formation of a story. M1 refers to the practical world of everyday action. In this world we find the building blocks of our narratives; ideas, objects, shards of other stories, in short: elements that already exist and are picked up to be the foundation of the narrative we are constructing. Ricoeur called this stage of creating a story the *prefiguration* of the narrative. M2 is the stage in which the plot is formed. Interactions between the different elements and the intentions of the characters are shaping the story. Ricoeur referred to this as the 'grasping together' of heterogeneous factors into a meaningful whole. The building blocks we sought out in M1 are now allowed to interact with each other and form that what most people perceive to be the actual narrative. This part of the process he called *configuration*. The last stage of the creation of a narrative, M3, Ricoeur called *refiguration*. This is the stage in which the story is brought to an audience and an interaction between the inner world of the story and the outer world takes place. The story engages the public, interpretation and meaning is added by outsiders. These reactions can be fed back to the narrative, thus becoming part of the stage of configuration. We can be the audience ourselves: the interaction between our personal lives and the story can give us insight in ourselves through engaging in that what the narrative reveals. The process of *prefiguration, configuration and refiguration* can be viewed as cyclical and repeating, resembling the hermeneutic circle. As Ricoeur so poetically said himself: "narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle."⁹

Within the study of modern mythology I have found the three stages of formation that Ricoeur uses very helpful in sifting through the rich material of a specific myth and identifying where the different elements come from and how they ultimately cling together. Where in the prefiguring stage of a story a given element is just that, an element that is waiting to be lifted from its bedding to be used, its function changes throughout the story. In the configuration state it starts to interact with other elements, it is given purpose and acquires its own characteristics. It emancipates from the bedding it previously rested in and develops a new narrative landscape around it, in collaboration with all the other building blocks of the story. Finally, when we look at the workings of a specific narrative within the larger world it exists in, the element, now enriched with all the characteristics it acquired within the story, is allowed to interact with the audience. Its function changes again: it is influencing the out-of-the-story world and helps shape it. It is also under the influence of the interpretations that are laid upon it: it is re-invented by the audience. This might lead to shifts in importance of certain elements in the story, thus changing the story from the outside inwards. By keeping track of which state of the narrative we are researching, we gain understanding of the shift in importance of certain elements through the process of the composing of the narrative. It helps us distinguish

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, III, 248, as cited by Morny Joy: "Introduction", *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative*, Calgary 1997, p. xxxvi.

between the intra- and extra-mythical analyses and brings clarity in our perception of the workings of the narrative and its distinctive elements. Throughout this thesis references will be made to those three stages for clarification.

The Place of Myth in Religious Studies - Historically and Contemporary

In the earlier stages of the study of religion the connection between myth and religion were almost absolute. There was no clear distinction between fictional narratives and historical narratives. Historical accounts were permeated with supernatural beings and ideas and religious narratives were thought to be historically accurate by their believers. Myths were thought to serve as some kind of primitive science, and the belief in those myths was automatically classified as religion. Authors like E. B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer believed myths and re-enactments of those myths to serve as a way to explain the natural world and exercise some influence over it for primitive people that were otherwise deprived from any understanding of, or agency in the natural world. Consequently they believed religion and its cosmological mythology to perish from the world once the scientific worldview would be embraced by everyone. The creation of myths was thus judged to be an intellectual endeavour, a point of view that was also entertained by the structuralist C. Lévi-Strauss.

Much more emphasis on the embodiment, and entertaining a functionalist view on religion, B. Malinowski perceived myth to be a cultural force. A myth is 'not merely a story told but a reality lived'¹⁰. He rejected the notion that myths are an explanation of the natural world and perceived the treatment of myth to be too much text-oriented without taking the cultural, functional and pragmatic aspects into account as they are manifested in ritual, embodiment and context.

Several myth and ritual theories have been developed. Most of them seem to entertain the idea of a binary opposition between myth and ritual. Mythology is perceived to be the intellectual, cognitive part of religion and somehow completely different from ritual as being the practical aspect of religion. We can solve this partition if we consider the idea of mythology as being a *narrative practice* with far reaching effects on the both the religious and the mundane life of the people in whose culture the myth is developed. By rephrasing mythology in those terms we come to a closer understanding of the workings of narratives and are able to study their effects without giving in to a hierarchical typing of myth over ritual or the other way around.

In the contemporary study of myths this point of view seems to be validated through the psychological perspective based on Jungian psychology. Several authors use psychology as a tool to analyse myths and explain their effects on the human mind and thus on their everyday life. This branch of the study of mythology does not only aim to explain myths but is also put to

¹⁰ Full quote: "Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies." From *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Redditch, 2011 (facsimile. Original: 1926) p. 21.

practical use in using myths in a therapeutic way.¹¹ This emphasis on myths as a useful tool hints towards a natural explanation towards the existence of religion and mythology but is not fully developed within the discipline of psychology. The second half of the 20th century gives rise to authors who aim to do just that: finding a natural, biological, evolutionary explanation for the recurrence of religious phenomena in every culture, even in one as scientifically advanced as ours. Scholars like W. Burkert,¹² P. Boyer,¹³ and L. Rue,¹⁴ explore biological, cognitive and social reasons for the persistence of religious behaviour in our society. Their findings ultimately lead them to the conclusion that although the veracity of religious ideas (do supernatural beings exist or not) cannot be ascertained, the phenomenon of religion, in whatever shape or form, will remain to be of importance to human beings.

This brings us to the study of myth in religion as it is exercised today, specifically in the field of new religious movements. It is there that we find the omission that this paper aims to redress. As D.G. Tumminia and R.G. Kirkpatrick point out:

There is nothing new about new religions. Through mythological worldviews, they instruct practitioners on proper conduct in relation to the universal riddles of meaningful existence, like how to manage emotions in suffering and how to behave in regard to the meaning of death. Mythic stories verbalize what is good and what is evil while also defining the use of personal power or one's submission to the community. These stories articulate the individual's place in a mythopoeic existence, in addition to providing a therapeutic course of action in which to seek comfort and healing.¹⁵

This insight in the importance of religious narratives in new religious movements validate the idea that an effort has to be made to come to a better understanding of the creation of mythic narratives and their workings within those movements.

One field in which the interaction between narrative and modern religious movement has been studied and analysed is the field of fiction-based religion. Here we find modern religious movements that base themselves on an existing, fictional narrative that is re-interpreted and transformed to shape a mythopoeic environment that provides the background for religious behaviour. Robert H. Heinlein's book *Stranger in a Strange Land* is one of the first examples of a fictional narrative leading to a religion; the Church of All Worlds, but also the Church of Scientology, based on the science fiction writings of L. Ron Hubbard comes in this category. More recently we find Jedaism as a movement based on the Star Wars movies and a variety of religious movements based on the work of fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien.¹⁶

¹¹ Cf. Estés, C. P, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, USA 1992; Bolen, J. S, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women*, 1984, *Gods in Everyman: A New Psychology of Men's Lives and Loves*, 1989 and Campbell, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Novato 2008, amongst others.

¹² Cf. Burkert, W, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions*, London 1996

¹³ Cf. Boyer, P, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion*, Berkeley 1994

¹⁴ Cf. Rue, L, *Religion is not about God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and what to expect when they fail*, New Jersey, 2005

¹⁵ Tumminia, D. G. & Kirkpatrick, R. G, "The Mythic dimensions of New Religious Movements", blz 366

¹⁶ Cf. Davidsen, M.A, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-Based Religion*, Leiden 2014

There are without doubt similarities between the study of narrative in fiction-based religions and the study of narrative in other religious movements. The defining difference lies within the *origin* of the narrative that, in the case of fiction-based religions has a known author and even a publishing date. In all the new religious movements that are not specifically fiction-based, research into the *composing* of the narrative has to be an important part of the academic effort.

One interesting term from the study of fiction-based religions I want to highlight here for its applicability in the study of composite myths as well: the concept of 'religious affordances'. Introduced by Davidsen in 'The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology'¹⁷ he roughly defined those as:

...a number of features shared with conventional religious texts that promote their transformation from fiction to religion. These features include (a) an elaborate cosmology and theology (in *the Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth*, (b) a frame narrative connecting the narrative world to our own (in *The Lord of the Rings*) and (c) Tolkien's personal experience of being inspired during the writing process (in his letters).¹⁸

Generalizing from these observations in the writings of Tolkien we seek to identify cosmological and theological elements in a narrative, a way to connect the narrative world to our own and a personal inspiration (from a key person or from the individual inspired by the narrative) to find the 'religious affordances'. With the definition of religion as used in this thesis in mind, some elaboration on the concept of religious affordances is in place. Besides the features that Davidsen listed, we also look for the presence of a supernatural being or supernatural beings in the narrative, the perceived need to form a relationship with those beings and ideas that can shape ritualistic behaviour. In the narrative that features throughout this paper we can clearly see how those religious affordances come into being, gain more and more importance and lead to the development of ritualistic practises connected to the narrative.

¹⁷ Davidsen, M.A, 'The Spiritual Milieu Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Mythology' in Possamai, A, *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, Leiden 2012, p. 185-204

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 188

Chapter II: Composing the Myth

Where to find the elements and uncovering how they relate to one another

The Main Storyline of the Exemplary Crystal Skull Narrative

In the process of finding a theoretical framework and developing a methodological tool for the study of composite myths, I will often refer to the crystal skull narrative. For the purpose of better understanding the analysis I deem it prudent to present the reader with a short overview of the main elements in the narrative. This overview is extracted from a number of sources including books, documentaries and websites and serves as an introduction to the narrative. The precise origin of the different elements of this storyline will become clear during the analysis of the crystal skull narrative.

- In a distant past our planet was visited by aliens.
- Those aliens have given humanity a part of their knowledge.
- They may have genetically engineered modern humans.
- They may have interbred with humanoids in order to breed modern humans.
- At some time the aliens needed to return to their home planets.
- They left behind a certain number of crystal skulls. The most common number heard is thirteen, but other numbers have been mentioned.
- Those skulls, each carved out of a large piece of crystal, are meant to be communicators and data processors, much like our computers today.
- The skulls have been given to the priests of several highly developed civilizations, and have been handed down from priest to priest, from caretaker to caretaker.
- Civilizations named in connection of the crystal skulls are the Atlantean, Lemurian, Mayan, Tibetan and ancient Egyptian cultures.
- There came a time that there was a need to hide the crystal skulls from the greedy and spiritually deprived western people, specifically during and after the time of Columbus.
- Over the last hundred years those skulls have returned from their hiding places, the famous Mitchell Hedges skull being one of the first to be discovered and brought to the attention of the western people.
 - Note that the discovery of the Mitchell Hedges skull itself is shrouded in mysteries and contradicting stories.
- The reason for the return of the crystal skulls lies in the necessity for humanity to develop themselves rapidly and turn the impending decline of the planet around. The skulls, with their infinite knowledge, bestowed on them by the aliens, can help us to accomplish that.
- Crystal skulls are not objects; they are entities with whom we can communicate.
- The skulls also communicate amongst each other.
- Every crystal cut in the shape of a human skull has the potential to become an entity and become able to communicate. A modern skull absorbs knowledge from the older ones and can convey this knowledge to its owners.

- Since the skulls are perceived to be entities and having a name, the owners are not called 'owner'. Common jargon is to call them 'caretaker' and sometimes 'guardian'. The Dutch term is 'hoeder' which has also the connotation of 'protector' to it.
- All skulls together, ancient ones (the original skulls given to us by the aliens), old ones (couple of hundred years old) and contemporary skulls, form an information network that we can tap into by techniques like meditation and scrying.

The Blending of Mythical Elements and Small Narratives into a Grand Composite Narrative

We have established that many of the modern mythic narratives not only contain elements from different sources but that they compose a grand narrative by assembling seemingly unrelated smaller narratives and binding them together. There are historical examples of this type of composing as well, we only have to think about the shaping of the Christian narrative on the first Nicean council in 350 CE, but there seems to be an important difference: in revealed religions like Christianity and the Islam a select group of officials made decisions on the narrative to be followed by a larger group of laymen. Within new religious movements the process of composing seems to be horizontally organised. At first glance there seems to be no authorities that consciously manipulate the myth and then present it to the audience. It almost seems as if the narrative - taking inspiration from all kinds of stories from all over the world and all over time - grows naturally. As if certain elements have a tendency to cling together independent from a narrator or a narrative tradition. In this paper I try to find the mechanics by which the human mind - ultimately the vessel in which the narrative resides - allow unrelated stories, symbols and meanings to gravitate towards each other. I am however not infused in the cognitive sciences, thus I am limited in certain aspects of this endeavour.

