

Synchronicity, Isomorphism & the Implicate Order

No concept in Jungian psychology creates more controversy than the idea of synchronicity; to mention the subject at all is to be immediately classified as loony by such groups as the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Yet, paradoxically, no other Jungian theory has aroused more enthusiasm among artists, writers, "mystics," and — strangely — quantum physicists. If there is any truth in the synchronicity model — which could be defined as "psychologically induced space-time relativity" — it explains perhaps even more than Jung himself realized; if there is no truth in it, it must count as the most plausible error of the 20th century.

Let us examine some examples of alleged synchronicity, and of seemingly related phenomena, and gradually draw our own conclusions.

NOTES ON JUNG AND QUANTUM MECHANICS by Robert Anton Wilson

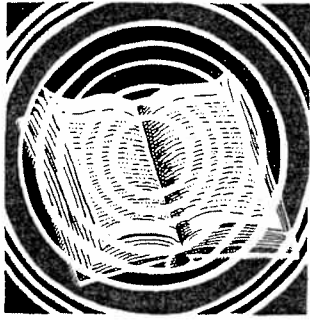


**DUNNE'S
"PRECOGNITION."** In 1902 the aeronautical engineer J.W. Dunne had a vivid nightmare in which he saw a French-speaking island and, in dream logic, "knew"

that a city there was about to be destroyed by a volcanic eruption. The nightmare elements were the usual hurrying, getting lost, etc. in an attempt to warn the people. Dunne, in the dream, "knew" that 4000 would be killed. Two days later a volcano blew in French-speaking Martinique and 40,000 were killed.¹

The fundamentalist materialist, of course, says "sheer coincidence." But some of us are haunted by the omnipresence of such "coincidences" in human life and would dearly love to have a scientific explanation for them rather than a mere pejorative label to dismiss them. What is interesting to me is that many parapsychologists would happily classify Dunne's dream as *precognition*. Although the fundamentalist materialists are hardly grateful to him for it, Jung's theory of synchronicity provides a less "spooky" and more "scientific" interpretation than the precognition theory. Furthermore, as we shall see, Jung's intuition that synchronicity somehow connects with quantum mechanics has more supporting evidence now than when he first uttered it.

It is also suggestive that Dunne dreamed of 4000 casualties and the news story two days later provided 40,000. This does tend to remind one of transmission errors in other communication channels.



THE HAGGARD EFFECT.

A World War I story from the *Daily Mail* of London: One battery of British soldiers observed a repeating pattern: Every time they received a book

by H. Rider Haggard, they would shortly receive an S.O.S. Eventually they all became so convinced this "coincidence" was repeating that they requested no more books by Haggard be sent to them. The number of S.O.S.'s then declined.²

It seems odd that this happened to military men; except for Kipling, Haggard was the ablest defender of militarism in British literature. I also note that Haggard wrote *She*, which many consider the classic portrait of a Jungian anima or female archetype, and Jung connected synchronicities with archetypes.

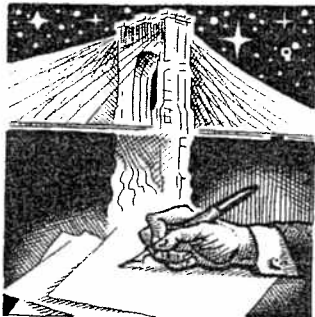


THE SPY WHO CAME IN THROUGH THE FLOOR.

When Norman Mailer began work on his novel *Barbary Shore*, there was no

Russian spy in it. As Mailer worked, a Russian spy entered the cast and gradually became the dominant character. After the book was published the F.B.I. came around and arrested the man living in the apartment below Mailer. He was Col. Boris Abel, named the top Russian spy in the U.S. at that time.³

Once again, I think of the relative conservatism of the synchronicity model. Some occultists would cheerfully claim that "psychic emanations" from Col. Abel were rising through the floor and invading Mailer's typewriter (or brain). I also think the fundamentalist materialist chant, or banishing ritual — "coincidence, coincidence, coincidence" — sounds increasingly like an attempt to evade the problem raised by such data rather than to deal with it.

