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PART 1

**THE MYSTERY
OF SYNCHRONICITY**

Twilight of the Clockwork Universe

Many of us have experienced instances in our lives when the seemingly logical and predictable fabric of everyday reality, woven from complex chains of causes and effects, seems to tear apart, and we experience stunning and highly implausible coincidences. During episodes of holotropic states of consciousness—holotropic meaning “moving toward wholeness”—these violations of linear causality can occur so frequently that they raise serious questions about the worldview with which we have all grown up. Since this extraordinary phenomenon plays an important role in many stories described in this book, I will briefly discuss its relevance for the understanding of the nature of reality, consciousness, and the human psyche.

The scientist who brought the problem of meaningful coincidences defying rational explanation to the attention of academic circles was the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung. Aware of the fact that unswerving belief in rigid determinism represented the cornerstone of the Western scientific worldview, he hesitated for more than twenty years before making his discovery public. Expecting strong disbelief and harsh criticism from his colleagues, he wanted to be sure that he could back his heretic claims with hundreds of examples. He finally described his groundbreaking observations in his famous essay entitled “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle” (Jung 1960).

Jung began his essay with examples of extraordinary coincidences occurring sometimes in everyday life. He acknowledged the Austrian Lamarckian biologist

Paul Kammerer, whose tragic life was popularized in Arthur Koestler's book *The Case of the Midwife Toad* (Koestler, 1971), as one of the first people to be interested in this phenomenon and its scientific implications. One of the remarkable coincidences Kammerer had reported involved a situation wherein one day his streetcar ticket bore the same number as the theater ticket he bought immediately afterward. In addition, later that evening, the same sequence of digits was given to him as a telephone number for which he had asked.

In the same work, Jung also related the amusing story told by the famous French astronomer Flammarion about a certain Monsieur Deschamps and a special kind of plum pudding. As a boy, Deschamps was given a piece of this rare pudding by a Monsieur de Fontgibu. For the ten years that followed, he had no opportunity to taste this delicacy until he saw the same pudding on the menu of a Paris restaurant. He asked the waiter for a serving, but it turned out that the last piece of the pudding had already been ordered and eaten by Monsieur de Fontgibu, who just happened to be in the same restaurant at that time.

Many years later, Monsieur Deschamps was invited to a party where this pudding was served as a special treat. While he was eating it, he remarked that the only thing lacking was Monsieur de Fontgibu, who had introduced him to this delicacy and had also been present during his second encounter with it in the Paris restaurant. At that moment, the doorbell rang and an old man walked in looking very confused. It was Monsieur de Fontgibu, who burst in on the party by mistake because he had been given the wrong address for the place to which he was supposed to go.

The existence of such extraordinary coincidences is difficult to reconcile with the understanding of the universe developed by materialistic science, which describes the world in terms of chains of causes and effects. And the probability that something like this would happen by chance is clearly so infinitesimal that it cannot be seriously considered as an explanation. It is certainly easier to imagine that these occurrences have some deeper meaning and that they are playful creations of cosmic intelligence. This explanation is particularly plausible when they contain an element of humor, which is often the case. Although coincidences of this kind are extremely interesting in and

of themselves, the work of C. G. Jung added another fascinating dimension to this challenging, anomalous phenomenon.

The situations described by Kammerer and Flammarion involved highly implausible coincidences, and the story about the plum pudding certainly did not lack an element of humor. However, both stories described happenings in the world of matter. Jung's observations added another astonishing dimension to this already baffling phenomenon. He described numerous instances of what he called "synchronicity"—remarkable coincidences, in which various events in consensus reality were meaningfully linked to internal experiences, such as dreams or visions. He defined synchronicity as "a simultaneous occurrence of a psychological state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state." Situations of this kind show that our psyche can enter into playful interaction with what appears to be the world of matter. The fact that something like this is possible effectively blurs the boundaries between subjective and objective reality.