I aim to come to an explanatory model of synthesizing (composing) of myths and concretizing it to achieve a maximum of applicability within the study of composite mythology. Abstract theorizing is left to the field of cognitive anthropology and psychology.

Mythic Elements; Where to Find the Raw Material

When we are discussing the 'clinging together' or the 'gravitating towards each other' elements, than what element are we talking about and where do we find them? If we are talking about stories made up by one single person, say a writer of novels, we could satisfy ourselves by answering this question in a psychological way and suppose that the elements of the story come from the mind and psyche of the author. This is however not a satisfactory answer in the composing of modern mythology; these stories seem to rise out of an extended body of narratives and mythological elements far greater than the psyche of one person. Is there a concept in recent studies of mythology or religion that would fit the kind of mythical cauldron I suppose here rather than inventing one of my own? Indeed there is. Studying religions and cults in the early seventies of last century the sociologist Colin Campbell came up with the concept of the 'cultic milieu'. First published in 1972¹⁹ the concept seems to have been laying dormant for a while, but from the late nineties onwards it is gaining momentum

¹⁹ Campbell, C, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, (1972), 119-136

and is now fairly often used in the study of contemporary religious movements. Campbell was looking for a way to study the emergence of cults in a broad social context instead of on their own terms only. A way of looking at them that would allow for studying not only the separate cults as entities but also the emergence and disappearance of cults as a process, having noticed that

...new ones are being born just as fast as the old ones die. There is a continual process of formation and collapse which parallels the high turnover of membership at the individual level. Clearly, therefore, cults must exist within a milieu which, if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to spawning cults in general.²⁰

Campbell considered the cultic milieu to be the cultural underground of society, including “all deviant belief systems and their associated practises. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all compromise elements of such an underground.”²¹ Although the cultic milieu might come across as vastly heterogeneous in ideas and institutions at first glance, Campbell convincingly argued that the sum of all its parts constituted a single entity with a body of shared characteristics: deviancy towards the dominant cultural orthodoxies, tolerance towards each other’s ideas and practices (and therefore a high tendency of syncretism) extensive use of different media of communication (in Campbell’s times magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures etcetera, nowadays aided by the internet via Facebook pages, websites, blogs and mailing lists) and finally a strong common ideology of seekership. This cultic milieu provides precisely the ‘mythical cauldron’ I was presupposing earlier. My use of the concept of the cultic milieu is slightly different from Campbell’s original use; Campbell is a sociologist and therefore emphasises the interaction between *people*, he works with individuals, groups and social effects. I am a narrativist and therefore I concentrate on storylines, ideas and mythological concepts. I do believe however that this is perfectly possible within the original concept of the cultic milieu without having to alter, expand or replace it. Having taken notice of the work of Christopher Partridge²² I add one other notion to that of the cultic milieu; the *occultural*. Partridge aimed to expand on Campbell’s cultic milieu by introducing the term *occulture*. The way in which Partridge conceptualises the term leads me to believe that his concept of the occulture and Campbell’s concept of the cultic milieu are essentially the same:

Very briefly, occulture includes those often *hidden, rejected* and *oppositional* beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism, and a range of other subcultural beliefs and practices, many of which are identified by Campbell as belonging to the cultic/mystical milieu and by Stark and Bainbridge as belonging to the occult subculture.²³

The reason I will use the term ‘occultural’ in spite of the fact that I am not substituting ‘the cultic milieu’ with ‘the occulture’ lies in the adjective use of the term: the rather long

²⁰ Campbell, C, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization,” *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, (1972), p.121

²¹ *ibid.* p. 121

²² Partridge, Chr, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Volume 1, London, 2004

²³ *ibid.* p. 68

denotation 'ideas from the cultic milieu' can now conveniently be labelled as 'occultural ideas' which allows for a smoother flow in the writing. I believe both authors are sufficiently honoured in the original meaning of their concepts.

Now we will turn to the task set at the beginning of this chapter: how is it that some of these occultural elements cling together and become a new coherent entity of stories, captured in one great narrative, while others are ignored?

Realms of Reality, Mapping the Gravitational Pull between Seemingly Unrelated Ideas

Throughout this paper I have been referring to *seemingly unrelated ideas*. It is time I bring some clarity in what is meant by this. Taking the Crystal Skull narrative as inspiration we find a whole list of occultural ideas:

- the ancient alien theory
- the notions of Atlantis and Lemuria
- the information storing properties of crystal
- the idea that properties of crystal can change if you change the appearance of it (in this narrative specifically by shaping it into a skull)
- the idea that (alien) entities can reside in inanimate objects - here specifically in crystal skulls, rendering the latter *beings* instead of *objects*
- the human capacity to have extrasensory perception and thus the capability of communicating with these beings
- spiritual evolution
- the spiritual mastery of the Maya's (and the Tibetans for that matter)
- the conviction that the human race is instrumental in the development of other beings as aliens, planet earth, that humans are in fact more or less instrumental in the evolution of the entire cosmos.

All of these ideas stem from different walks of life and different timeframes as will be demonstrated later. At the same time these 'unrelated ideas' must have some relationship to one another or they would not have been picked up by the human mind and connected to each other in a grand narrative. On an instinctive level they apparently belong together.

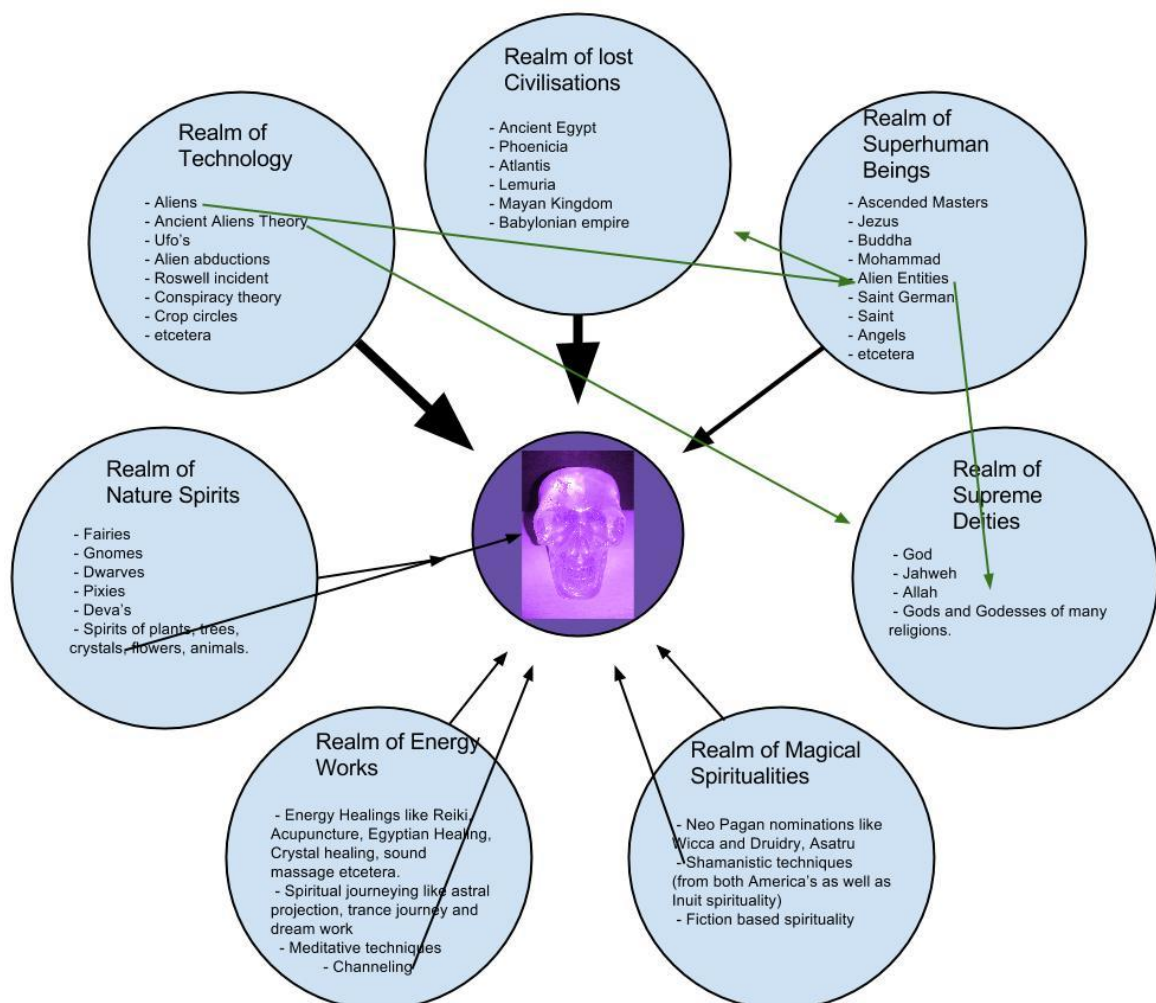
I would hypothesize that when we look closer to the ideas and how they feature in different narratives we can identify clusters of elements that are closely connected to each other. Such cluster represents a *realm of reality*²⁴ which is in itself consistent. Each of those realms comes with a preferred attitude towards cosmology and morality, is connected with a preference to a certain kind of art, to literature or television shows and the distinct realms even predict a preference for a certain kind of lifestyle. Some of the realms have strong connections with other realms, others are sparsely connected or not at all.

²⁴ Note that the use of the word *reality* in the concept of *realm of reality* does not reflect on how *realistic* those realms are in the ordinary use of the term. I am merely referring to a *perceived reality* as these realms are imbued with meaning and purpose by the human mind.

For example: the existence of alien races, their use of spacecrafts ('ufos' to us), their technological superiority, alien abductions, government cover-ups of alien contact, all these elements constitute a realm of reality I would like to call the *Realm of Technology*. This realm is attractive to people with a preference for technological narratives like science fiction, who like to read scientific magazines and are interested in programs on ufology. Most of them will probably be fans of the television series 'the X-files' and I expect a more than average interest in things like the crop circle phenomena. I predict that when researched there will be a relative high percentage of people who classify themselves as agnostic or atheist and a tendency towards distrusting governmental bodies and entertaining conspiracy theories.

Other realms of reality include the *Realm of Lost Civilisations*, *Realm of Nature Spirits*, *Realm of Energy Healings*, *Realm of Superhuman Entities*, *Realm of Supreme Deities*, and the *Realm of Magic*. This list is by no means exhaustive but this selection will do for the purpose of this thesis. By researching another type of narrative, other realms of reality will present themselves. For better understanding the process of composing a grand narrative I present a graphical presentation of the hypothesis of realms of reality in connection with the crystal skull narrative:

Fig. 1: Graphical presentation of the theory of the Realms of Reality



As shown each realm consists of concepts that intuitively belong together even if they do not historically belong together. The realm of lost civilisations for example consists not only of civilizations of which we know with academic and historic certainty they existed but also contains Atlantis and Lemuria, two continents of which the actual historical existence is by no means established. The concept of these continents and their supposed high civilization however belongs in the same kind of narratives as that of the ‘wise and noble’ ancient Egyptians, Babylonians and Mayans as shown in this quote taken from a book on one specific crystal skull:

Evidence Dorland has uncovered has caused him to speculate that in all probability the skull was first carved and put to religious use either by the legendary people of Atlantis or the ancient Egyptians or Babylonians. At that time it resembled the crude specimen on display in the British Museum and was, in a sense, unfinished. Later, it was used by the Babylonian priests in religious temples on the hill of skulls perhaps around 1000 B.C. The Phoenicians then brought the skull from Babylon to Central America where it was used first by the Mayas and then by the Aztecs. Perhaps the skull spent some time at Atlantis before being transported to Central America. It was probably the Maya or Aztecs which completed the sculpting, detached the lower jaw, and carved the prisms into the piece. The skull was then “lost” again for hundreds of years until found by the Mitchell-Hedges expedition.²⁵

Within the presentation of the realms of reality I have drawn some arrows. The black arrows indicate how different realms of reality influence the Crystal Skull Narrative, placed in the middle of this diagram for that purpose. The bolder the arrow the more influential I judge the realm to be on the narrative. Some of the elements of a realm have their influence on other realms or elements thereof, indicated with green arrows. Note that the Realm of Supreme Deities does not have a direct influence on the narrative but is under the influence of the ancient alien theory (and thus the idea of Aliens as superhuman beings and even deities); in the ancient alien theory all narratives of deities are supposed to be shaped after memories of alien encounters.