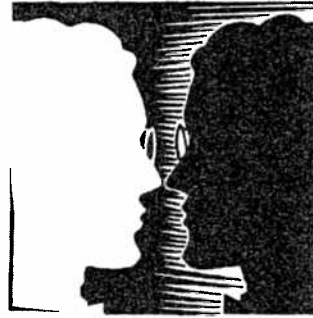


A BRIDGE IN TIME.

When Hart Crane was living in Brooklyn Heights he wrote his epic poem, *The Bridge*, in which the building of the Brooklyn Bridge — the longest suspension bridge

ever attempted until its time — is the symbol of human aspiration and hope. Only a year later did Crane discover that the address at which he lived while writing the poem was where Washington Roebling, the crippled chief engineer on the bridge, had lived nearly 50 years earlier.⁴

Some will regard this as "haunting" or "psychic residue." Synchronicity again seems a less radical notion than its occult rivals.

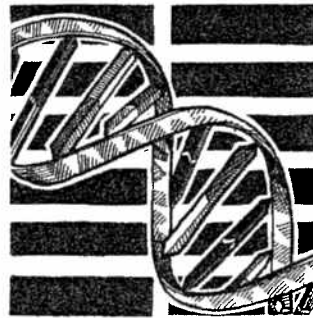


BLACK AND WHITE.

In Switzerland in 1915 James Joyce met a man named Schwarz ("Black") who introduced him to a man named Weiss ("White"). Since Joyce was

as fluent in German as in English, this coincidence amused and intrigued him; but it was through Weiss that Joyce met Jung himself. Joyce later went on to build a black/white symbolism into *Finnegans Wake*.⁵

This is the kind of thing that drives CSICOP to froth at the mouth. Joyce, as we all know, had ruined his mind by reading too much hermetic philosophy and it was absurd of him to find meaning in a coincidence of names.



MIND-LIKE STRUCTURES.

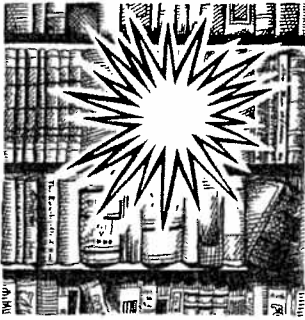
Leibniz invented the binary number system in the early 1700s. As he himself was the first to discover (in 1713) this code is entirely isomorphic (similar in structure) to the *I Ching*, a

Chinese work so old that it has been called "the oldest book in the world." (The 64 hexagrams of the *Ching* are perfect isomorphs of the first 64 numbers, 0 to 63, in binary.) More recently, Martin Schonberger has demonstrated that both the *Ching* and binary are isomorphic to the 64 codons of the genetic code.⁶

This is more provocative than it appears at first glance. Modern computers operate on Leibniz's binary code and materialists claim these machines can think or will soon think, but mystics say this is impossible because the machines lack "souls." Yet the *I Ching* operates on the same code, and here the positions are reversed: Materialists deny that the *Ching* "thinks" (gives meaningful answers), but mystics claim it does think. (The human brain operates on a similar binary system, which may account for the occasional impression that people think, or can think at times.)

The DNA code is isomorphic to both binary and the *Ching*, a fact that throws an entirely new light on the vexed question, is there a "mind" or something like a "mind" be-

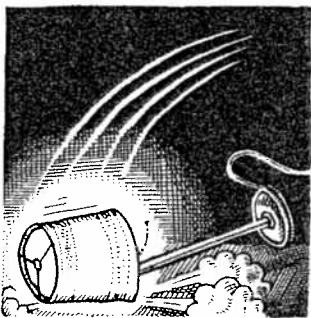
hind evolution? It appears there is something at least as "mind-like" as the *I Ching* or a computer.



