

Synchronicity:

The Bridge between Matter and Mind and the Resurrection of Spirit in the World

F. David Peat, edited by Robert Jon Religa

Abstract: Many of us have experienced a mysterious and inexplicable coincidence in our lives, an event that is charged with deep significance. Such true Synchronicities are more than mere chance occurrences. They provide a bridge between inner and outer worlds, between our private thoughts and objective realities. Within a synchronicity patterns of external events and inexplicable occurrences mirror inner experience, and dreams and fantasies can flood over into the external world.

To distinguish them from mere chance occurrences Dr. Carl Jung stressed that they are "meaningful coincidences", while James Joyce wrote of Epiphanies, those moments of illumination when disparate events coalesce into a recognizable pattern.

While synchronicities defy any rational explanation, in terms of causal links and connections, they nevertheless reveal to us an underlying world of patterns, forms and connections that transcend any division between the mental and the material. It is for this reason, this intimation of the Transcendent, that synchronicities are so fascinating. Synchronicities can also function as transformative meeting points that occur at crucial periods in our lives.

The physicist Wolfgang Pauli, a contemporary of Carl Jung, shared many of the same views on the nature of Reality. Just as Dr. Jung studied dreams as a way to access and understand the nature of Reality, Pauli's dreams led him to explore the relationship between psyche and matter and a belief in the "Resurrection of Spirit within the World of Matter".

Many of us feel confined to a narrow world of logic and physical law, a world that admits no hint of mystery. We feel isolated within an indifferent universe and an increasing complex society whose members are reduced to ciphers. Synchronicities, by contrast, offer a doorway into a very different world. One that is more in keeping with the deep insights that have been offered, for example, by the new Sciences.

Time, Synchronicity and Evolution

It is the condition of life in a modern, industrial world that we so often experience a sense of isolation and dislocation from the natural world and those around us. If we ask for meaning we are told that meaning has become a relative thing, an affliction of post-modernism. And, should we turn to science for comfort, it is to be told that life is no more than an accident spawned on a planet orbiting a relatively unimportant star within a contingent and meaningless universe.

Yet there are also moments in the life of each one of us when we touch what the Irish writer, James Joyce, termed an epiphany, so that "the soul of the commonest object.... seems to us radiant". Epiphanies are occasions of benediction when meaning floods as a blessing into our lives and we have a profound experience of recognition, pattern, numinousness, a deeply felt intuition of the rightness of a particular situation, and of a world that suddenly makes sense. Within such a moment the habitual distinction we make between inner and outer, subjective and objective, dream and reality breaks down to reveal the cosmos and our own lives under the one light.

This experience of epiphany is the essential feature of what the psychologist Carl Jung termed a synchronicity. In turn, synchronicities reveal the larger patterns of the cosmos, including those movements of growth, realization and renewal we call evolution.

Jung originally defined synchronicity as "an acausal connecting principal" and "meaningful coincidence". Of particular significance is the associated sense of meaning and significance that distinguishes a true synchronicity from a mere coincidence. Synchronicities reveal, in particularly dramatic ways, links between inner mental patterns and events in the external world. These involve quite different orders of connection than those associated with our familiar notions of causality. In this sense, synchronicities are closer to the medieval conception of sympathies.

A sense of numinousness meaning is the key to recognizing the occurrence of a synchronicity. But here we must be on guard against reducing meaning to the merely personal or subjective, having no wider associated objective correlate. In his discussion of what he termed the four Psychological Functions (thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition), Jung was at pains to point out that feeling, which is directly associated with the appreciation of meaning and value, is, along with reason, one of the mind's rational functions. It is by engaging in a balance between thinking and feeling - a combination of thought and logic along with an objective sense of value - that allows us to make the important and reasoned decisions that guide our life. So, according to Jung, the sense of meaning or value is far from being loose and subjective for it can be as rigorous and objective as logical thought.

It is this objective sense of value and meaning that enables us to recognize the occurrence of a synchronicity or meaningful linking between inner and outer, the self and the natural world. But if meaning were no more than the purely subjective, or personal idiosyncrasy, then synchronicity becomes trivialized into nothing more than anecdotal and superficial coincidence.