The hypothesis of the realms of reality provides us with a tool to map the territory of a composite narrative and helps us to understand why so many seemingly unrelated mythical elements end up in the same narrative. It gives us insight in how all these elements are related after all. It clusters the mythical elements floating around in the cultic milieu and provides us with the raw material of a narrative in accordance with the stage of *prefiguring* in the narrative theory of Paul Ricoeur.

Who Does the Composing: The Oyster Mechanism

I stated in the introduction of this chapter that whereas some very well known grand narratives have undergone stages of purposeful formation by authorities within the narrative, in the field of modern mythology this process seems less purposeful and more ‘natural’ so to speak; the narrative grows over time. Different people, not necessarily recognised as

²⁵ Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull: The Story of the Mystery, Myth, and Magic of the Mitchell-Hedges Crystal Skull Discovered in a Lost Mayan City During a Search for Atlantis*, New York 1973, p. 8.

authorities of the narrative to begin with, add to the narrative for example by publishing books and articles on the narrative. Individuals may become authorities through their publications *after* contributing to the story. I named this process the 'oyster mechanism' due to the fact that this process resembles the way a pearl is formed in an oyster: a grain of material (the core of the narrative) is inserted in an oyster (comparable with the cultic milieu) and over time layer upon layer of new material is secreted and deposited on this grain of material, until a pearl (the grand narrative) has formed. When researching a narrative it is important to find this first grain, this first mythical idea and identify by whom the first layers of the narrative are 'secreted'. This process is what Paul Ricoeur calls the *configuring* stage of the narrative. Let's take a look at the Crystal Skull Narrative in an attempt to identify the individuals and the processes that have been instrumental in the shaping of this particular myth.

The First Grain: a Mysterious Artefact

In the first stages of the development of the crystal skull narrative there was one singular focus point: a life sized crystal skull with a detached jaw that is said to be found in either 1924 or 1927, depending on which account we read²⁶. According to the narrative the skull, which was initially called 'the skull of doom', was found by Anna Mitchell-Hedges. Anna, the adopted daughter of explorer and adventurer F.A. Mitchell-Hedges, claimed that she found the skull on her 17th birthday during the excavation of the city of Lubaantun in Belize while she was there accompanying her father. The historical accuracy of this claim is highly debated. F.A. Mitchell-Hedges himself, who wrote several books about his adventures, failed to mention the find of the crystal skull in his 1931 book *Land of Wonder and Fear*.²⁷ That seems to be quite an omission given the fact that he did dedicate a large part of the book to the discovery of Lubaantun and describing his life amongst the native people who helped him excavate the site. In his memoirs²⁸, published in 1954 he did mention the crystal skull in the first edition, only to have this particular part removed from subsequent editions. Even in this first edition he didn't mention how the skull came to be in his possession. On the contrary:

We took with us also the sinister Skull of Doom of which much has been written. How it came into my possession I have reason for not revealing. The Skull of Doom is made of pure rock crystal and according to scientists it must have taken over 150 years, generation after generation working all the days of their lives, patiently rubbing down with sand an immense block of rock crystal until finally the perfect Skull emerged. It is at least 3,600 years old and according to legend was used by the High Priest of the Maya when performing esoteric rites. It is said that when he willed death with the help of the skull, death invariably followed. It has been described as the embodiment of all evil. I do not wish to try and explain this phenomenon.²⁹

²⁶ We find 1924 in Hadley-James, B. (ed), *the Skull Speaks through Carole Davis*, Toronto, 1985, p. 12. The year 1927 is first mentioned in Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull*. p. 14 and p. 48. Garvins book predates that of Hadley-James, making the claim that the skull was found in 1924 the younger claim. The relevance of this seemingly trivial fact will become clear in the following pages of this thesis.

²⁷ Mitchell-Hedges, F.A, *Land of Wonder and Fear*, London, 1931

²⁸ Mitchell-Hedges, F.A, *Danger my Ally*, London 1954.

²⁹ *Danger my Ally*, 1954, p. 243.

Who had been writing about the crystal skull is unclear and where F.A. Mitchell-Hedges got his information on the making and the use of the crystal skull is not mentioned. There have been a couple of articles on two crystal skulls in the periodical *MAN*³⁰ that compared a crystal skull in the collections of the British Museum to one in the possession of a mister Sydney Burney. These articles served to establish the relationship between the British Museum skull and the Burney skull and do not go into detail on how the skulls were made, other than a remark that no sign of the use of modern tools - like a lapidary wheel - has been found on either skull. Mentioning these articles is relevant however, because the Burney skull is in fact the same skull as the 'skull of doom' that later became known as the Mitchell-Hedges skull. Contrary to the claim that Anna and her stepfather found their skull in 1924 or 1927, the skull was in possession of Sydney Burney in 1936.

Mitchell-Hedges was a fervent believer of the existence of Atlantis which he thought to be situated off the coast of Central America. He believed that the remnants of ancient cultures he has discovered in this area, notably the lost city of Lubaantun³¹, proved the existence of past cultures far superior to ours. The connection between the Mitchell-Hedges Crystal Skull and the lost continent of Atlantis has therefore been implied in the narrative from an early stage on although not been made explicit by Mitchell-Hedges himself. Never did Mitchell-Hedges hint on extraterrestrial life forms, not in connection with the skull or in any other context. Viewed in the light of the strong alien connection within the current crystal skull narrative this is worth noticing.

After her adoptive father died Anna Mitchell-Hedges became the owner of the skull. In 1964 she decided she wanted to sell it and sought the help of Frank Dorland, an art restorer who had helped her father sell some of his artefacts earlier. Dorland agreed to help her preparing a story in order to make the skull more sellable. It was only after that agreement that Anna Mitchell-Hedges claimed that it was in fact her - and not her father - who discovered the skull in Lubaantun, either in the year 1924 or 1927 (the dates vary). By stating she herself found the artefact, she sought to become the only source for its veracity.³² Her claims are however highly questionable.³³

The Mystery (is) in the Making

After the alleged agreement between Anna Mitchell-Hedges and Frank Dorland, the latter was granted possession of the skull from 1964 until 1970³⁴. Dorland researched the skull intensively

³⁰ Morant, G.M, 'A Morphological Comparison of Two Crystal Skulls', *MAN, a Monthly Record of Anthropological Science*, volume 36, July 1936, page 105-107 and Digby, A, 'Comments on the Morphological Comparison of Two Crystal Skulls', *MAN, A Monthly Record of Anthropological Science*, volume 36, July 1936, page 107-109

³¹ Situated in what is now known as the kingdom of Belize but was known as British Honduras in Mitchell Hedges' time.

³² Source: Chris White in his documentary 'Ancient Aliens Debunked'. This documentary that aims to debunk all claims made by the authors of the Ancient Aliens Documentaries featured on History Channel. White devoted a website to this task on which the documentary can be viewed and that shows reference material. See www.ancientaliensdebunked.com

³³ See the aforementioned article in *MAN* and material from Chris White in his documentary 'Ancient Aliens Debunked', as well as MacLaren Walsh, J, "Legend of the Crystal Skull", *Archeology*, nr 3, vol 61, May/June 2008, a publication of the Archeological Institute of America.

³⁴ Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull*, p. 14

and had tests conducted both by spiritual researchers as well as by mainstream scientists. Although Dorland did not publish his book *Holy Ice: Bridge to the Unconscious* until 1992³⁵, part of his findings have been made public by Richard Garvin as early as 1973.

Gavin, a creative director for a major West Coast advertising agency and part time writer, was approached by Dorland for the purpose of writing a book about the Mitchell-Hedges skull to make the skull more sellable.³⁶ The resulting book did not make for very impressive reading. The main part of the book consists of an extract of Frank Mitchell-Hedges' autobiography *Danger my Ally* the remainder of the book is dedicated to the research of Dorland and his ideas, many of which are highly speculative. There are however some interesting elements of the crystal skull narrative that originated from this otherwise obscure book. Also we find evidence of a conscious manipulation of the narrative. One of the facts that keeps coming back in all literature on the Mitchell-Hedges skull is that of the skull having been carved 'against the natural axis of the crystal without shattering it'. Whether or not this is true or even relevant is not in discussion here, for the narrative itself serves as proof of the particularity of the artefact.³⁷ This fact comes from Garvin's book³⁸ and belonged according to him to one of the findings that the researchers at the crystal laboratories of the Hewlett-Packard Company in California made. Dorland and Garvin took the Mitchell-Hedges skull to this laboratory for analysis.³⁹ Hewlett-Packard also reported that the skull was "exquisite, a compound of patient hand crafting (using sand and water to smoothly abrade the rock) and of a technical precision requiring an estimated 300 man-years of effort."⁴⁰ These types of findings enriched the narrative with the idea that the making of the skull was a mystery in itself. Furthermore Gavin reports on the occultural experiences that Dorland claimed to have had with the skull. Dorland testified to having seen alterations in its appearance - from clear to cloudy - and the emission of an aura-like glow around it.⁴¹ He also recounts auditory sensations like singing choirs and the sound of bells for which he has no explanation.⁴²

One of the most curious parts of *The Crystal Skull* is chapter three. In this chapter Garvin wrote about the two 1936 articles in MAN magazine that we encountered before. However, he did not mention Sydney Burney as the owner of the skull; instead he blatantly substituted the name 'Burney's skull' for 'Mitchell-Hedges skull'.⁴³ By doing so he presumably tried to obscure the fact that the skull did not belong to either Anna Mitchell-Hedges or her father before 1936 and that Anna's account of the finding of the skull therefore cannot be true. Garvin shames himself even more when later on in the book he stated that "Except for a brief period of time in 1928-1929 when the skull was used as collateral for a loan, it never left his [Mitchell-Hedges,

³⁵ Dorland, F, *Holy Ice: Bridge to the Subconscious*, St. Paul 1992

³⁶ Chris White, 'Ancient Aliens Debunked', documentary.

³⁷ Carey Robbins, an artist who works with crystal and has made some beautiful handcrafted crystal skulls, claims that the whole 'against the natural axis' idea is based on a misconception. It is possible to work against the axis without shattering the crystal. Cf: Shapiro J, *Kristallen Schedels: een Groot Mysterie Nader Bekeken*, Eeserveen 2006, p 62.

³⁸ Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull*, p. 75.

³⁹ *ibid.* p. 73.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 77.

⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 9.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 10.

⁴³ *ibid.* p. 22 ff.

red.] possession. When Mitchell-Hedges travelled the skull went with him.”⁴⁴ The fact that in 1936 the skull evidently belonged to somebody else is not mentioned.

After 1970, when Anna Mitchell-Hedges reclaimed the skull from Dorland, she seemed to have stopped trying to sell the skull and instead started touring around with it, showing it to people for money and allowing paying customers to spend some time with it. During interviews she told the story on how she found the artefact in 1924 (sometimes 1927) by standing on top of a temple and seeing a glitter in the depths beneath her, although in another version she was together with her father and they discover it under a Mayan altar. She was thus contributing to the myth by making changes to the story orally. Anna Mitchell-Hedges has never published on the skull herself but she did entertain many guests in her house for the purpose of seeing the skull. Amongst those there were several crystal skull researchers that published parts of her story in their books.⁴⁵

The Wider World

The development of the crystal skull narrative did not happen in a cultural vacuum. From the second half of the 19th century onwards there was great interest in lost cities and lost cultures. Ever since Heinrich Schliemann unearthed the ancient city of Troy between 1870 and 1890 with mainly the work of Homer to guide him,⁴⁶ the hunt was on for mythical places. Frederick Mitchell-Hedges himself led several expeditions in the America's, partly funded by musea in Britain and North America,⁴⁷ in search of the lost civilisation of Atlantis. He brought his financiers exotic artefacts and even more exotic tales that found their way to the papers.⁴⁸ Initially the Mitchell-Hedges skull as well as other skulls that were around, like the British Museum skull and the skull in Paris (both of which will feature later on in this thesis), were considered a pre-Columbian artefacts by mainstream archaeologists and displayed as such in musea. The Mitchell-Hedges skull was initially the only skull of which was insinuated that it might have come from Babylon, Egypt, Tibet or even the mythical land of Atlantis. This was mainly done by Garvin,⁴⁹ who was without doubt inspired by F.A. Mitchell-Hedges autobiography.