THE HAUNTED BOOKCASE. One day in 1909 Freud and Jung were having an argument about parapsychology. As tempers flared, there suddenly came an explosive

bang from the bookcase. Jung said that was an example of a catalytic phenomenon. Freud said, "Bosh." Suddenly seized with intuitive certainty, Jung announced that to prove he was right there would be a second explosive crash from the bookcase.

There was.⁷



A WOBBLE IN TIME. Robert Harvie, an English psychologist, was reading Jung's account of the above incident to a friend. When he came to the second explosive boom, a lamp in his room fell over,

for no apparent cause. Poltergeists, anyone?⁸



THE EXPLOSIONS CONTINUE. After Arthur Koestler described Freud's exploding bookcase in *The Roots of Coincidence*, he received a letter from a woman named

Margaret Green. She reported reading Koestler's account of the incident while on a train. As she read, the window beside her burst as if hit by a rock.⁹

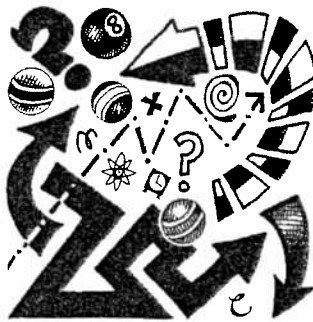
Instead of an itinerant poltergeist, I prefer to attribute this to a mischievous boy standing near the railroad tracks, as the fundamentalist materialists would. Nonetheless, I think it is a damned peculiar coincidence that the hypothetical boy threw the conjectural rock at exactly *that* instant.

Amusingly, I was discussing this whole chain of "explosions" with my wife in a San Francisco restaurant in 1981. I commented that I had written and spoken about this "psychic" chain reaction many times without triggering

anything that went bump in the night. As I said that, my water glass inexplicably spilled. A waiter rushed over to mop up the tablecloth — and knocked over my wife's water.

Best not to think about that at all, probably.

What is going on here? In the familiar Oriental metaphor, each individual "mind" is an aspect of or manifestation of the *alayavijnana* (the "treasury unconscious" as expounded by Lama Govinda),¹⁰ "as all the facets of a diamond are aspects of the one stone." This thought has proven easy to memorize and repeat (just go to any New Age convention) but is rather hard to grasp fully. Let's see if we can, as the Chinese say, draw our chairs closer to the fire and endeavor to understand what we are talking about.



CORRELATION WITHOUT CONNECTION.

Everything in physics, from Newton to Einstein, can be explained in terms of the familiar billiard-ball model. That is, if A is correlated with B, then B and A must have collided with each other or with some hidden C which collided with both — like the billiard balls on a pool table.

Since the 1920s there has been a dawning suspicion that quantum mechanics does not demand such mechanical or "causal" connections to produce correlation. In the 1960s, Dr. John S. Bell of the CERN nuclear research center in Switzerland published an elegant mathematical proof that quantum mechanics does indeed indicate that correlations exist without connections.¹¹ Such acausal correlations are called "nonlocal effects," a term first introduced by Dr. David Bohm.¹²

The perfect illustration of a nonlocal correlation, predicted by Bell and experimentally verified five times now, occurs when photons are emitted from a mercury atom. Photon counters are set far enough apart that the time for light to travel between them is 20 nanoseconds. They are then activated by switches which act in 10 nanoseconds. Since light cannot travel from one photon counter to the other in the time of the measurement, and nothing known to physics can travel faster than light, there can be no mechanical or causal connection between the two photons when measured. Nonetheless the photons remain mathematically correlated, and this effect persists whatever "property" of the photons is being measured. It is as if each photon "knows" what the other is doing.

A parallel on the macroscopic level was given to me by American physicist Dr. Nick Herbert. Imagine a man in Moscow and a man in Washington, and imagine that we have discovered they only have two pairs of socks. If they behaved as photons do in Bell's Theorem (and in experiments), the man in Moscow would only wear black socks

when the man in Washington was wearing white socks. But even more astounding, if we somehow got the black socks off the man in Moscow and replaced them with white socks, the man in Washington would immediately — before any news bulletin at the speed of light (or less) could reach him — remove his white socks and replace them with black socks. It is as if he “knew” telepathically what was happening to his “partner” in Moscow.