When we recognize a true synchronicity we know it is informing us about the global patterns that stretch across the mental and physical worlds. Synchronicities provide us with into the inner structures of both nature and mind but with this proviso - synchronicities do not operate in linear, didactic ways but through metaphor, image

and allusion. They are like those paintings from the later stages of cubism that framed, within their inward order, contrasting elements of the external world - for example, juxtaposing the painted images of parts of a violin, table, wine bottle, newspaper and chair with glued on fragments of a real chair caning, real newspaper print and pieces of table cloth. So too synchronicities juxtapose and bring together elements from the external and internal worlds, hinting at significant correspondences and the ways that inner and outer patterns reflect each other.

Synchronicities hint that beyond our habitual distinctions between matter and mind lies a higher synthesis - one that contains them both. What is held deeply and internally (within the body-mind) must be first projected outward, and made manifest as physical patterns within the external world, before it can be ingested and internalized into awareness, in terms of symbol, patterns and linguistic codes.

Patterns beyond Space and Time

Of their very nature synchronicities involve patterns that transcend the usual limits of space and time. In this sense it is worth reminding ourselves that synchronicities are as much a property of the material world as they are of the mental and it is no coincidence that a physicist, Wolfgang Pauli, should have been drawn to Jung's discussions of synchronicity.

In the introduction to this essay we suggested that science presents us with a picture of reality devoid of value and meaning. Yet this is perhaps more characteristic of science of the pre-quantum period since the insights of quantum theory stress the observer's participation within the universe. In addition, Wolfgang Pauli's own work indicates that archetypes, or transcendent patterns, extend from the realm of consciousness and mind into that of matter and energy. Carl Jung had introduced the notion of archetypes in psychology in terms of universal patterns and structures deep within the psyche of the human race. Jungian archetypes themselves both at the individual level, through the history of a person's life, and at the social and national level as when a group becomes swept up in some dream or goal.

In his writings Jung suggests that archetypes transcend the realm of the purely mental, for they exist at what he terms the psychoid level, which partakes of both matter and mind yet lies beyond their distinction. Synchronicities themselves are the expression of the way an archetype underlies both mental and physical patterns. As a physicist, Pauli was sympathetic to this point of view and argued that just as Jung had identified the objective element within the psyche (the collective unconscious), so too physics would eventually have to come to terms with the subjective aspects of matter (which he termed "the irrational").

In this respect a particularly deep connection, or synchronicity, exists between Jungian psychology and one of the most mysterious and fundamental principles of the quantum theory - Pauli's own Exclusion Principle. It is worth spending a little time to explain the nature of this connection for it demonstrates very firmly that synchronicity is grounded as much in the material as it is in the psychic.

All quantum systems are described by what is termed a wave function. Mathematically this is a function existing in an abstract space (termed Hilbert Space). But what really concerns us here is Pauli's discovery that the form of the wave function is governed by the principle of symmetry.

And the notion of symmetry is deeply connected to music, poetry, art and the architecture of the human body and brain. In fact Pauli had discovered that all quantum entities must have one of two possible forms which he called - Symmetry or Antisymmetry. One could consider these symmetries as the most fundamental archetypes of the cosmos and, indeed, in his private writings Pauli referred to them as "God and the Devil".

It turns out that electrons, protons, and the other material particles that make up an atom are all governed by a principle of anti-symmetry, while photons of light, gravity and force-carrying mesons have symmetric wave functions.

While the principles of symmetry or antisymmetry may appear rather abstract, it turns out to have enormously practical implications. It is because of antisymmetry that electrons are prevented from all occupying the same energy states and forced to take up characteristic energy patterns around an atom. Thanks to the Pauli principle atoms corresponding to each element are chemically different, matter is thus distinct and the cosmos exhibits all its wealth and diversity.

This is a truly staggering result for, up to this point, physicists would have assumed that the reason electrons, or any other particles, are kept apart, or patterned in particular ways, is because of forces operating between them. But Pauli's result arises purely out of the principle of antisymmetry. It involves no physical force but is the direct consequence of the overall forms of nature. Pauli had discovered that "an acausal connecting principle" that governs the fundamental patterns of quantum matter. Electrons behave as they do because they conform to overarching forms - a new conception that echoes that of medieval notions of correspondence, sympathy and harmony within the earthly and celestial worlds. And, according to Carl Jung, such archetypal patterns also operate deep within the collective consciousness of the human race. Synchronicities therefore indicate the possibility of deep cooperative engagements with the cosmos.¹

It appears that within nature principles of pattern and form are the deepest of all, and precede physical laws associated with causality, force and energy. Perhaps we could call the Pauli Exclusion Principle "an Archetype of Matter". At its deepest level, synchronicity is therefore the experiential and symbolic representation, in terms of objective patterns, of mental and physical archetypes. It opens the door to the suggestion that one may be able to participate, in a direct way, with the inner workings of matter. Or suggests the possibility for the individual, and society as a whole, to enter into a cooperative relationship with the movements of nature and the cosmos.