For the next decade the crystal skull narrative seemed to lay dormant. No books were published on the subject. In the cultic milieu however, several concepts that will influence the formation of the crystal skull narrative were beginning to bloom. The notion of 'channelling'; receiving message from spirits, deities or ancestors while they speak through the body of a medium became popular in the second half of the 20th century. Mediums like Jane Roberts, who channelled an entity by the name Seth from 1963 onward,⁵⁰ and J.Z. Knight, channeller of

⁴⁴ Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull* p. 100.

⁴⁵ cf. Garvin 1973, Hadley-James 1985, Bowen, Nocerino and Shapiro 1988, Dorland 1992 e.o.

⁴⁶ Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Schliemann, accessed on June 14th 2015 at 19.20 hour.

⁴⁷ A 'thank you note' from the director of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, dated November the fifth 1934 is reproduced in Mitchell-Hedges autobiography.

⁴⁸ Some newspaper articles were reproduced in Richard Garvin's book *The Crystal Skull*.

⁴⁹ Garvin, R, *The Crystal Skull*, p. 30, p. 49, p.58.

⁵⁰ Hanegraaff, W.J. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, New York, 1998, p.29.

the entity Ramtha since 1977⁵¹ were well known. Seth was according to Roberts a discarnate entity, Ramtha was supposed to be the spirit of a warrior of Atlantis.⁵² In his sessions with Knight, Ramtha not only spoke of Atlantis but also of Lemuria as though the two landmasses were coexisting in the same time sphere with each other. Here we witness the influence of the Realm of lost Civilisations, as identified earlier in this thesis. In 1968 Erich von Dänikens *Chariots of the Gods?*⁵³ had been published and with that the ancient alien theory had become quite popular. Although the ideas that von Däniken presented in his book are not entirely new, the popularity of his work has been influential in the shaping of the Realm of Technology.

In the same time frame, roughly the seventies of the 20th century, a number of political developments took place that have influenced the cultic milieu and have found their way into the crystal skull narrative. Two oil crises, the first in 1973 and the second in 1979 led to the search for more oil in western territories and fuelled the upcoming ecological movements. The idea that the earth was in danger and it is up to the human race to save it was expressed in books like *Ecotopia* from the American author William Western.⁵⁴ (The term 'ecotopia' became popular in the ecological Earth First! movement that developed in the mid-eighties. Movements like Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front have their own niche in the cultic milieu)⁵⁵ All these elements; the channelling; the ancient astronaut theory; and the growing awareness of the problems humankind have caused on the earth's well being were woven into the crystal skull narrative through a most curious book that entered the market in 1985: *The Skull Speaks through Carole Davis*, edited by Brian Hadley-James.

The Galaxy and Beyond; the Mitchell-Hedges Skull 'Speaks'

The Skull Speaks through Carole Davis is a transcript from trance sessions that a medium by the name of Carole Davis had with the Mitchell-Hedges skull. Here we witness the entree of the extraterrestrials in the narrative: the beings that spoke through the skull were several consciousnesses from a different time and a different galaxy, revealing how they came to the earth long, long time ago to experience a material life form, and how they left, leaving several crystal skulls behind as a means for data-storage and communication. The book provided us with a new variation on the discovery of the crystal skull; here the skull was discovered on January the first 1924 while excavating a temple in Lubaantun by Frederick Mitchell-Hedges, in the presence of Anna. According to the story Fredrick held the skull high for everyone to see, causing great joy in the native workers present. They recognised the skull from their ancient past and rejoiced in its recovery. A small altar was built and the skull was placed upon it. Frederick Mitchell-Hedges decided to give the artefact to the native people in recognition of its religious and cultural importance. (And instead of handing it over to the museum that provided the funds for the excavation on the condition that the finds would be the property of

⁵¹ Cowan, D. E. & Bromly, D. G, *Cults and New Religions: a Brief History*, Oxford 2008, p. 78.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 79

⁵³ Däniken, von, E, *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*, London 1968.

⁵⁴ Callenbach, E, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Western*, New York 1975.

⁵⁵ Taylor, B, 'Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion, and Violence from Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance', in Kaplan, J. & Löow, H, (ed.), *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, Oxford 2002, page 27.

the museum). For three years the skull remains in possession of the Maya Kekchi Indians. When the Mitchell-Hedges expedition finally departed from the area, the Maya Kekchi Chief and their Medicine man, grateful for all the good the expedition has brought their people (modern medicine, tools, utensils and a steady income for years), thanked Mitchell-Hedges by presenting him the crystal skull as a gift. Strangely enough Frederick Mitchell-Hedges didn't mention this episode in any of his books. It seems to me that this story was fabricated after Frederick Mitchell-Hedges died in 1959. Reason for that was to justify the possession of the skull by Anna Mitchell Hedges, probably in light of an upcoming movement for the recovery of stolen artefacts by indigenous people on several places in the world.⁵⁶

Throughout the transcripts the skull feeds into the idea that human beings are in large part responsible for the evolution of the earth and should aim to evolve and grow spiritually in order to keep up with cosmic evolution. These ideas are not unlike the teachings from the aforementioned channelled being called Ramtha. References are made by the supposed alien beings to the destruction of planet earth by the wrongful use of technology⁵⁷ and the need to clean the atmosphere of planet earth⁵⁸. Furthermore the beings reveal that the Mitchell-Hedges skull is made from a piece of a crystal in Atlantis and that more skulls will be found, "for no one man and no one mind were given all knowledge. *When all are placed together, you will be "Keepers" of wondrous knowledge.* [Italics in the original]"⁵⁹

This last information will give future writers the opportunity to speculate about the number of skull that the aliens have brought to the earth, allowing for other skulls besides the Mitchell-Hedges skull to take a place in the narrative.

The Final Touches: Multiple Artefacts, Alien Abductions and Revolutionary Technology

Shortly after the previous book, in 1988, *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls Revealed* was published by a triad of authors and crystal skull researchers: Sandra Bowen, F.R. 'Nick' Nocerino and Joshua Shapiro. A number of new elements were brought into the narrative. This book seems to be the source of the number thirteen in connection with the crystal skull. According to several contributors of the book there were originally thirteen skulls left on earth by the aliens. Nocerino speaks of twelve skulls and one master skull,⁶⁰ Bowen of thirteen skulls and a master stone.⁶¹ This element of thirteen original skulls has become a steady story element that we find in all subsequent literature on the crystal skulls. Also in this book we find the first mention of UFOs and alien abductions in connection to the crystal skulls.⁶² Stories of alien abductions had been around from as early as the late fifties, with cases like the Hill abduction case (involving a married couple that experienced an abduction and had detailed memories of that during hypnotic sessions. Their case introduced a the category of alien abductions to the field

⁵⁶ Resulting, among other, for the United States in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990.

⁵⁷ *The Skull Speaks*, p. 23

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 41

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 17.

⁶⁰ Bowen, S, Nocerino, F.R, Shapiro, J, *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls Revealed*, Pacifica 1988², p. 16

⁶¹ *Ibid.* P. 62 and p. 68.

⁶² *Ibid.* P. 27.

of UFO research) and the famous Walton case (in which a woodcutter was abducted in front of the eyes of his six co-workers and which case made headlines in 1975, followed by a book and a movie), as just some of the examples.⁶³ Absorbing the alien abduction narrative in the crystal skull narrative can be viewed as an elaboration of the previously mentioned connection with alien entities, moving the aliens from ancient times into the present. This is however a gradual difference in the story, not a principle one. Nick Nocerino, who is acknowledged within the crystal skull movement as an important researcher on the subject,⁶⁴ was the first to suggest that the skulls were not necessarily handcrafted, but could have been formed by aliens using mental, energetic techniques to shape an idea into an object. Michael Kant, another contributor of the book elaborates on this idea by claiming that the Mitchell-Hedges skull was the skull of an Atlantean princess, transformed into a crystal skull by the mental powers of the priests in a process he called morphocrystallic transformation.⁶⁵ This idea was later picked up by Jaap van Etten (see below). Another important contribution Nocerino made to the crystal skull narrative is the distinction that is he made between three categories of skulls: The 'ancient skulls', the 'old skulls' and the 'new skulls'. Ancient skulls are skulls allegedly dating back to 15.000 years. Old skulls are thought to be 150 – 300 years old. The third category, the new skulls, consists of skulls recently carved mainly in Brazil and China. In the grander scheme of things I find it interesting to see that although Nocerino was a trained Wiccan, the crystal skull narrative does not seem to resonate in any special way within the Wiccan community.⁶⁶

With the publication of *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls Revealed*, the main ingredients of the Crystal Skull Narrative had been assembled. It took however another decade to become popularised to such extent that the narrative enters mainstream pop-culture through new books, films and documentaries. From this popularisation a body of ritual practices emerged in a circle of people that did not necessarily have firsthand experience with so called 'ancient skulls' but work with modern day imitations. Those artefacts were weaved into the story over the course of the next couple of years of the this second stage of the formation of this narrative

The Second Stage of Formation: the Transition into Popular Culture

Notwithstanding the fantastic ingredients of the crystal skull narrative so far, it didn't enter into popular culture until the turn of the millennium. There are only two exceptions I came across: an episode of the popular television 'the A-Team' from 1986⁶⁷ and a comical horror movie 'House II: The Second Story', released in 1987. The episode of the A-Team features a crystal skull as a religious object but doesn't give any thought as to the origin of the skull or its worth beyond that of a big jewel. The horror movie entertains the idea that the crystal skull is a pre-Columbian artefact providing longevity and even immortality to its owner. Through a time warp the skull enters into a prehistory-like surrounding from which it has to be reclaimed.

⁶³ Source: Clark, J, (ed), *The UFO Encyclopedia: the Phenomenon from the Beginning*, 2nd edition, Detroit 1998, vol. 1, p. 1-3.

⁶⁴ Cf: Childress, D.H. & Mehler S.S, *The Crystal Skulls: Astonishing Portals to Man's Past*, Kempton 2008, chapter 5, bearing the title: 'F.R. 'Nick' Nocerino: Dean of Crystal Skull Researchers.'

⁶⁵ *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls revealed*, page 160

⁶⁶ Based on personal observation.

⁶⁷ The A-Team, season 5, episode 7, 'The Crystal Skull', first aired on november 28th 1986.

Both stories are inconsequential in the formation of the crystal skull narrative and they did not substantially contribute to the narratives popularity.

This all changes with the publication of the book *The Mystery of the Crystal Skulls, Unlocking the Secrets of the Past, Present and Future* in 1997 by Chris Morton and Ceri Louise Thomas. This book proved to be the definitive work as far as the composing of the crystal skull narrative is concerned and was highly influential in the transition of the narrative from the cultic milieu into popular culture.

The authors basically told the tale as we have heard it so far from all of the above mentioned writers, dutifully commenting on the controversies surrounding the finding of the skull and the question of ownership. They highlight the connection with the ancient Mayans by devoting a large part of their book to it. A new ingredient they add is the mention of 'many' oral traditions featuring crystal skulls and relating the connection between those skulls and Atlantis. To prove this point a variety of spokesmen and women from indigenous people, North American Indians as well as Central and South American people is interviewed. Through the interviews two aspects of the crystal skull narrative are cemented into place: the Atlantean connection and the extraterrestrial origin of the skulls. The Pleiades, Sirius and Orion are mentioned as the origin of the extraterrestrial races that the indigenous people called 'sky people'⁶⁸. The idea that there were originally thirteen crystal skulls left by alien visitors is being nuanced by Don Alejandro, one of their respondents: according to Don Alejandro the Mayans originally owned thirteen skulls, but there were as many as fifty two skulls⁶⁹. Most of the skulls were left in the Americas, but some of them were given to people in Tibet and to the aborigines of Australia. The authors have tried to get tests done on several skulls by the British Museum to establish their age and origin in as far as this is possible but claimed that after some test were done the British Museum refused to give them their test results without explanation. This leads to some speculation on the possible mysteries the British Museum was trying to protect, thereby feeding into the conspiracy theory about governmental cover-ups of alien life forms.