Bears an uncanny resemblance to Jungian synchronicity, doesn't it?

In a recent interview, Dr. David Bohm (the man who coined the word “nonlocality”) commented on the implications of the latest experimental verification of Bell's Theorem:

It may mean that everything in the universe is in a kind of total rapport, so that whatever happens is related to everything else; or it may mean that there is some kind of information that can travel faster than the speed of light; or it may mean that our concepts of space and time have to be modified in some way that we don't now understand.¹³

The first of Bohm's three alternatives sounds remarkably like Jung's concept of synchronicity; it also sounds like the monism of the *Upanishads*, Spinoza, et al. It also seems a clear and coherent formulation of what Joyce was getting at in *Finnegans Wake*, where he links everything in Dublin with everything else in the space-time continuum.

The second Bohmian alternative, information faster than light, is called “information without transportation” by San Francisco physicist Dr. Jack Sarfatti, who is its lone proponent in the scientific community at this time. It implies the possibility of sending messages to one's ancestors, with all the sci-fi paradoxes associated with that concept. Yet at least these ghostly information units would provide a mechanism to explain not only synchronicity but those wild phenomena called precognition, ESP, clairvoyance, and “memories of past lives.”

Bohm's third alternative, a redefinition of space and time to include nonlocal correlations, seems to lead us back to Oriental ontologies and Jungian synchronicity. Or else it leads us to some destination we cannot even imagine now. Just how serious this redefinition might be is indicated by Dr. John Archibald Wheeler, who has pointed out that Bell-type correlations are nonlocal in time as well as in space — a fact overtly expressed in Bell's math but one most physicists have not gotten around to digesting yet. According to Wheeler, we must consider that, by nonlocal correlation, every experiment we perform on the subatomic level is affecting the Big Bang and thus recreating the universe in which we live.¹⁴

This speculation of Wheeler's, nutty as it may sound, at least explains the Anthropic Principle — the odd fact that we live in a universe which seems “designed” for human beings. Theists, of course, have always accepted design and usually claim to know the designer by name; atheists and most scientists claim apparent design is “merely” accident — as apparent synchronicity, to them, is “merely” coincidence; but the Anthropic Principle insists the design is there, with or without a centralized Designer. According to Wheeler, we are the designers.

Bohm actually has a fourth alternative, which, to me at least, makes more sense than any of the above; unfortunately, it is rather recondite and dense. In this model, which Bohm has been constructing and improving since the early 1950s, the universe has both an explicate and an implicate order. The explicate, or unfolded, order is what we normally see, the world of seemingly solid and separate “objects” (or persons) in space-time. The implicate, or infolded, order, is not perceptible, but can be deduced from the data of modern quantum mechanics. It is the same within every seemingly separate part of the explicate order.¹⁵

Well, I warned you it would be dense.

The Bohm model is often compared to a hologram. In a hologram, the information of every part contains the information of the whole, as you must have heard by now. You can hack off a piece of a hologram and it will contain the same information as the whole you hacked it off of. Well, the universe is like that too, according to Bohm. In other words, one day in Dublin may contain the information of the whole human odyssey, as Joyce tried to demonstrate. The peculiarities of Joyce's style result from his attempts to convey this vision by creating holographic prose. Blake asserted he could see “infinity in a grain of sand,” but Joyce tried to *show* it to us.

Got it? Bloom in *Ulysses* is not the “reincarnation” of Odysseus and Hamlet's father; he is merely, like them, another local manifestation of one nonlocal (hidden) variable in the implicate order. Our unconscious, like that of Joyce's creatures, is not “an area within our brains” but a “network of connections through time and space.”¹⁶ An ancient Chinese sage or sages found the same binary system as Leibniz because that system is nonlocal (in our genetic code, for instance). “Telepathy” is not information *traveling* from one head to another, and “precognition” is not information *traveling* “backwards in time”; rather, the same nonlocal information is present in every part of our holographic universe.