Time, connection and evolution

Synchronicities, along with Pauli's Exclusion Principle, call into question the most cherished scientific concepts of chance and necessity, causality and acausality, separation in space and in time. Yet, throughout history most cultures have had profoundly different visions of space, time and causality than those of 19th century science. These more traditional approaches embrace rather than reject synchronicity.

In ancient Indian and central America, and indeed, in Europe until the late middle ages, time was experienced not as an arrow moving along a line but in terms of cycles of birth, death and renewal. Furthermore time was unified with space, as can still be found in the verbal tense structures of certain Native American languages. (Events far away, but occurring contemporaneously with those nearby, must nevertheless be spoken of using a different tense.)

The universe was perceived not so much in terms of separately distinct objects connected by forces but through sympathies, influences, humors, resonances and patterns that belong together. It was not that movements of the planets causally influenced events on earth, but that an essential harmony was maintained between the patterns of heaven and earth. Within such a world-view, synchronicity is perfectly natural.

It was only with the rise of banking and commerce - lending money against time and accumulating interest - in the late middle ages that time became fragmented from space into a linear, secular form. Finally, with the Renaissance and the rise of science, time became the servant of prediction, control, accumulation, wealth, progress and a faith in the power of technology to solve all problems within a material universe pictured exclusively in terms of force and mechanical causality. In Dr. Jung's language - a Sensate paradigm of technology. According to such a worldview biological evolution, a long march towards perfection, replaces life as part of an organic universe imbued with spirit.

The use of a linear time as the ultimate arbiter of progress is an aberration within the world's cultures. Creativity lies outside time. It embraces both the emergence of new, the unconditioned, and the renewal of the familiar - as when an outstanding pianist plays a well-known sonata or an intelligent reader returns to a familiar poem. True evolution is of a similar order. It is an expression of the basic creativity of the cosmos, that same creativity capable of throwing up the arresting patterns we term synchronicities.

Evolution lies outside the restraints and measures of linear time. Is Brahms superior to Bach, Grass to Goethe, Beuys to Grundwald, or for that matter Freud superior to Shakespeare in understanding the dark nature of the human soul? Or have the spiritual and ecological sensibilities of contemporary Europe advanced compared to the gentle agricultural culture of the Iroquois nation of North America. And, in terms of life on earth, are not the ancient bacteria that regulate the composition of our atmosphere amongst the most significant entities to have evolved?

But in an image of evolution based upon the values of industrial progress and economic competition, the meaning of an individual life and the creative moment is lost within supposed grand struggle for survival between species. But twentieth century science has challenged the very ground upon which this 19th century ideal was founded. No longer does science boast of its ability to predict and control, nor technology to create eternal progress. First quantum theory and then the theories of chaos and complexity have transformed our notions of being and becoming.

Modern science pictures life in terms of stable eco-systems, and eco-systems interacting through patterns of cooperation and self-organization. In this sense it is the responsibility of each individual to engage and renew their subtle, yet vital connections with the whole.

There are also those rare occasions when nature's system reenter into flux. At these times old forms and stabilities dissolve into creative chaos and new patterns and forms emerge out of the tiny individual fluctuations within the flux that rapidly amplify and lead to new forms of stability. Such moments could well be compared to synchronicities, for they are moments that transcend traditional boundaries, opportunities for creative change and seeds for the future. Indeed, moments like these, which may be extremely gentle and subtle, can act to change a person's entire life or enable an individual to exercise a transformative or healing function upon an entire society.

As we have already said this contemporary vision of the cosmos resonates with that of an earlier time. Each one of us can now feel a part of a much great whole. The space in which we live becomes richly criss-crossed with webs of interconnection so that rather than being lost in some vast, impersonal and contingent cosmos, each of our actions echoes and resonates in unpredictable ways. In this new world we are both free to create, yet at the same time aware of our obligations to the whole.