Struggling with this phenomenon, Jung became very interested in the developments in quantum-relativistic physics and in the radically new worldview to which they were pointing. He had many intellectual exchanges with Wolfgang Pauli, one of the founders of quantum physics, who was his client and personal friend. Under Pauli's guidance, Jung became familiar with the revolutionary concepts in modern physics, including the challenges to deterministic thinking and linear causality it had introduced into science. Jung was aware of the fact that his own observations appeared much more plausible and acceptable in the context of the new emerging image of reality. Additional support for Jung's ideas came from no less than Albert Einstein who, during a personal visit, encouraged Jung to pursue his idea of synchronicity because it was fully compatible with the new discoveries in physics (Jung 1973). Toward the end of his life, Jung became so convinced about the important role that synchronicity played in the natural order of things that he used it as a guiding principle in his everyday life.

The most famous of many synchronicities in Jung's own life is one that occurred during a therapy session with one of his clients. This patient was very resistant to psychotherapy, to Jung's interpretations, and to the notion

of transpersonal realities. During the analysis of one of her dreams featuring a golden scarab, when therapy had reached an impasse, Jung heard a sound of something hitting the windowpane. He went to check what had happened and found on the windowsill a shiny rose chafer beetle trying to get inside. It was a very rare specimen, the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that can be found in that latitude. Nothing like that had ever happened to Jung before. He opened the window, brought the beetle inside, and showed it to his client. This extraordinary synchronicity became an important turning point in the therapy of this woman.

The observations of synchronicities had a profound impact on Jung's thinking and his work, particularly on his understanding of archetypes, primordial governing, and organizing principles of the collective unconscious. The discovery of archetypes and their role in the human psyche represented Jung's most important contribution to psychology. For much of his professional career, Jung was very strongly influenced by the Cartesian-Kantian perspective dominating Western science, with its strict division between subjective and objective, inner and outer. Under its spell, he initially saw the archetypes as transindividual, but essentially intrapsychic, principles, comparable to biological instincts. He presumed that the basic matrix for them was hardwired into the brain and was inherited from generation to generation.

The existence of synchronistic events made Jung realize that archetypes transcended both the psyche and the material world and that they were autonomous patterns of meaning, which informed both the psyche and matter. He saw that they provided a bridge between inner and outer and suggested the existence of a twilight zone between matter and consciousness. For this reason, Jung started referring to archetypes as having a "psychoid" (psychelike) quality. Stephan Holler described Jung's fully advanced understanding of the archetypes in a succinct way and using poetic language: "The archetype, when manifesting in a synchronistic phenomenon, is truly awesome if not outright miraculous—an uncanny dweller on the threshold. At once psychical and physical, it might be likened to the two-faced god Janus. The two faces of the archetype are joined in a common head of meaning" (Holler 1994). Following the publication of Jung's

essay on synchronicity, this concept has become increasingly important in science and has been the subject of many articles and books (von Franz 1980, Aziz 1990, Mansfeld 1995) .

During the fifty years I have been involved in consciousness research, I have observed numerous extraordinary synchronicities in my clients, heard many stories about them from my fellow researchers and therapists, and personally experienced hundreds of them myself. I have selected for this chapter a small representative sample of the most interesting stories from my collection. The first of them bears some similarity to Jung's encounter with the golden beetle in that it involves the appearance of an insect in a place and at a time that was highly unlikely.

THE WAY OF THE ANIMAL POWERS

Praying Mantis in Manhattan

During one of his many workshops at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, our friend and teacher Joseph Campbell gave a long talk on his favorite subject—the work of C. G. Jung and his revolutionary contributions to the understanding of mythology and psychology. During this lecture, he made a fleeting reference to the phenomenon of synchronicity. One of the participants, who was not familiar with this term, interrupted Joe and asked him to explain what synchronicity was. After giving a brief, general definition and description of this concept, Joe decided to illustrate his explanation with a practical example. Instead of telling Jung’s story of the scarab, which one usually hears on such an occasion, Joe decided to share with the audience an example of remarkable synchronicity from his own life.