Bohm has not drawn these conclusions this boldly; but another physicist has. Dr. Edwin Harris Walker has been expounding

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this theory — nonlocality of “mind” as well as of “matter” — since the early 1970s.¹⁷

I have been mulling this over since Bell and Bohm first came to my attention in the early 1970s and it seems to me that, in any nonlocal theory, the notion that “I” am “in” my brain is as naive as the notion that Johnny Carson is “in” my TV set. After all, how can Johnny Carson be “in” millions of TV sets simultaneously? How can I be “in” two places at once when really I’m nowhere at all (as the Fire-sign Theatre once asked)? Bilocation is as common in parapsychological data as are “telepathy,” “precognition,” synchronicity, and the especially provocative out-of-body experience — all of which make perfect sense if we simply assume that the implicate order of the universe remains nonlocal even while the unfolded explicate order seems divided into separate and localized “persons” and “things.” *Isomorphism and synchronicity are both aspects of the basic non-locality of information.*

Maybe we all needed to get working at computers before any of us, including the physicists, could understand such a notion.

Jung tried to explain synchronicity as a connection at right angles to linear causality. As many critics have pointed out, that is an excellent metaphor but hardly a precise scientific theory. Yet Jung was on the right track. He kept insisting that somehow, somewhere in quantum theory, the actual mechanism of synchronicity would be found and defined. In the late 1980s it begins to look as if we have started to understand it. ■

Robert Anton Wilson is the author of numerous books including *the Historical Illuminatus Chronicles*, *The New Inquisition*, *Cosmic Trigger*, and *Coincidence* (Falcon Press, Santa Monica.)

FOOTNOTES

1. *Synchronicity*, by Carl Jung, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, pp. 38-39.
2. *London Daily Mail*, March 26, 1919.
3. Author's personal conversation with Norman Mailer, confirmed by Mailer when included in another article by the author in *Science Digest*.
4. *Coincidence: A Head Test*, by Robert Anton Wilson (Santa Monica, Calif.: Falcon Press, 1988). Previously verified by *Science Digest*.
5. *James Joyce*, by Richard Ellman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 405.
6. *The I Ching and the Genetic Code*, by Martin Schomberger (New York: ASI Publishers, 1979).
7. *Coincidence: A Head Test*, by Robert Anton Wilson (Santa Monica, Calif.: Falcon Press, 1988), p. 149.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
10. Schomberger, p. 19, and Introduction, *passim*.
11. *Physics*, 1-195 (1964).
12. For a detailed discussion of nonlocality, see *In Search of Schrodinger's Cat*, by John Gribbin (New York: Bantam, 1984).
13. *London Sunday Times*, Feb. 20, 1983.
14. Wheeler's views are described in "Turning Einstein Upside Down," by John Gliedman (*Science Digest*, Oct. 1984).
15. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, by David Bohm (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983).
16. Sheldon Brivic, in *Crane Bag* (Dublin), Vol. 6., No. 1 (1982).
17. "The Compleat Quantum Anthropologist," by Edwin Harris Walker, *Proceedings of the American Anthropological Association*, Mexico City, 1974. See also *Future Science*, Dr. Stanley Krippner and John White, eds. (New York: Doubleday, 1978), for an article by Dr. Walker and Dr. Nick Herbert in which this model is directly related to parapsychology.

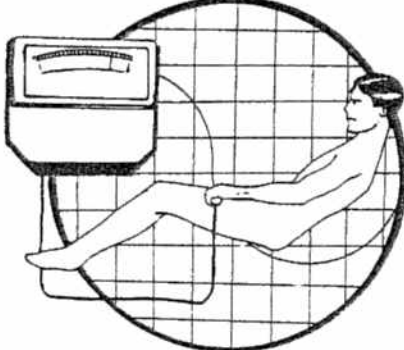
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