The crystal skull narrative gains momentum from 2000 onwards, featuring in several media like the tv series *Stargate SG1*, (episode 21 season 3, 'Crystal Skull') in 2000, a short appearance in the movie *The Librarian: Return to King Solomon's Mines* in 2006, the book *The Crystal Skull* by Manda Scott in 2007, in the *Assassin's Creed* video game series from 2007 onwards and even a vodka brand called Crystal Head Vodka, that serves his drink in glass skull bottles, founded in 2007. In 2008 the book from Morton and Thomas was the basis for the movie *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*⁷⁰ which finally made the story known to a large public. The movie led to a Lego-set of the temple of the crystal skull, bringing the narrative to children.

In this same period a number of books were written about the phenomenon of the crystal skulls but no fundamentally new elements were added to the central narrative. There are however many little additions that allow the narrative to acquire a practice and start developing from an exotic tale into a movement with believers, practitioners and institutions.

⁶⁸ Morton, C. & Thomas, C.L, *Mystery of the Crystal Skulls*, p.330.

⁶⁹ Morton, C. & Thomas, C.L, *Mystery of the Crystal Skulls*, p.346.

⁷⁰ Released in 2008

According to Shapiro, in his 2006 book *Kristallen Schedels: een Groot Mysterie nader bekeken*,⁷¹ and the people he has interviewed for this book, new skulls can generate the same mystical experiences as the old and ancient skulls. They are in that respect every bit as 'real' as the old ones. The new skulls are being absorbed in the narrative as being entities in their own right and therefore able to communicate with the ancient skulls as well as with their owner. Hereby Shapiro breaks with the tradition of mainly attributing spiritual powers and experiences to ancient skulls, opening up the possibility for the larger public to acquire a skull and have those experiences themselves. In *Kristallen Schedels* Shapiro gives the stage to a variety of people to give account of their personal experiences with crystal skulls. Through their testimonies divers occultural ideas are added to the crystal skull narrative, not fundamentally changing it, but providing enough variety to create religious affordances for vastly different people. For example St Germain and the White Brotherhood of ascended masters⁷² make their way into the narrative.

Other extrapolations lie in the field of the supposed technical superiority of the alien races involved in creating the crystal skulls. Jaap van Etten, a Dutch biologist with a specialization in ecology, explains in his book *Crystal Skulls: Interacting with a Phenomenon*, how some of the skulls are created through morphocrystallic transformation or morphocrystallic generation. The first technique allows for an already existing matrix - like an actual human skull - to be transformed into a crystal, the second technique consists of creating a crystal form through the use of consciousness alone⁷³. Authors like van Etten and to a certain extent Shapiro are supplementing meditative techniques and personal experiences as methods to obtain information with techniques taken from physics. For example the measuring of electrical fields around the crystal skulls before, during and after meditation. Again, this doesn't bring any changes to the narrative itself but serves as a legitimisation strategy. The use of (pseudo) science and scientific language as a discursive strategy in legitimising occultural ideas has a substantial history.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Shapiro, J & Roodnat-Shapiro, DR, *Kristallen Schedels: een Groot Mysterie Nader Bekeken*, Eeserveen 2006. NB: this is a Dutch book and has not been translated.

⁷² The Ascended Masters, is a concept originating in the work of H.P. Blavatsky (although she didn't coin the term itself but instead speaks of masters of ancient wisdom or mahatmas.) and refers to enlightened people or spirits that –instead of merging with Deity or residing in heaven – have chosen to serve mankind with their wisdom. St Germain is one of those enlightened people, channeled by Guy Ballard and made popular through Guy Ballards book *Unveiled Mysteries*, Chicago, 1934 (published under his pseudonym King, G.R)

⁷³ J. van Etten, *Crystal Skulls, Interacting with a Phenomenon*, page xxiv.

⁷⁴ Cf. Hammer, O, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Leiden 2004, chapter 5, pp. 236-330.

Chapter III: Historical basis

Many narratives have a tendency towards claiming to be historical accurate and religious narratives are no exception. Whether this is a discursive strategy in order to fabricate a tradition⁷⁵ or whether this is simply because the narrative gives a veritable rendition of historical facts is something that needs to be examined before anything else. Both the different elements of the narrative - especially when we research a composite narrative - as well as the entire narrative as a coherent whole needs to be scrutinised on historical accuracy. This step is more or less meant to serve as an exclusion mechanism: If the narrative we aim to analyse is in fact an actual account of historical facts we need to reconsider the nature of our interest in the narrative. A chapter in a history book might not provide what we need when we research the psychological benefits of a given religion. It might however be of great value when we research the means by which people of power maintain their position or it might be worth examining why this particular piece of history is deemed important enough to be carried within a tradition. The main motivation for trying to establish the degree of historical accuracy lies in the fact that we should not light heartedly attribute psychological or emotional motives to a narrative if it is in fact a historical account. For this reason I will try to establish the historical veracity of the crystal skull narrative before going into other aspects of the analysis. At the same time I will link the elements to the realm of reality it belongs to in order to establish the importance of different realms on the story.

Within the crystal skull narrative a number of historical claims are made: the involvement of alien beings with our planet in an ancient past, the withdrawal of these beings and their gift of the crystal skulls to mankind. The crystal skulls themselves are thought to have been passed down from one priest to the other, in the meantime working wonders for the people of Atlantis and Lemuria, until in fairly recent times (15th century with the discovery of America by Columbus) their concealment for western greed became necessary. From the 15th century until early 20th the skulls stayed hidden, their existence only known to some indigenous tribes until they started resurfacing over the last century. Finally there are the stories connected to the find of the Mitchell Hedges skull, the skull that started the skull movement as it is today. Most of the historical claims that are made stem from one of three realms of reality: the 'realm of lost civilisations' the 'realm of technology' and indirectly from the 'realm of superhuman beings'.

These claims can be attributed to three layers in the narrative: the cosmological, the physical and the individual layer. This stratification happens to also provide the areas in which we find the religious affordances as defined by Davidsen: cosmological and theological elements, a way to connect the narrative world to our own world and a key person who acts as a catalyst either through his own inspired work or by inspiring those who experience the narrative. Each of these layers has its own claims to historical veracity. Although these layers are closely intertwined within the narrative, for the purpose of our analysis they will be dealt with separately.

⁷⁵ Cf. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*. Pp. 44, 45.

Cosmological Layer - History of the World

The cosmology we encounter in the crystal skull narrative is largely taken from the ancient alien theory. According to that theory the earth has been visited by aliens who were instrumental in the development of the human race, either through DNA recombination or through interbreeding with early humanoids. All religious narratives contain memories of these events, erroneously attributing them to gods. The theory offers no explanation of where these aliens came from,⁷⁶ or what their origin was. The stories of lost civilisations, including off but not limited to Atlantis and Lemuria are supposed to be evidence of the aliens' ongoing influence on the development of humanity.

When we look critically into these historical claims we find that there is no accepted scientific evidence of aliens having visited our planet in the past or in the present time. We can dismiss this fact as lacking historical veracity. None of the subsequent claims considering the actions of those aliens can therefore be substantiated.

The belief in the existence of Atlantis in a historical past plays a large part in the crystal skull narrative. It is in most cases taken to have been a real island kingdom that perished from the world in ancient times. Sometimes people refer to Atlantis as a kingdom that exists in another reality or on another planet, but this seems to be the minority interpretation. The story of Atlantis is in itself multilayered and can be analysed through the oyster mechanism. It has been started by Plato in his 'Timaeus' and 'Critias'. There Plato described a beautiful country with wise and highly developed citizens that became subjected to degeneracy and was finally swallowed by a tidal wave. In Plato's story there was nothing abnormal about those people; they didn't have flying machines, they didn't work with extraterrestrials; they were just well educated people that became corrupted by the power they acquired. For a long time the story has been considered to be a fictional narrative that served as an illustration to Plato's attempts to describe a perfect society. It isn't until the neo-Platonists that Atlantis' status is elevated from fiction to fact. As predicted by the theory of the oyster mechanism, one can track the subsequent authors that contributed to the narrative: Francis Bacon, in his book *New Atlantis*⁷⁷ gave the Atlanteans great bio-technology, astronomy and mystical metallurgy. The authors William Warren⁷⁸ and Ignatius Donnelly⁷⁹ both went through great lengths to prove the historical veracity of the Atlantis story, placing the continent in the North Pole and the Atlantic respectively and both considering it the cradle of humankind, the Garden of Eden so to speak. Both attributed a well developed civilisation to the Atlanteans without resorting to magical abilities or alien connections. That has been mended by Madame Blavatsky⁸⁰ who, in a very complex description of the stages in which the world and the human race came into being attribute supernatural powers to the inhabitants of Atlantis.⁸¹ Her student, Rudolf Steiner,

⁷⁶ Other than from specific stellar systems or planets. But how the aliens themselves came into being is not discussed, thus pushing the question of 'world creation' only further away in time and space but not fundamentally solving it.

⁷⁷ Bacon, F, *New Atlantis*, Oxford 1915

⁷⁸ Warren, W, *Paradise found, the Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole*, Cambridge 1885

⁷⁹ Donnelly, I, *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World*, 1882

⁸⁰ Blavatsky, H.P, *The Secret Doctrine: the Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, London 1888.

Version used: *De Geheime Leer, de Synthese van Wetenschap, Godsdiens en Wijsbegeerten*, deel 2 - *Anthropogenesis*, den Haag.

⁸¹ Blavatsky, H.P, *De Geheime Leer*, Deel 2, Stanza XI, pp 279 - 300

described the Atlanteans as beings living in tree houses that were formed by the trees themselves on request of the Atlanteans. He also had them moving around in flying vehicles.⁸² From the second half of the 20th century the Atlantis narrative is embraced by a variety of groups within the cultic milieu. Ancient alien astronaut theorist, Anthroposophists, Neopaganists and adherents to the crystal skull narrative alike have members that believe in the historical veracity of Atlantis and the great powers of its inhabitants. This view is however contested by mainstream archaeology and history.

The same goes for the sunken continent of Lemuria. This continent was supposed to have existed by 19th century biologists and palaeontologists. They theorised that a continent between Madagascar and India would explain why they found fossils of related species of Lemurs in both lands and why certain geological features were so similar. The name 'Lemuria' was suggested by the English zoologist Phillip L. Sclater.⁸³ The modern theories of plate tectonics has rendered the theory obsolete, but not before madam Blavatsky had integrated Lemuria in the same complex theory of world development in which she had woven the Atlantis myth.⁸⁴

Concluding we can state that the cosmological claims in the crystal skull narrative are not an actual historical account by any accepted historical standard. However, this view is contested by alternative archaeology, ancient alien theorists and conspiracy theorists. In those fields the accepted view is that aliens do indeed exist, that they visited our planet in the ancient past, and that they have continued to do so until this very day. Evidence of this is supposed to be abundant but either ignored by mainstream science or labelled classified by the government that is withholding all proof from the general public.

We do have a dilemma here: although mainstream science does not recognise the existence of alien races and UFO's, more and more evidence to the contrary comes to the public attention. Astronauts, pilots and high ranking military personnel start commenting on incidents with UFO's that they have been involved with personally. From an academic point of view their testimonies cannot be ignored: after all, good science is not about *maintaining* a worldview but about *testing* it to its very limits. Although this is an area in which I do not have sufficient expertise to come to an informed conclusion I feel compelled to bring this dilemma to the reader's attention. The historical claims of this narrative have proven to be invalid until further notice. I deem it possible that this point of view will alter in the course of the coming years. Some elements of the narrative might prove to have historical plausibility after all.⁸⁵

Physical Layer - History of the Artefacts

About the history of the artefacts themselves is quite some dispute. The Mitchell-Hedges skull is currently the most famous crystal skull of all, but it is by no means the only one of which claims of an origin that dates back at least to pre-Columbian times have been made. Three

⁸² Steiner, R, *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*, Rudolf Steiner online archiv: <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/011.pdf>

⁸³ Sprague de Camp, L, *Lost Continents: the Atlantis Theme in History Science and Literature*, New York 1970, page 54.