Before moving to Hawaii in their advanced age, Joe and his wife, Jean Erdman, had lived in New York City’s Greenwich Village. Their apartment was on the fourteenth floor of a high-rise building on Waverly Place and Sixth Avenue. Joe’s study had two pairs of windows, one of them facing the Hudson River, the other up Sixth Avenue. The first set of windows offered a beautiful view of the river, and during nice weather both of them were open all the time. The view from the other two windows was uninteresting, and the Campbells very seldom opened them. According to Joe, they might have not opened them more than two or three times during the forty-odd years they had lived there.

One day in the early 1980s, Joe was in his study working on his magnum opus, *The Way of the Animal Powers*, a comprehensive encyclopedia of shamanic mythologies of the world. At that time, he was writing the chapter on the mythology of the African Bushmen, a tribe living in the Kalahari Desert. One of the most important deities in the Bushman pantheon is Mantis, who combines the characteristics of a Trickster figure and Creator God. Joe was deeply immersed in this work, surrounded by articles and books on the subject. He was particularly impressed by the story Laurens van der Post wrote about his half-Bushman nanny, Klara, who had taken care of him since the moment of his birth. Van der Post vividly remembered instances from his childhood when Klara was able to communicate with a praying mantis (*Mantis religiosa*). When she talked to the member of this species, asking specific questions, the insect seemed to be responding appropriately with movements of its legs and body.

In the middle of this work, Joe suddenly felt an irresistible and completely irrational impulse to get up and open one of the windows facing Sixth Avenue. These were the windows with a boring view that normally remained closed all the time. After he opened it, he immediately automatically looked to the right without understanding why he was doing it. The last thing you would expect to encounter in Manhattan is a praying mantis. And yet, there it was, a large specimen of its kind, on the fourteenth floor of a high-rise building in downtown Manhattan, climbing slowly upward. According to Joe, it turned its head toward him and gave him a meaningful look. Although this encounter lasted only a few seconds, it had an uncanny quality and left a powerful impression on Joe. He said that he could confirm what he had read just minutes earlier in Laurens van der Post's story: there was something curiously human about the face of the mantis; its "heart-shape pointed chin, high cheek bones, and yellow skin made it look just like a Bushman's."

The appearance of a praying mantis on the fourteenth floor of a high-rise building in the middle of Manhattan is a very unusual occurrence, in and of itself, to say the least. But if one considers the timing of its appearance, coinciding with Joe's intense immersion in the mythology of Kalahari

Bushman, and his unexplainable impulse to open the window and actively seek the meeting, the statistical improbability of this concatenation of events is truly astronomical. Only a hardcore materialist committed to his or her worldview with a quasi-religious fervor could believe that something like this might have happened by pure chance.

Traditional psychiatry does not distinguish between true synchronicities and psychotic misinterpretations of the world. Since the materialistic worldview is strictly deterministic and does not accept the possibility of “meaningful coincidences,” any intimation of extraordinary synchronicities in the client’s narrative will automatically be interpreted as “delusion of reference,” a symptom of serious mental disease. However, there cannot be any doubt about the existence of genuine synchronicities, where any person who has access to the facts has to admit that the coincidences involved are beyond reasonable statistical probability. This certainly is the case with Joe’s extraordinary encounter with the praying mantis.

THE DYING QUEEN

When Dreams Foretell What Comes by Day

In 1964, I was invited by Joshua Bierer, a British psychiatrist, to participate in the Congress of Social Psychiatry in London; Joshua was the organizer and program coordinator of this conference. My lecture was part of a symposium on LSD psychotherapy, which gave me the opportunity to meet several prominent psychedelic pioneers, whose work I had previously known only from their writings. There I connected with two remarkable women, British therapists Joyce Martin and Pauline McCririck. Both of them had traditional training in Freudian psychoanalysis, but were now practicing LSD psychotherapy in Joyce's palatial house on London's famous Welbeck Street. They had jointly developed what they called "fusion therapy," a form of psychedelic treatment that was too revolutionary even for many therapists who were open-minded and courageous enough to administer LSD to their patients.