Synchronicities and the personal unconscious

Earlier I suggested that true synchronicities are relatively rare events and should not be confused with the trivial coincidences of daily life. However, there are special occasions when, for a time at least, an inexplicable series of synchronicities appear to cluster around a person. This can happen when someone is in a time of crisis, close to a mental breakdown, pushing creativity to a limit - or when they have fallen head and heels in love! In such liminal states the hard and fast boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity temporarily dissolve and a constellation of synchronicities act to precipitate a major change in a person's life.²

Synchronicities are connections between the internal patterns of the organism and its environment. They can occur both as acts of renewal and in order to catalyze necessary change, or as parts of a person's creativity. In a larger context they can transcend the individual and embrace an entire society, a nation and a species. Here an image from chaos theory may serve to press the analogy. Healthy systems in nature, and society, are involved in constant acts of renewal, rather than in change for novelty's sake. In chaos theory terms they are said to be under the influence of what are termed "strange attractors". This means preserve their inner stability, by means of constant renewal, while at the same time remaining open and responsive to their environments. Here it should be emphasized that stability does not necessarily mean always maintaining the same form in time. It can also mean regularity in growth and development.

Strange attractors are analogous to archetypes; they are underlying patterns in an abstract space that manifest themselves as recognizable types of behavior within a system. Under the influence of a strange attractor a system is be open and responsive without compromising its inner authenticity. In terms of synchronicity, the internal patterns of the strange attractor connect, through a semi-permeable barrier, to the external environment in constant acts of renewal. In terms of the stability of human society, and its healthy growth and development, these strange attractors arise out of the constant small acts of connection through, respect, love and compassion, which keep people together. It is at this point those synchronicities and epiphanies remind us of our connection, and obligations, to the whole.

Yet, there are also times in which the external environment must undergo a more violent type of change. In biological terms this may follow an abrupt drop, or rise, in temperature, or the arrival of some new predator. In economic terms it could be the opening up of a new market. In cultural terms the appearance of new technology or a foreign culture. At all events, under such conditions the power of a strange attractor is no longer sufficient to stabilize a system and thus its boundaries dissolve into a period of creative chaos. During such an interregnum many new patterns of possible behavior co-exist until, almost by chance, one of these becomes amplified and a new phase of self-organization appears.

The connection with synchronicities should be clear. Times of crisis occur in the life of an individual, and of a society or species. When old forms of behavior are insufficient to meet a new challenge, the boundaries between inner and outer, individual and collective consciousness, external pattern and internal behavior, dissolve. This may lead to a period of numinous dreaming, collective social fantasies and desires, and great artistic expression - and finally, a sudden surge within "the spirit of the age". It is quite possible that some analogous happens even at the biological level of a species itself.

In times of creative confusion, and this indeed could be what we are all experiencing at the end of the millennium, we feel that we are in danger of losing all direction and heading for chaos. Yet within this chaos lie symbols thrown up by deep unconscious material. Just as, in the I-Ching, The Chinese Book of Changes, pattern of the yarrow stalks give an image of the potential within the present, so too dreams, synchronicities and moments of creative insight point to critical points of transition. Reason can take us so far, yet in the irrational world of dream and synchronicity the human being and society may find clues for the direction of its next step.

The Dark Side

Yet, nothing is won without risk and there is a danger in laying ourselves open to the world of the irrational, for in that twilight world of communal dreams and collective desires we can too easily become possessed by dark forces. The English composer, Sir Michael Tippett, spoke of his act of composition, the supreme moment of creation, as transcending the personal and, for him, being akin to an act of possession. But, he warned, in opening himself up to the gods he could never know which would appear.

History has shown us how easily the dark forces erupt. Moreover their contamination is not the province of any one nation or people, for all of us are guilty. Our century, like so many others, has been one of war, genocide and exploitation. But added to this has been the mass destruction of species and ecologies on an ever-increasing scale.