⁸⁴ Blavatsky, H.P, *De Geheime Leer*, Deel 2, Stanza XI, pp 279 - 300

⁸⁵ For an introduction in the field of UFO's and the conspiracies around them: Coen Vermeeren, *UFO's Bestaan Gewoon*, see bibliography. Dr. ing. Vermeeren is a scholar in aviation and space technology and works at the TU Delft.

other skulls I will mention here, although there are some more of them. For now it is enough to know that the British Museum owns a crystal skull and so does the French Musée du Quai Branly. Both skulls are known since the second half of the 19th century.⁸⁶ The Smithsonian Institute acquired one more recently when in 1992 a crystal skull bigger than a human head was delivered at their doorstep, with a note attached to it. The note said: "This Aztec crystal skull, purported to be part of the Porfirio Díaz collection, was purchased in Mexico in 1960.... I am offering it to the Smithsonian without consideration."⁸⁷

Known for her expertise in Mexican archaeology, Jane MacLaren Walsh, anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institute at the department of anthropology was asked if her department would be interested in the object. Walsh's acceptance of the skull led to an extensive inquiry into the origin of the crystal skulls that were known in several collections and the subsequent writing of an article about her findings.⁸⁸ During her research she traced the origin of the known crystal skulls back as far as she could, thereby discovering that a life-sized crystal skull that appears to be a replica of the British Museum skull, has been purchased somewhere in the early 1900s by Sidney Burney, a London art dealer who subsequently sold it via Sotheby's to a Frederick Arthur Mitchell-Hedges. The same Mitchell-Hedges that was the adopted father of Anna Mitchell-Hedges; the woman who claimed years later that she found the skull in the ruins of Lubaantun in 1924. Walsh linked at least five crystal skulls to the antique dealer Boban amongst them the British Museum skull and the Parisian skull. Walsh discerned several generations of crystal skulls, the first consisting of small skulls not higher than 2,5 cm, all with a vertical hole drilled into them. They might be genuine pre-Columbian beads that are later re-carved in the form of skulls for the European market. The second generation is represented by the British Museum crystal skull, approximately 15 cm high and no vertical hole drilled through it. A third generation of skulls is represented by the skull that was eventually known as the Mitchell-Hedges skull. The fine workmanship and the detached mandible earned this skull a class of its own. According to Walsh there is little doubt that this skull is a replica of the British Museum skull and even an improvement on it.⁸⁹ This pushes the date of carving to after the 1920s. After examination of some of the skulls together with her British Museum colleague Margaret Sax, Walsh concluded that although nearly all skulls had been identified as Aztec, Mixtec, Toltec or Maya at some point, this is unlikely to be the case. The skulls do not resemble any of the known styles in the mentioned cultures and bear markings of carving techniques unknown to those cultures. Walsh believed the smaller ones from the first wave to have been carved in Mexico during a 24 year period in which they were immediately sold in Europe. The Parisian skull and the British Museum skull she believed to have been crafted in the 19th only shortly after specimen of the first generation showed up in museums. The skull that was left at the Smithsonian was bought in 1960 according to the accompanying note. Walsh believed it

⁸⁶ MacLaren Walsh, J, "Legend of the Crystal Skull", *Archeology*, nr 3, vol 61, May/June 2008, a publication of the Archeological Institute of America. Online publication with no page numbers available.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ MacLaren Walsh, J, "Legend of the Crystal Skull", *Archeology*, nr 3, vol 61, May/June 2008.

⁸⁹ Based on the conclusions of G.M. Morant and A. Digby:

Morant, G.M, 'A Morphological Comparison of Two Crystal Skulls', *MAN, a Monthly Record of Anthropological Science*, volume 36, July 1936, page 105-107 and

Digby, A, 'Comments on the Morphological Comparison of Two Crystal Skulls', *MAN, A Monthly Record of Anthropological Science*, volume 36, July 1936, page 107-109

was produced shortly before that. In her professional opinion all crystal skulls are modern hoaxes, none of them is of genuine pre-Columbian descend.

Individual Layer - History of Key Person in Connection to the Narrative

The key person in the development of the crystal skull narrative is without a doubt Anna Mitchell-Hedges. The way in which she handled the story about the finding of the skull and her exposure of it to the public has been instrumental in the growth of an occultural aura around the skull. The historical claims made about the discovery of the Mitchell-Hedges Skull have been the subject of debate as shown in earlier parts of this paper and will not be repeated here. It suffices to say that Anna Mitchell-Hedges claim that she found the skull in a Mayan temple in Lubaantun in 1924 (or 1927) is arguably a lie, constructed to claim legal ownership over the skull.

The crystal skull narrative does not provide information that can be sufficiently verified as historically accurate and fails to do so on all levels. We can therefore safely assume that we are indeed dealing with a mythical narrative and not with a historic account.

Chapter IV: Intramythical Analysis

Further Analysis of the Exemplary Narrative

For the purpose of this paper we have used the crystal skull narrative in an exemplary way. It served to illustrate the hypothesis of the realms of reality as well as a demonstrative tool in the working of the oyster mechanism. We researched the historical veracity of the numerous claimed made in the narrative in order to establish whether we were dealing with an actual historical account or not. Both the allocation to realms of reality and the research of the historical roots of the narrative have provided us with insight in the building blocks of the narrative. They are in line with the prefiguration stage of Paul Ricoeur. By establishing that the crystal skull narrative is in fact not an historical account we paved the way for further analysis of the narrative, working from the supposition that this narrative can be considered mythical in nature. In the first chapter we were introduced to the difference between *intramythical* analysis and *extramythical* analysis. In the intramythical analysis we will explore the configuration stage of the narrative: what are its main actors, how do they interact and how do these interactions contribute to the plot of the story. We will again link the different story elements to a realm of reality, broadening our understanding on how the elements do have a certain belonging to one another.

Actors in the Narrative

As far as characters are concerned the crystal skull narrative is very simple and straightforward. There are no individual players in the narrative other than as representative of one of the three groups of players that are important to the story:

1. *The aliens* who visited our earth in ancient times. They were advanced, benign, created the human race (or helped it develop, thus making us into what we are now), and when they had to leave they left us a number of crystal skulls, filled with knowledge about the universe and ready for us to use when we need it. We can still communicate with those aliens, either through the use of a crystal skull as a communicative device, or through the communication with a crystal skull as being an entity itself.
2. *The ancient heirs* of the alien knowledge and the crystal skulls. This includes debated races like that of the Atlanteans and Lemurians, as well as priests and shamans from Tibet, the Incas, the Aztec, the Mayans, the Egyptians and so on. All these people are thought to have been caring for one of the original skulls, right down to contemporary Mayan shamans. According to the story those caretakers have conducted rituals with the skulls, imprinted their own knowledge in them as well as reading the knowledge of the aliens from them. They also used the skulls for healing and meditative purposes. Some skulls are thought to have been able to influence the weather conditions and have thus contributed to the wellbeing of the native peoples in which care they were.
3. *The modern day caretakers*.⁹⁰ By acquiring a crystal skull of your own, you can become a

⁹⁰ The owners of crystal skulls are not called *owner*. They go by the name of *caretaker*, *carer* or *guardian*. See for example Jaap van Etten, *Crystal Skulls*, p. 3 and Shapiro, J, *A Definite Explanation about the Crystal Skulls*, published on www.skullis.com.

successor in this line of knowledge from the dawn of time until now. Arguably this is the greatest strength of the crystal skull narrative: it offers the opportunity not only to connect to the ancient mysteries but to become an active part of it, to become a priest in your own right so to speak. This narrative is, when we look at the religious affordances, ultimately not about aliens, Atlanteans or Mayan priests: it is about us, and about how special one can be for the cost of a piece of carved rock quartz and the strength of one's beliefs in the narrative. The three main character groups are taken from two of the realms of reality: either the 'realm of lost civilisations' or the 'realm of technology'. The actions that the characters perform, like the healing with skulls and the communication through crystal skulls, are coming mainly from the 'realm of energy works' and in a lesser degree from the 'realm of nature spirits'. The last realm appears specifically in connection to the perceived entity of the crystal skull being itself. One group of characters, the modern day caretakers, are not themselves allocated to a specific realm of reality. They are the participating audience. Their linkage to a realm of reality is not of a substantial kind but lies in the field of agence. They are strongly connected to the realm of magical spiritualities as being the practitioners or adepts of this realm.

Objects in the Narrative

The crystal skull narrative revolves around artefacts; the crystal skulls. They are the 'raison d'être' of the narrative and the actors in it. Many stories feature important artefacts; a ring, a magical sword or a sacred cup are but a few examples, but the crystal skull narrative takes the role of the artefact to a whole new level: the skulls are imbued with consciousness, intelligence and intent. They like to communicate with humans:

I think it is safe to conclude that the Crystal Skulls draw one into making contact with them. The gazer's vibration activates the skull on some level, which then sends back energy appropriate to the observer that helps to further open a person's chakras, removes memory-veils of knowledge contained in a person's consciousness, etc.⁹¹

The agence of the crystal skulls go as far as that they are supposed to actively participate in the process of becoming somebody's property:

Some people say that it is not you who select a crystal skull, but the crystal skull that selects you. I believe both have truth. You feel attracted to a crystal skull because that crystal skull has a vibration that you can easily resonate with, and you recognize that resonance through the feeling you have for that crystal skull. At the same time, your energy awakens the energy of the crystal skull. The crystal skull resonates with aspects of your energy, and it consequently vibrates stronger than any of the other crystal skulls. It is "calling" the person whose energy induces its activation through his or her resonance with that crystal skull.⁹²

The skulls do not only communicate with their caretaker, they also communicate with each other:

Portal for example, has proven to be able to receive important energy from different places and other ancient skulls, and transmit this energy to the other skulls in order to help them to become more powerful. (original text in Dutch: Portal is bijvoorbeeld in staat gebleken om

⁹¹ Bowen, S, Nocerino F.R. and Shapiro, J, *Mysteries of the Crystal Skulls Revealed*, p.86.

⁹² Etten, J. van, *Crystal Skulls: Interacting with a Phenomenon*, p. 55.

belangrijke energie van verschillende plekken en andere oeroude schedels te ontvangen en door te geven aan de andere schedels om hen te helpen krachtiger te worden).⁹³

This perceived ability to convey energy and knowledge from one skull to another is put to use within the crystal skull movement. On the internet are skulls for sale that have been energized by spending some time in the presence of a known ancient or old skull.⁹⁴

In the perception of the people involved in the crystal skull movement the crystal skulls are not objects: they are entities. They have a personality, they have their own name and they have their own area of expertise. A skull can for example be perfect for the use in healing ceremonies, or will be perceived as a protector.

Religious Affordances in the Narrative

The religious affordances of this narrative, the capacity of the narrative to give meaning to somebody's life, to 'make sense of it all' is broad. The narrative provides a clear history of humankind based on the ancient alien theory. There is however no cosmogony connected to the crystal skull cosmology: the narrative offers a range of ideas on how the universe is organised and by whom it is inhabited and to what end, but it has no opinion on how the universe came into being. By omitting a cosmogony within the crystal skull narrative there is room for different religious ideas about the origin of creation and for combining mainstream religious ideas with the crystal skull narrative. This makes the crystal skull narrative - in spite of its exotic aspects - quite accessible for people from different religious or spiritual backgrounds.

More importantly, once engaged in the crystal skull narrative, it offers all the religious affordances needed to make the narrative fit for religious use independently from whatever religious background one might have started out with. In the first chapter I defined religion as "the belief in the existence of supernatural beings and the perceived necessity to form a meaningful relationship with them through acts of reverence." There are supernatural beings with infinite wisdom and seemingly limitless technology in the guise of aliens. There is a perceived necessity to form a relationship with them in order to receive their wisdom and help save the earth and mankind. Finally the ritualistic properties of the dealings with the crystal skull as vessels for the supernatural beings show feelings of reverence.