This method, particularly suited for patients with a history of abandonment, rejection, and emotional deprivation in infancy, involved close physical contact between therapists and clients during LSD sessions. During their sessions, these clients spent several hours in a deep age regression, lying on a couch covered with a blanket, while Joyce or Pauline lay by their side, holding them in close embrace, as a good mother would do to comfort her child. Their revolutionary method effectively polarized the community of LSD therapists. Some of the practitioners realized that this was a very powerful and logical way to heal "traumas by omission," emotional problems

caused by maternal deprivation and bad mothering. Others were horrified by this radical “anaclitic* therapy”; they warned that close physical contact between therapist and client in a non-ordinary state of consciousness would cause irreversible damage to the relationship.

I was among those who were fascinated by Joyce and Pauline’s “fusion therapy” because it was clear to me that “trauma by omission” could not be healed by talking therapy. I asked many questions about their unorthodox approach, and when they saw my genuine interest, they invited me to spend some time at the Welbeck clinic, meet their patients, and have a personal experience with their approach. I was impressed when I found out how much their clients benefited from the nourishing physical contact they had received in their psychedelic sessions. It also became clear to me that Joyce and Pauline encountered considerably less transference problems than an average Freudian analyst with his or her detached “deadpan” approach to therapy.

At the International Conference on LSD Psychotherapy held in May 1965 in Amityville, Long Island, Joyce and Pauline showed their fascinating film on the use of the fusion technique in psychedelic therapy. In a heated discussion that followed, most of the questions revolved around the transference/countertransference issues. Pauline provided a very interesting and convincing explanation why this approach presented less problems in this regard than the orthodox Freudian approach. She pointed out that most patients who come to therapy experienced in their infancy and childhood lack of affection from their parents. The cold attitude of the Freudian analyst tends to reactivate the resulting emotional wounds and triggers desperate attempts on the part of the patients to get the attention and satisfaction that had been denied to them.

By contrast, according to Pauline, fusion therapy provided a corrective experience by satisfying the old anaclitic cravings. Having their emotional

*An infant and a toddler have strong primitive needs for instinctual satisfaction and security that pediatricians and child psychiatrists call *anaclitic* (from the Greek *anaklinein*, meaning to cling or lean upon). These involve the need to be held, caressed, comforted, played with, and be the center of the caregivers’ attention. If these needs are not met, it has serious consequences for the future of the individual.

wounds healed, the patients recognized that the therapist was not an appropriate sexual object and were able to find suitable partners outside of the therapeutic relationship. Pauline explained that this paralleled the situation in the early development of object relationships. Individuals who receive adequate mothering in infancy and childhood are able to emotionally detach from their mothers and find mature relationships. By contrast, those who experienced emotional deprivation remain pathologically attached and go through life craving and seeking satisfaction of primitive infantile needs.

Having heard enthusiastic stories from Joyce and Pauline's LSD patients at their Welbeck Street clinic, I became deeply interested in having a firsthand experience of the "fusion technique." My own session with Pauline was truly extraordinary. Although both of us were fully dressed and separated by a blanket, I experienced a profound age regression into early infancy and identified with an infant nursing on the breast of a good mother and feeling the contact with her naked body. Then the experience deepened, and I became a fetus in a good womb blissfully floating in the amniotic fluid. For more than three hours of clock time, a period that subjectively felt like eternity, I kept experiencing both of those situations—"good breast" and "good womb"—simultaneously or in an alternating fashion. I felt connected with my mother by the flow of two nourishing liquids—milk and blood—both of which felt at that point sacred. The episode culminated in an experience of sacred union with the Great Mother Goddess, rather than human mother. Needless to say, I found the session profoundly healing.

In 1966, during a conference on LSD psychotherapy in Amsterdam, I had the opportunity to have another equally remarkable session with Pauline and experience the "fusion therapy" the second time. We became good friends and saw each other occasionally at professional meetings or during my visits to London. In the late 1960s, after Joyce Martin's death, Pauline did not have anybody to sit for her in her own psychedelic sessions, and she asked me to step into Joyce's shoes and become her guide. At this time, I was not in Europe anymore; having received a scholarship to Johns Hopkins University, I now lived and worked in Baltimore. It reflected Pauline's deep conviction about the value of psychedelic