If we continue to speak of evolution within such a context then it can only mean an evolution involving a deeper appreciation of value, meaning and a sense of connectedness, rather than some fantasy that all our problems will be solved by developing yet more technology and control combined with an evolutionary leap in raw intelligence. If consciousness and humanity are to evolve it must be through renewal and growth and an act of recognition of our essential solidarity with all living things. At the same time we must acknowledge our shadow, the dark side of our humanity, and attempt to come to terms with it. We must know our darkness and our light. We must become conscious of the patterns that connect to us life, both matter and spirit.

Transcendence and Renaissance

That felt sense of the patterns of the cosmos that are experienced as flowing through us during synchronicities and epiphanies. At such moments it seems as if we are able to touch the essential creativity of the universe. This may have been what the painter Cezanne meant, when he spoke of the landscape becoming conscious through him and of his paintings being the objective consciousness of that landscape. Or when Mozart reported that compositions appeared to him in their entirety.

It is that ability to touch the universal during moments of high creativity that has been characteristic of the work of other great artists, architects, writers, musicians and mystics, or "Touching the Transcendent" as Dr. Joseph Campbell phrases it; and also of those moments when human society demonstrates a collective creative urge as occurred, yet always in a limited sense, in ancient Athens and during the Renaissance.

Our planet stands at a crisis point. Our way out can no longer lie in fantasies of control but in a new wisdom, an understanding of our inner connectedness to all things and the realization of our inherent creativity and humanity.

Footnotes

1. This pattern of abstract antisymmetry has another deep significance. The physicist, John Bell, argued that because of the antisymmetry of their wave functions, pairs of electrons remain correlated even when separated by large distances. Again, these correlations have nothing to do with forces, fields or causal connection. Of particular importance is their "non-local" nature - these correlations are instantaneous and transcend the notions of separation in space and time. [[back](#)]

2. Synchronicities can also occur to those who have long suppressed their unconscious impulses. Jung referred to the hidden "inferior function" which can be buried to such an extent that it builds up an enormous charge of energy until, like tightly coiled spring, it erupts into the external world by producing what Jung called "exterior manifestations". Here, synchronicities act to reconnect a person with forgotten inner patterns. Pauli was a case in point, a highly intellectual physicist whose "feeling" side had been suppressed to the point where it burst out into a disastrous relationship.

Those who keep a lid upon their unconscious world may also become obsessed with discovering synchronicities in their own lives. It is as if by externalizing and objectifying their inner turmoil they make it more acceptable to their over rational minds, bringing the unconscious to the point where it becomes a puzzle for the logical mind to work upon. Rather than attempting to experience directly the nature of the patterns they are being presented with, their synchronicities become devalued and on a par with an obsessive, yet inherently trivial, interest in all things paranormal.

(From a chapter from :Monika Sachtleben (Hrsg.): "Kooperation mit der Evolution. Über das Zusammenspiel von Mensch und Kosmos, Diederichs-Verlag, New Science, München 1999, ISBN: 3-424-01473-7.

Dr. F. David Peat

Pari, Italy

David Peat is an author, physicist and thinker who, for many years worked as a theoretical physicist in Canada, looking at the foundations of quantum theory and its link with general relativity. His long-term friendship with David Bohm involved an exploration of ideas in physics, space, time and the nature of consciousness. While living in Canada David also organized a series of dialogue circles with Native American Elders and Western scientists in collaboration with Leory Little Bear.

David has a long-term interest in the links between art, music and science. For several months he served as a peripatetic "Scientist in Residence" at St Martin's School of Art, Ruskin College of Art, the West of England College of Art and Brighton College of Art. He also has several ongoing conversations with a number of artists and musicians.

David is the author of over twenty books including:

From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the
Twentieth Century
The Blackwinged Night: Creativity in Nature and Mind
Synchronicity: The Bridge between Matter and Mind
Lighting the Seventh Fire: The Spiritual Ways, Healing and Science of the
Native American
Science, Order and Creativity (with David Bohm)
Philosopher's Stone
Einstein's Moon
Infinite Potential: The Life and Times of David Bohm and with John Briggs
- Turbulent Mirror
Looking Glass Universe
Seven Life Lessons of Chaos

While in Canada also he wrote and co-produced many radio documentaries including the twenty-hour series "A Question of Physics", as well as plays for stage and radio and a twenty-minute film, Memories.

In 1996 David moved to the village of Pari, near Siena, Italy where he runs the Pari Center for new learning. .

The F. David Peat website: <http://www.f davidpeat.com>