⁹³ Shapiro, J. & Roodnat-Shapiro, D, *Kristallen Schedels*, p.117.

⁹⁴ See <http://www.crystalskullexplorers.com/ET-EnergizedSkulls.html> on which skulls can be bought that are energized by being in the presence of the skull ET, owned by the Dutch skull researcher Joke van Dieten.

Chapter V: Extramythical Analysis

Until now we have looked at how the narrative was constructed over time, whether there was a historical truth in the narrative and we have conducted an intramythical analysis. Since the modern day caretakers can be viewed both as adherents to the story as well as participants in it, they have been mentioned in the earlier paragraph. I believe the active participation in an ancient mystery line is the main attraction for modern day skull keepers. To explore these benefits deeper we will now turn to the use of the narrative in everyday life by conducting an extramythical analysis.

The Ancillary Strategies of Loyal Rue

When we shift our attention to the interaction between the narrative and the surrounding world I speak of the *extramythical analysis*. I have been inspired by part of the work of Loyal Rue in the development of the extramythical analysis. In his book *Religion is not about God*, Rue identified five strategies used to lend credence to a central narrative in any given religion: intellectual strategies, experiential strategies, ritual strategies, aesthetic strategies and institutional strategies. Rue called these the ‘ancillary strategies’⁹⁵. These ancillary strategies constitute the different ways in which a narrative can carry on within its surrounding culture; how it behaves and interacts in the refiguring stage of the formation of a narrative. By looking at each of those five strategies one comes to a detailed and structured extramythical analysis. It can save us from the pitfalls of textual analysis only and thus makes for the difference between narratology and narrativism. The strategies are defined as follows:

- 1: *Intellectual strategies*; those strategies have to do with the rational discourse about the given narrative (like philosophy and theology),
- 2: *Experiential strategies*: The narrative is validated by personal, transformative experiences. They can be purposefully induced or spontaneous.
- 3: *Ritual strategies*: In this case ‘ritual’ is perceived to be the ‘practice’ of the religion. The conducting of ceremonies of worship for example, has a strengthening effect on the aura of factuality of the narrative, thus inducing feelings of belief in the veracity of the narrative in its audience.
- 4: *Aesthetic strategies*; the representation of the narrative in art. This does seem to have some overlap with ritual strategies. After all, much religious art is created for ritual. The essential difference is that ritual strategies are of a performative nature whereas aesthetic strategies are of a perceptive nature. Rue points to the use of art and symbol to manipulate the emotional predisposition in man in order to express, transmit and revitalize the narrative.
- 5: *Institutional strategies*. Narratives change over time and so do the interpretations of the meaning of a narrative. Somewhere someone has the power to make alterations and influence the other four ancillary strategies, sometimes by changing the myth, sometimes by changing the ritual and so on. Rue refers to the centre of this power as ‘institutional’. This should not be confused with an actual institution like a church. Centres of institutional power may be far more subtle than that. It is needless to say not all ancillary strategies enjoy the same emphasis within any given narrative. A fundamental adaptation of Rue’s work lies in the fact that he

⁹⁵ Rue, L, *Religion is not about God*, pp. 126 - 144.

places the 'root narrative' in the centre of his scheme, where I think we can effectively place any narrative in the centre. The more essential the narrative is for the enduring of the cultural context, the more it will be carried on through the use of the ancillary strategies. A simple fairy tale (here in the meaning of folkloric fantasy tale with no claims of veracity) will fail to extract any exciting results in our analysis. Let us see what result we get from analysing the crystal skull narrative with the aid of the five ancillary strategies.

Analysing the Crystal Skull Narrative through the Ancillary Strategies

Intellectual strategies: The discursive strategies used to strengthen the crystal skull narrative are of a scientific nature rather than of a philosophical or theological nature. The high level of independence of the adherents that all have their own communication with the supernatural being accounts for a lack of theological debate: all knowledge obtained through meditation or dreams is perceived to be valuable in its own right and is not debated.⁹⁶ The use of scientific methods and adopting a science-like language is in line with the supposed scientific advancement of the supernatural beings: the narrative is already infused with an aura of technology. As a discursive strategy this phenomenon has been extensively described by Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*.⁹⁷

Experiential strategies: A large part of the crystal skull movement is centred on the personal experiences of the adherents. All these experiences have to do with 'connecting' with a crystal skull. People sometimes use scrying (staring into the cranium of a clear crystal skull much like into a crystal ball) in order to see pictures emerge, but most of the time the efforts to connect to a skull are meditative in nature. It involves sitting with the skull in your hands, lying down with the skull on one of your chakras or taking the skull to bed with you and sleep next to it, asking for clear dreams.⁹⁸ A body of ready to go guided meditations is available on internet web shops⁹⁹ and through his Facebook page¹⁰⁰ the author and crystal skull explorer Joshua Shapiro hosts 'Crystal Skulls World Peace Meditations' on a regular basis.

Ritual strategies: The notion that crystal skulls carved by modern artists are every bit as 'real' as the skulls brought to the earth by an alien race opens up the possibility for everybody to enter the narrative and become one of its actors. One only has to buy a skull to become a 'caretaker' of a crystal skull being. Workshops are given on how to 'open' a skull and how to 'work' with them, allowing anyone with an interest to become an initiate into the crystal skull narrative. The strong connection that is made with the Incas and the Mayans and the role of their shamans in the protection of the secret wisdom of the crystal skulls opens up an avenue toward the use of shaman techniques in connection to the crystal skulls. Individual practices are supplemented by meeting up with other caretakers and allow the crystal skulls to communicate with each other. Also people lend out their skull to other caretakers to work

⁹⁶ Channeling has become possible for almost everybody through several stages in the development in the cultic milieu and is perceived as a dependable source of knowledge. Cf: Hamer, O, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Leiden 2004, pp. 427-430.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 201-330.

⁹⁸ Cf. Shapiro, J, & Roodnat-Shapiro, D, *Kristallen Schedels*, pp. 121-136.

⁹⁹ For example on www.crystalskulls.com

¹⁰⁰ FBpage: Joshua Shapiro - A Crystal Skull Explorer

with them for a while, or organize healing session with their skull(s). Some people working with crystal skulls have also been trained in (neo-)shamanism. They prefer to do a little ritual before working with their skull, or do shamanistic healing rituals aided by the presence of their skull. On crystal skull events one may witness the use of modern shamanic rituals including the honouring of the four quarters, mother earth and father sky¹⁰¹. The influence of writers like Michael Harner¹⁰² on the shamanic use of crystals and trance journeying as a way to obtain knowledge is clear¹⁰³.

Aesthetic strategies: In the crystal skull narrative and the movement connected to it, aesthetics are very important. The main focus point of the narrative is after all an object and joining the narrative is done by buying such an object for ourselves. Over time, with the growing of interest in the crystal skull narrative, a wide variety of modern crystal skulls have entered the market. Since a couple of years we see the appearance of crystal skulls that are not human in shape. This trend started with crystal skulls that were humanoid, but supposedly alien in shape and has continued with the creation of dragon skulls and skulls in the shape of raven heads, wolf heads and other animals. This is an interesting development. I have not found evidence yet that the new shape of crystal skulls are being woven into the crystal skull narrative with the possible exception of humanoid skulls like the so called 'traveler skulls' and 'starbeing skulls' and more recently 'druse skulls'. (See for examples of different types of crystal skulls the photo gallery in the centre of this paper)

Institutional strategies: The crystal skull movement does not seem to have entered a stage of institutionalisation in the classic sense of the word yet. The power to expand on the narrative, create new types of skulls or add ritualistic behaviour is invested in every caretaker individually. Recognised authorities in the field are mainly the authors of books on the crystal skull phenomenon. A certain degree of authority can be obtained through the artefact one is the caretaker of: if a crystal skull is recognised as 'old' or 'ancient', notably by established authorities like aforementioned authors, the caretaker of that skull will get recognition through the artefact.

Crossovers: Crystal Bricolage

Since the crystal skull narrative is very artefact oriented I encountered a rather interesting phenomenon during my research into this narrative and the movement: a wild variety of objects that are crystal skull inspired have been flooding the market in the last decade. In the aesthetic strategy we saw the upcoming of crystal skulls in the shape of alien heads and the emergence of 'druse skulls' (see photo gallery in the centre of this thesis) but that also dragon, raven, owl and other animal skulls are being produced. Although no in depth research has been done to these particular skulls, they seem to attract a group of buyers that is not

¹⁰¹ See for example the program of the Crystal Skull Event 2012, held in Holland, on which a 'Despacho Ceremony' is given a large time slot with no competing events going on at the same time.

<http://www.purityevents.nl/crystal-skull-event-2012>

¹⁰² Harner, M, *The Way of the Shaman*, New York, 1990 and *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality*, Berkeley, 2013

¹⁰³ Guided meditations for example can be downloaded from websites like www.crystalskull.com for a fee.

primarily interested in the crystal skull narrative as presented in this thesis.

Dragon skulls seem to attract people that are interested in energy work, calling themselves 'lightworkers'. On some of the websites I consulted on dragon skulls there are references to the classic crystals skulls and the same kind of properties are attributed to the dragon skulls, but adherent maintain that their focus is 'working with dragon energy.'¹⁰⁴ Further research is needed to establish if these are isolated examples or maybe we are witnessing the start of a new 'denomination' within the crystal skull movement. Other skulls, like raven and wolf skulls (and owls and even sabre-toothed cats) seem to be of interest for people interested in the material and not necessarily in the crystal skull narrative that we are discussing here. None of the websites on which these skulls are offered refer to any occultual qualities other than the qualities the stone of which the skull is made is supposed to possess. The last addition to the vast growing range of crystal skull types, are the skulls made from other material than crystal, like shells and fossils. They seem to have mainly decorative meaning but I could be mistaken: the narrative is developing while you read this paper and new additions might be woven into the fabric as we speak. There are different crossovers between the crystal skull narrative and other occultual ideas and practices. In 2007 a set of cards, the 'Crystal Skull Message Cards' entered the market, to "offer the opportunity for other people to experience these special crystalline 'tools'..."¹⁰⁵ The deck, consisting of 39 cards is accompanied by a booklet that teaches the buyer how to use the cards for healing and/or meditative purposes which shows a strong resemblance with the use of tarot card decks. Also small crystal skulls shaped into pendulums to make them useful as a dowsing tool are being sold¹⁰⁶ and recently I came across a Shiva lingam stone¹⁰⁷ being decorated with a skull on one of its ends to combine crystal skull power and the power of the Shiva lingam stone. It seems that most of the innovations that appeared over the last couple of years are economically driven: they appear on websites that sell them and are brought to the public's attention through newsletters that seem to be mainly infomercials.¹⁰⁸

Conclusions on the Crystal Skull Narrative

The crystal skull narrative as it is today presents itself as a historical account of the development of the earth and the human race. When we trace the story back to its earliest form we find that several authors have added different elements to the story over the course of the last eighty years with the most composing done in the 1980s. What started out as a story of Mayan priests and possibly Atlantean connections centred around a mysterious artefact, grew into a cosmology of intergalactic proportions in which the ancient alien theory became more and more prominent. From a mainstream scientific point of view none of the claims made within the crystal skull narrative can be substantiated. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that there does exist a number of crystal skulls that first came to the attention of the public from the second half of the 19th century onwards, and from which the origin cannot be established with certainty.

¹⁰⁴ Cf: www.dragonwisdomschool.org and <https://dragondreaming.wordpress.com>

¹⁰⁵ From the guidebook accompanying the deck of cards, page 7

¹⁰⁶ By the name of 'Advisor Crystal Skull': www.crystalskulls.com

¹⁰⁷ Shiva Lingam Stones are sacred stones in the Hindu tradition.

¹⁰⁸ Like the *Crystal Skull Guardian Monthly News*, from www.crystalskulls.com

A growing number of people are interested in crystal skulls and use them as healing tools within a religious/spiritual framework that has strong connections with modern shamanism, light work and eastern based concepts like chakra healing. Becoming a caretaker of a crystal skull allows the individual to connect with the narrative on a personal level, placing themselves in a tradition of ancient wisdom and acquiring a form of priesthood. Consequently there are no 'laymen' within the crystal skull movement; every believer is automatically a participant on a priestly level. The crystal skull narrative encompasses ideas about the future of planet earth and allocates an important role to the human race in the grand scheme of things: the elevation of planet earth towards a higher state of consciousness. Planetary awareness and healing are key-concepts and only human beings of sufficient spiritual development are being chosen by alien entities to receive the necessary knowledge and tools to assist them in helping the earth and the human race upon it reaching their full potential. An individual knows that he is chosen when crystal skulls are resonating with him, prompting him to buy one. Since modern-day skull carvings have been absorbed in the crystal skull narrative the story has become accessible for anyone with fifty dollar to spare on a small crystal skull of their own.

Caretakers of crystal skulls show a great affection for these artefacts. They are being named ('reveal' their name to their caretaker) and are taken to gatherings with other caretakers to meet with other skulls. Sometimes caretakers even claim that their skulls are 'a couple' and should stay together when they move house to another caretaker (which means that they are being sold in a package deal and cannot be bought as single objects).

None of the caretakers of crystal skulls I have met feels that the crystal skull movement is a religious movement. The crystal skull narrative is not perceived to be a mythological or religious narrative but is labelled as alternative science. In fact the term 'crystal skull movement' is my own, neither the authors of the books on the subject nor the caretakers I have spoken to perceive this as a movement. The main reason for not labeling their own ideas as religious is because they do not 'believe in supernatural beings', they 'know of the existence of aliens', which is another thing altogether.

From an academic point of view however I would label the crystal skull movement as a new religious movement. All elements of a religion can be found within the movement: The belief in supernatural beings namely the aliens, the perceived necessity to form a meaningful relationship with them (if we don't the planet will surely perish, we have to aid the aliens in saving the earth now we still can) and acts of reverence. It is clear that the communing with crystal skulls has a deep spiritual meaning to the adherents of the movement. Every single author speaks about how life changing their experiences with crystal skulls are, that they have never been the same after their first meeting with a crystal skull, and that speaking with and about crystal skulls is the reason they are on this planet in this incarnation. Most authors claim to recall past lives in which they also worked with crystal skulls in a priestly capacity and how the work they do now is simply a follow up of something they started long ago. I have not been able to research this specific element of the narrative within a larger population of non-authors.

Chapter VI: Distilling a Methodology

Finding a Methodology to Accompany our Theoretical Framework.

At the beginning of this thesis we started out on a journey in search of finding a theoretical framework that could assist us in analysing complex, multilayered, composite myths. The theory of the realms of reality has given us a mapping device to understand the coherence between seemingly unrelated ideas and the gravitational pull they have over one-another in the prefiguring stage of a narrative. By closely looking to the crystal skull narrative, we have found the oyster mechanism. With the help of the oyster mechanism we can observe how, in the figuring stage of the narrative, the different elements are added to the narrative. We have established the historical veracity of the different elements of the narrative to discern whether we were dealing with a composite myth or with a historical account. Through our intramythical and extramythical analysis we have come to a broad understanding of the narrative and its agency in the world. I am confident that we now have enough material to distil a methodology from our work that can be of service to future research into composite myth.

Five Steps: A guide to Analyse (Composite) Myths

Step one: allocation to realms of reality

When we first look at a narrative, especially a composite one, the abundance of story lines, story elements, building blocks and underlying motives can be overwhelming. By looking at all these aspects and allocating them to different realms of reality we begin to understand how all these elements come together. It gives us a structure from which we can start our research into the different aspects of the narrative.

Step two: History of the Narrative

2.1: Research the historic roots of the narrative and/ or identify the different narratives woven together. As indicated in 'the oyster mechanism', narratives, especially composite narratives, are constructions of different narratives woven together. Any story that we are researching has probably earlier versions. We need to look at these previous narratives and try to locate the individuals that have contributed to its growth. Look for evidence of the historic veracity there where this is claimed.

2.2: Research the origin of the different narratives that are identified in step 1.1. In composite myths we find different narratives that have been used as building blocks for the narrative at hand. These different building blocks can be identified and in their turn tested on historical veracity.

Step three: Intramythical Analysis

3.1: Zoom in on the characters in the narrative and their actions: By analysing the actions of the main characters of the story we get our first pointers on the individual and collective benefits that the narrative provides to its audience. Information about a cosmology is revealed at the same time as instructions on moral conduct are promoted.

3.2: Identify the object or artefacts in the narrative: In some but not all narratives there are

objects used in the configuring stage of the narrative that acquire so much agency of their own that they make their way into the refiguring stage of the narrative; they become 'real' and transfer into objects of worship. The crystal skulls in the crystal skull narrative are a good example of this but also the symbol of the cross in Catholicism is exemplary on how an element in a story becomes an object in real life. By analysing their role during the intramythical analysis we better understand their appearance in the extramythical analysis.

3.3: identify the religious affordances in the narrative. The elements we have identified in the first two steps of our research are now being glued together through their interaction. They show us the purpose of the narrative in its instructive and meaning giving capacity. This is where we identify the religious affordances of the narrative.

Step four: Extramythical Analysis

Analyse the narrative through the ancillary strategies: the extramythical analysis consists in its entirety of researching the ancillary strategies identified by Loyal Rue: intellectual strategies, experiential strategies, ritual strategies, aesthetic strategies and institutional strategies.

Stage five: Conclusion and Interpretation

Draw conclusions about the main function of the narrative and present your interpretation. By working through the first four steps of this methodology we have now enough information from both an intra-mythical as well as an extra-mythical perspective to present our conclusions about the narrative.

Chapter VII: Final Thoughts

From Occultural Idea to Cultural Practice - the Strength of a Good Story

One of the reasons I have chosen to study the crystal skull narrative lies in the fact that it has become very visible in a very short time. Over the course of the last eighty years we have witnessed the coming up and the maturation of the crystal skull narrative. Fairly early on the process we see that the bipartition between theory and practice, between the narrative as story and the narrative as lived reality has been lifted. Early researchers into the phenomenon of the crystal skulls have used ritualistic practices as means of investigation, displaying a spiritual or religious bond with their research subject. Since the popularisation of the crystal skull narrative in the last twenty years there has been an enormous increase in the availability of specimens of the object of the narrative: crystal skulls. Through New Age stores and internet sites there are literally thousands of crystal skulls to be obtained on any one given time. The market still seems to expand, given the fact that new forms of crystal skulls are added to the spectrum almost on a daily basis.

The growth in popularity of the crystal skull narrative gives proof of the ability of modern, relatively well educated and relatively rich Westerners to attach belief to controversial ideas even if they are not 'groomed' in them. (Compared to the fact that a lot of those Westerners are groomed into believing the Christian narrative for example) I find this fascinating and believe that there is a lot to be learned about the function of religion if we turn our eyes to the most recent developments in that field. A large part of that study should go to the narratives entertained within those movements. What I call the crystal skull movement would not have been identified as such if it wasn't for the strong central narrative that moves it. I therefore completely agree with Tumminia and Kirkpatrick¹⁰⁹ when they state that modern myths have been wrongfully understudied and hope that the tool I have developed in this thesis can be of some assistance in mending that omission.

Future Works

I started the work for this thesis from the need of finding a comprehensive way in which to study the narratives of new religious movements. I believe that the work done so far has lived up to the expectations were raised in the introduction of this thesis. The analysis conducted so far on the exemplary narrative is extensive and gives a broad understanding of the narrative itself as well as of the workings of the narrative in the apparent world. As always there remains work to do. I hereby present some ideas on possible future work based on this thesis:

- Both the theoretical framework as the methodological tool presented in this work are mainly based on my work with the crystal skull narrative. The first thing that I would like to see happening is applying these tools to different narratives to see if they ultimately provide enough information to come to good comparative research into modern myths.
- I also would like to see the work expended to *composite mythologies* and establish if there

¹⁰⁹ Tumminia, Diana G. & Kirkpatrick, R. George, "The Mythic dimensions of New Religious Movements, Function, Reality Construction, and Process"

even is such a thing. Are there within modern religious movements bodies of myths that can be classified as composite mythologies with the same coherence and stature as for example Greek mythology? And if so, do those mythologies belong to their own realm of reality or are they incorporating different realms? Are all myths within such a mythology modern (singular or composite) or is there room for older myths within the same mythology?

- As far as the crystal skull narrative itself is concerned, there are different avenues open for further research. Two of them spring in mind: for this paper I have conducted a literature study without adding the benefits of extensive fieldwork. Since the main object of this paper was to come to a toolbox for the study of composite myths this is entirely defensible. However, to deepen the understanding of the crystal skull movement itself, one might want to go out there and talk to the actual adherents of the crystal skull narrative. I have done this on a handful of occasions and in a haphazard kind of way, just to get the 'feel' of the movement, but structured research is required in this area.

- We came across different kind of modern skulls. Particularly the crystal dragon skulls seem to be in use in a movement based on a different narrative than the crystal skull narrative. It would be interesting to establish if we are dealing with a crystal skull 'denomination', or a movement that has no direct ties with the crystal skull movement and just happens to use a similar kind of artefact.

- One thing that I find fascinating within the crystal skull narrative is the way in which the artefacts are perceived. On first glance there seem to be a lot of similarities between the veneration of the crystal skulls and that of Christian relics in the middle ages. The relics of a martyr or saint, sometimes the skull, often other body parts, are reported to emit sweet scents or music, and bring healing and protection to the owner... I believe there is an interesting paper waiting to be written here.

W.J. de Jong

Rotterdam June 2015

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www.crystalskull.com

www.skullis.com

List of illustrations

Cover photo: Labradorite crystal skull - courtesy of skullis.com

Fig. 1: Graphical presentation of the theory of the Realms of Reality

Photo gallery of different types of crystal skulls - centre pages, courtesy of skullis.com

- 1) human skull, citrine
- 2) Mitchell-Hedges skull, rose quartz replica
- 3) Alien 'traveler' skull, amethyst
- 4) Alien 'Star Being' skull, lapis lazuli
- 5) Dragon skull, african green stone
- 6) Raven skull, agathe
- 7) Wolf skull, labradorite
- 8) Owl skull, black obsidian
- 9) Lion skull, white jade
- 10) Saber tooth skull, rock quartz
- 11) Druse skull, amethyst
- 12) Druse skull, quartz rock
- 13) Skull carved in chamber ammonite fossil
- 14) Skull carved out of a Cypraecassis Ruffa
- 15) Skull carved out of a Trochus

Photo gallery of different types of crystal skulls.

Photographs courtesy of skullis.com



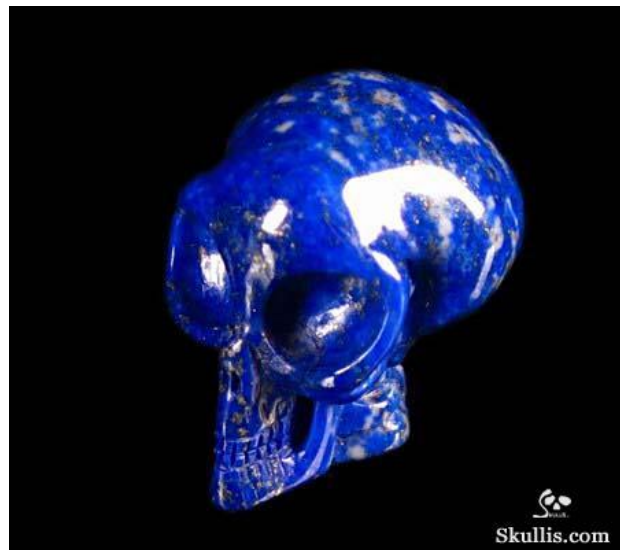
1) Human skull, citrine



2) Mitchell-Hedges skull, rose quartz replica



3) Alien 'traveler' skull, amethyst



4) Alien 'Star Being' skull, lapis lazuli



5) Dragon skull, african green stone



6) Raven skull, agathe



7) Wolf skull, labradorite



8) Owl skull
black obsidian



9) Lion skull
white jade



10) Saber tooth skull
rock quartz



11) Druse skull, amethyst



12) Druse skull, quartz rock



13) Skull carved in chamber ammonite fossil



14) Skull carved out of a Cypraea Ruffa



15) Skull carved out of a Trochus